

EMPIRICISM THE BASIS OF GEORGE ELIOT'S  
MORAL PHILOSOPHY

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I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared  
under my supervision by Tila Mae Armstrong  
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## PREFACE

George Eliot, one of the most intellectual of human beings and by nature the possessor of a highly analytic mind, grew up in the nineteenth century - a century characterized by the prevalence of general disintegrating influences in the realm of thought. To the scepticism, agnosticism, and general revolutionary tendencies of the age she was sensitive to the highest degree. That she understood the scientific spirit of her age and the evolutionary philosophy that had developed therefrom better perhaps than those responsible for the new age of thought, is evidenced by her own life and writings. She, as much as Darwin, is of the great scientific movement of the nineteenth century; her philosophy, no less than Comte's, is clothed in the language of positivism. That she is connected with their theories more in appearance than in reality, however, is a matter that has been largely overlooked. That she became an evolutionist before she had an opportunity to come into intellectual contact with the originators of the theory is a fact disregarded by those who see in her own theories the reflection of Darwinism. Just as the evolution theory was long accepted before it was formulated into a

philosophy, so was George Eliot brought under a set of philosophic influences before she knew the great speculative minds of her age. She painted life in accordance with the spirit of her age, but where did she get her materials? In what ways was she the embodiment of the great new age, and how did she differ from it? Did Comte, Spencer, and Lewes supply her with a philosophy of life, or did they merely give system to her thoughts? These are the questions to be dealt with in this discussion.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE STATUS OF THOUGHT DURING THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF GEORGE ELIOT'S LIFE

In the opening decades of the nineteenth century there came into English life a new freedom of thought that manifested itself in all phases of man's activities, with the consequent result that before the end of the century new standards were established in politics, religion, philosophy, and science. Though men's minds were for a short while haunted by the anarchistic tendencies that followed the French Revolution, such far-reaching social changes had been wrought by the new economic forces which had come into play that political reorganization became a necessity. As early as 1832, in the great Reform Act, steps were taken that resulted in the transference of political power from the landed aristocracy to the middle classes, and established as a fact the new theory that political power inheres in the people. In the reform era that followed the year 1832, the processes of legislation did much toward awakening the social consciousness: sharp class distinctions were obliterated; claims for the masses were recognized; humanitarian reforms were enacted; conditions of labor were ameliorated; a movement for the emancipation

of women was begun; and popular education was advocated. Men gained more and more control over the forces of nature until a complete transformation of the world was wrought through the factory, the railway, the steamship, and the applications of electricity; and the secrets of the universe were penetrated by the discoveries of science to such an extent that a complete revolution was effected in the domain of thought. New knowledge and old dogmas came into such fierce conflict that the traditional system of religion was shaken at its foundations; and a great religious upheaval resulted, from which men emerged steeped in scepticism. All these disintegrating forces created on the part of the nineteenth-century British populace a freedom of thought and action that had its basis in a non-compromising attitude toward facts and truth.

Perhaps the greatest advancement made in the nineteenth century was in the field of theology; yet religious thought has seldom been so stagnant as it was during the first twenty years of the century. Traditional teaching remained in almost undisputed possession, and the greatest inequality existed among the various religious sects. The Anglican Church was favored with representation in the House of Lords, appointment to government offices, and membership in

the universities; whereas Dissenters, Catholics, and Jews were subject to disabilities that were humiliating both socially and legally. By 1828, however, Parliament removed the disabilities of the non-conformists, and originated the movement for religious equality in England. This phase of religious progress was due largely to the demands of the middle class, most of whom were non-conformists. But the removal of disabilities brought about no immediate progress in theology. Christian faith was advocated on the ground of external evidences that had characterized it in the previous century, and theology could make no serious progress until it was emancipated from such outworn conventions. A freer view of biblical inspiration and the application to the Scriptures of the same critical principles being applied to other literature were necessary before any revolution would follow. The ruling idea of development which characterized the scientific thought of the age would also, if applied to theology, create a more sympathetic interest in doctrine viewed historically rather than as absolutely defined. The time was ripe for the advent of Christian scholars who would attempt the presentation of a truer theology. Let us see from which group of theologians - Evangelicals, Noetics, Coleridgeans, Tractarians - such scholars

were likely to come.

There is no doubt that the spirit of religion was greatest among the Evangelicals. Their theology was concentrated upon a few doctrines forming the scheme of salvation, and its advocates gave themselves almost wholly to the business of making converts. They held firmly to the belief that Scripture was the sole test of Scripture; hence the fact that the idea of an infallible book was readily accepted made circumstances favorable for their work. The year 1833, which marks the birth of the Oxford Movement, was the high tide of Evangelicalism. It was a movement kindred in spirit to that of Methodism; it held a Calvinistic viewpoint, and placed much emphasis on personal holiness. Advocates of the Evangelical theology emphasized the Protestant character of the church and zealously devoted themselves to efforts for social and moral reform. They supported charitable enterprises with admirable generosity, and maintained a long struggle against the slave trade; in fact, it is the lasting glory of the party that the emancipation of slaves was largely a result of their work. By their preaching and example they brought about a moral reformation and made their religion the moral cement of English society. The stern Victorian moralist, regardless

of his denominational choice, showed the influence of this school. The Evangelicals were also the richest of the theologians in literary connections: "Carlyle, Macaulay, Browning, Ruskin, and George Eliot all came under Calvinistic and evangelical influences; and though some of them wandered very far from the fold, they all bore to the end the marks of their early training and associations."<sup>1</sup> But no emancipation in theology was to come from the Evangelicals. Their lack of speculative interest caused them to be allied to traditional teaching rather than to any effort to revive and liberate theology.

The first evidences of liberal theology were seen in the beliefs of the Coleridgeans and the Noetics. Coleridge revolted against the utilitarian fashion in theology and put forth an effort to spiritualize it. As the exponent of German philosophy he was the chief force in breaking down the rationalistic tendencies of the eighteenth century. He combatted the contemporary idea that the Bible was not to be reasoned with, and his spiritual philosophy was an excellent supplement to the more positive ideas that were beginning to characterize life in the universities. At Oriel

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<sup>1</sup> Walker, Literature of the Victorian Era, pp. 84-85.

