

THE MATURING EMOTION
OF
GEORGE ELIOT

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APPROVED:

E. C. Brodie
Major Professor

G. A. Odum
Minor Professor

Floyd Stovall
Director of the Department of English

L. A. Sharp
Dean of the Graduate Division

THE MATURING EMOTION

OF

GEORGE ELIOT

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By

Helen Virginia Botsford, B. A.

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PREFACE

There have been few indeed who have left as much to the world as George Eliot. Scholar, translator, creative artist, and philosopher lived side by side, producing monumental works. Yet George Eliot and all that she wrote lived with little Mary Anne Evans at Arbury Farm, at Griff House, at Miss Wallington's School¹ and grew with the insatiable intellect of Marian Evans who "was a seeker after truth and eager to find it wherever it might lie, however far from the familiar and accustomed."²

This study has been made in an attempt to illustrate how the genius that was George Eliot developed, how a magnificent intellect was driven first to achievement by emotional frustration and then was coupled with emotional maturity in the person, developing emotional maturity in the creative artist and producing at last the supreme and delicate balance of intellectual and emotional maturity in the philosopher who found her medium in creative art.

¹Miss Wallington's School was the proper name of the institution.

²Blanche Colton Williams, George Eliot, p. 26.

The circumstances which fashioned the erudite artistry of George Eliot have been related in the hope that the reader may better understand her genius and may visualize the development of emotional maturity evident in her novels.

"Nothing like the combination of her disciplined intellect, her ability willed by passionate energy to accomplishment, her genius in fiction, her selflessness, her compassion --- nothing like this combination has existed in any other woman of whom history has kept the record."³

All citations from the novels have been taken from the Foleshill edition. Citations of George Eliot's poetry are from the 1883 New York edition, edited by John Walter Cross.

³Ibid., p. 323.

CHAPTER I

PREPARATIVE YEARS

One morning a hundred years before the Armistice ending the first world war was signed, the following words were entered laboriously in a family Bible: "Nov. 22, 1819, Mary Anne Evans was born at Arbury Farm at five o'clock this morning."¹

As Robert Evans laid down his pen and shut the family Bible, he no doubt wished that this new child had been a boy who might one day aid his older brothers, Robert and Isaac. Little was he to know that this third daughter, who was destined to be his last child, was one day to bring scholars searching for anything they might find pertaining to her birth.

The scholars and other curious admirers who came to Arbury Farm did not regard it as the birthplace of Mary Anne Evans, nor of Marian Evans as she later changed her name, nor of Marian Lewes as she signed herself for so many years, nor of Mary Ann Cross, the legal name she bore at the time of her death; they were interested in these names only because a great and famous personage had discarded all of them to use the pseudonym by which

¹ Emilie and Georges Romieu, The Life of George Eliot, p. 14.

she was always to be known to posterity: George Eliot.

Mary Anne Evans' childhood was a happy one. She adored her brother Isaac and followed him wherever she could, loving the countryside and revolting against the manners of the day which insisted that she be a proper little lady. Fortunately her father understood; "Mary Anne, his beloved Polly --- as in his infinite tenderness he called her --- became the centre^{tu} of the universe to him."² So 'Polly,' full of fun although frail and frequently indisposed, grew freely, finding ample opportunity for her mental and emotional vitality until at length

Robert Evans thought the moment had come for giving his Polly an education worthy of the exceptional intelligence that all discerned in her. As soon as she was nine he sent her to a boarding₃ school at Nuneaton, a little town quite near by.³

There the younger girl met that teacher whose friendship dominated her remaining school years and years afterward. From the quiet, restrained religion of her home, she passed . . . into the evangelicalism of Miss Maria Lewis, to whose religion of feeling and duty she became an easy convert.⁴

Religion was always to play a dominant role in the life of the future novelist, offering happiness, demanding sacrifices, compelling arduous work, bringing

²Ibid., p. 16.

³Ibid., p. 31.

⁴Williams, op. cit., p. 22.

bitter disillusionment, and providing an eternal conflict in the years to come. At Miss Wallington's School the child was imbued with religion by the fervent Maria Lewis, who so believed the Calvinistic doctrines that she saw Mary Anne Evans as one of the chosen few.

So the young girl came to feel that she had been destined for great things and never spared herself the exhausting torment of self-abnegation and ceaseless study. It was under this influence that she learned the exacting demands of duty --- duty to ideas and beliefs. She also gained a friend, closer in sympathy and understanding than her older sister, Chrissey, who had accompanied her to school.

Soon, however, the two Evans girls were off to Coventry to continue their education under the direction of the Franklin sisters. Here Mary Anne was under the domination of strong Baptist influences and began to feel strong religious fervor. As might have been expected from such an individualist, she formed a prayer group, permitting only those who sought a perfect life to enter. Metaphysical problems had already become her chief interest.

The three years which Marian spent with the Misses Franklin were serene, care-free, abounding in joys pure and deep. They were laborious too, profitable in every respect. Their impress was

never to be effaced all the rest of her life.⁵

It was the last formal education Mary Anne Evans was to have.

In 1835 Robert Evans fell seriously ill, and both girls returned home. During the following year they watched their mother exhaust herself in caring for their father; that summer their mother died, and Chrissey became the housekeeper with her younger sister's aid. A year later Chrissey married, and Mary Anne Evans, not yet eighteen, assumed the duties of the household, supervising the servants and caring for her father. The added work was not enough to keep her fully occupied, for she had not yet recovered from the loss of her mother. "To the old, sorrow is sorrow; to the young, it is despair."⁶

Mary Anne Evans sought refuge even as she assumed her new tasks; so she turned to intellectual pursuits.

. . . never will she renounce study, reading, the cultivation of her mind. Philosophy, mathematics, Latin, Greek, French, German, Italian, even Hebrew --- she neglects nothing, not even her music.⁷

The essential fact to bear in mind is that from 1835 to 1840 the girl was developing her brain. To no woman, perhaps, have the gods given more acute

⁵Romieu, op. cit., p. 37.

⁶J. W. Cross, George Eliot's Life as Related in Her Letters and Journals, I, 22.

⁷Romieu, op. cit., p. 44.

power of observation, a more retentive memory, greater intelligence and acquisitiveness, a happier sense of logic, stronger feeling, nobler passion than they gave to Mary Anne.⁸

The years of study and speculative thought bore fruit. In 1840 Mary Anne Evans saw herself in print for the first time when she published some stanzas in The Christian Observer. "She signed herself just M. A. E."⁹ But she was far from satisfied with this meager achievement. "Greater projects filled her mind --- nothing less than a Chart of Ecclesiastical History"¹⁰ But she had scarcely begun when another published the work she had proposed.

Consequently, evidence of her early literary talent may be found only in the letters which passed between her former teacher, Maria Lewis, who took the name 'Veronica,' meaning fidelity in friendship, and Mary Anne, who was addressed by the name 'Clematis,' meaning mental beauty, for "to one alert for signs they point like arrows to the writer Mary Anne was to become, at the same time they are records of an incipiently magnificent mind."¹¹

⁸Williams, op. cit., p. 29.

⁹Romieu, op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Williams, op. cit., p. 34.

It is interesting that the name chosen by Maria Lewis for her former pupil and promising young friend was almost prophetic.

'Clematis' suited Marian to admiration. . . . she demanded constant support. As she grew older this hunger of an impetuous heart was to become more and more acute. In the child, it was no more than the imperious desire for a father's or brother's love; in the young girl, for fast friendships. In the grown woman it was to amount to an inability to thrive, to live without affection or love, without some being by her side ready to sacrifice everything to her, to offer up its entire destiny, as the bush has to do to the insatiable clematis.¹²

Thus far Marian Evans had known three close bonds, sharing deep understanding with her father, her brother Isaac, and Maria Lewis. Now she was to form new and even deeper attachments.

When Isaac married, Robert Evans and his daughter left Griff House and returned to Coventry. Here Marian was "placed all unwittingly by her father among men and women she most needed for mental stimulation."¹³ It was here at Coventry where she was to spend the next eight years and at Rosehill less than a mile away that "Marian . . . met those who were to exercise so decisive an influence on her mind, that is to say on her life."¹⁴

¹²Romieu, op. cit., p. 49.

¹³Williams, op. cit., p. 37.

¹⁴Romieu, op. cit., p. 51.

The Pears were their neighbors and were deeply interested in philosophical subjects. Through them Marian met at Rosehill Charles Bray and his wife, the former Caroline Hennell, who shared her husband's "unprejudiced spirit of investigation, his desire to make of their home a center for men and women foremost in every field of art, science, and speculative thought."¹⁵ Also at Rosehill was Caroline Bray's sister, Sara Hennell, who was to be "the foremost lifelong friend of George Eliot."¹⁶

And then Charles Hennell appeared in person. He was thirty years old, . . . distinguished-looking, charming, a brilliant talker, and he immediately sought the acquaintanceship of erudite Miss Evans.¹⁷

Marian Evans was twenty-two, and she fell very much in love. Never having cared about her appearance, wishing only to be neat and clean, Marian now commenced spending hours in the hope that she might make herself beautiful. She read Charles Hennell's Enquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity avidly and found the first great disturbing influence in her life.

Metaphysics, like love, is an affair of the heart, not of the head. We believe with our hearts, just

¹⁵Williams, op. cit., pp. 40-41.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 41.

¹⁷Romieu, op. cit., p. 59.

as we love with our hearts.¹⁸

Having made this discovery, Marian Evans was distraught. She lost her faith in Christianity.

The process of disintegration seems to have been rapid. How far the attack from without may have been simultaneously assisted by a change of heart from within is a question"¹⁹

Nonetheless, Marian Evans for the first time in her life fought with her father and refused to obey him when he requested only that she attend church with him. She felt she had attained a new mental freedom, despite her father's ultimatum that unless she accompany him to church, she must leave the house. Heartbroken, but unswerving in her devotion to her new belief, Marian remained adamant. For the next week she reposed at Griff House with her favorite brother Isaac; then she was forgiven by her father and returned to Coventry to continue attending church each Sunday. Such an action, she reasoned, was not hypocrisy; it was only a means of proving her devotion to her father.

But the inward mental conflict had begun and was to continue throughout her days. She could never reconcile, try though she would, the differing religious beliefs of those she loved. In this emotional struggle Marian Evans

¹⁸Ibid., p. 54.

¹⁹J. Lewis May, George Eliot, p. 56.

learned the great lesson of temperance, appreciating and understanding that each man must find his own religion and having found it, adhere to its tenets loyally.

During the next year Marian Evans and Charles Hennell spent many an hour together.

They had all tastes in common. Never were two beings better matched. He admired her grace, her talents, her powers of observation, her cultivated, enlightened, subtle mind. She admired his breadth of view, his learning, his metaphysical and social ideas. In speech and in writing she declared that Charles Hennell was a perfect model of manly excellence.²⁰

Such blissful happiness was not destined to endure. The famous German scholar, Brabant, and his lovely daughter, Rufa, arrived at Rosehill. Within a few short weeks "the fascinating Charles fell in love, became engaged, married."²¹ Marian Evans had lost her dream and discovered anew the abyss of loneliness.

As she had done following the death of her mother, Marian Evans once again sought refuge and consolation in demanding and exacting work. Ironically enough, it was Charles Hennell who offered her an all consuming task: the translation of Leben Jesu. Rufa Brabant had undertaken the translation of Strauss' work prior to her marriage because of her father's insistence; now she was

²⁰Romieu, op. cit., p. 74.

²¹Ibid., p. 76.

relieved to see the responsibility fall upon other shoulders.

Having accepted the challenge, Marian Evans devoted the next three years of her life to the translation of The Life of Jesus. Not only was it necessary that she know German thoroughly, a tongue she had studied by herself, but it was also necessary that she translate the numerous footnotes and annotations in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and French.

Having completed the enormous task, Marian Evans watched the publication of the three volumes in 1846, knowing that her name was not to appear as the translator since David Friedrich Strauss would be insulted at the thought of a woman attempting to understand, to say nothing of attempting to translate, his treatise.

All reviewers assumed the translator to be a learned man, a theologian . . . to prepare a text so faithful and scholarly. Marian did a thing peculiarly difficult to do She not only rendered word for word, thought for thought, sentence for sentence, but rendered them into beautiful, harmonious English, bearing the spirit and tone of the original. As translator alone, Marian Evans attained a high place in English literature²²

Following a lengthy rest, Marian Evans commenced the translation of Spinoza at the request of Charles Bray. But her interest in translation was lagging. Far more

²²Williams, op. cit., p. 51.

exciting was the prospect of phrenology which the Brays were discussing and studying. Willingly and eagerly she accompanied them to London and allowed her head to be shaved. The action was typical of her intellectual curiosity.

When the experiment proved a failure, Marian Evans returned home, discreetly hiding her shaved head in a lace cap, and worked alternately on Spinoza's Ethics and Tractus Theologico-Politicus. In her free moments she read George Sand, whose name was one day to be linked with her own.

It is interesting in view of later developments that she wrote Sara Hennell concerning George Sand as follows:

I should never dream of going to her writings as a moral code or text-book. I don't care whether I agree with her about marriage or not It is sufficient for me . . . that I cannot read six pages of hers without feeling that it is given to her to delineate human passion and its results, and . . . some of the moral instincts and their tendencies, with such truthfulness, such nicety of discrimination, such tragic power, and, withal, such loving, gentle humor, that one might live a century . . . and not know so much as six pages will suggest.²³

The same thoughts were later to be expressed by the critics of George Eliot.

It was during this semi-fallow period that Marian

²³Cross, op. cit., I, 144.

Evans tried her hand at creative writing. Published posthumously, these early attempts "reveal mild ability in fiction, best illustrated in the reflectively philosophic Little Fable with a Great Moral."²⁴

Exhausted from the arduous years of labor devoted to Strauss, worried over her father's failing health, and bound by her sense of duty to complete the translation of Spinoza, Marian Evans found her only mental stimulation at the Bray's, where she met Robert Owen, Richard Froude, Francis Newman, John Chapman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Sibree, Maria Bury, and Harriet Martineau. She was emotionally unsettled and "thought of herself as utterly idle . . . as a miserable wretch, with aching limbs and sinking spirits."²⁵ She was in desperate need of loving, sympathetic words.

Then the crushing blow fell. Robert Evans died the last of May, 1849. Marian was thirty and knew that hereafter she must work for a living to supplement the small annuity left her. In utter despair she again sought refuge in work.

