



Life, Literature and Education.



George Eliot.

The early half of the nineteenth century was less kind to the woman who essayed literary work than later years have been. The feminine brain was not supposed to be of sufficient strength to produce anything worthy of consideration, and so we find the woman filled with a desire to write out her thoughts must needs masquerade under a masculine name.

One of these, Mary Ann Evans, is known but little to the world under her real name, but is familiar to almost every English-speaking man and woman as George Eliot, and under this name she won a lasting fame.

She was born at Arbury Farm, in Warwickshire, November 22nd, 1819, her father, at the time of her birth, being forester and land-agent for the owner of Arbury Hall. Here she lived for twenty years, these scenes of her childhood being woven into many of her books, especially in the Mill on the Floss, where Tom and Maggie Tulliver preserve the impressions of her childhood. At school she was a great favorite, and so highly was the privilege of walking and talking with her esteemed that the teacher is said to have arranged that the scholars accompany her in alphabetical order.

In the spring of 1841 she and her father removed to Coventry, where she made the acquaintances who confirmed in her the convictions that separated her from the orthodox church, whose services she attended only at the express wish of her father. She studied earnestly and systematically, taking French, German, Italian, Latin and Greek from tutors, and undertaking Hebrew by herself. In 1846 her first work appeared, being a translation of Strauss's "Life of Jesus," a careful and scholarly piece of work, and this was followed by other translations of equal merit.

Among the clever men in whose society she found delight was George Henry Lewes, a clever journalist, something of a philosopher, and a man of science, and, though not a writer, an excellent critic, and the expression of her genius is largely due to his encouragement and friendly criticism. That strange docility of mind, so strong and yet so yielding, was moulded by him to work that he himself had not the mental capacity to achieve. Her inexplicable

life with him was unsanctified by the marriage ceremony, yet for twenty-five years they rendered cheerfully the obligations which the tie enjoins. Strange to say, in all her books, no principle is more insisted upon than the sanctity of marriage, and no other violation of law receives such condemnation, so that it would seem that her conduct in her own eyes was not justified entirely.

Her first original work was "Scenes from Clerical Life," which some good judges have declared was stamped with the writer's individuality, as none of her subsequent writings were, though "Adam Bede" and "The Mill on the Floss" have greatly exceeded her first work in popularity, and most firmly established Miss Evans' right to a position among the great English novelists. "Silas Marner," a short but very strong piece of work, followed these; then "Romola," "Felix Holt," "Middlemarch," and "Daniel Deronda."

In 1878 a great sorrow came upon her in the death of Mr. Lewes, and for many weeks she saw no one, but devoted herself to the preparation of his unfinished writings. An entry—the only one for a month—in her diary said, "Here I and Sorrow sit."

In the spring of 1880 she was married quietly to John Cross, who had been one of her friends for many years, and who had greatly assisted her in the editing of Mr. Lewes' papers. Their life together was a short one, for, after returning from a European tour, she was taken ill with a heavy cold, and died on the 22nd of December, 1880.

Perhaps no juster appreciation of her work can be given than the criticism written by one of our Canadian authors, Bliss Carman: "George Eliot is pre-eminently one of those to whom nothing human can ever be alien. For abstract wrong she has no pity, but whenever her fellow-beings are concerned, or the almost living creatures of her brain, she is all mercy and sympathy and loving kindness. Not once does she ridicule their foibles nor belittle the meanness of them all. She loves them too well ever to make fun of them behind their backs. And when she would move us to smiles there is no malice in her voice, as we seem to hear her say, 'How delightful, how absurd a thing is humanity!' A large intelligence was her dominant characteristic. However keenly she might feel, she could always see more keenly still. To insist on the value of character, on the absolute necessity of right conduct, the untainted culture of the heart as the only aim of life, the only assurance of happiness, is the whole of George Eliot's teaching."

"THE ADOPTION OF THE BABY," FROM "SILAS MARNER."

"Thank you kindly," said Silas, hesitating a little. "I'll be glad if you will tell me things. But," he added, uneasily, leaning forward to look at Baby with some jealousy as she was resting her head against Dolly's arm and eyeing him contentedly from a distance, "but I want to do things for it myself, else it may get fond o' somebody else and not fond o' me. I've been used to fending for myself in the house—I can learn, I can learn."

"Eh, to be sure," said Dolly,

gently, "I've seen men as are wonderfully handy with children, though they be awkward and contrary mostly, God help 'em. You see this goes first, next to her skin," proceeded Dolly, taking up the little shirt and putting it on.

"Yes," said Marner, docilely, bringing his eyes very close that they might be initiated into the mysteries; whereupon Baby seized his head with both her small arms and put her lips against his face with purring noises.