College, Oxford, there had sprung up a group of intellectuals known as the Noetics, who knew nothing of German philosophy but who indulged in unfettered criticism. They are significant as the predecessors of the Broad Churchmen, who in the last half of the century made great advances toward combining free thinking with a position inside the Christian Church. Though they stirred little actual enthusiasm, it was natural that a society accustomed to defer to authority and tradition should be shocked at the freedom they exercised in submitting everything to reason.

Reacting against the liberalism of the Noetics was another group of Oxford students known as the Tractarians. Through them - under the leadership of Keble, Pusey, and Newman - the Oxford Movement came into being as a protest against the Victorian spirit of compromise. Their problem was to check the spread of rationalism, the mainspring of the movement; and they set about accomplishing their purpose by advocating their ideas in a series of pamphlets called Tracts for the Times. They expressed a profound dissatisfaction with the dormant state of religion in the Established Church, a growing enthusiasm for the mediaeval past, and a haunting fear that the movement in the direction of liberal reform might prove to be a danger to the rights

of the church. Before long a trend toward Roman Catholicism became noticeable among them, and Newman, the spirit incarnate of the movement, gradually found himself unable to recognize any via media between Atheism and Catholicism. Accordingly he reverted to the Roman Catholic faith, and in 1845 joined the Roman Church. Those of his followers who could not take shelter under authority heard the call of reason; and under Pusey, the intellectual leader of the Oxford Movement, remained in the Anglican communion.

The result of the Catholic reaction was a temporary discouragement of free inquiry; but scientific knowledge, whose bearing on traditional theology was not at first perceived, would permit no cessation of intellectual investigation. The difficulties of faith increased under the continued pressure of modern inquiry and physical science until at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign it was impossible to reconcile the old and the new faith. The spirit of doubt obtruded itself until many of those who started out ardent followers of Newman became coldly distrustful of any authority whatsoever, lost their faith, and drifted into an attitude of indifference or antagonism toward Christianity.

Great as was the revolution in the field of

theology, it was in some respects eclipsed by, and in a great measure influenced by, scientific investigation. The advances of science so greatly increased the bounds of human knowledge that new fields opened where it had been thought that man could never penetrate, and more significant still was the development of a scientific habit of mind whereby man judged even the problems of humanity that lie outside of the realm of science. Many things silently became impossible of belief not because they were disproved by science but because the scientific habit of mind was fatal to them. Through science the battle for freedom of thought was won, and the term free thought was no longer opprobrious.

It was in man's conception of the universe that the influence of science was truly seen. Early in the century the accepted basis of geology was catastrophic, and it was not until the publication of Lyell's Principles of Geology (1830-1833) that the belief was dispersed. Smith's Strata Identified by Organized Fossils, published in 1816, had pointed out conclusively the succession of faunas and their utility in determining the relative ages of deposits. According to the catastrophic theory whole faunas were swept off at a time, but Lyell contended that the surface of the earth came into existence as a result of slow and constant



changes, ages and ages in duration, and that the process is still going on. His great service was in substituting the view of the gradual extinction of the species and the continuous creation of new ones; His insistence that the processes of the past must be judged by those now in progress forms the keynote of the whole of his scientific work.

To Lyell's conclusions the greatest thinker of the century was somewhat indebted. Lyell played an important part in accustoming men's minds to the vast changes brought by natural processes and in leading them to reflect upon evolution; and it is in this way that Darwin was indebted to him. A voyage around the world (1831-1836) in the exploring vessel The Beagle was the most important experience in Darwin's life. There he made use of the scientific spirit and point of view that had come to him from reading Principles of Geology, with the result that he extended to biology and all living things the slow evolution which Lyell piously restricted to geology and the surface of the earth. After having read Malthus's Principle of Population in 1838, he evolved the theory of natural selection or "the survival of the fittest", the theory that was given to the world in 1859 in The Origin of the Species. Darwin dominated the scientific thought

of his age, but the leaders of the established schools of theology and science were so opposed to his evolution theory that the mere mention of his name brought down a storm of protest. Many writers, among whom were Herbert Spencer and Thomas Henry Huxley, popularized the doctrine of evolution; but it was Darwin's original theory that worked a complete revolution of thought.

Undeniably linked with the scientific discoveries of the period, but of less importance in revolutionizing thought, were the advances made in philosophy. The philosophy of England was no longer English philosophy in the strict sense of the word, for it showed alike the influence of German and French schools. During the first half of the century the Scottish school, which was developing in opposition to the scepticism of Hume, held sway; and through its leader, Sir William Hamilton, who did much toward introducing British readers to the German philosophy, attempted to establish the philosophy of common sense. In the third quarter of the century this school was displaced by the Utilitarians, whose instrument of thought was a cold, hard, clear, and somewhat narrow logic. A decade or two before the rise of the Utilitarians there came from France certain tenets that were received with something like philosophic revelation. These new theories, known as Positivism,

originated with Auguste Comte, who conceived the idea that the theory of evolution was applicable to social phenomena. Positivism did not reach its height during the first half of the century, but its influence was such that English philosophy came to be clearly separated into two movements, one representing a revival of the teaching of Kant and the other finding its origin in natural science and associated with the doctrine of evolution.

With this development in philosophic thought there came further perplexities to British minds already greatly disturbed by marked deviations in theology and epochal discoveries in science. Man's most important problem became one of adjustment; and philosophers, theologians, and writers - particularly certain Victorian novelists - undertook the task of devising a satisfactory medium whereby man might adjust himself more satisfactorily to the forces making for confusion and disintegration.

## CHAPTER II

### GEORGE ELIOT'S EXPERIENCE PRIOR TO HER FIRST CONTACT WITH COMTIST INFLUENCE

Basically important in the development of a man's physical, moral, and spiritual being are the forces of heredity and environment, forces both individual and social. Though man is the product of his age, his immediate environment and individual heritage are primary factors in determining his ideas of life. On the part of the reader who attempts to explain the theories and ideas of an author it becomes necessary, therefore, to know the influence of these forces on the author's daily life; so it is that we turn to the home-life of George Eliot and make an examination of the domestic influences under which she grew up.