To beguile her grief she spent the long hours of her claustration in translating Spinoza's Tractatus Theologico-Politicus from the Latin. That austere

²⁴Williams, op. cit., p. 54.

²⁵Ibid., p. 58.

task suited her mood.²⁶

The following month, however, she joined the Brays in their trip to Europe. They visited France, Italy, and Switzerland; then the Brays returned home. Marian Evans remained in Geneva, studying and recuperating in body and in spirit.

If those eight months on the Continent crystallized many things for the young woman, some of them were her dependence upon love and sympathy, . . . loyalty to old ties, and receptivity for all in nature, institutions, or among people that her intellect told her was good.²⁷

Returning to England, it was natural that Marian Evans should visit the Brays. No sooner had she become settled in their household than John Chapman, who had recently purchased the Westminster Review, arrived. He was well-acquainted with Marian Evans' astute mind, and he urged her to write some articles and reviews for his magazine.

She acquiesced and commenced work on Robert Mackay's The Progress of the Intellect. The review was such a success that Chapman urged her to come to London; she did so with no hesitation, becoming assistant editor of the Westminster Review early in 1851.

The relationship between John Chapman and Marian

²⁶Romieu, op. cit., p. 95.

²⁷Williams, op. cit., p. 65.

Evans will always be a matter of speculation. Suffice it to say that Marian Evans was delighted with her work. "Eighteen hours of labour she put in every day, with the reading of manuscripts, sorting them out, sub-editing critical articles, pageing, proof-correcting, etc. . . ."²⁸ She made numerous new friends: Thomas Carlyle, Thomas Huxley, John Stuart Mill, Louis Blanc, Robert MacKay, Herbert Spencer, Madame Belloc, and Barbara Smith.

But she was emotionally disturbed. She went walking with Robert Mackay; she attended the opera with John Chapman and spent long hours talking with him until his wife made their companionship scandalous; she read Augustus Comte with Herbert Spencer and spent many hours discussing the French philosopher with him in a secluded garden on the Thames until malicious rumors made Spencer decide he had best leave London.

Marian Evans, too, left London and visited the Brays just as she had done following the Chapman affair. At Rosehill she felt there was understanding, and if she wished, she might openly mourn the death of Charles Hennell which had occurred the previous year. Her position on the Westminster Review was assured; the name of Marian Evans carried weight. So she enjoyed her self-imposed

²⁸Romieu, op. cit., p. 109.

vacation and continued with her translation of Spinoza.

When she at last returned to London, Marian Evans did not know that she would never again find a second home with the Brays at Rosehill. Neither had she known ten years ago when she accompanied her father to Coventry that her future relationships were to have so profound an effect upon her life. After meeting the Brays and being

drawn into the system of this luminary, she sustained an injury the effects of which, though intermittent in their manifestations, did in fact remain with her to the end, rarely and faintly apparent when her genius was at its height, recovering their sinister ascendancy as her genius began to decline. In after years, when she had had experience of life, when she had found her vocation and when even the triumphs of that vocation were beginning to be viewed by her in their true perspective, she cast many a backward glance over these Coventry experiences and thought, not indeed without affection, but with some pity and perhaps a shade of contempt, of those rather pretentious little philosophers who had strutted and fretted their hour upon the stage with such complacent satisfaction in the validity of their own conclusion.²⁹

After a few weeks in London Marian Evans was again feted by the intellectuals; her circle of friends grew wider. But as the days passed, she spent more and more time with George Henry Lewes to whom she had been introduced long ago by Herbert Spencer. "At first they were two uneasy lonelinesses come together"30

²⁹ May, op. cit., p. 66.

³⁰ Romieu, op. cit., p. 122.

Then their simple pleasure in one another's company became an imperious need. From their long talks each derived enrichment and fecundity of spirit. They spoke to one another about everything, discovering in one another "the marriage of true minds."³¹ Marian Evans was happier than she had been in years.

By 1854 when she had completed the translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's The Essence of Christianity, Marian Evans had made the decision which was to change her life. She could not, she would not think of a future without George Henry Lewes. She packed her books and sent them to Rosehill; then she resigned her position on the Westminster Review. Marian Evans was ready for whatever the future might bring.

Fully realizing the results that must ensue from her action, she accompanied Lewes to Germany in July, 1854.

Brave and pathetic pair The homeliest man in London . . . had joined hands with the homeliest woman in literary circles

At thirty-seven, Lewes had been betrayed by his wife and his best friend; at thirty-five, Marian had seen almost no fulfillment of those early ambitions that tormented her soul; she was tired, disappointed, and she . . . wanted love. . . . Now, she was entering into what the Victorians called an unhallowed union, out of which would spring George Eliot, effacing the work and even the name of the journalist --- then the better-known of the two ---

³¹William Shakespeare, "Sonnet 116," Sonnets, p. 82.

compelling respect for the woman who had been Marian Evans, the woman who, for a quarter-century, was to sign herself M. E. Lewes.³²

When the journalist and former editor returned to England eight months later, they were shunned. Marian Evans had been renounced by her brother Isaac and her sister Chrissey as she had expected. But even the Brays offered no understanding; theory was one thing, practice another. They would not condone her action despite her pleading letter:

If there is any one action or relation of my life which is, and always has been, profoundly serious, it is my relation to Mr. Lewes We cannot set each other quite right in this matter in letters, but one thing I can tell you in few words. Light and easily broken ties are what I neither desire theoretically nor could live for practically. Women who are satisfied with such ties do not act as I have done. That any . . . person who is sufficiently acquainted with the realities of life can pronounce my relation to Mr. Lewes immoral, I can only understand by remembering how subtle and complex are the influences that mould opinion I should not care to vindicate myself if I did not love you and desire to relieve you of the pain which you say these conclusions have given you.³³

Of all she had known and loved, Marian Lewes found that but two friends remained: Sara Hennell and Barbara Smith. Everywhere else only insults and rebuffs awaited her.

But no time could be lost seeking understanding. The deed was done, and they were in desperate need of

³²Williams, op. cit., p. 102.

³³Cross, op. cit., I, 235-236.

money. She continued with her translation of Spinoza's Ethics, while he continued with his Life of Goethe. Both wrote numerous articles, he for The Leader, she for the Westminster Review.

That summer George Henry Lewes took his sons, Charles Lee, Thornton, and Herbert, aged thirteen, eleven, and nine respectively, to the seashore, while Marian Lewes planned for their future education. The following year at large expense they were sent to Switzerland. "Marian assumed equal responsibility for their education . . ." ³⁴ even though it meant greater sacrifices.

Fortunately Lewes soon completed his study of Goethe, and it proved popular. Money was still a burden, but no longer a soul consuming anxiety. Late in 1855 the

growing success of The Life of Goethe made up to them for other troubles. In two and a half months a thousand sets at thirty shillings had been sold. And then there were the eulogistic letters . . . ³⁵

When the translation of Spinoza had been completed in 1856, George Henry Lewes again urged his wife to try fiction. Spurred on by his love and sympathetic advice, she commenced writing. "She felt that she could not invent a story--but perhaps she might find one, and she looked for it among the recollections of her childhood

³⁴Williams, op. cit., p. 120.

³⁵Romieu, op. cit., p. 177.

days."³⁶

Marian Evans had spent fifteen years translating, writing book reviews and critical essays. Now at the age of thirty-eight Marian Evans and Marian Lewes were destined to die as she wrote and brought forth the novelist: George Eliot.

³⁶ Charles S. Olcott, George Eliot: Scenes and People in Her Novels, p. 11.

CHAPTER II

SCENES OF CLERICAL LIFE

In writing The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton, George Eliot drew every character from life. The story was one with which the residents of Nuneaton were well acquainted, having watched the drama enacted nearly twenty-five years before. It mattered not that George Eliot had changed the names of the people concerned; she had reconstructed the tale in such faithful detail that everyone in Nuneaton knew it was actually the story of Reverend John Gwyther.

Not only were those in Nuneaton excited and curious about the true identity of George Eliot, but everyone in England who read the tale in Blackwood's magazine was also wondering about this new author. No one suspected that George Eliot might be Marian Evans, who had just published an article Silly Novels by Lady Novelists in the Westminster Review.

Those in Nuneaton decided that George Eliot must be Liggins, the only man among them who had ever been known to write. "Liggins quite relished the greatness thus thrust upon him, and failed to make a prompt denial."¹

¹Oloott, op. cit., p. 17.

It occurred to none of them to think of Marian Evans. They either quite forgot or did not wish to remember that Shepperton Church or Chilvers Coton had played an important part in her early life. "In this church Mary Anne Evans was baptized, and she attended it during the whole of her residence at Griff."² Further, she had been acquainted with the facts of John Gwyther's life.

Just as those in Nuneaton overlooked the obvious connection between George Eliot and Marian Evans, so did everyone in England. John Blackwood, her publisher, was quite convinced that the story had been written by a member of the clergy. Thackeray, Dickens, Congreve, and others congratulated Blackwood upon the discovery of the new writer. But none except Charles Dickens suspected that George Eliot was a woman.

Lewes and his wife had been both careful and wise. As soon as the story had been finished, it was decided between them that it should appear anonymously. Marian Lewes decided upon the first name of her husband, George, and upon the last name, Eliot, because it was "to L_____ I owe it,"³ because it was a "good mouth-filling, easily pronounced word,"⁴ and because it bore a resemblance to

²Oscar Browning, Life of George Eliot, p. 47.

³Williams, op. cit., p. 132.

⁴Elizabeth S. Haldane, George Eliot and Her Times; A Victorian Study, p. 119.

her own name, each beginning with the letter E and containing five letters.

Having decided the name by which she was to be known to posterity, there remained the problem of publishing the story. Lewes immediately began to act as agent and wrote John Blackwood late in 1856, less than two months after his wife had begun The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton.

I trouble you with a MS. of 'Sketches of Clerical Life' which was submitted to me by a friend who desired my good offices with you. It goes by this post. I confess that before reading the MS. I had considerable doubts of my friend's powers as a writer of fiction; but, after reading it, these doubts were changed into very high admiration. I don't know what you will think of the story, but, according to my judgement, such humor, pathos, vivid presentation, and nice observation have not been exhibited (in this style) since the 'Vicar of Wakefield'; and, in consequence of that opinion, I feel quite pleased in negotiating the matter with you.⁵

Blackwood, heralding the reaction of his readers, was so pleased with the story that he not only arranged for its immediate publication, but insisted upon its being placed first in his magazine. Little did he realize that a new trend was being introduced in the fiction of that day.

Democracy had entered once again into the field of fiction. Readers and critics alike were intrigued with

⁵Cross, op. cit., I, 300.

the re-discovery of commonplace man. Many had all but forgotten that humor and pathos are not limited, but encompass every person on earth. George Eliot had been successful in stirring her readers with commonplace troubles and in making them understand the universality of true sorrow and real grief. She had achieved in her first story what she was later to write Sara Hennell was her purpose in writing fiction.

If art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally. The only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is that those who read should be better able to imagine and feel the pain and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling erring human creatures.⁶

George Eliot had done even more in her first story. She had re-awakened within her readers knowledge of the very real and enduring truth: "In our deeds lie our rewards and punishments."⁷

This philosophy was to emerge in varying degrees from all that George Eliot was to write. Few can ever read of Amos Barton's tragic loss at the death of his wife and of his equally tragic realization that his lack of loving understanding and loving care had been partially, if not completely, to blame for her early passing

⁶Cross, op. cit., II, 295.

⁷Williams, op. cit., p. 130.

without being forced to reflect upon their own thoughtless deeds or without being profoundly moved. Here, as in her future works, George Eliot illustrated how deep tragedy could arise from a seemingly trivial incident.

In her next story George Eliot not only continued to draw her material from actual happenings, but she also drew upon her own experiences subjectively. Mr. Gilfil's Love Story reveals all too clearly how a person's real nature may be warped and twisted by an unfortunate experience with love.

Thus we may see development in the artistry of George Eliot. While retaining all that she had gained in her first tale, she made two important advances in character portrayal. First, she drew upon her emotional memories in delineating the anguish and joy of Maynard Gilfil. "Great writers, despite Flaubert, are self-revealing, and we may learn more of George Eliot in this single little story, imperfect though it be, than from a wilderness of biographical facts concerning her."⁸

Not only did George Eliot mature emotionally by drawing freely from her own emotional past, but she also demonstrated her growing power in fiction by altering some of the most salient facts in the life of Bernard

⁸ May, op. cit., p. 87.

Gilpin Ebdell, upon whom she had based her story. Tina

did not die as told in the story, in which Mr. Gilfil only "tasted a few months of perfect happiness," but made him an excellent wife for twenty-two years. The jealousy of Catarina and the tragic death of Captain Wybrow are, of course, pure fiction.⁹

The character Catarina, partially based upon the real life of Sally Shilton, suggests the inventive imagination George Eliot was later to develop with such power and also illustrates the broadening influence of travel. Mr. Gilfil's Love Story had been completed and almost wholly written in the Scilly Islands, where Lewes and his wife had gone following the publication of his History of Philosophy in 1857. Writing of rural England in such a foreign environment, George Eliot perhaps sought to reconcile the two by introducing the Italian influence in the background of her character Catarina. Perhaps she sought only to disguise her own deep emotional reactions in relating the story, but "no better evidence exists as proof of George Eliot's passionate nature, her capacity for spiritual agony than . . ." ¹⁰ when Catarina accepts the fact that she must lose Anthony with whom she is infatuated.

Despite these stages of growth evident in her second story, most readers would prefer The Sad Fortunes of the

⁹Olcott, op. cit., pp. 34-35.

¹⁰Williams, op. cit., p. 136.

Reverend Amos Barton. "'Mr. Gilfil' has a genuine plot, but the plot is rather a strain on our imagination, and the tale does not develop so naturally as the other."¹¹ This was to be expected, for it is one thing to relate a story as it actually occurred, and it is a far different task to build a convincing story upon an actual incident or series of incidents as she had just done. "'Mr. Gilfil' was in reality George Eliot's first original work, for whereas she knew the characters in 'Amos,' she could have known Mr. Gilfil, if at all, only as an old man, when she was a child."¹² Her second story had been drawn from occurrences which had happened nearly twenty-five years prior to those she had recorded in her first story.

Nonetheless, Mr. Gilfil's Love Story evoked new acclaim from the critics. "Sir Leslie Stephen . . . said . . . that 'it appears to be almost faultless, and as admirable a specimen of the literary genus to which it belongs as was ever written.'¹³ Archer Gurney stated that George Eliot had written a masterpiece and addressed a letter of praise to the author. John Blackwood, her publisher, also congratulated George Eliot and forwarded the many commendatory letters to Lewes.

