

FROM GEORGE MOORE'S CONFESSIONS OF
A YOUNG MAN.

"MY soul, so far as I understand it, has very kindly taken color and form from the many various modes of life that self-will and an impetuous temperament have forced me to indulge in. Therefore I may say that I am free from original qualities, defects, tastes, etc. What I have I acquire, or, to speak more exactly, chance bestows, and still bestows, upon me. I came into the world apparently with a nature like a smooth sheet of wax, bearing no impress, but capable of receiving any; of being molded into all shapes. Nor am I exaggerating when I say I think that I might equally have been a Pharaoh, an ostler, an archbishop, and that in the fulfilment of the duties of each a certain measure of success would have been mine. I have felt the goad of many impulses, I have hunted many a trail; when one scent failed another was taken up, and pursued with the pertinacity of an instinct rather than the fervor of a reasoned conviction. Sometimes, it is true, there came moments of weariness, of despondency, but they were not enduring: a word spoken, a book read, or yielding to the attraction of environment, I was soon off in another direction, forgetful of past failures. Intricate, indeed, was the labyrinth of my desires; all lights were followed with the same ardor, all cries were eagerly responded to: they came from the right, they came from the left, from every side. But one cry was more persistent, and as the years passed I learned to follow it with increasing vigor, and my strayings grew fewer and the way wider. I was eleven years old when I first heard and obeyed this cry, or, shall I say, echo-augury? Scene: A great family coach, drawn by two powerful country horses, lumbers along a narrow Irish road. The ever recurrent signs—the long ranges of blue mountains, the streak of bog, the rotting cabin, the flock of plover rising from the desolate water. Inside the coach there are two children. They are smart, with new jackets and neckties; their faces are pale with sleep, and the rolling of the coach makes them feel a little sick. It is seven o'clock in the morning. Opposite the children are their parents, and they are talking of a novel the world is reading. Did Lady Audley murder her husband? Lady Audley! What a beautiful name; and she, who is a slender, pale, fairy-like woman, killed her husband. Such thoughts flash through the boy's mind; his imagination is stirred and quickened, and he begs for an explanation. The coach lumbers along, it arrives at its destination, and Lady Audley is forgotten in the delight of tearing down fruit trees and killing a cat. But when we returned home I took the first opportunity of stealing the novel in question. I read it eagerly, passionately, vehemently. I read its successor, and its successor. I read until I came to a book called *The Doctor's Wife*—a lady who loved Shelley and Byron. There was magic, there was revelation in the name, and Shelley became my soul's divinity. Why did I love Shelley? Why was I not attracted to Byron? I

cannot say. Shelley! Oh, that crystal name, and his poetry also crystalline. I must see it, I must know him. Escaping from the school-room, I ransacked the library, and at last my ardor was rewarded. The book—a small pocket edition in red boards, no doubt long out of print—opened at the *Sensitive Plant*. Was I disappointed? I think I had expected to understand better; but I had no difficulty in assuming that I was satisfied and delighted. And henceforth the little volume never left my pocket, and I read the dazzling stanzas by the shores of a pale green Irish lake, comprehending little and loving a great deal. Byron, too, was often with me, and these poets were the ripening influence of years otherwise merely nervous and boisterous. And my poets were taken to school, because it pleased me to read 'Queen Mab' and 'Cain' amid the priests and ignorance of a hateful Roman Catholic college. And there my poets saved me from intellectual savagery; for I was incapable at that time of learning anything. What determined and incorrigible idleness! I used to gaze fondly on a book, holding my head between my hands, and allowing my thoughts to wander far into dreams and thin imaginings. Neither Latin, nor Greek, nor French, nor History, nor English composition could I learn, unless, indeed, my curiosity or personal interest was excited,—then I made rapid strides in that branch of knowledge to which my attention was directed. A mind hitherto dark seemed suddenly to grow clear, and it remained clear and bright enough so long as passion was in me; but as it died, so the mind clouded and recoiled to its original obtuseness. Couldn't, with wouldn't, was in my case curiously involved; nor have I in this respect ever been able to correct my natural temperament. I have always remained powerless to do anything unless moved by a powerful desire. The natural end to such school-days as mine was expulsion. I was expelled when I was sixteen, for idleness and general worthlessness."

After a curious boyhood, a delirium with books and a wild mental dance with English literature, the young man becomes possessed with the sudden idea that he must go to France.

"France! The word rang in my ears and gleamed in my eyes. France! All my senses sprang from sleep like a crew when the man on the look-out cries, Land ahead! Instantly I knew I should, that I must, go to France, that I would live there, that I would become as a Frenchman. I knew not when, nor how, but I knew I should go to France. Then my father died, and I suddenly found myself heir to considerable property—some three or four thousand a year; and then I knew that I was free to enjoy life as I pleased; no further trammels, no further need of being a soldier, of being anything but myself; eighteen, with life and France before me! At last the day came, and with several trunks and boxes full of clothes, books and pictures, I started, accompanied by an English valet, for Paris and Art."