Marian Evans was born in that midland district of England about which she has so fondly written in her novels. Griff House was only twenty miles from Stratford-on-Avon, the beauty spot of England and a land of great historic memories. The monotonous succession of level fields marked by green hedgerows had not been broken by the railroads that were soon to arouse the ill-will of the village folk, and the peaceful calm of everyday life was still undisturbed by anything more

than the daily coach. Griff House itself was the typical ivy-covered farmhouse surrounded by a well-kept lawn and a flower garden very similar to Mrs. Poyser's, in *Adam Bede*. Though the immediate landscape was none too attractive, it was dear to the heart of Marian and her readers. Of the influence of these early surroundings she speaks very definitely:

Our Midland plains have never lost their familiar expression and conservative bias for me.<sup>1</sup>

It is interesting, I think, to know whether a writer was born in a central or border district - a condition which always has a strongly determining influence. I was born in Warwickshire, but certain family traditions connected with more northerly districts made these districts a region of poetry to me in my early life.<sup>2</sup>

A human life should be well-rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of the earth, for the labors men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that home a familiar, unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge: a spot where the definiteness of early knowledge may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbors, even to the dogs and monkeys, may spread, not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood.<sup>3</sup>

There is no doubt that the sweet, sunny calm of these early surroundings had much to do with the quiet, reposeful strength characteristic of her work.

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<sup>1</sup> *Theophrastus Such*, p. 275.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted by Phelps, "Last Words of George Eliot", *Harper's Magazine*, Vol. 64, p. 569.

<sup>3</sup> *Daniel Deronda*, Vol. I, p. 22.

To the influence of George Eliot's early environment must be added that of her parentage. The influences upon her of her father and mother form interesting contrasts; and though she evidently possessed more of her father's traits, she was not lacking in at least one of the characteristics of her mother. Her father, at the time of her birth a well-known land agent, was a man much respected and admired for his honesty, straight forwardness, efficiency, and upright dealings. A staunch Tory, he opposed revolutionary doctrine and felt that the strength of the nation lay in a strong government. His attitude of reverence for "government", in contrast with his dislike of all "rebels", became an effective part of Marian's religion and the basis of a latent conservative bias later reflected in all her works, especially in her attitude toward political reform, as indicated in "Felix Holt". The name of this grave father she pronounced with awe; yet the greatest sympathy and understanding existed between the two. In the performance of his duties as land agent Mr. Evans was frequently accompanied on his trips about the country by Marian, who enjoyed the beauty of Warwickshire and listened to the long dialogues between her father and the simple country folk. The impressions made on her childish memory were stored

away and later given to the world in Adam Bede and The Mill on the Floss. Of the importance of the contacts she made on these trips she wrote long afterward:

A chief misfortune of high birth is that it usually shuts a man out from the large sympathetic knowledge of human experience which comes from contact with various classes on their own level. Hence I have always thought the most fortunate Britons are those whose experience has given them a practical share in many aspects of the national lot, who have lived long among the mixed commonalty, roughing it with them under difficulties, knowing how their food tastes to them, and getting acquainted with their notions and motives, not by inference from traditional types in literature or from philosophical theories, but from daily fellowship and observation.<sup>4</sup>

A vivid likeness of her father, to whom Marian owed some of her most valuable experience and many of her most admirable traits, is seen in Caleb Garth, in Middlemarch.

Of Marian's mother we know little except that she was of somewhat higher social position than Mr. Evans, and was an affectionate, warm-hearted woman. In her we see something of the deeply affectionate nature of Marian, who very early in life realized the absolute need of some person who should be all in all to her, and to whom she should be all in all.

Since no part of George Eliot's philosophy has been questioned more than her religious attitudes, let

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<sup>4</sup> Theophrastus Such, pp. 266-267.

us examine the influence of her parents in moulding her religious views. She was reared in a strictly evangelical atmosphere, in a home characterized by the most earnest piety accompanied by a narrow dogmatism; hence there is no doubt that her naturally religious nature was strengthened by the strictest observance of decorum. She became acquainted with varieties of religious opinion by listening to the conversations between her parents, who were members of the Established Church, and other members of her family, who were Methodists. She had an unusually great interest in the Bible; and long before she entertained any sceptical views, her inquiring mind led her to examine with zealous interest anything approaching theological argumentation. Though she was at various periods in her life unsettled in her religious beliefs, "she nourished from childhood to the grave the same religious nature which had dawned at Griff".<sup>5</sup>

Let it be borne in mind that the purpose of this chapter is not to give a complete biographical account of George Eliot; otherwise, there will be no justification for omitting many very interesting personal matters. Up to this point the discussion has dealt with her

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<sup>5</sup> Harrison, Choice of Books, p. 203.



immediate surroundings and her parentage. It is the purpose now to examine the inherent tendencies that were manifested during her school life.

In 1824 Mrs. Evans was in such ill health that Marian was removed from her care and placed in a small boarding school at Attleboro. Very little significance is attached to this period except for the fact that even then, at the age of five, she led a solitary life and showed signs of dissatisfaction with her surroundings:

When I was quite a little child, I could not be satisfied with the things around me. I was constantly living in a world of my own creation, and was quite contented to have no companions, that I might be left to my own musings, and imagine scenes in which I was chief actress.<sup>6</sup>

Viewed in the light of her later development it appears as a sign of the practical, positive basis of her life that she could not, even in childhood, rest content with ideas that remained in the realm of thought and had no connection with action. Her removal to Nuneaton, in 1826, brought her into intimate association with a Miss Lewis, a woman of strong evangelical influence, who was in later years the fulfillment of Marian's

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<sup>6</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 39.

desire for some one of like sympathy to whom she could pour out the yearnings of her heart and mind. Her long correspondence with Miss Lewis is the most satisfactory source obtainable for an account of her mental attitudes preceding the great change that took place in her beliefs. During the time that she was at Nuneaton, books became a passion with her; she read everything procurable, always retiring to her bedroom to pour over a book while her companions were enjoying outdoor recreation. Though she was not a precocious child, the scope of her reading at this early age is indicative of her intellectual bent and her literary taste. Defoe's The History of the Devil, Johnson's Rasselas, Pilgrim's Progress, and Waverly were among the books that engaged her attention. She was at this time "an old-fashioned child, already living in a world of her own imagination, impressible to her fingertips, and willing to give her views on any subject".<sup>7</sup>

For the next three years, 1832-1835, Marian lived in a very congenial atmosphere of Calvinistic influences at the Misses Franklins' school in Coventry, a school much above the average for girls. She was then very much what she has described her own Maggie at the age

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<sup>7</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 14.