¹¹Haldane, op. cit., p. 131.

¹²Williams, op. cit., p. 137.

¹³May, op. cit., p. 111.

The question of George Eliot's true identity provoked more discussion in literary circles. Mr. Gilfil's Love Story was proof that George Eliot was a new writer in the field of fiction; George Eliot was a writer of the future! Here was a story written in charming simplicity and utter naturalness; there was no style except the style of the true artist approaching perfection.

But John Blackwood made no attempt to tear away the anonymity behind which his new and most promising author had chosen to hide. He had written George Eliot when the story of Amos Barton had proved so successful and had received the following reply:

Whatever may be the success of my stories, I shall be resolute in preserving my incognito --- having observed that a nom de plume secures all the advantages without the disagreeables of reputation. Perhaps, therefore, it will be well to give you my prospective name, . . . in case of curious enquiries; and accordingly I subscribe myself, best and most sympathetic of Editors, yours very truly, George Eliot.¹⁴

It was the first time George Eliot had signed the name by which she was to be known, but Blackwood was to be the recipient of many letters signed 'George Eliot' even though most of their correspondence was to pass through Lewes. Not even the acclaim the story had received upon publication had changed the desires of George Eliot; the

¹⁴Romieu, op. cit., p. 192.

new author had preferred to remain anonymous. Consequently, Blackwood was content to allow matters to remain as they were following the renewed acclaim of the author's second story.

"'Janet's Repentance,' the last of the 'Scenes,' had been begun in the Scilly Islands, on April 18, 1857, but the greater part of it was written in Jersey, where the Leweses had delightful lodgings, at Gorey in the Bay of Granville, within sight of the castle of Montorgueil."¹⁵ Lewes continued with his Seaside Studies, which he had begun on the Scilly Islands, while George Eliot strove to complete her next tale. "Artistic temperament, lack of faith in her work, assumed temporary control."¹⁶ She was exhausted mentally and physically, but there was no time for rest.

Lewes' three sons must return to school after spending their summer vacation with them. Further, Lewes' legal wife, Agnes, was deeply in debt

and Thornton Hunt behind in contributions to her and the household.

The inference is plain. Either George Eliot helped to support the Lewes relations, or if Lewes spent all his money on them, she was supporting him. No matter. They did not worry over mine and thine.¹⁷

¹⁵Browning, op. cit., p. 51.

¹⁶Williams, op. cit., p. 137.

¹⁷Ibid., pp. 132-133.

A new burden was about to fall upon their shoulders. George Eliot must aid her sister, Chrissey, whose husband had just died, leaving her with three children and little money.

Did it matter that Marian Lewes had been renounced by her sister, that she had been banned for her immoral life; did it matter that Agnes had betrayed Lewes, that he was not even certain whether his two youngest sons had his blood or Thornton Hunt's? Only the financially secure and the small undeveloped souls may afford such thoughts and welcome the chance to reciprocate with denouncing deeds and emotions. The ties of blood and family are strong; there were mouths to feed, bodies to clothe, and minds to educate. It was an overpowering burden, but it was also a demanding duty.

So George Eliot labored without rest, without inspiration, and wrote the longest piece of fiction she had yet attempted. "'Janet's Repentance' is, again, full of early recollections."¹⁸ But the characters are no longer of first importance; they serve only as a medium through which the conflict between religion and irreligion may be developed. Consequently, the short novelette failed to move its many eager readers and to

¹⁸Browning, op. cit., p. 52.

meet the high standards evidenced and promised in George Eliot's two previous stories.

The cause was evident. Not only had the author neglected to adhere to the basic principles of fiction by relating a tale in which the conflict was human and universal in its appeal, but she had also committed the crime of aiming her story at a distinct group of people. George Eliot forgot that the primary function of fiction is to amuse, the secondary function to teach. She was crusading in Janet's Repentance, obviously striving to impress her audience and so failed except among those who already shared her beliefs. "Clergymen of that day . . . did write Blackwood that it was exquisite and that they cried over it."¹⁹ The critics were silent or abusive: George Eliot had written a melodrama in which the character of Dempster had been grotesquely overdrawn.

Just as she failed with Janet's Repentance, so George Eliot was destined to fail whenever her theme was philosophical and was written with didactic consciousness. "Too often she addressed herself to the . . . Brays and Herbert Spencers of her day, seeking, not so much to utter the emotion or depict the vision within her, as to express herself in language which should find favor with

¹⁹Williams, op. cit., p. 139.

that cultured and superior section of the public who subscribed to the Westminster Review."²⁰ George Eliot was never to learn that art can not be manufactured; it can be produced from quiescent reflection. Fiction, when presented by the artist, stirs not only the intellect but also the emotions.

Fortunately, Blackwood recognized the depreciation of George Eliot's art in Janet's Repentance and discouraged her in attempting a fourth tale, tentatively titled Clerical Tutor. Blackwood wanted to close the series and republish it under the original title Scenes of Clerical Life.

George Eliot agreed. Sara Hennell had arrived for a visit and was soon followed by Barbara Smith Bodichon and her husband. A much needed rest had been forced upon George Eliot. When her guests left, she and Lewes spent days reading.

The year 1857 had been a profitable one. George Eliot had netted a comfortable sum from her writings; George Henry Lewes' Life of Goethe had reached the third edition, Seaside Studies was proving popular, History of Philosophy had appeared in a new edition, and Physiology of Common Life had just been accepted. The Leweses might

²⁰May, op. cit., p. 99.

rest for a month or longer if they wished.

Shortly before Christmas they had another visitor.
The brother of John Blackwood,

Major Blackwood called --- an unaffected, agreeable man. It was evident to us, when he had only been in the room a few minutes, that he knew I was George Eliot.²¹

No revelation, no open acknowledgement was made.

Nonetheless, George Eliot, growing in emotional maturity, became willing to divulge her identity to her publisher. She had reached the stage where she no longer found it necessary to hide herself behind a cloak of secrecy. So John Blackwood was invited to visit them. Later he wrote his wife:

I drove to Richmond to see Lewes, and was introduced to George Eliot --- a woman (the Mrs. Lewes whom we suspected). This is to be kept a profound secret, and on all accounts it is desirable, as you will readily imagine.²²

George Eliot's secret, her true identity, had been shared with her publisher, his brother, and his wife. Yet she was not willing that the world know. Blackwood might know; in time others might know, but not yet.

²¹Cross, op. cit., I, 342.

²²Williams, op. cit., p. 142.

CHAPTER III

ADAM BEDE

Resting and rejoicing over the publication of Scenes of Clerical Life, George Eliot turned again to the pages of George Sand. Perhaps she felt a deeper and a closer understanding of George Sand's philosophy now that their lives had followed the same course. Strange coincidence that both women had chosen the same first name for their nom de plume, more ironical that the litterati of London were soon to brand George Eliot 'an English George Sand,' most revealing that George Eliot in her moments of hesitation and doubt was to seek comfort in reading George Sand --- the influence of the one upon the other was ever present, but negligible; they were kindred spirits, leading parallel lives in the same century.

Once again George Eliot re-lived the days she had spent in the country, finding solace in George Sand's vivid descriptions and picturesque portrayals of the countryside.

It was under their spell that long ago she too had tried to describe, in her 'preliminary chapter,' village life and manners in her native country. Then, in despair at ever equalling the grace and charm of George Sand, she had given up the attempt.¹

¹Romieu, op. cit., p. 206.

Now it was different. George Eliot had tasted the sweetness of success. No longer did she seriously doubt her ability to write, for was not the fame of George Eliot growing every day? Did not the love and encouragement of George Henry Lewes give her every reason for greater self-confidence? Was not the slow but steady sale of Scenes of Clerical Life heartening?

A change in Marian Evans Lewes's personality is marked Whereas she had been the editor, the editorial hack, . . . her time divided between . . . writing that demanded chiefly intellect and education and acquaintance . . . , she was now in accomplishment, the novelist, the reflective writer, drawing upon all her powers of observation, of recollection, of imagination.²

Previously George Eliot had dealt with her characters objectively, revealing a suggestion of her power in the subjective treatment of Catarina and Maynard Gilfil. "Her power of objective representation was fully grown from the first."³ She had always analyzed the emotions and psychological reactions of others with remarkable keenness. Now she began to analyze herself and those closest to her in her memories.

Consequently, the genius of George Eliot flowered. "True to life, true to genius, her first full-length novel, named for the first man and the first English

²Williams, op. cit., p. 144.

³Browning, op. cit., p. 48.

scholar, stands first in the affection and judgement of many"⁴

The reason is obvious. Adam Bede is written with subjective development of character. George Eliot did not need to think how her characters would act; she knew. As a result the characters in Adam Bede are not characters alone; they are people.

George Eliot had forgotten Marian Evans and Marian Lewes; she forgot her identity and wrote freely, drawing from her memory the rural England that she had known and loved and the people who had once been so close to her. Her father had been one of the dominant influences in her life, and now that she had grown more settled emotionally and had felt again the security of loving and of being loved, she found in him the very epitome of the finest common people to be found in rural England.

For almost two years George Eliot devoted herself to the task of writing Adam Bede. When at last it had been completed, she wrote in her diary:

Wrote the last word of "Adam Bede"
Jubilate.

The germ of "Adam Bede" was an anecdote told me by my Methodist Aunt Samuel (the wife of my father's younger brother) --- anecdote from her own experience. . . . she had visited a condemned criminal --- a very ignorant girl, who had murdered her child and refused to confess; how she had stayed

⁴Williams, op. cit., p. 147.

with her praying through the night, and how the poor creature at last broke out into tears and confessed her crime. My aunt afterwards went with her in the cart to the place of execution; and she described to me the great respect with which this ministry of hers was regarded by the official people about the jail. The story . . . affected me deeply, and I never lost the impression . . . ; but . . . I never mentioned it . . . till something prompted me to tell it to George in December, 1856, when I had begun to write the "Scenes of Clerical Life." He remarked that the scene in the prison would make a fine element in a story; and I afterwards began to think of blending this and some other recollections of my aunt in one story, with some points in my father's early life and character

The character of Dinah grew out of my recollections of my aunt

The character of Adam and one or two incidents connected with him were suggested by my father's early life; but Adam is not my father any more than Dinah is my aunt. Indeed, there is not a single portrait in "Adam Bede"--only suggestions of experience wrought up into new combinations. When I began to write it, the only elements I had determined on, besides the character of Dinah, were the character of Adam, his relation to Arthur Donnithorne, and their mutual relations to Hetty--i.e., to the girl who commits child-murder--the scene in the prison being, of course, the climax towards which I worked. Everything else grew out of the characters and their mutual relations. Dinah's ultimate relation to Adam was suggested by George, when I had read to him the first part of the volume; he was so delighted with the presentation of Dinah, and so convinced that the reader's interest would centre in her, that he wanted her to be the principal figure at the last. I accepted the idea at once, and from the end of the third chapter worked with it constantly in view.⁵

This description of the writing of Adam Bede is revealing in many respects. It presents a new George Eliot, more intimate and less fearful of censure. Having reached mental maturity at an early age, she was now

⁵Cross, op. cit., II, 48-50.

beginning to experience the fundamentals of emotional maturity. She could remember and reflect with balanced objectivity and subjectivity.

An examination of the characters portrayed in Adam Bede illustrates the growth of artistry and emotional maturity in George Eliot. She willingly admits that she received the germ of the story from her Aunt Samuel and "that the character of Dinah grew out of my recollections of my aunt."⁶ The life of Dinah Morris may be compared most intimately with the life of Elizabeth Evans who married Samuel Evans, thus becoming Aunt Samuel to George Eliot. Samuel Evans was the brother of Robert, and he, as Seth Bede, was a devout Methodist.

In the story Seth is anxious to marry Dinah, but is refused, Adam being the man of her choice. In real life 'Seth' was more fortunate, and for nearly half a century . . . this devoted pair went about doing good.⁷

That George Eliot was consciously remembering this phase of her Aunt's life may be seen by the fact that she has Seth think of himself, "There's no man could love her better, and leave her freer to follow the Lord's work."⁸ Additional similarities may be seen in the fact

⁶William Mottram, The True Story of George Eliot in Relation to "Adam Bede", p. 49.

⁷Olcott, op. cit., p. 44.

⁸George Eliot, The Works of George Eliot, Foleshill edition, Vol. I, Adam Bede, p. 34.

that George Eliot's Aunt Samuel had preached publicly in her youth, as does Dinah Morris. Both were forced to stop preaching by an edict of the Methodist church forbidding women to preach.

The emotional development of Dinah Morris is true and convincing because George Eliot wrote subjectively. Once she had lived in spirit as Dinah Morris lived in Adam Bede. Once Mary Anne Evans had forbidden herself all the delights of the world, "the most trivial gratifications, even to smiling."⁹ She had spent many moments in her youth pondering the various questions in theology, constantly seeking spiritual truth. No wonder she later wrote Sara Hennell, "How curious it seems to me . . . that people should think Dinah's sermons, prayers, and speeches were copied, when they were written with hot tears as they surged up in my own mind."¹⁰

Thus the character of Dinah Morris represents the delicate balance so necessary to true art. Her character was drawn from objective memories, but it was developed from subjective feelings. Consequently, Dinah Morris lives. George Eliot had become an artist. "Dinah, the enthusiastic Methodist, in very many traits recalls her aunt Samuel, . . . but, even more, it was herself

⁹Romieu, op. cit., p. 40.

¹⁰Olcott, op. cit., p. 49.

that Marian put upon the scene in this figure"¹¹

Again George Eliot reveals part of herself to us in the character of Hetty, who is required to oversee most of the tasks pertaining to Mrs. Poyser's part of the household. She is seventeen, and she revolts against the duties incumbent upon her. Marian Evans had been in a similar position when her mother died.

The weight of the household, the direction of the farm rest on her eighteen-year-old shoulders. . . . Her part it is now to keep an eye on everything, as her mother used to do: on the kitchen, cellar, farmyard, stable, orchard and vegetable garden But the dairy is her especial delight, with a wholesome, rustic atmosphere that enchants her.¹²

So it is with Hetty, disliking her many tasks at the Poyser home, but enjoying her work in the dairy.

Moreover, Hetty was particularly clever at making up the butter; it was the one performance of hers that her aunt allowed to pass without severe criticism; so she handled it with all the grace that belongs to mastery.¹³

Still greater depths in maturity and understanding are to be noted in Adam Bede, for George Eliot presents a prototype of her father in the character Adam Bede. No one will deny that she deeply loved her father, but in her youth she had disagreed with him on almost every

¹¹Romieu, op. cit., p. 221.