"See there," said Dolly, with a woman's tender tact, "she's fond of you. She wants to go on your lap, I'll be bound. Go, then; taker her, Master Marner; you can put the things on her, and then you can say as you've done for her from the first of her coming to you."

Marner took her on his lap, trembling with an emotion mysterious to himself, at something unknown dawning in his life. Thought and feeling were so confused within him that if he had tried to give them utterance he could only have said that the child was come to him instead of the gold he had lost—that the gold had turned into the child. He took the garments from Dolly and put them on according to her teaching, interrupted, of course, by Baby's gymnastics.

"There, then! Why, you take to it quite easy, Master Marner," said Dolly, "but what shall you do when you're forced to sit at your loom? For she'll get busier and mischievous every day—she will, bless her!"

Silas meditated a little while in some perplexity. "I'll tie her to the leg o' the loom," he said at last, "tie her with a good long strip o' something."

"Well, mayhap that'll do as it's a little gell, for they'r easier persuaded to sit in one place nor the lads. I know what the lads are, for I've had four—four I've had, God knows—and if you was to take 'em and tie 'em up they'd make a-fighting and a-crying as if you was ringing the pigs. Eh, if it wasn't a sin to the lads to wish 'em made different, bless 'em, I should have been glad for one of 'em to be a little gell—and to think as I could ha' taught her to scour and mend and the knitting and everything. But I can teach this little un, Master Marner, when she gets old enough."

"But she'll be my little un," said Marner, rather hastily, "she'll be nobody else's."

"No, to be sure, you'll have a right to her if you're going to be a father to her and bring her up according. But," added Mrs. Winthrop, coming to a point which she had determined beforehand to touch upon, "you must bring her up like christened folks' children, and take her to church, and let her learn her catechise, as my little Aaron can say off—the 'I believe' and 'hurt nobody by word or deed,' and everything, as well as if he was the clerk. That's what you must do, Master Marner, if you do the right thing by the orphim child."

The Choir Invisible.

Oh, may I join the choir invisible  
Of those immortal dead who live again  
In minds made better by their presence—  
live

In pulses stirred to generosity,  
In deeds of daring rectitude, in scorn  
For miserable aims that end with self,  
In thoughts sublime that pierce the night  
like stars,

And with their mild persistence urge  
man's search  
To vaster issues.

So to live is heaven;  
To make undying music in the world,  
Breathing the beautiful order that controls

With growing sway the growing life of  
man.

So we inherit that sweet purity  
For which we struggled, failed and  
agonized

With widening retrospect that bred  
despair.

Rebellious flesh that would not be sub-  
dued,—

A vicious parent shaming still its child,  
Poor anxious penitence—is quick dissolved;  
Its discords, quenched by meeting  
harmonies,

Die in the large and charitable air;  
And all our rarer, better, truer self,  
That sobbed religiously in yearning song,  
That watched to ease the burden of the  
world,

Laboriously tracing what must be,  
And what may yet be better—saw within  
A worthier image for the sanctuary,  
And shaped it forth before the multitude,  
Divinely human, raising worship so  
To higher reverence more mixed with  
love.

That better self shall live till human  
Time  
Shall fold its eyelids, and the human sky  
Be gathered like a small scroll within the  
tomb  
Unread forever.

This is the life to come,  
Which martyred men have made more  
glorious  
For us who strive to follow. May I  
reach

That purest heaven, be to other souls  
The cup of strength in some great agony,  
Enkindle generous ardor, feed pure love,  
Beget the smiles that have no cruelty,  
Be the sweet presence of a good diffused,  
And in diffusion ever more intense!  
So shall I join the choir invisible,  
Whose music is the gladness of the  
world.  
—George Eliot.

Tribute from a Leading Educationist.

"Since boyhood on the old farm I have followed the career of your excellent "Farmer's Advocate and Home Magazine" with great interest—as it has developed from a monthly to a semi-monthly, and then to a weekly, with its many departments, all so ably edited, and all so good. I must now express my appreciation of it all, and especially of the latest department begun—"Life, Literature and Education." True greatness in a nation and greatness in literature develop, together, thought, and language to express that thought. The prosperity of Canada for many generations will depend on those who till the soil, and no one can estimate the benefit to our "Fair Canada" of the cultivation of a good literary taste by this department in your Magazine, which goes into so many thousands of the homes of Canada, from ocean to ocean. You have struck a happy vein in your selections—not too deep, popular, and yet so good. "Glen-garry School Days" is a good story for Canadians. Its characters are sturdy and strong, and several false