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of thirteen.

A creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her; with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it. No wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions came of it.<sup>9</sup>

For her instructors, the Misses Franklin, who were daughters of a Baptist minister, she entertained the highest respect; and she soon adopted their religious views with intense eagerness, although she never formally joined the Baptists or any other church than the Church of England.<sup>10</sup> She became a leader in the religious life of the school; but she was unable, she says, to work herself up to demonstrable effects of the services as some of the girls could. Here again she commonly returned to her own room and read with avidity Paley's Evidences or any other argumentative theology available. Had this reading been purely superficial, probably there would be no reason for mentioning it as of any importance in her experience, but she did not read superficially then or later. Her reflective mind, even

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<sup>8</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> The Mill on the Floss, (Part one), pp. 349-350.

<sup>10</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 20.

in her youth, caused her to read with an unusual perception, and was responsible for the birth of many ideas that perplexed her greatly; for example, when she read Bulwer's Devereux, at the age of thirteen, she was interested in the relationship between religion and morals.

I remember, as I dare say you do, a very amiable atheist depicted by Bulwer, in Devereux; and for some time after the perusal of that book, which I read seven or eight years ago, I was considerably shaken by the impression that religion was not a requisite to moral excellence.<sup>11</sup>

Her writings are unmistakable proof that the impression made here became an established principle with her. Hers was a religion of morals. If the stimulus given to mental activity be accepted as the test of a good education, the schooling at Coventry was successful enough. She received not only a sound English education but also a cultural development from instruction at the hands of excellent masters of French, German, and music. Her intellectual curiosity was certainly roused, though not as yet fixed upon any definite object. It was just at this particular stage in her mental development that the illness and death of her mother recalled her from a congenial, intellectual atmosphere to the ordinary life

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<sup>11</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 48.

of her father's household - a complete separation from intellectual companionship. Thus, at sixteen began a new era in her career and one which, says her biographer, she drew upon for some of her most touching creations.

Since the burden of the proof in this discussion is based on the experiences of George Eliot during this new era, the years 1836-1849, it is necessary that certain facts be borne in mind; namely, (1) that the purpose of this study of George Eliot is to show that the foundations of her philosophy were already laid when she came under the influence of Comtism; (2) that in the particular years 1836-1849 the main theories of George Eliot's philosophy were established; (3) that the term philosophy is used here to indicate her reaction to the complex tendencies that marked her life. As frequently as possible her own comments, preserved in her correspondence with Miss Lewis and others, will be used as evidence.

The years immediately after her mother's death were for George Eliot in many respects the most trying years of her life. She had returned from Coventry with ultra-evangelical tendencies that were beginning to express themselves in the form of self-renunciation. The pursuit of pleasure was a snare; dress was vanity; society was danger. She made her hard lot harder by

unnecessary asceticism, as, for example, when she accompanied her brother to London - she would not go with him to the theater, but spent her evenings in reading; and, while he purchased hunting sketches, bought for herself a copy of Whitson's Josephus. She was haunted by a sense of her own shortcomings, and meditated sorrowfully upon her besetting sin - "the one of all others most destroying, as it is the fruitful parent of them all, - ambition, a desire insatiable for the esteem of my fellow creatures"<sup>12</sup>. She was also greatly troubled about the question of novel-reading, of which she disapproved.

As to the discipline our minds receive from the perusal of fictions, I can conceive none that is beneficial but may be attained by that of history. . . . Religious novels are more hateful to me than merely worldly ones: they are a sort of centaur or mermaid, and, like other monsters that we do not know how to class, should be destroyed for the public good as soon as born.<sup>13</sup>

Narrow as some of these views are, it is important to remember that her early religious experiences were an essential part of the growth of the personality we call George Eliot. The views changed in good time, but the moral earnestness which prompted them was a permanent

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<sup>12</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

characteristic. Her dissatisfaction with any equivocal relation is best stated in her own words:

I do not deny that there may be many who can partake with a high degree of zest of all the lawful engagements the world can offer, and yet live in near communion with their God, - who can warmly love the creature and yet be careful that the Creator maintains His supremacy in their hearts; but I confess in my short experience and narrow sphere of action I have never been able to attain this. I find total abstinence much easier than moderation.<sup>14</sup>

There was no position of moderation for her, nor was there one a few years later when she recognized a definite change in her religious beliefs. Nothing could have grieved her more than the break with her father, unless it had been the equivocal position of professing the faith she had ceased to believe in.

There were trials in Marian's life at Griff other than the mental disturbances accompanying her spirit of renunciation. She was living a life of divided interests - one the dutiful performance of daily household duties; the other the urgent desire to engage in intellectual pursuits. With all the sincerity that later characterized her life as an author, she performed the laborious tasks of butter and cheese-making, baking, canning, and household management; but she found many

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<sup>14</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 29.

of the tasks distasteful. Her mind longed to examine the unread books in her library, but her strict adherence to a sense of duty prevented any slighting of household duties. Through very tactful management, however, she found time for the study of subjects of much depth and great variety. She found every kind of intellectual acquisition an inexhaustible source of delight. Languages, music, literature, science, and philosophy interested her alike, according to her own description of the chaotic state of her mind about this time.