¹²Ibid., p. 43.

¹³Eliot, op. cit., p. 81.

point. They had been separated by nearly fifty years in age, by education, and by culture. Their very instincts were in direct opposition; "great affection is needed for bridging this hiatus."¹⁴ Nonetheless, affection alone could not have produced the character of Adam Bede; it required complete understanding, the ability to feel subjectively in the life of another, even when that life had always been viewed objectively or in relation to her own subjectivity.

The similarities in the lives of Robert Evans and Adam Bede are obvious. Samuel Evans became a Methodist, as did Seth Bede, and was teased about it by his brother, as was Seth. Robert Evans was gentle and very considerate at home, as was Adam Bede. "Both were greatly attached to their brothers, although they differed in religious beliefs."¹⁵ The outward circumstances in their lives are also evident.

The church at Norbury was attended regularly by Robert Evans, and here, like Adam Bede, he sang in the village choir.¹⁶

Robert Evans, like Adam Bede, was first a carpenter, then a forester, and then a land-agent. The friendship of Adam with Arthur was precisely that of

¹⁴Romieu, op. cit., p. 42.

¹⁵George Willis Cooke, George Eliot: a Critical Study of Her Life, Writings, and Philosophy, p. 285.

¹⁶Olcott, op. cit., p. 66.

Evans to young Newdigate, the Oldinport of Amos Barton.¹⁷

When Mr. Francis Newdigate, who made him the agent of his estate, inherited the larger and finer estate of Arbury, Robert Evans went with him, settling at South Farm, where his distinguished daughter was born.¹⁸

In the story these facts are altered but little. When young Arthur Donnithorne inherits the estate, Adam Bede does not move, but merely becomes over-seer.

"Robert Evans established his own workshop at Ellastone."¹⁹ Adam Bede also established a workshop of his own, although it remained in his home.

Adam Bede was an unusual man, filled with burning energy. He was endowed with all of the admirable characteristics for which we search in mankind. He was talented in the art of carpentry, and his services were ever in demand. The same has been written of Robert Evans.

True her father was, in his way, a remarkable man. A stalwart, of giant strength, self-reliant, energetic and practical. Had he continued in life as a builder he would have distinguished himself in that capacity. He did afterwards win wide distinctions as an estate agent and steward.²⁰

Adam Bede also won wide distinction. He was the envy of every man in Hayslope and the outlying country.

¹⁷Browning, op. cit., p. 63.

¹⁸Olcott, op. cit., p. 51.

¹⁹Mottram, op. cit., p. 54.

²⁰Ibid., p. 4.

Further evidence that George Eliot was portraying the life of her father's family in Adam Bede is to be found in the character of Thias Bede, who it may be conjectured was George Evans, the father of Robert Evans, as Thias Bede was the father of Adam.

George Evans was the carpenter and builder for the whole locality. His 'brow was wet with honest sweat,' while his good wife, Mary, was a woman of household thrift and motherly activity. Every . . . son was taught his father's trade The demands of labour were constant and severe.²¹

So it was in the Bede household, where work was never absent, ever demanding. Thias Bede, as George Evans, was a man who sought perfection in his labors,

but who took to drink in his later years. He was at an alehouse very late one night, and the next morning was found dead in a brook near his house.²²

Having known of this tragedy in her youth, George Eliot understood in mature reflection how her father felt as he witnessed the degeneration of the man who had once been his idol and who had taught him everything he knew --- his own father. Certainly she portrays and reveals the thoughts and feelings of Adam Bede in such a subjective manner that she divulges an intimate knowledge of such an occurrence.

The central figure of Adam Bede is her own father, with his sense calmed, rough, violent,

²¹Ibid., p. 20.

²²Cooke, op. cit., p. 285.

upright and good.²³

Many years later George Eliot substantiated this statement when "she made this acknowledgement concerning Adam Bede: 'There are things in it about my father, i. e., . . . things my father told us concerning his early life.'"²⁴

The other major characters in Adam Bede are fictional, illustrating again the growth of George Eliot's power of character delineation.

We may as well dismiss the idea of a Mr. Jonathan Burge from our minds. He and his workshop are a creation of the literary artist to fill up the plan of her story.²⁵

We know that Mrs. Poyser . . . never had any real existence.²⁶

Mrs. Poyser is an original character She is the wittiest of all the author's characters, as Adam Bede is the noblest and Dinah Morris the saintliest.²⁷

After Adam Bede had been published, George Eliot was to ask "herself in her Journal, 'Shall I ever write another book as true?'"²⁸ Small wonder that she felt this questioning doubt, for

into this book she put the best of herself; her sincerity, her compassion, her family and her heart.

²³Romieu, op. cit., p. 221.

²⁴Mottram, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

²⁵Ibid., p. 52.

²⁶May, op. cit., p. 163.

²⁷Olcott, op. cit., p. 57.

²⁸Williams, op. cit., p. 147.

It contains all the poetry with which her childhood was imbued, the familiar countryside painted with a magic brush, dear ones standing out in incomparable relief.²⁹

In Adam Bede, however, it is important to observe, George Eliot is portraying not what she saw, but what she remembered. She was calling to mind the things of her childhood, and both the scene and the actors are viewed by her through the heightening medium of imaginative memory and the imaginative memory inevitably lends a touch of the ideal to everything it contemplated born of the emotions which the remembrance of them awakens in our hearts.³⁰

When Adam Bede had been finished, George Eliot and George Henry Lewes left for Germany, the land filled with poignant memories for them both. Here they were accepted socially as man and wife. Here they might escape for a time the family troubles hovering over them; they might forget that Chrissey was dying and that Agnes enjoyed mounting expenditures and growing debt. Here they might think of their work.

While we were at Munich George expressed his fear that Adam's part was too passive throughout the drama, and that it was important for him to be brought into more direct collision with Arthur. This doubt haunted me, and out of it grew the scene in the wood between Arthur and Adam; the fight came to me as a necessity one night at Munich opera.³¹

So George Eliot wrote in her journal, unwittingly revealing the change that had occurred within her. She

²⁹Romieu, op. cit., pp. 220-221.

³⁰May, op. cit., pp. 165-166.

³¹Cross, op. cit., II, 50-51.

was beginning to accept advice, just as she had earlier responded to her husband's suggestion regarding the character of Dinah Morris.

Lewes was responsible for two important points. He was convinced by the first three chapters that Dinah Morris would be the center of interest for readers Lewes' other remark was that Adam Bede was becoming too passive. He ought to be brought into more direct collision with Arthur Donnithorne.³²

George Eliot, the person, had grown in emotional maturity, reflecting the same evident growth in George Eliot, the writer. How deeply she must have loved Lewes and how well she must have come to understand her own abilities may be seen in the fact that she did now welcome advice and even ask for it. But Lewes was ever wise in his criticisms, understanding his wife's sensitive and humble nature. "A thousand eulogies would not give her the slightest confidence, but one objection would increase her doubts."³³

Consequently, she still wished to remain hidden in the security of her nom de plume. There was still a feeling of restraint, an inner discretion that advised against flaunting openly her secret. Perhaps it was fear --- fear of further public censure --- that made

³²Leslie Stephen, George Eliot, pp. 65-66.

³³Williams, op. cit., p. 141.

her wish to shield herself. Had she not yet forgotten the nightmare of those days following her elopement with George Henry Lewes? Had the wounds not yet healed; did she still suffer as she had at first?

From time to time an echo of what was whispered came round to her, and she was shattered. Her conscience was revolted by such calumny and base injustice. Her nerves were jangled, her mind distraught.

That they should dare to speak of profligacy, when her union with George Lewes was founded on devotion, kindness, respect, on the loftiest expression of an exclusive and faithful love, rightly outraged her. And her helplessness to break down that insulting ostracism plunged her into a mute despair that kept her awake for nights at a time.³⁴

This was no longer the case, for otherwise George Eliot could not have written Adam Bede. Had she not reached the stage where she could view the cruelties of mankind with malice and yet retain a firm belief in the essential goodness of the individual, she could not have written so freely, expressing so much hidden beauty in mankind.

Nor could this very expression have been the result of a soul starved for companionship --- being denied it physically, seeking it mentally. George Eliot had a deep and soul-filling companionship in the person of George Henry Lewes. For the first time in her life George Eliot was being permitted the blissful joy of

³⁴ Romieu, op. cit., p. 171.

loving and of being loved, of sharing complete and sympathetic understanding with another. Not even in the days when she and her brother Isaac had been so close had she had this. Nor had her relationship with her father, with Charles Hennell, or with Herbert Spencer given her this soul satisfying love which quenched the inner restlessness within her. True she had needed these others in order to appreciate what she now enjoyed, and Adam Bede is proof of the depths she experienced emotionally. How else might she have portrayed the subjectivity of those members of her family with such objectivity?

Nevertheless, the emotional strain George Eliot had endured is revealed in Adam Bede. That a quivering inward fear remained in her heart may be seen in the innumerable instances that show man's crying need for human understanding. We see Dinah asking Seth's understanding when she will not marry him and will not forego preaching; we find Seth asking Adam's understanding in matters of religion; we note old Thias Bede asking friendly and compassionate understanding of his sons and wife; we read of Arthur seeking Adam's understanding after the seduction of Hetty; we see both Arthur and Adam requesting deep understanding of Mr. Irwine; we find Hetty seeking understanding from Arthur and Dinah. Time and again George Eliot asks us to be more sympathetic;

this is to be even more fully developed in her later novels. Can it be that George Eliot was subconsciously asking the same request --- sympathetic understanding --- of her family and of those of her dearest friends who had forsaken her?

There is more in Adam Bede than a perpetual seeking for sympathetic understanding. There is also a strong demand for retaliation of wrong and harmful deeds. Does not Hetty pay for her crime? Does not Thias Bede meet an inevitable end for which we have not the slightest regret? Does not Arthur Donnithorne so mar his life that his chances for complete happiness are gone? The loss of respect of those people who live on his estate is not enough; he must lose the friendship of Adam and of Mr. Irwine, although they willingly extend kindness to him. "The doctrine of retribution is presented as distinctly and positively in "Adam Bede" as in any subsequent book George Eliot wrote."³⁵

These same psychologically conflicting elements show us the battle which was raging inside George Eliot. She felt that she had been criticized unjustly, and she wished sympathetic understanding for her deeds from those who had shunned and ostracized her; yet she agreed with the world at large in condemning and in ostracizing her

³⁵Cooke, op. cit., p. 299.

as an advocate of free love. Her religious training had been too thorough in her youth; she could not sanction free love; her very life with George Henry Lewes is indicative of her attitude toward such relationships as is her portrayal of Hetty.

Yet this questioning within herself made her produce characters who question their deeds. "George Eliot's characters are greater than their deeds; their inward life is truer and more rounded than their outward life is pure and noble."³⁶ The same may be said of George Eliot's own life. Perhaps it was this very thing which made her write Adam Bede, stressing an ethical philosophy which showed the irrevocability of conduct.

When Adam Bede was published, George Eliot joined the front ranks of English writers. "Blackwood had praised the manuscript from the very first."³⁷ He was "convinced that he had a real masterpiece under his hand, a Heaven-sent book, such as only appears once in every hundred years."³⁸

The first edition brought forth shouts of acclaim. All England, particularly literary England, praised the book. Charles Reade declared that Adam Bede was "the

³⁶ Ibid., p. 302.

³⁷ Cross, op. cit., II, 13.

³⁸ Romieu, op. cit., p. 220.

finest thing since Shakespeare."³⁹ Nor was the fame of George Eliot limited to England. Alexandre Dumas pronounced Adam Bede "the masterpiece of the century."⁴⁰ Both Charles Dickens and the wife of Thomas Carlyle renewed their praise of George Eliot. "Adam Bede's success was instantaneous and extraordinary, alike with the critics and the public, and George Eliot suddenly became a star of the first magnitude."⁴¹

Under such conditions it was only natural that all England should begin to demand that George Eliot be identified. The time for an anonymous author had passed. The public demanded a human being whom they might worship; a name without a fleshly counterpart was nothing. All of England was asking and demanding to know: Who is George Eliot?

Marian Lewes remained silent and requested Blackwood to do so. At last the public, seeking a hero about whom they might know everything, decided that Liggins of Nuneaton was George Eliot. He had never denied the allegation since the appearance of The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton; now Liggins gladly accepted money

³⁹May, op. cit., p. 162.

⁴⁰Romieu, op. cit., p. 22.

⁴¹May, op. cit., p. 170.

and homage from the curious and took to drink.

The Leweses were greatly perplexed. George Eliot published public denials of Liggins' claims, and Lewes did everything in his power to stop the legend, but it continued to grow. Blackwood daily received insulting letters for his 'theft' of Adam Bede when the author, thought to be Joseph Liggins by a gullible public, was badly in need of financial assistance. Further denials of Liggins' claims were useless unless another George Eliot could be produced.

This burlesque episode . . . compelled Marian to emerge from her retirement.

At first she did so for the benefit of only a few close friends, but the news spread rapidly, and it was not long before the whole of England knew who the personality was hidden behind the pseudonym of George Eliot.⁴²

If she had ever wondered and worried lest when her identity became known, her income from her novels would cease, George Eliot now discovered the fickleness of mankind.

For it is self-evident that the world reserves its censure for the lowly and would never fasten it on anyone with a name. What is looked on as a crime in the obscure passes for elegance with the distinguished.⁴³

How George Eliot must have smiled at this irony!

⁴²Romieu, op. cit., p. 240.

⁴³Ibid., p. 241.

To have been condemned in one breath, to have that action forgotten, and to feel the fragrant breath of praise, acclaim, and solicitude in the next --- that had been George Eliot's experience, as it had been George Sand's. But George Eliot "shrank from the consequences of a literary fame, had none of George Sand's love of notoriety or desire to impress herself upon the world."⁴⁴

George Eliot had grown in maturity. She had developed a truer perspective of life. She had learned a valuable lesson, one which was to reveal itself many times in her future works.

To know how to despise, to keep a philosophic smile, an inalienable serenity in the midst of outcry: that is the art of life!⁴⁵

⁴⁴Cooke, op. cit., p. 70.

⁴⁵Romieu, op. cit., p. 179.

