

OUR BIOGRAPHICAL BUREAU.

George Eliot's Religious Belief.

IN P to the age of seventeen or eighteen Marian had been considered the most truly pious member of her family, being earnestly bent, as she says, "to shape this anomalous English Christian life of ours into some consistency with the spirit and simple verbal tenor of the New Testament." "I was brought up," she informs another correspondent, "in the Church of England, and have never joined any other religious society; but I have had close acquaintance with many dissenters of various sects, Calvinistic Abaptists to Unitarians." Her inner life at this time is faithfully mirrored in the spiritual experiences of Maggie Tulliver. Marian Evans was not one who could rest satisfied with outward observances and lip-worship: she needed a faith which should give unity and sanctity to the conception of life, which should awaken "that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self, which is to the moral life what the addition of a great central ganglion is to animal life." At one time Evangelicalism supplied her with the most essential conditions of a religious life: with all the vehemence of an ardent nature she flung her whole soul into a passionate acceptance of the teaching of Christianity, carrying her zeal to the pitch of asceticism.

This was the state of her mind at the age of seventeen, when her aunt from Wirsbworth came to stay with her. Mrs. Elizabeth Evans (who came afterwards to be largely identified with Dinah Morris) was a zealous Wesleyan, having at one time been a noted preacher; but her niece then a rigid Calvinist, hardly thought her doctrine strict enough. When this same aunt paid her a visit some time afterwards, at Foleshill, Marian's view had already undergone a complete transformation, and their intercourse was constrained and painful; for the young evangelical enthusiast, who had been a favorite in clerical circles, was now in what she described as "a crude state of freethinking." It was a period of transition through which she passed into a new religious synthesis.

Her intimacy with the Brays began about the time when those new doubts were beginning to ferment in her. Her expanding mind, nourished on the best literature, ancient and modern, began to feel cramped by dogmas that had now lost their vitality; yet a break with an inherited form of belief to which a thousand tender associations bound her was a catastrophe she shrank from with dread. Hence a period of mental uncertainty and trouble. In consequence of these inward questionings it happened that the young lady who had been brought to convert her acquaintances was converted by them. In intercourse with them she was able freely to open her mind, their enlightened view helping her in this crisis of her spiritual life; and she found it an intense relief to reconcile her moral and intellectual perceptions with a particular form of worship.

By far the most trying consequence of her change of views was that now, for the first time, Marian was brought into collision with her father whose pet she had always been. He could not understand her inward perplexities, nor the need of her soul for complete inward unity of thought, a condition impossible to her under the limiting conditions of a dogmatic evangelicalism, "where folly often mistakes itself for wisdom, ignorance gives itself airs and knowledge, and selfishness, turning its eyes upward, calls itself religion." She, on the other hand, after a painful struggle, wanted to break away from the old form of worship, and refused to go to church. Deeply attached though she was to her father, the need to make her acts conform with her convictions became irresistible. Under such conflicting tendencies a rupture between father and daughter became imminent, and for a short time a breaking up of the home was contemplated, Marian intending to go and live by herself in Coventry. One of the leading traits in her nature, its adhesiveness, however, and the threat of separation proved so painful to her that her friends, Mr. and Mrs. Bray, persuaded her to conform to her father's wishes, as far as outward observances were implied, and for the rest he did not trouble himself to inquire into her thoughts or occupations.

George Eliot had the highest regard for Lewes's opinions, but held to her own. One of the chief subjects of dif-

ference consisted in their attitude toward Christianity: whereas he was its uncompromising opponent, she has the greatest sympathy with its various manifestations, from Roman Catholic asceticism to Evangelical austerity and Methodist fervor. Her reverence for every form of worship in which mankind has more or less consciously embodied its sense of the mystery of all "this unintelligible world" increased with the years. She was deeply penetrated by that tendency of the Positivist spirit which recognizes the beneficial element in every form of religion, and sees the close, nay, indissoluble, connection between the faith of former generations and the ideal of our own. She herself found ample scope for needs and aspirations of her spiritual nature in the religion of humanity. As has already been repeatedly pointed out, there runs through all her works the same persistent teaching of "the infinite Nature of Duty." And with Comte she refers "the obligations of duty, as well as all sentiments of devotion, to a concrete object, at once ideal and real; the Human Race, conceived as a continuous whole, including the past, the present, and the future."

Though George Eliot drew many of her ideas of moral cultivation from the doctrines of Comte's "Philosophic Positive," she was not a Positivist in the strict sense of the word. Her mind was far too creative by nature to give an unqualified adhesion to such a system as Comte's. Indeed, her devotion to the idea of mankind, conceived as a collective whole, is not so much characteristic of Positivists as of the greatest modern minds, minds such as Lessing, Bentham, Shelley, Mill, Mazzini, and Victor Hugo. Inasmuch as Comte co-ordinated these ideas into a consistent doctrine, George Eliot found herself greatly attracted to his system; and Mr. Beesly, after an acquaintance of eighteen years, considered himself justified in stating that her powerful intellect had accepted the teaching of Auguste Comte and that she looked forward to the reorganization of belief on the lines which he had laid down. Still her adherence, like that of G. H. Lewes, was only partial, and applied mainly to his philosophy, and not to his scheme of social policy. She went farther than the latter, however, in her concurrence. For Mr. Lewes, speaking of the "Politique Positive" in his "History of Philosophy," admits that his antagonistic attitude had been considerably modified on learning from the remark of one very dear to him, "to regard it as a Utopia, presenting hypotheses rather than doctrines—suggestions for future inquiries rather than dogmas for adepts."

On the whole, although George Eliot did not agree with Comte's later theories concerning the reconstruction of society, she regarded them with sympathy "as the efforts of an individual to anticipate the work of future generations." This sympathy with the general Positivist movement she showed by subscribing regularly to Positivist objects, especially to the fund of the Central Organization presided over by M. Lafitte, but she invariably refused all membership with the Positivist community. In conversation with an old and valued friend, she also repeatedly expressed her objection to much in Comte's later speculations, saying on one occasion, "I cannot submit my intellect or my soul to the guidance of Comte." The fact is that, although George Eliot was greatly influenced by the leading Positivist ideas, her mind was too original not to work out her own individual conception of life.

Incidents in a Philosopher's Boyhood.

Prof. Joseph Henry, one of the most eminent of American scientists, died May 13, 1878. On Thursday, the 19th day of last month, his memory was honored by the unveiling at Washington of a magnificent bronze statue, made by W. M. Storey, and costing \$15,000.

Among the interesting reminiscences of his boyhood is the story of his first pair of boots—a true story, often told by himself in later years.

When he was a boy, it was the universal custom to have boots made to order, and his grandfather, with whom he was living, indulgently allowed him to choose the style for himself. There was no great variety of styles. Indeed, the choice was limited to the question of round toes or square toes. Day after day Joseph went to the cobbler's and talked over the matter without coming to a decision, and this even after their manufacture was begun, until at last the shoe-