I have lately led so unsettled a life, and have been so desultory in my employments, that my mind is more than usually chaotic; or rather it is like a stratum of conglomerated fragments, that shows here a jaw and rib of some ponderous quadruped, there a delicate alto-relievo of some fern-like plant, tiny shells, and mysterious non-descripts encrusted and united with some unvaried and uninteresting but useful stone. My mind presents just such an assemblage of disjointed specimens of history, ancient and modern; scraps of poetry picked up from Shakespeare, Milton, Cowper, and Wordsworth; newspaper topics; morsels of Addison and Bacon, Latin verbs, geometry, entomology, and chemistry; Reviews and meta-physics, - all arrested and petrified and smothered by the fast-thinking every-day accession of actual events, relative anxieties, and household cares and vexations.<sup>15</sup>

It was during these years at Griff that Miss Evans was preparing herself for the day not far distant when the

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<sup>15</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 45.



soundest minds of her time found it a pleasure to converse with her, and valued her opinions as those of an unusually brilliant mind.

Partly as a result of her studies and partly as the consequence of a deeply analytic mind, Marian began to find no comfort in the religious beliefs she had entertained. As she had first known it, religion was a quiet, unimpassioned thing, a simple teaching of rules of life, with dimly expected rewards and punishments to be proportioned to one's actions. When she left school in 1835, she had passed from this calm religion into a sterner religion of unmodified Calvinism, and now from the latter part of 1839 there were signs of another approaching change. It is not alarming, however, that there should be doubts in her mind, for there was among her countrymen a general admiration for an honest doubt which might have more faith than half the creeds; the English middle classes of Evangelical faith were opposing the Tractarians on one hand and the Broad church on the other, and the public was beginning to read Carlyle, a moralist and pantheist rather than a devout Christian. The question of the origin of the church was a very vital question, and much attention was being given to reading and writing religious history. George Eliot herself had begun the making of an Ecclesiastical Chart which was to give all kinds of information

about the chronology of the apostolical writings, a scheme, though unfinished, that proved a valuable exercise for her as a serious student of religious history. Her correspondence with Miss Lewis at this time reveals her reaction to some of the religious questions of the day:

You allude to the religious, or rather irreligious contentions that form so prominent a feature in the aspect of public affairs, a subject you will perhaps be surprised to hear me say, is full of interest to me, and on which I am unable to shape an opinion for the satisfaction of my mind. I think no one feels more difficulty in coming to a decision on controverted matters than myself. I do not mean that I have not preferences; but, however congruous a theory may be with my notions, I cannot find that comfortable repose that others appear to possess after having made their election of a class of sentiments. - - - On no subject do I veer to all points of the compass more frequently than on the nature of the "visible church".<sup>16</sup>

A further examination of the nature of Miss Evans's reading will remove any doubt that she was intensely interested in obtaining as much information as possible on the topics that were perplexing her mind. She read an essay on Schism by Professor Happus of the London University, and the Evangelical Milner's Church History. With their views she compared those of The Portrait of an English Churchman, by W. Gresley, a champion of Tractarianism, and found that the Tracts themselves

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<sup>16</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 40.

showed a "confused appreciation of the great doctrine of justification." She was attracted too to The Great Teacher, written by John Harris, a popular writer of the time who held very liberal views. Chief among the works that absorbed her attention was Taylor's Ancient Christianity and the Oxford Tracts, a book which Mrs. Cash, a pupil of Miss Evans's, declares to have had much influence in unsettling her views of Christianity. Mr. Taylor's book was in substance an attempt to show that the early church, to which the Tractarians referred as the embodiment of pure Christianity, was in fact already corrupt. The general tone of Miss Evans's correspondence during the time that she was reading so actively indicates that a more rational view of things had perceptibly begun before the settlement at Foleshill, which came about in 1841.

A review of the principal tendencies manifested by George Eliot before her removal to Foleshill and her acquaintance with a new intellectual environment will help to account for the rapidity with which her change of religious beliefs came about. In the course of this discussion the following facts have been pointed out: (1) in her nature there was a degree of moral earnestness rarely found; (2) she was entirely sensitive to the religious contentions of her age; (3) her

intellectual acquisitions included religious history, languages, music, literature, science, and philosophy; (4) the greatest part of her thinking was in a theological direction. Certainly she had not established a philosophy, but it is apparent that her experience was favorable to intellectual growth.

Marian Evans's removal to Foleshill marks the beginning of one of the most important periods in her development. Up to the time of her twenty-first year she had been living in the isolated surroundings characteristic of English country life, but in 1841 her father turned over his position as land agent to his son Isaac and moved to Foleshill Road, near Coventry, a semi-detached suburban village. Thus Marian was transferred into a center of commercial and intellectual activities, a town of factories and mills, and a society of busy, active people. This was a great change for one of George Eliot's sensibility to surroundings. As a result her ways of life altered; hence the purpose of this discussion now will be to examine the ideas of the friends with whom she associated, and to observe the influence they exerted on her.

For a short time after Miss Evans became a resident of Foleshill, she was very unhappy; but she continued to read widely and to give much time to French, Italian,

German, and Hebrew, the last an unaided effort. It was not long, however, until she had made the acquaintance of some of the most intelligent members of Coventry society, chief among whom was the Bray family. Her introduction to this family is described by Mr. Bray in his autobiography:

Our real acquaintance began in 1841. Amongst the natural reasons for introducing her, we thought that the influence of this superior young lady of Evangelical opinions might be beneficial to our heretical minds. She was then about twenty-one. We soon found that her mind was already turning toward greater freedom of thought in religious opinion, and that she had even bought for herself Hennell's Inquiry.<sup>17</sup>

The family to which Miss Evans was thus introduced included, besides Mr. and Mrs. Bray, Mrs. Bray's brother and sister, Charles and Sarah Hennell. Theirs was a very charming home, and in it Miss Evans for the first time met such distinguished persons as Combe, Froude, and Emerson. A general intellectual atmosphere permeated the place, for each member of the family was a highly intellectual, free-thinking individual.

Mr. Bray, the first with whom Miss Evans became acquainted, was a wealthy ribbon manufacturer, with much leisure time at his disposal for writing and thinking. He was an ardent admirer of Emerson and other

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<sup>17</sup> Bray, Autobiography, p. 76.

leaders of the Transcendental movement, but he was fully prepared to accept views based upon foundations in science. Mrs. Bray, a very charming woman, was of a mind fully open to new theories; but she was perhaps more in sympathy with the aspects of Christianity than her husband was. Her brother, Mr. Charles Hennell, a man much given to original thinking, had, in 1838, published An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity, a book which explained the origin of Christianity by natural causes. The sister, also a writer of considerable importance, became Miss Evans's very dear friend. To this family George Eliot was unmistakably indebted for their directing some of her main beliefs.