CHAPTER IV

THE MILL ON THE FLOSS

Having produced Adam Bede, George Eliot was destined to write another great novel, continuing in the same vein. She had written of her father's life; now she was to produce a greater work by drawing a prototype of herself, Mary Anne Evans, in the character of Maggie Tulliver.

George Eliot began the story early in 1859 and then put it aside, feeling dissatisfied with what she had written. She had not yet recovered from the tremendous effort of Adam Bede; she could not put her best into her work. Nonetheless, she felt the need for work and began a short novelette.

The Lifted Veil, coming after the brilliance of Adam Bede, is doubly disappointing. It is a mystical tale, revealing the growth of George Eliot's imaginative powers and the influence of Lewes' interest in science. The characters are scarcely more than names; the reader is not convinced of Latimer's power of clairvoyance. There is no sympathy aroused in the reader for any of the characters, least of all for Latimer in whom George Eliot may have been trying to prove that

superhuman gifts do not make for happiness. The story rushes to its inevitable end with the swiftness of a melodrama.

Fortunately, Blackwood published The Lifted Veil anonymously in the Edinburgh Magazine, and the fame of George Eliot was not marred. But the author liked the story as she had earlier favored Janet's Repentance, despite Blackwood's wiser knowledge that it did not equal her two previous stories. In these simple acts George Eliot gave evidence of her genius; she was never, except with occasional rare insight, to be able to judge and to differentiate her good work from her bad.¹

Nonetheless, George Eliot did know when her writing did not equal the deep emotion she felt within herself. When she had finished The Lifted Veil and had recovered from the shock of Chrissey's death, George Eliot re-wrote the chapters of the story she had begun under the title of Sister Maggie. Money was no longer a problem, but work was a soul-consuming necessity.

Hereafter, George Eliot with some aid from her brother Isaac must support and educate the three orphans left by her sister's death. She must forget that she had been alienated in the not too distant past and that she had

¹May, op. cit., p. 225.

been truly re-united with Chrissey only upon her death-bed. "But saddening as this loss was so soon after their reconciliation, the author of Adam Bede . . ." ² had grown in emotional maturity; she understood and accepted the frailties in human nature.

Freely and willingly Marian Evans had chosen her path in 1855. Now with new burdens resting upon her shoulders George Eliot returned to the life from which she had gained the most happiness and which she was destined to "continue to the day of her death: that of a married woman of letters, working hard for her living, endeavouring to fulfill the duties of her vocation, performing with conscientious love and devotion the part of a wife and mother." ³ The remainder of the year was devoted to mothering Lewes' eldest son, Charles, "a passionate lover of music . . . a great bond of sympathy between them . . ." ⁴ and to writing the story of Maggie Tulliver.

When the story was completed early in 1860, George Eliot had reached the peak of her genius. She had written an autobiographical novel with such artistry

²Anna T. Kitchel, George Lewes and George Eliot: A Review of Records, p. 187.

³Browning, op. cit., p. 42.

⁴Romieu, op. cit., p. 253.

that none suspected her secret until scholars later unearthed it. She had produced a story, real and moving, from the depths of her heart.

The title Sister Maggie lacked the poetic tone of the story, and George Eliot was displeased with it as she had earlier been dissatisfied with her first chapters. Lewes "preferred 'The House of Tulliver'; or 'Life on the Floss'" ⁵ It remained for Blackwood to suggest the proper title under which the book was published. "The title, The Mill on the Floss, is one of the perfect titles in fiction despite the slight inaccuracy--the Mill not being on the Floss but on its tributary, the Ripple."⁶

George Eliot had made another outward advance in emotional maturity; she had willingly accepted advice from her publisher and had agreed with his decision. But the title page of the novel carried the most revealing growth in George Eliot's personality in "the following inscription:

To my beloved husband, George Henry Lewes, I give this M.S. of my third book, written in the sixth year of our life together, at Holly Lodge, South Field, Wandsworth, and finished 21st March, 1860.⁷

⁵Cross, op. cit., II, 111.

⁶May, op. cit., p. 203.

⁷Cross, op. cit., II, 116.

Each succeeding volume to be written by George Eliot was to bear a similar inscription. It was not a desire to flaunt her relationship that inspired this loving inscription and was to inspire others; it was merely George Eliot's open acknowledgement of the love she bore the man she considered her husband. Let the public whisper behind her back! She had witnessed the fickleness of man's opinion and no longer cared about public censure.

The same lack of restraint and serene freedom of thought were evident in The Mill on the Floss. George Eliot created Maggie Tulliver with such authenticity that the reader may find in her character "all the charm, all the qualities and weaknesses of her creator, . . . so perfect was the art of the composition that it became impossible to distinguish the model from the imitation."⁸

Maggie is the prototype of Mary Anne Evans just as Tom is the prototype of Isaac. Nowhere in fiction is the love of a young girl for her older brother more ardently portrayed.

Maggie, thirsting for the education which is wasted on her brother Tom, longs also, with passionate ardor, for greater love and sympathy than his colder heart can give. Her turbulent, impulsive nature finds

⁸Romieu, op. cit., p. 250.

within itself no power of will firm enough to direct its course, and some calmer strength must supply the guidance of which she stands in need. Thus her mind craves instruction, her heart love, and her nature support. All these we find denied her by the circumstances of her lot.⁹

Mary Anne Evans was permitted to gain more education than Maggie Tulliver; Robert Evans was a more understanding and tolerant father. Mary Anne Evans' love for her brother Isaac was thwarted by his lack of understanding just as Maggie's is for Tom. Both heroine and creator were starved intellectually and emotionally in their youth; both were constantly seeking further knowledge in books and a deep and soul-filling love from the brothers they adored. "There is no need to dwell on the extent to which the early chapters of The Mill on the Floss are a picture of the early life of George Eliot and her brother Isaac."¹⁰

Even more evident similarities are revealed in the emotions of the adult Maggie and Tom Tulliver. Having found a temperament spiritually akin to her own in Philip Wakem, Maggie Tulliver forms an affectionate friendship even though she knows that her brother Tom will never sanction or try to understand the relationship between them. Did not Marian Evans find solace in the friendship

⁹Abba Goold Woolson, George Eliot and Her Heroines, p. 58.

¹⁰Browning, op. cit., p. 73.

she shared with Charles Kemell, and did she not adhere to his religious beliefs even though she knew that neither her father nor brother would attempt to understand?

When Maggie is innocently but irremediably compromised as a result of her boat trip with Stephen, Tom makes no pretense at understanding his sister's actions. Maggie has disgraced the Tullivers; Tom renounces his sister as thoroughly and as dogmatically as Isaac Evans had renounced Marian Evans and "had cut her out of his life more completely than if she had been dead,"¹¹ following her elopement with Lewes. But Marian Evans continued to love her brother Isaac regardless of his actions toward her. So Maggie retains her love for her brother Tom and willingly gives her life in the hope that she might save him. "Brother and sister had gone down in an embrace never to be parted; living through again in one supreme moment the days when they had clasped their little hands in love, and roamed the daisied fields together."¹²

The relationship between Tom and Maggie is convincing and deeply moving because George Eliot recorded

¹¹Romieu, op. cit., p. 160.

¹²Eliot, op. cit., Vol. VIII, The Mill on the Floss, p. 545.

her emotional past freely and naturally. Tom and Maggie are individuals who have loved one another through the sharing of a carefree companionship in their youth; maturity emphasizes the innate differences in their natures, and their love will not bridge the shattering of convention with sympathetic understanding. One is irrevocably bound by the traditional moral code and can never understand the freedom of thought vouchsafed by the other's actions.

Nowhere, so far as we know, does she more directly justify her cause, unless it be in the novel which is generally recognized as a picture of her early life. "The Mill on the Floss" represents the heroine's sudden flight with a lover who is already the betrothed of another as an act innocent in itself, and excusable, from the circumstances that attended it; but it calls down upon her the bitter reproof and lasting alienation of a beloved brother, and the relentless condemnation of her social world.¹³

These scenes illustrate the autobiographical nature of The Mill on the Floss, but George Eliot did more than recount the various emotional episodes which were destined to estrange Tom and Maggie Tulliver. She revealed in the characters of Stephen and Philip, both of whom Maggie Tulliver loved as George Eliot had loved Charles Hennell and George Henry Lewes, the subtle difference between love based upon the sharing of similar intellectual

¹³Woolson, op. cit., p. 119.

interests and coupled with the demands of strong physical attraction and the love based upon spiritual kinship.

Stephen Guest is a prototype of Charles Hennell; both were handsome and fascinating in the eyes of Maggie Tulliver and Marian Evans. Both appeared worldly, having a sophisticated knowledge; both were cultivated and charming in their manner. Stephen Guest thrilled Maggie Tulliver with his attentions, and she readily yielded to his attentions even though in spirit she remained loyal to Philip.

The altering of circumstances scarcely disguises the emotional struggle Marian Evans endured when she tried to reconcile Charles Hennell's religious beliefs with those of her father. Maggie Tulliver, too, is forced to choose between the orthodox beliefs pertinent in her background and actions representing the culmination of new mental freedom. The difference in ages is merely another fictional attempt to conceal the autobiographical nature of the novel. The struggle remains convincing not only because George Eliot wrote from the depths of her heart but also because she revealed the emotional intensity born of alternate joy and suffering in a universal struggle, common to all men at all ages regardless of race, color, or creed. Inevitably the day comes in the life of each individual.

when a choice must be made between perservering with one's former beliefs and actions and adopting a new set of principles which herald another life.

Just as Marian Evans had found sympathetic understanding in Sara Hennell, who most logically might have been the first to condemn her friend's deed on an ethical basis, so Maggie Tulliver found sympathetic understanding in Lucy and Philip, who had suffered more from her deed than all others in St. Ogg's. In this incident alone is revealing proof of Geroge Eliot's emotional maturity: deep hurt can not erase true love; it may be an aid in promoting deeper understanding.

Some such end is the goal of all George Eliot's love stories, whether they be tragic or joyous. We are not allowed to forget the beauty and freshness and charm of human love; but we are neither allowed to ignore the strength and sweetness which should come from love tested by tribulation.¹⁴

As it has been conjectured that Stephen Guest was the prototype of Charles Hennell, it may also be ventured that Philip Wakem was the prototype of George Henry Lewes. Philip is a hunchback and physically unattractive, but his soul is filled with noble beauty. He has a brilliant mind and is ever seeking more knowledge. Certainly the same was true of George Henry Lewes. Although he was

¹⁴Lina Wright Berle, George Eliot and Thomas Hardy, p. 121.

not deformed, he was called "the homeliest man in London . . ." ¹⁵ and was endowed with one of the most brilliant minds in London.

It was as natural that Philip and Maggie should be deeply attracted to one another as it was that Marian Evans and George Henry Lewes should find a life companion in each other. Maggie Tulliver is ever seeking spiritual companionship, and she draws more happiness from her brief chats with Philip Wakem in the Red Deeps than she has found anywhere else. Here is a meeting of kindred souls, matched spiritually and intellectually.

George Eliot understood intellectual companionship in fullest measure; and that it could exist without sacrifice of the 'feminine' qualities she sought to prove, both in her novels and in her life itself. Her marriage to George Henry Lewes offers an illustration paralleled in literary history only by the other great idyll of the Brownings --- both conspicuous justifications of the belief that the education of women should enrich rather than endanger the marriage relation, by making friendship possible within it. ¹⁶

By drawing upon all of these incidents and circumstances in her own life and by imbuing them with an authentic emotional intensity, George Eliot "wrote The Mill on the Floss which will live for ever." ¹⁷ As in Adam Bede she portrayed those near and dear to her with

¹⁵Williams, op. cit., p. 102.

¹⁶Berle, op. cit., p. 70.

¹⁷May, op. cit., p. 17.

understanding subjectivity, but she advanced a step in emotional maturity by presenting her own emotional development and reaction freely and with complete objectivity in the character of Maggie Tulliver. As an individual George Eliot had reached emotional maturity; as an artist George Eliot was to progress one step more before reaching complete emotional maturity.

When The Mill on the Floss had been completed, the Leweses left for Italy. George Eliot was again in need of rest and change of atmosphere.

Always after finishing a book I have a period of despair that I can ever again produce anything worth giving to the world. The responsibility of writing grows heavier and heavier . . . as the world grows older and the voices of the dead more numerous. It is difficult to believe, until the germ of some new work grows into imperious activity within one, that it is possible to make a really needed contribution to the poetry of the world¹⁸

Unknowingly, George Eliot had passed an important epoch in her life. Adam Bede had been translated into both French and German and continued to enjoy great popularity and critical approval. The Mill on the Floss was destined to follow its predecessor in popularity, high critical acclaim, and numerous foreign translations; it was also to be published in an American edition and to receive the praise of Queen Victoria.

¹⁸Cooke, op. cit., p. 105.

It is not merely because they are things of beauty that George Eliot's best novels --- Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss --- deserve to live . . . but because that beauty is a type that is unique in English literature, because no one has depicted in such mellow and lasting colors that England undefiled and unspoiled which was the England of her childhood.¹⁹

Both novels were not only beautiful and convincingly authentic, but they were great commentaries on human life. "Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss are of a nature and a scope which prompt comparison not so much with the work of any novelist as with such a creative genius as Shakespeare."²⁰ Here, as always, George Eliot wrote with a moral purpose, tracing "some of her characters through a long process of development, and showing how they are affected by the experiences of life."²¹ As always, George Eliot portrays the deep human need for sympathetic understanding and the inevitable retribution of man's deeds.

"George Eliot appears as at once realist and artist, --- one who presents not only the truth, but the illusion of truth as well."²² As a realist George Eliot never

¹⁹Browning, op. cit., p. 76.

²⁰May, op. cit., p. 140.

²¹Cooke, op. cit., p. 121.

²²Berle, op. cit., p. 11.

hesitates in portraying unseemliness; as an artist she finds and reveals the beauty inherent in most of man's actions or arouses a seeking after beauty in the catharsis of her tragedies. With true scientific spirit George Eliot

conducts her representation of provincial life. Not only does she seek fidelity to the facts of life, but also fidelity to human kind itself. This has been the path of sane realism.²³

Nonetheless, George Eliot wrote with such artistry that "in aspiration, if not always in achievement, in vision, if not always in expression, she is of the kin of Shakespeare and of Sophocles, and her place is not far below the greatest of the world's elect."²⁴

Into The Mill on the Floss George Eliot injected her deepest emotions, her dearest memories, and her most bitter recollections; she gave the best within her freely and produced a masterpiece of realism and artistry.

The unique and distinctive greatness of The Mill on the Floss does not live in the story as such, moving as it is. Nor is it explained by . . . triumphant examples of genre painting. Nor again is it . . . the charm of the descriptive passages . . . The greatness of The Mill on the Floss lies not merely in the perfection of its literary execution. It appeals not only to the esthetic but to the moral sense, and its greatness is measured by its effect not only on the senses but on the mind and still more on the soul.²⁵

²³Ibid., p. 42.

²⁴May, op. cit., p. 343.

²⁵Ibid., pp. 188-189.

Unfortunately when George Eliot left for Italy with Lewes following the completion of The Mill on the Floss, a change was destined to occur in her writing. "This journey forms a dividing epoch in George Eliot's artistic life, nearly as important as that of the journey to Italy in the life of Goethe."²⁶

²⁶Browning, op. cit., p. 74.

CHAPTER V

SILAS MARNER AND ROMOLA

In Italy the Leweses rested from the tremendous exertion of the past year, rejoiced over the mounting sales of Animal Studies and The Mill on the Floss, and traveled everywhere in search of fresh ideas and cultural thought. Once they had viewed the historical remains of the Renaissance, they turned quite naturally to the libraries.

George Henry Lewes commenced gathering material for his forthcoming study Aristotle, and George Eliot turned to the history of Florence in the late fifteenth century. She had been fascinated with the story of Savonarola and found in it the germ of a novel. Scholar that she was, George Eliot commenced reading avidly, learning all she could about the Medici, Charles VIII, Savonarola, and late fifteenth century Florence.

To name the authors read . . . would be to make a catalogue. Nerli, Nardi, Sacchetti, Sismondi, Montell, Renan, Pulci, Villani, Varchi, Politian, Muratori --- these are merely suggestive of the long list she attacked.¹

There could be no rest for minds ever in search of

¹Williams, op. cit., p. 195.

more knowledge, ever seeking to give what knowledge they had gained to others. Lewes approved of his wife's projected novel and aided her by visiting the San Marco monastery, to which she had been denied admittance, and taking notes. He understood the driving necessity for work which burned within her and had made her say: "I am miserable when writing, but I am still more miserable when not writing."²

After six months of study the Leweses returned to England. They were laden with copious notes and eager to commence work. Aiding Lewes' two eldest sons in their study for governmental positions and accepting the many visitors who came to honor George Eliot were merely additional duties incumbent upon them. Romola was begun, while the study of Aristotle was continued.

After a few weeks George Eliot dropped the tremendous task before her and wrote a short story, Brother Jacob, which might well have been left unpublished and was indeed not published until four years had passed and her new publishers needed money. The tale is completely fictional and not in the least convincing, suggesting only the wandering of a strong imagination. The element of retribution is present in David's recognition

²Ibid., p. 133.

by his brother Jacob, but the reader is not moved to compassion by David's downfall. The tale does not belong with George Eliot's nature; it appears to be a cynical farce.

After working on Romola for several weeks, George Eliot again put it aside and commenced working on another "story --- the idea of which . . . had thrust itself between me and the other book . . . Silas Marner, the Weaver of Raveloe."³ The rural England she loved could not yet be banished from her mind; it remained hauntingly alive, offering more inspiration than the months of study had yet produced in the writing of Romola.

But the months of study had left their imprint: the scholar in George Eliot battled the artist. She longed to write a simple moving novel, but

Silas Marner was not written without a struggle. She, who of old had written three volumes in six months, now needed a year to bring this, the briefest of her works, to a conclusion.⁴

The artist strove to recapture the charm of rural England and the refreshing naturalness of humble people; the scholar sought perfection in style and an ethical philosophy. Artistry won. Silas Marner "is singularly direct

³ Cross, op. cit., II, 203-204.

⁴ May, op. cit., p. 232.

and free of moral reflection, unless it be that of the purifying effect of family life"⁵ The element of sympathetic understanding is presented with convincing spontaneity as is the element of retribution. Silas Marner offers a lasting and beautiful philosophy far more important than the scholar was later to offer. Nevertheless, "many critics, with their minds fixed on such things as 'composition,' 'balance,' 'arrangement,' the due disposition of light and shade, see in Silas Marner George Eliot's finest achievement."⁶

In many respects Silas Marner represents the peak of George Eliot's creative genius. In this novel she reached artistic emotional maturity: imagining a story so real that the most trivial incidents appear authentic and creating a group of characters with such balanced subjectivity and objectivity that they live as individuals. "No scene familiar in early life is described, no friend of early years is portrayed."⁷ Yet Dolly Winthrop lives as certainly as Maggie Tulliver; Silas Marner suffers as surely as Philip Wakem. Each of the characters with one exception is an original creation, growing and developing beneath the reader's eyes. "Godfrey Cass is

⁵Haldane, op. cit., p. 182.

⁶May, op. cit., p. 224.

⁷Browning, op. cit., p. 80.

a reminiscence of Arthur Donnithorne and a foretaste of Tito, one of those weak, self-indulgent characters who are led by the impulse of the moment, and whose softness is a source of ruin to themselves and others."⁸

Yet the character of Godfrey Cass gives evidence of George Eliot's emotional artistry, proof of her artistic emotional maturity. Arthur Donnithorne seduced Hetty and left her in the hour of need just as Godfrey Cass had forsaken his wife and child, but greater compassion is aroused by Godfrey Cass' confession than by Arthur Donnithorne's. Tito Melema was destined to lead a double life in Romola, deceiving his wife and betraying his father-in-law, just as Godfrey Cass deceived Nancy by failing to acknowledge his previous marriage. But no pity is felt when Tito meets his downfall and death; great pity is stirred in the reader when Eppie refuses to leave Silas Marner to live with her own father. All three men suffered for their deeds, but the suffering of Godfrey Cass alone creates a catharsis. In comparison Tito Melema's end seems melodramatic and Arthur Donnithorne's downfall vindictive.

Silas Marner is ostracized for a theft he did not commit just as Maggie Tulliver is condemned for an act wholly innocent in itself; yet a greater catharsis is

⁸ Ibid., p. 79.

achieved when Silas Marner is redeemed and gains a noble happiness in his love for Eppie than when Maggie Tulliver is re-united with her brother Tom. Both episodes are demands for more sympathetic understanding, but the very life of Silas Marner is a plea for more humane deeds and neighborly love.

George Eliot repeats another phase of her former writing in the character of Dunstan Cass, who knows his brother Godfrey's secret and who uses it as a weapon to obtain what he wishes. Jacob also shares his brother David's secret and remains a constant threat. Here the similarity ends, for neither half-witted Jacob nor the thieving David are convincing characters; the shrewd and cunning Dunstan Cass is.

In the story of Silas Marner George Eliot revealed simply and forcibly the philosophical truth evident in all of her novels: our deeds inevitably furnish our rewards and punishments. "Self-gratification is the source of all our woes; no forgiveness can screen us from the consequences of selfish, ignoble acts."⁹ But Silas Marner represents the last time that George Eliot was to voice this philosophical thought with such artistry that it appears as inevitable as life itself; in the

⁹Woolson, op. cit., p. 140.

future this thought occurred dogmatically as a preaching upon life.

When Silas Marner was published by Blackwood early in 1861, George Eliot had produced her last artistic document in which her dominant philosophical thought would appear simply and impressively, leaving its moral imprint upon the reader: "the climax of every life is the result of all that has gone before in acts, reading, thinking."¹⁰ So George Eliot, the moralist, sought to teach in her books.

But these truths which she so strenuously maintains were not the outcome of her own religious creed, and are not deducible from the system of philosophy which her later thought adopted. Her deep sense of moral obligation, her love of uprightness in dealing, of simple sincerity and honesty in thought and deed, were a direct inheritance from the beliefs which her youth had so fervently cherished, or had come to her indirectly, through parentage and early home training.¹¹

So it was with the best that George Eliot wrote. "When she is remembering and not inventing, or at least when she is inventing on a basis of her own genuine experience, she has had few rivals among fiction writers and no superiors."¹² When Silas Marner had been completed, "the inspiration that shed a grace and glory

¹⁰ Williams, op. cit., p. 177.

¹¹ Woolson, op. cit., p. 141.

¹² May, op. cit., pp. 230-231.

over the scenes of her childhood and youth comes to an end."¹³ Hereafter, George Eliot was to pursue another course.

The magnificent rural trilogy of Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss and Silas Marner . . . had marked the apogee, the culminating point. Into those pathetic, palpitating works Marian had poured the best of her heart, the quintessence of her fervent soul. Her grandiose triptych was impregnated through and through with piety; for this free-thinker remained, at the root of her being, a mystic.¹⁴

As might have been expected, Silas Marner was hailed by literary England. Sir Leslie Stephen said that it had "the unmistakable mark of high genius."¹⁵ Dickens and Congreve praised the work. "Frederic Harrison thought it her best novel; in his earlier stage of criticism it was preferred by Henry James . . . perfection wrought in miniature."¹⁶ Robert Browning expressed his appreciation as did Anthony Trollope and numerous others.

Silas Marner is, perhaps, the novel of George Eliot which has earned the highest praise from literary craftsmen. It contains all her merits in high perfection, concentrated by the narrow limits in which the work is enclosed.¹⁷

Silas Marner is usually spoken of as George Eliot's

¹³ Ibid., p. 232.

¹⁴ Romieu, op. cit., pp. 264-265.

¹⁵ Olcott, op. cit., p. 104.

¹⁶ Williams, op. cit., p. 190.

¹⁷ Browning, op. cit., p. 79.

most artistically perfect production; and indeed Silas Marner, because it contains that immortal scene in the Rainbow Inn, can never be discarded, for that scene is Shakespearean¹⁸

If fiction is ever to acknowledge a Shakespeare among its creative minds; if, like the drama, it is to possess the one supreme master to whom no gifts have been denied, it will be when a greater than George Eliot shall arise, equipped not only with her observant glance and strong imaginative powers, her sympathetic understanding and philosophic thoughts, but, in addition to these, with that intensity of feeling and pure integrity of moral standards which Charlotte Bronte reveals, joined with the full flow of generous emotion which distinguishes George Sand.¹⁹

With Silas Marner completed, George Eliot returned to Romola. Then George Henry Lewes fell ill. What could be better than another trip to Italy? One might rest and recuperate, while the other gathered even more historical material.

When they returned to England, George Eliot again commenced the tremendous task to which she had devoted so many arduous hours of preparation. "Not only was she attempting to write an historical novel of more than four hundred years ago, but she was attempting also to write a religious story which centred on the spiritual experiences of a beautiful young woman."²⁰ The entire project was completely foreign to anything she had yet

¹⁸May, op. cit., p. 100.

¹⁹Woolson, op. cit., p. 175.

²⁰Haldane, op. cit., p. 196.

attempted. To write a convincing, moving novel of the distant past was difficult enough; to write a religious novel advocating the tenets of a religion she knew only through study provided a test not only for her intellectual integrity but also for her emotional artistry.

Thus Romola, as did its predecessor Silas Marner, offered the crucial proof of George Eliot's artistic emotional maturity. In the one she created a group of living characters against the background she loved; in the other she related the trials suffered by the adherents of religious beliefs utterly foreign to her nature against a background equally foreign. It was a gigantic undertaking, but George Eliot succeeded in advancing the Catholic doctrines with as much understanding of the inherent good derived from a strong faith as she had earlier portrayed in Dinah Morris' fervent advocacy of Methodism.

When Romola was finished almost three years from the date of its inception, George Eliot wrote: "I began it as a young woman --- I finished it an old woman."²¹ Small wonder she made such a statement. "Romola was the first book in which the author subordinated artistic effect to spiritual and ethical teaching."²² In her

²¹Cross, op. cit., II, 255.

²²Olcott, op. cit., p. 150.

later books she was to continue all too frequently the stressing of a moral belief, but they were not to be relieved by historical backgrounds.

Romola was the one historical novel George Eliot was to write and has been called "the one English novel of the Renaissance, despite the existence of The Cloister and the Hearth" ²³ It was accurate in detail and "will always count as a great historical novel." ²⁴ If the characters do not equal her previous creations and if the novel too often appears pedantic, Romola is still to be admired; George Eliot to be congratulated. "The mentality that could absorb, in the time she gave herself, the vast amount of material necessary, the mentality that converted it into a complex, well-knit story of magnificent pageant and human drama is scarcely below that of a god." ²⁵ It was a supreme task, and the accomplishment of it meant the shattering of George Eliot's health.

Romola did not win the praise and acclaim of her previous books even though George Eliot received the greatest sum of money she had yet received for any of her work from her new publisher, George Smith, who

²³Williams, op. cit., p. 201.

²⁴Haldane, op. cit., p. 209.

²⁵Williams, op. cit., p. 201.

"offered to buy it outright for ten thousand pounds and to publish it serially in the Cornhill"²⁶ Magazine. The succeeding months again proved Blackwood's wisdom in refusing to pay very much for Romola. Sales lagged, and at length George Eliot gave the short story Brother Jacob to Smith as compensation for his loss of money in the venture.

The public had not found the universal charm and appeal of George Eliot's earlier works; they had not found a group of characters whose joys and sorrows they might share. "Romola is an intensely interesting picture of the real life of Florence in the period of the Renaissance; it is an impressive portrait of the greatest moral reformer of the fifteenth century, and it is a lofty presentation of great moral truths so dramatically presented as to make a profound impression."²⁷ But the characters lacked human warmth; the scholar and the philosopher had smothered the artist.

Romola is not a woman filled with religious ardor, seeking to benefit humanity with deeds of kindness and compassionate love as was Dinah Morris; we know Dinah Morris received joy from her acts; we doubt that Romola

²⁶ May, op. cit., p. 241.

²⁷ Olcott, op. cit., p. 151.

gained anything but stupefying forgetfulness. At the last Romola feels:

It was mere baseness in me to desire death. If everything else is doubtful, this suffering I can help is certain; if the glory of the cross is an illusion, the sorrow is only the truer. While the strength is in my arm, I will stretch it out to the fainting; while the light visits my eyes, they shall seek the forsaken.²⁸

Tito, the best drawn character in many respects, too often resembles a case history in abnormal psychology to be convincingly human. As always, George Eliot was more concerned with her characters' inner life, and "with the most subtle power she traces the growth of Tito Melema's mind through its perilous descent into selfish corruption" ²⁹ But the reader does not feel Tito changing; he learns of the change through George Eliot's scientific analysis of his mind.

Savonarola, the central figure of the historical background, is presented authentically from data gained in study, but his character is not infused with life. He remains an historical figure, a great religious and political reformer, "clearly and sympathetically drawn from the biography of Pasquale Villari" ³⁰ His sermons are more impressive and more lasting than he.