As has been mentioned, Miss Evans was first attracted to Mr. Bray. Let us see what the reason was. Mr. Bray was an ardent phrenologist and had published, in 1839, a work on the Education of the Feelings and, in 1841, his main work, The Philosophy of Necessity. He had also written pamphlets on Illusion and Delusion, The Reign of Law, Toleration, and Christianity. Among the doctrines set forth in the work on necessity are (1) the dominion of law, (2) the reign of necessity, (3) experience as the foundation of knowledge, (4) humanity as an organism that develops a larger life for man by

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the aid of experience and tradition - doctrines which might be listed as the ones set forth years later in the novels of George Eliot. Mr. Bray wrote "not for the gratification of self-love, nor out of an abstract regard for truth, but from a deeply felt wish to do good to his fellow-beings and a conviction that this truth was the best gift in his power to offer"<sup>19</sup>. Was not a man of such convictions likely to be held in the highest regard by George Eliot? Let us see now how she was attracted to another member of the Bray household.

According to Mr. Bray's account, Miss Evans had been interested in reading Hennell's Inquiry into the Origin of Christianity before she met the family; and, judging by her interest in religious history, she had made much unconscious preparation for the acceptance of Mr. Hennell's ideas. As actual preparation she had twice re-read the Bible after her purchase of the Inquiry and previous to its reading. When she began reading the book, she was deeply impressed; and her interest in it led to a mutual interest between the author and herself in their frequent meetings in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Bray. Though she later confessed

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<sup>18</sup> Cooke, George Eliot, p. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Deakin, The Early Life of George Eliot, p. 42.

that she could not accept as facts some of the points Mr. Hennell included, she admitted that it expressed exactly her idea of what the New Testament would be if the miraculous and highly improbable were removed.<sup>20</sup> The following extract from a letter to Miss Lewis, dated November 13, 1841, gives her reaction to the book and apparently fixes the date of the first acknowledgment by herself that her opinions were undergoing a momentous change:

My whole soul has been engrossed in the most interesting of all inquiries for the last few days, and to what result my thoughts may lead, I know not, - possibly to one that will startle you; but my only desire is to know the truth, my only fear to cling to error.<sup>21</sup>

It was impossible for a nature so disturbed as the letter to Miss Lewis indicates the writer to have been, to rest satisfied in compliance with the old forms; so, rather than suffer from an equivocal position, she gave up going to church. In the eyes of her father she had committed an unforgivable offense; and the result was a temporary break between them. This decision was not reached without a desperate conflict between her strong domestic affection and a passionate desire for intellec-

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<sup>20</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, pp. 70-76.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 76.



tual honesty. She never did anything by halves, and the same enthusiasm that had swept her away in the current of evangelical piety now hurried her with equal rapidity in a quite contrary direction. That she was thoroughly prepared now for a further moulding influence of free thought as expressed by the Brays and the Hennells is apparent from her own statement:

To fear the examination of any proposition appears to me an intellectual and a moral palsy that will ever hinder the firm grasping of any substance whatever. For my part I wish to be amongst the ranks of that glorious crusade that is seeking to set Truth's Holy Sepulchre free from a usurped domination. We shall then see her resurrection.<sup>22</sup>

Miss Evans's revolt from orthodox views was unaccompanied by the bitterness which often accompanies the emancipation from the strictness of a sectarian tyranny. Although she felt the painfulness of the wrench it cost her to part with so much that was dear, and though she was greatly concerned about the grief she caused her friends, she did not quail before consequences nor exhibit any vacillation of judgment. Her complete satisfaction in the belief that she had not made a mistake was evident even during the trying period when she was not living with her father.

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<sup>22</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 79.

My acquaintances of this neighborhood seem to seek an opportunity of smiling on me in spite of my heresy. All these things, however, are but the fringe and ribbons of happiness. They are adherent, not inherent, and without any affectation I feel myself to be acquiring what I must hold to be a precious possession, an independence of what is baptized by the world external good.<sup>23</sup>

No spirit of aggressiveness was manifested toward her father or others who could not understand her action or accept her belief; instead there was then and throughout her life the greatest sympathy for all earnest believers of any creed. When her friends had effected a reconciliation with her father, upon her agreement to attend church again, she returned to Coventry; and for the next seven years she experienced greater spiritual peace than ever before. The old sceptical attitude gave place to a cheerful and comforting assurance, and she settled into a deep religious earnestness, where the evolution of man's destiny was the inspiration. Soon after the reconciliation she wrote of the happiness she was experiencing:

I am anxious that you should not imagine me unhappy even in my most melancholy moods. I think there can be few who more truly feel than I that this is a world of bliss and beauty, that is, that bliss and beauty are the end, the tendency of the creation; and

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<sup>23</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 82.

evils are the shadows that are the only conditions of light in the picture; and I live in much, much enjoyment.<sup>24</sup>

Miss Evans's happiness in the fact that she had put off the old belief was heightened by continued associations at Rosehill, the home of the Bray family. It was to Mrs. Bray that she went when she was in pain or trouble and wanted affectionate companionship. She thought Mrs. Bray the most religious woman she had ever known, and it was in the beauty of Mrs. Bray's nature that she found the strongest evidences that goodness was not dependent upon any particular form of faith. With Mr. Bray Miss Evans quarrelled, and the humorous side of her nature was brought out. To the third member of the trio, Miss Sarah Hennell, who came on occasional visits to Coventry, Miss Evans turned for intellectual sympathy. The two ladies became like sisters to Miss Evans, and Mr. Bray was her most intimate male friend. The almost unbroken chain of letters to them during the remainder of George Eliot's life indicates that the family exerted a very important influence. Miss Mary Sibree, an intimate friend and pupil of Miss Evans, had this to say:

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<sup>24</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 85.