²⁸ Eliot, op. cit., Vol. X, Romola, p. 573.

²⁹ Cooke, op. cit., p. 121.

³⁰ Haldane, op. cit., p. 204.

Both *Romola* and *Savonarola* are indicative of George Eliot's growing interest in Positivism. Both are "working in the intellectual realm . . . for the interest of humanity . . . and confined simply to the moral influence of advice and theoretical formulation."³¹

Only the minor characters are imbued with life. One of the most touching scenes in the book occurs when Tessa is promised a home for herself and her offspring. Other strong scenes are centered about Bardo, the blind scholar, who treasures the library never again to be read and enjoyed by him.

The artist in George Eliot creeps through the maze of historical data, of philosophical thought, of psychological analysis of character to present clearly and forcibly the numerous minor characters who are needed to bring the story to fulfillment. Were it not for these small touches of artistry, suggestive of her former powers in character delineation, *Romola* might well be classed as a scholarly achievement rather than a literary effort.

"Whatever the virtues, whatever the faults, of *Romola*, the author loved it best of all her books, felt it had been written with her best blood and with the

³¹Arthur Kenyon Rogers, *A Student's History of Philosophy*, p. 485.

most ardent veracity of which she was capable."³² To the end George Eliot was proud, as well she might have been, of having written Romola. It had been a tremendous undertaking, just as the translation of Leben Jesu had been. Who would not be proud of having reached the goal of completion after months and years of arduous labor?

"Over Romola criticism appears to be more divided than over any other of George Eliot's works"³³ Some maintain that it represented the culmination of her artistic development and is her most brilliant achievement; others contend that Romola was the beginning of George Eliot's decline as a creative artist. "Before Romola, contends one side, she did her best writing; afterward, replies the opposing side."³⁴ It remains a moot question.

George Eliot had written stirring and inspirational novels, born of the throes and pangs of intense emotional strain. Then she reached emotional maturity not only as a person, but also as an artist. It was natural that hereafter she should be more interested in intellectual and spiritual problems, striving as always to find an ethical moral philosophy.

³²Williams, op. cit., p. 203.

³³Ibid., p. 199.

³⁴Ibid.

CHAPTER VI

FINAL YEARS

When the Leweses returned from their third trip to Italy in 1864, they found a new life awaiting them. For the first time since their union, lodging was no longer a problem. Now they had a home, The Priory, which had been obtained on a fifty year lease following a short visit on the Isle of Wight a few months ago.

As they became settled in their new home, neither suspected that The Priory was soon to become famous as a center of the literary world. They were thankful that all of Lewes' sons were settled: Charles had obtained a government position in London and was soon to be married, Thornton had gone to Africa, and Herbert had secured a position in Scotland. Chrissey's children, too, had bright futures before them. Domestic problems were almost non-existent. Even Lewes' mother had entertained and welcomed George Eliot. Isaac Evans alone refused to acknowledge his sister.

Content with their new home, the Leweses found added pleasure in the success of George Henry Lewes' Aristotle. It had been praised by both scholars and

critics and was enjoying a wide popular sale. "Romola, meantime, was admired by Tennyson, Browning, H. Coleridge, Monckton Milnes, Trollope, and others."¹ The Leweses had much for which they might be thankful.

The only provoking question was what should be written next. Both were mentally exhausted from their efforts during the past three years. Any proposed work was regarded with nervous hesitation, born from the lack of inspiration. Write they must, but there was no longer any joy, any relief in writing.

The problem was to be solved for them both when Lady Martin, the famous actress Helena Faucit, requested that George Henry Lewes write a play for her. The drama was begun by Lewes, but his health failed. George Eliot took up his work.

Months dragged by; the play was not finished, nor was it nearing completion. Helena Faucit no longer expected to play the leading role: there were other plays, and the Leweses might remain her good friends.

Yet even though it was no longer urgent that the play be finished, George Eliot was not one to lay aside the work she had begun. She commenced reading more about Spain and even began the study of Spanish in order that

¹Williams, op. cit., p. 206.

she might write more convincingly. But there was little inspiration; The Spanish Gypsy proceeded slowly.

The next year George Henry Lewes assumed the editorship of the Fortnightly Review. George Eliot became hostess to large groups of the famous and the near famous who came to The Priory each Sunday afternoon, seeking the favor of the new editor. The social contacts, long denied to them both, proved highly beneficial. Lewes' health improved, as did George Eliot's. Writing became meaningful once again.

George Eliot wrote a number of articles for Lewes' magazine: A Word for the Germans, Servant's Logic, Futile Falsehoods, and several others. Her talent for witty dialogue had not dimmed; these articles reflected the wholesome humor evident in earlier works. George Eliot had begun to write as of old; she had regained the human touch.

The Sunday afternoon gatherings at The Priory had restored George Eliot mentally and spiritually. She had always been excessively timid, "the last thing which a casual or careless observer would suspect . . . ,"² and the resulting circumstances of her elopement with George Henry Lewes had increased her natural tendency to

²May, op. cit., p. 109.

withdraw from social contacts. "Like many, perhaps most 'conceited' people, George Eliot was inwardly very much given to despondency, very easily depressed, and very much inclined to under-rate her own powers."³ Now as hostess at The Priory, George Eliot not only was the recipient of many congratulatory remarks but also was forced to participate in the discussions of the day. Old wounds were healed; old friendships were renewed. Herbert Spencer was a frequent guest. The Brays became increasingly cordial. George Eliot renewed her acquaintance with Ralph Waldo Emerson and numerous others she had formerly known or met years ago at Rosehill.

With new faith in herself George Eliot commenced another novel, Felix Holt, The Radical. It was completely fictitious and was concerned with the years before and after the passage of the Reform Bill. As might have been expected following Romola, George Eliot read Blackstone as preparation for the legal portion of her story. Later critics were to condemn the settlement of the Transome estate as a legal dissertation, involving far too many entanglements to be convincing as fiction.

Nevertheless, Felix Holt was far less pedantic than

³Ibid.

Romola. Only the fine amount of historical and legal detail give evidence of the study involved. "Fawcett, Mill, Neale, Hallam . . . were all . . . perused; while, . . . the brave author went through the file of The Times for the years concerned."⁴ The scholar in George Eliot demanded authenticity.

The artist in George Eliot combined her memories of the rural England she loved with the new knowledge she had obtained and produced a strong and well-constructed political novel. The multitude of studious details add to the realism of the story except in the ponderous legal discussions. The characters are vivid and well drawn, although in the latter portion of the book they often seem to be mere vehicles for George Eliot's political beliefs.

Felix Holt is reminiscent in many respects of Adam Bede. Both are humble men, seeking perfection in their daily work, striving to improve themselves by obtaining more education, and realizing the importance of kind and thoughtful deeds among their fellow men. But Felix Holt is not as convincing a character as Adam Bede, for he lacks the human weaknesses. As the story progresses, Felix Holt, "consciously working for the general welfare

⁴Haldane, op. cit., p. 230.

of society,"⁵ becomes more and more a proponent of George Eliot's philosophical belief in Positivism.

Self-sacrifice and denial of self-gratification had not been convincing in Romola's character; they are more convincing in the character of Felix Holt, but not completely so. Both tend to become expositions of Comte's philosophy, emphasizing the need for sociological ethics while maintaining that true religion lies in humanity.

This philosophical belief had apparently become so entrenched in George Eliot's mind that she was unable to write without projecting it into her work. Perhaps it may be attributed to a renewal of her friendship with Herbert Spencer with whom she had first read Comte. Perhaps it was a reflection of her close friendship with Frederic Harrison, the chief English disciple of the positivist religion,⁶ or of her association with John Stuart Mill. Perhaps it was a natural outcome of her own life. Public opinion had helped to form and shape her destiny. What was more natural than that she should recognize public opinion as a powerful implement for good as well as for bad? It was inevitable too that she should agree with Comte's theory of education: "Knowledge is of value because it helps us modify conditions

⁵Rogers, op. cit., p. 486.

⁶Williams, op. cit., p. 210.

in the physical and social world."⁷ Had not her own educational development supplied proof of the veracity of Comte's treatise?

Felix Holt was the most convincing medium George Eliot was to have in voicing Comte's positivism. The very subject of the story offers an explanatory parallel: the passage of the Reform Bill will not automatically improve the status of the common man; it will merely provide the opportunity for man to improve himself. Religion and education are necessarily coupled together since both find their basis in improving the human race. The truly religious man must be educated; the truly educated man must be religious. "Nature gets its reason and end in the service of humanity."⁸

These philosophical doctrines are skillfully developed in the story. Felix Holt, filled with the noble passion for reform, practices self-abnegation and is brought into direct conflict with Harold Transome, who pretends devout interest in reform so that he may gain personally. Esther finds true happiness with Felix Holt and willingly forgets the riches she might have had.

"George Eliot, though her interest in philosophical questions may be a little too intrusive, may still

⁷Rogers, op. cit., p. 480.

⁸Ibid., p. 481.

deserve gratitude for introducing a new motive, and showing us the fate of young people affected by the unusual weakness of preoccupation with ideals."⁹ The love story, hinged on the mystery of the unknown heir, would indeed be fanciful, almost melodramatic, were it not for the development of the philosophical motive.

Again George Eliot introduces the element of retribution in the character of Mrs. Transome. As in Romola, the minor characters are more skillfully delineated and are more human than the major characters. John Macy in a later critical estimate stated that "the character of Mrs. Transome is worth all the rest in the book."¹⁰ Sir Leslie Stephen agreed.

When Felix Holt was finished in 1866, the Leweses left for a trip through the Netherlands. John Blackwood had accepted the novel for publication, and George Eliot was happy that their business association had been renewed. Unfortunately, the novel was not to find either popular success or high critical acclaim.

When George Eliot returned to England, she again commenced work on the long neglected drama. The Spanish Gypsy proceeded slowly and laboriously, becoming less

⁹Stephen, op. cit., p. 152.

¹⁰Williams, op. cit., p. 227.

and less of a drama and more and more of a dramatic poem. Attending lectures on Positivism and studying Spanish history occupied more and more of George Eliot's time.

Early in 1867 the Leweses left for Spain. George Eliot was eager to gather still more material. George Henry Lewes had resigned his editorship of the Fortnightly Review because of failing health. A trip seemed advisable,

The journey brought desired results. George Eliot completed The Spanish Gypsy the following year, and "in May, 1868, the poem was published, after having occupied more or less completely two years of its author's life"¹¹ and having presented a troublesome problem for over four years.

Blackwood's publication of the poem brought encouraging sales, provoked chiefly by curiosity. George Eliot a poet? The critics disagreed. Certainly a monumental task had been performed, but it was not inspiring. "If imagination, noble conception, and noble language, could have made a great poem, George Eliot would have succeeded, but it was not sufficient, and consequently she failed."¹² The philosopher and the scholar had killed the artist.

¹¹Haldane, op. cit., p. 220.

¹²Ibid., p. 224.

Abstract philosophical conceptions are not compatible with deep human emotions. One must be written with a cold intellect, phrasing laborious sentences; the other flows freely and simply, surging from the emotional overflow of the heart.

The tragedy of Fedalma's and Silva's parting arouses no catharsis; it becomes merely a dissertation on Positivism. Fedalma is not a happy young woman about to wed her love before another duty calls her; she is merely another vehicle to emphasize the ultimate good derived from self-renunciation. Consequently, Fedalma is no more alive than Romola and even less convincing than Felix Holt.

The beauty of the descriptive passages, the intricate historical details, the careful consideration of aesthetic principles, the delicate phraseology, and the admirable theme are insufficient; they can not surmount the lack of deep human emotion, so necessary to poetry. "No deliberate absorption of imagery can ever make up for the direct spontaneous intuition" ¹³ Vivid reality is not a matter of intellectual analysis; it springs from emotional memories.

Had George Eliot's emotions become stagnant or had

¹³Stephen, op. cit., p. 159.

she become so imbued with the philosophy of Comte that the problems of the individual man no longer concerned her? Or was her deep regard for the problems of mankind merely indicative of her emotional maturity as a philosopher? As a person, George Eliot was emotionally mature; as a creative artist, she had reached emotional maturity. It was natural that this maturity should become evident in the philosopher, since strong philosophical beliefs inevitably find their roots in the emotions. George Eliot's concern for mankind in general is proof of her emotional maturity as a philosopher; the individual, while highly important, is not as important as the whole of mankind.

This philosophical belief had been evident in Romola and in Felix Holt; it was even more fully developed in The Spanish Gypsy. Whatever may be said about the faults of the long dramatic poem, it must "be said that it certainly shows a powerful intellect stored with noble sentiment and impelled to utter great thoughts."¹⁴ The crime for posterity was that George Eliot sought a poetic medium.

After several months of travel on the Continent the Leweses returned again to England, and George Eliot began

¹⁴Ibid., p. 166.

another novel, Middlemarch, early in 1869. Once again she turned to study, "reading on medical subjects --- Encyclopaedia about the Medical Colleges, Cullen's Life, Russell's Heroes of Medicine, etc. . . ."15 in order that she might better portray the young doctor, Tertius Lydgate. But Lydgate was not drawn entirely from study and imagination; his character was based to a large degree upon Dr. Clifford Allbut of Leeds.

Lewes had been writing scientific articles and traveling through England in order that he might meet eminent men in the field of science and medicine. As was to have been expected, George Eliot accompanied him on his short trips, "and in Allbut the author of Middlemarch found the original of Tertius Lydgate."¹⁶

The medical and scientific knowledge George Eliot derived on these visits is clearly visible in the novel, but it is not cumbersome as the legal details had been in Felix Holt. George Eliot was interested in the medical discoveries of the day, sharing Lewes' chief interest of the moment, and her enthusiasm overweighs the studious element.

When Middlemarch was begun, George Eliot undoubtedly

¹⁵Cross, op. cit., III, 71-72.

¹⁶Williams, op. cit., p. 241.

planned to make Lydgate the chief character. But the novel progressed slowly; there were too many excursions. Then Lewes' second son, Thornton, arrived at The Priory with a serious back injury. He was destined to linger for six painful months, while the Leweses nursed him constantly. George Henry Lewes forgot his scientific articles, and George Eliot forgot her novel. Their 'boy' Thornton was dying.

During these months of worry and tension, George Eliot turned again to poetry. Unfortunately, she produced nothing of lasting poetic beauty with the possible exception of The Legend of Jubal. The poems were filled with metaphysics, emphasizing again the inevitability of retribution and the ultimate good derived from self-renunciation. Armgart carries the theme of Romola and Felix Holt: true happiness is found by living for others. Brother and Sister, which was to be published under the name of Marian Lewes, relates again the deep love Mary Anne Evans held for her brother Isaac. It is devoid of philosophy and is a plea for adult understanding. How Lisa Loved the King is a poetical version of one of the tales in Boccaccio's Decameron. The College Breakfast is illustrative of "George Eliot's judgement of Hegelianism, aestheticism, and positivism."¹⁷ Agatha is a

¹⁷Stephen, op. cit., p. 169.

statement of George Eliot's religious philosophy: beauty lies in simple thoughts and deeds and in loving others more than self. All of the poems except The Legend of Jubal were introspective, revealing the emotional strain under which George Eliot was laboring.

Lewes was ill. Endless hours must be spent at the bedside of Thornton, fighting hopelessly against tuberculosis of the bone. Agnes must be discreetly accepted and persuaded to spend more time with her son. The new social receptions at The Priory must cease. Herbert Spencer might come and discuss philosophy, and young John Walter Cross, whom the Leweses had met through Spencer, might find admittance at The Priory by virtue of his solicitude as a new neighbor.

Directly after the funeral the Leweses left for Surrey. No work was done for weeks. When they returned to The Priory, George Eliot began to complete The Legend of Jubal. Except for intimate visits with their new neighbors, John Walter Cross and his mother, the Leweses spent their days alone. The Crosses' loss of a sister and daughter a month before Thornton's passing united them in mourning.

George Eliot began another novel, tentatively titled Miss Brooke. Lewes wrote various articles. Helena Faucit,

Robert Browning, and other new intimates came for short visits. At last The Legend of Jubal, "a satisfactory poetical symbol . . . ,"¹⁸ was finished. The Leweses left for Germany.

The rather morbid tone of The Legend of Jubal might be attributed to the shock of Thornton's death were it not for the fact that George Eliot's work from the time of Romola was increasingly more concerned with the immortality of mankind and the complete mortality of the individual man. Jubal finds derision and oblivion as a man; his deeds win the love and grateful thankfulness of all mankind. The poem and the Comtian philosophical doctrines inherent in it are convincing because of the mythological tone and fanciful setting.

These same doctrines evidenced in Middlemarch are not as convincing, although in this novel George Eliot does succeed in portraying human beings who find salvation by working for others. When the novel was published late in 1872, Lord David Cecil was highly enthusiastic.

Middlemarch, George Eliot's masterpiece, has a bigger subject, the biggest subject of any English classical novel. Like Tolstoy in War and Peace, she shows us the cosmic process, not just in a single drama but in several; not only in an individual but in a whole society. The principles of moral strength and

¹⁸Ibid., p. 171.

weakness . . . are the determining forces of life
¹⁹

The book was hailed by critics; it was devoured by the public. In a novel of epic scope George Eliot had succeeded in combining the scholar, the philosopher, and the creative artist. Middlemarch represents in many respects the culmination of George Eliot's genius. It is a novel of maturity: intellectually, emotionally, philosophically. It lacks high artistry because its somber tone is unrelieved by humor and because its loose plot is at times unwieldy.

Perhaps one of the marvels of Middlemarch is that it was combined so well with the story of Dorothea Brooke, which had been begun as a separate novel. The scholar recognized the identical themes; the philosopher saw a broader scope on which the Comtian tenets of renunciation of self for the betterment of mankind might be developed; the creative artist found an opportunity to portray more people and their reactions to the complexities of life. "In reality people's lives are something of a tangle . . . : one influences the other in a curious mixed way"²⁰ Middlemarch is as real in this respect as life itself. "It is not a story, but a combination of at

¹⁹Williams, op. cit., pp. 269-270.

²⁰Haldane, op. cit., p. 245.

least three stories--the love affairs of Dorothea and Casaubon, of Rosamond Vincy and Lydgate, and of Mary Garth and Fred Vincy, which are again interwoven with the story of Bulstrode."²¹ One relationship illustrates the selfish husband; one shows the selfish wife; one marriage, that of Mary Garth and Fred Vincy, is an example of the delicate balance of love and sacrifice in a happy marriage. Middlemarch is a mature adult novel; "the great quality of the book is that we have in it the essentials of men's and women's relationship to one another, such as they are for all time."²²

The characters are warm and human. Most of them have prototypes. Dorothea Brooke is Marian Evans just as her sister Celia is Marian Evans' sister Chrissey. That one was the older in life and the other older in fiction does not destroy the resemblance. Ladislaw is a mature prototype of George Henry Lewes, just as Philip Wakem was a youthful prototype. Casaubon, the selfish scholar, was probably derived from Brabant, the German scholar. Caleb Garth was another idealized version of Robert Evans.²³

George Eliot could subordinate her philosophy and

²¹Stephen, op. cit., p. 174.

²²Haldane, op. cit., p. 246.

²³Williams, op. cit., p. 267.

the results of her study to write again of the memories dear in her heart. Middle Mercia is Coventry; the rural lands are those Mary Anne Evans had known and loved as a child. If the descriptions of the countryside lack some of the fresh charm of her earlier books, they are more mellow in tone.

Middlemarch, having taken four years from its inception to its completion, was a supreme achievement. It has been called "one of the two or three greatest novels in English literature,"²⁴ but it "seems to fall short of the great masterpieces which imply a closer contact with the world of realities and less preoccupation with certain speculative doctrines."²⁵ Certainly it does not have the artistry of George Eliot's earlier works; it does have a deeper maturity, a mellow richness. Perhaps George Eliot realized the subtle difference when she wrote: "I have finished my book, and am thoroughly at peace about it--not because I am convinced of its perfection, but because I have lived to give out what it was in me to give, and have not been hindered by illness or death from making my work a whole, such as it is."²⁶

²⁴Williams, op. cit., p. 270.

²⁵Stephen, op. cit., p. 184.

²⁶May, op. cit., p. 301.

The next few months were spent visiting. Lewes had returned to his earlier interest in philosophy, and George Eliot willingly accompanied him to meet Jowett, translator of Plato, and other philosophical scholars.

The fame, the wealth, the glory of George Eliot mounted steadily until in 1873 Alexander Main compiled and John Blackwood published a volume: The Wise, Witty, and Tender Sayings of George Eliot. An eager public demanded more and more from one of its favorite authors. George Eliot wrote some poems: Arian, A Minor Prophet, The Choir Invisible, and Stradivarius. All were philosophical in tone and theme.

The remainder of the year the Leweses traveled in Europe, where George Eliot gathered background material for her next novel, Daniel Deronda. Returning to England, they spent Christmas at the Cross home, renewing the intimate **friendship** which had sprung between them.

Settled once again in The Priory, Lewes completed Actors and the Art of Acting, and George Eliot commenced writing. Personal affairs soon interrupted. Thornton Hunt died, and arrangements had to be made for Agnes' inheritance. Herbert was ill in Africa and needed money. Charles' first child was born. Lewes' mother died.

At length they were able to return to work. George Henry Lewes commenced working on the Problems of Life

and Mind, while George Eliot continued with Daniel Deronda. Finally after three years of alternate and laborious work, the novel was a thing of the past. "The year 1876 saw Daniel Deronda finally finished and published" ²⁷ Both George Eliot and George Henry Lewes had been frequently ill. Herbert had died in Africa, leaving a wife and child. Social life had become a strain. Their closest friends were John Walter Cross and his mother. Age and illness were slowing but not dimming the work of the Leweses. They left for another trip to Europe.

"About no novel of George Eliot's has criticism so differed as over Daniel Deronda." ²⁸ It met with high praise and abusive ridicule upon its publication. The contrasting reactions were partially a result of the subject matter: the difficulties suffered by the Jews in a Christian world and the need of restoring the Jewish nation. Handled with artistry, the book might have succeeded, but "in Daniel Deronda thought and learning have usurped the place of art." ²⁹ It is evident that George Eliot had made a study of the culture produced by the Jews, that she was well-acquainted with

²⁷ Kitchel, op. cit., p. 276.

²⁸ Williams, op. cit., p. 286.

²⁹ May, op. cit., p. 308.

their history and their literature.

It is even more evident that Daniel Deronda was written with a crusading spirit. As George Eliot wrote Harriet Beecher Stowe, with whom she had long been in correspondence, "There is nothing I should care more to do, if it were possible, than to rouse the imagination of men and women to a vision of human claims in those races of their fellow men who most differ from them in customs and beliefs."³⁰ This desire is all too obvious in the novel. Everything is "subordinated to the underlying purpose . . . the presentation of the life, the history, and the future of the Jewish race" ³¹ Intermingled with this theme is George Eliot's dogmatic belief in the "influence which the actions and the tendencies of each individual must exercise on human life."³²

Daniel Deronda is not a man; he is "an aesthetic embodiment of an ethical revelation" ³³ Gwendolen is another Rosamond, another Tito, but she is not as convincing, since she serves too obviously as a contrast to Daniel Deronda. George Eliot was too concerned with the

³⁰ Cross, op. cit., III, 212.

³¹ Olcott, op. cit., p. 182.

³² Rogers, op. cit., p. 439.

³³ Stephen, op. cit., p. 190.

doctrine of Positivism to endow any of her characters with life.

Only the minor characters of the Meyrick sisters are delineated with a certain degree of artistry, possibly because they may have found their basis in Cara and Sara Hennell.³⁴

As in Middlemarch, George Eliot weaves two separate stories together in order to emphasize her philosophical beliefs by contrast and in order to create the atmosphere of reality. The scheme fails utterly in Daniel Deronda. George Eliot strives too ardently to impress her readers with her dominant theme: "To the Hebrews we have a special debt, . . . and it is a sign of intellectual narrowness and stupidity that our attitude to them and others is as it is."³⁵ The scholar and the crusader had stifled the creative artist.

Daniel Deronda was the last novel George Eliot wrote. It sold widely, possibly because of its controversial nature, but it found few lasting admirers.

Yet the "name of George Eliot promised to hold . . . that preeminent place which in France had long been conceded to . . . George Sand."³⁶ For judged as a whole,

³⁴Williams, op. cit., p. 287.

³⁵Haldane, op. cit., p. 272.

³⁶Woolson, op. cit., p. 4.

George Eliot's novels have a broader scope and a deeper meaning than any mere recital of personal adventures can supply. Blended more or less intimately with their masterly delineation of character, and its less striking manifestation in deeds, we find a richness and profundity of speculative thought We gain from her pages, not only a transcript of the life that surrounded her, but the fruits of ripe scholarship, and the contemplative wisdom of a philosophic mind. The ablest thinkers perceive that here is an intellect which has gathered whatever of record or reflection the past has preserved, has deduced from this experience of mankind the lessons it conveys, and has brought for their acceptance the transmuted treasures of its thought. They find themselves summoned to contemplate, not merely a few interesting careers, but an epitome of human life.³⁷

Nevertheless, the creative artist that had been George Eliot was dying. The scholar and the philosopher could not recapture the spark of genius. In her last book "George Eliot put together some semi-remembrances, mingled with ironic reflections, under the title The Impressions of Theophrastus Such"38 Lewes unfortunately approved of the work and sent it to Blackwood, who eventually published it.

There is no great writer of fiction so hard to follow in her portentously long didactic sentences as George Eliot at her worst. And in Theophrastus we have many of these sentences³⁹

But the name of George Eliot had become so great that The Impressions of Theophrastus Such enjoyed a wide

³⁷ Ibid., pp. 23-24.

³⁸ Romieu, op. cit., p. 327.

³⁹ Haldane, op. cit., p. 290.

popular sale. It was the last that George Eliot was to write.

When George Henry Lewes died on November 28, 1878, "George Eliot, the genius who sprang from the union between Marian Evans . . . and George Henry Lewes . . . ,"⁴⁰ died too. Marian Lewes was left with but two desires: that she might complete Lewes' Problems of Life and Mind and that she might soon join him in death.

When Lewes' last work had been published and when the George Henry Lewes Studentship had been established at Cambridge, Marian Lewes was desolate. For twenty-three years "they had lived side by side . . . ; together they had eaten the bread of affliction and the bread of abundance . . ."⁴¹; now there was nothing. "Here I and sorrow sit."⁴²

Charles tried in vain to revive the shattered spirit of the woman he had long considered his mother. It was useless. Marian Lewes wished to die. Then John Walter Cross came and interested his elderly friend in reading Dante's Inferno.

Marian Lewes roused herself and commenced entertaining

⁴⁰Williams, op. cit., p. 1.

⁴¹Romieu, op. cit., p. 330.

⁴²Cross, op. cit., III, 249.

those she considered her daughters-in-law and her grandchildren. Cross aided her, rejoicing in the renewed interest she showed in life.

In May, 1880, Marian Lewes wrote her old friend, Barbara Smith Bodichon, as follows:

By the time you receive this letter I shall . . . have been married to Mr. J. W. Cross, who, you know, is a friend of years, a friend much loved and trusted by Mr. Lewes, and who, now that I am alone, sees his happiness in the dedication of his life to me. This change in my position will make no change in my care for Mr. Lewes's family, and in the ultimate disposition of my property. Mr. Cross has a sufficient fortune of his own.⁴³

So Marian Lewes, given into marriage by Charles Lewes, her 'eldest boy,' became at the age of sixty-one the legal wife of John Walter Cross, a man many years her junior. After the ceremony they left for Europe, and Mary Ann Cross received the letter of forgiveness from her brother Isaac for which she had been waiting nearly a quarter of a century. She answered immediately, writing, "Your letter was forwarded to me here, and it was a great joy to me to have your kind words of sympathy, for our long silence has never broken the affection for you which began when we were little ones."⁴⁴

All was serene. Mary Ann Cross, united with her beloved brother, was at last a respectable married woman. She died December 22, 1880, less than seven months after

⁴³ Ibid., pp. 292-293.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 287.

her marriage. She was buried, as she had wished, in the unconsecrated section of the Highgate Cemetery at the side of George Henry Lewes.

It remained for posterity to judge whether or not she had succeeded in her aim and dominant belief "that the only worthy end of all learning, of all science, of all life, in fact, is, that human beings should love one another better."⁴⁵ It remained for posterity to decide whether or not George Eliot might

. join the choir invisible
Of those immortal dead who live again
In minds made better by their presence⁴⁶

⁴⁵Olcott, op. cit., p. 173.

⁴⁶George Eliot, "The Choir Invisible," Poems, p. 441.

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