Mr. and Mrs. Bray and Miss Hennell, with their friends, were her world, - and on my saying to her once, as we closed the garden door together, that we seemed to be entering Paradise, she said, "I do indeed feel that I shut out the world when I shut that door."<sup>25</sup>

Rosehill not only afforded a pleasant variation from her life at Coventry, but the family also made frequent holiday excursions in which Miss Evans joined. It was one of the excursions, in 1843, that was indirectly responsible for Miss Evans's undertaking the translation of Strauss's Leben Jesu. A Miss Brabant, a member of the party, had undertaken the translation; but upon her marriage to Mr. Charles Hennell, Miss Evans was persuaded to complete the translation. Dr. Brabant, Miss Brabant's father, was a personal friend of Strauss. Thus the Rosehill group had again been the means of making new intellectual contacts for George Eliot, the importance of which should be emphasized.

For the next two and one-half years Miss Evans was engaged in the translation of the great work of Strauss, with whom she already had slight acquaintance through his preface to Hennell's Inquiry. She did not undertake the work through admiration of the author, however. It was rather a call of friendship: to complete what

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<sup>25</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 118.

someone else was unable to continue and to make Strauss accessible to Mr. Bray, who did not read German. The book dealt with a subject in which Miss Evans had long been interested; namely, the origin of Christianity. Strauss had attempted to prove that the belief in the divinity of Christ rested on legends that had grown up in the pious imaginations of his early followers, a book so daring in its interpretation of the origin of Christianity that it excited much attention among all those who had broken away from the old belief. That Miss Evans did not become a disciple of Strauss is probably due to the fact that she preferred Hennell's interpretation of Christianity. Though the laborious task of translation was often very distasteful, it was valuable to her as a mental discipline, concentrating her studies on one point and serving as a steadying influence. It also strengthened her habit of piercing into the depths of an author's meaning. The creditable and scholarly manner with which she executed the work prompted the following comment from the Westminster Review:

The author could hardly have spoken better had his country and language been English. The work has evidently fallen into the hands of one who has not only effective command of both languages, but a familiarity with the subject-matter of theological

criticism, and an initiation into its technical phraseology.<sup>26</sup>

Among other translations that Miss Evans undertook was Feuerbach's Essence of Christianity, a work whose influence on her was greater than Strauss's. A summary of Feuerbach's idea will be sufficient explanation for its approval by one who already rejected the belief in Christianity but upheld the spirit of religion. According to Feuerbach, the mind creates for itself objective images corresponding to its subjective states, and reproduces its feelings in the outward world. In reality there is no objective fact corresponding to these subjective ideas, but what the mind conceives to exist is a necessary product of its own activity. The mind believes in God, which is man's way of realizing the perfect type of his own nature, but God does not exist; he is a true picture of man's soul, a necessary product of his feeling and consciousness. All religious ideas are true subjectively, and Christianity especially corresponds to the inward wants and aspirations of the soul.<sup>27</sup> In Feuerbach's doctrine that religion gives fit expression to the emotional life and spiritual aspirations of man, and that what it finds within in no degree corresponds

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<sup>26</sup> Cooke, George Eliot, p. 24.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 26-27.

with that which surrounds man without, George Eliot found the expression of one of her deepest convictions. The benefits derived from the translation, however, extended beyond her own life: she became the means of bringing some of the most germinative of continental ideas within the reach of English students.

The completion of the translations of Feuerbach and Strauss removed a very heavy burden and left Miss Evans free for the more pleasant task of reading. Once free from the paths of Biblical criticism, she turned to the enjoyment of a great body of literature so varied in its nature that her reflections gave rise to the utterance of many profound philosophical ideas. The ideas advanced at this time have a particular significance for this discussion because of the fact that they are the underlying ideas in the philosophy later set forth in her novels. The importance she attached to self-sacrifice, to worshiping at the divine image of truth, and to the unalterable effect of one human being upon another is, though less frequently uttered, no less evident in her correspondence during this period of her career than in the pages of her novels. It will not be the purpose of this part of the discussion to give a detailed account of her reading, but rather to point out in her reaction to her reading those phases

of her thinking that later developed into an established philosophy.

It is interesting to note that almost without exception it was the moral aspect of literature that engaged her attention. In Richardson's Sir Charles Grandison she found great delight, and declared that the morality was perfect.

I had no idea that Richardson was worth so much. I have had more pleasure from him than from all the Swedish novels together. The morality is perfect, - there is nothing for the new lights to correct.<sup>28</sup>

Jane Eyre had both her approval and disapproval; she admired the author's treatment of the significance of self-sacrifice but not the motive behind it.

I have read Jane Eyre, and shall be glad to know what you admire in it. All self-sacrifice is good, but one would like it to be in a somewhat nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcase.<sup>29</sup>

In The Shadow of the Clouds she was interested in the matter of transubstantiation, a doctrine very forcefully preached in her novels.

Poor and shallow as one's own soul is, it is blessed to think that a sort of transubstantiation is possible by which the greater ones can live in

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<sup>28</sup> Cross, The Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 123.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 141.



us. Egotism apart, another's greatness, beauty, or bliss is one's own.<sup>30</sup>

Francis Newman's innate goodness prompted a remark from Miss Evans that was the summation of her idea of the importance of worshiping at the divine image of truth.

His soul is a blessed yea. There is a sort of blasphemy in that proverbial phrase, "Too good to be true." The highest inspiration of the purest, noblest human soul is the nearest expression of the truth.<sup>31</sup>

Of her favorite, Rousseau, she declared that it would signify nothing if some wise person stunned her with proof that his views of life, religion, and government were very erroneous.

It would not be the less true that Rousseau's genius has sent that electric thrill through my intellect and moral frame which has awakened me to new perceptions - which has made man and nature a fresh world of thought and feeling to me; and this not by teaching me any new belief.<sup>32</sup>

Neither did it matter to her that she could not accept George Sand's moral code.

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

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<sup>30</sup> Cross, The Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 149.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 143 (*Italics are the present writer's.*)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 147.

loving, gentle humor, that one might live a century with nothing but one's own dull faculties, and not know so much as those six pages will suggest.<sup>33</sup>

This was sufficient for her as a reason for bowing before George Sand. Of Carlyle's eulogy on Emerson she wrote as follows:

I have shed some delicious tears over it. This is a world worth abiding in while one man can thus venerate and love another.

Such ideas as these were not merely chance remarks; her letters are filled with them. A summary of the principal phases of her thought as set forth in her letters at this period would include the fundamental ideas of what we call George Eliot's philosophy.

During the illness and death of her father, Miss Evans experienced a spiritual growth that minimized her suffering and rested on the same qualities that ruled the lives of some of her greatest characters. The doctrines of resignation and self-abnegation that moulded the lives of Romola and Dorothea Brooke must have been born in Miss Evans as she attended her father in his long illness. In her faithful devotion to him she not only lived an existence entirely out of herself, but she also learned, through her sorrow, to look upon

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<sup>33</sup> Cross, The Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 147.

life with a much broader and deeper sympathy. In her correspondence with Miss Hennell and other intimate friends she had much to say of the consolations derived from nursing her father.

I have found already some of the "sweet uses" that belong only to what is called trouble, which is, after all, only a deepened gaze into life, like the sight of the darker blue and the thickening host of stars when the hazy effect of twilight is gone. I am entering on a new period of my life, which makes me look back on the past as something incredibly poor and contemptible. I am enjoying repose, strength, and ardor in a greater degree than I have ever known.<sup>34</sup>

When Mr. Evans's death occurred, on May 31, 1849, Miss Evans's grief was almost too great to be borne, but death was for her, as it was for many of the characters of her own creation, a means of drawing her into a deeper and truer sympathy with her fellow men.

It fortunately happened that at the time of Mr. Evans's death the Brays were planning a trip to the continent, and Miss Evans, who seemed entirely unable to overcome her grief, accepted their invitation to join them. The group spent several weeks in Geneva, after which the Brays returned home, and Miss Evans decided to remain. During the next eight months beautiful scenes and new acquaintances afforded her a delight-

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<sup>34</sup> Cross, The Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 141.

ful, soothing change. Though her correspondence during the months at Geneva is particularly interesting, there is little in it of value for the purposes of this discussion.

Upon her return to England she spent a short time with her brother and then made her home with Mr. and Mrs. Bray for the next sixteen months. During those months she wrote a review of Mackay's Progress of the Intellect, of particular importance here because she agreed with the philosophy of the author. Mr. Mackay's purpose was to show that divine revelation is not to be found exclusively in the records of any one nation but is coextensive with the history of human development. Miss Evans's review contained these remarkable passages:

The master-key to this revelation is the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world, - of that invariability of sequence which is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science, but which is still perversely ignored in our social organization, our ethics, and our religion. It is this invariability of sequence which can alone give value to experience, and render education, in the true sense, possible. .... Every past phase of human development is part of that education of the race in which we are sharing; every mistake, every absurdity into which poor human nature has fallen, may be looked on as an experience of which we may reap the benefit.<sup>35</sup>

All through her life George Eliot preached with unvarying

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<sup>35</sup> Cross, The Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 189. (Italics are the present writer's.)

earnestness the impossibility of separating our lives from those of the generations who live before us.

Soon after George Eliot wrote the sympathetic review of The Progress of the Intellect, she accepted a position as assistant editor of the Westminster Review, and a new period, emphatically an important one, opened in her life. It may be doubted that one who had spent her life in the provinces and had had no concern in periodical literature would be capable of doing editorial work in London, but Miss Evans's experience not only fitted her for the duties of an editor but was such as to preclude any disastrous effects from the new social and intellectual environment of London. She had long been a serious student of life as represented by the best minds of the past and of her own age; and she was, as a result, keenly aware of all the disintegrating forces of her age. Though she no longer believed in the creeds and practices of religion, she retained a deeply religious nature. A certain conservative bias and a deep, moral earnestness had prevented her becoming a blind disciple to any system of thought, but in the positive teachings of Charles Bray she found a means of shaping her own philosophy. The view of life that she developed was based on experience, a broad, human sympathy, and a belief in the efficacy of moral conduct.

Such was Miss Evans's outlook on life when she took up her new duties in 1851. That she was already largely in accord with the intellectual trends of her new environment it is the purpose of the next chapter to establish.

### CHAPTER III

#### GEORGE ELIOT'S ENTRANCE INTO THE COMTIST MILIEU

"As Goethe came after Lessing, Herder, and Kant, so George Eliot came after Comte, Mill, and Spencer. Her books are to be read in the light of their speculations, and she embodied in literary forms what they uttered as science or philosophy.<sup>1</sup>" As has been stated already, it is the purpose of this discussion to prove that this assertion is unfounded in the sense that it is interpreted to mean that George Eliot was supplied with a philosophy by Comte, Mill, and Spencer. As a basis for the proof, the nature of George Eliot's experience previous to her first contact with Comtian philosophy was set forth in Chapter One. Before further proof can be offered, it will be necessary to point out the principles of Comtian philosophy, or Positivism, the system of thought to which she is generally believed to be indebted for her own philosophy of life.

Positivism is a philosophical term, applied somewhat loosely to any system which confines itself to the data of experience and declines to recognize a priori or

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<sup>1</sup> Cooke, George Eliot, p. 2.

metaphysical speculation.<sup>2</sup> From the point of view of methodology the term "positive" is conceived in polemical opposition to the metaphysical abstractions of traditional philosophy.<sup>3</sup> We call "positive" the facts and things of immediate perceptions as well as the relations and uniformities which thought may discover in them without transcending experience. On the other hand, we call "metaphysical" every inquiry which claims to go beyond the sphere of the empirical. Thus Hume was a positivist inasmuch as he restricted philosophy to the sphere of the observation. Similarly Mill, Spencer, and other physical scientists viewed the universe from the positivist standpoint. In its commonest acceptation, however, the term is used of the philosophy of Auguste Comte, from whom the idea of a new positive and scientific era of human thought was adopted widely by scholars during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Auguste Comte (1798-1857) was a French philosopher whose doctrine was to the nineteenth century something more than that which Bacon's was to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. His prominence in the realm of thought rests upon the fact that he conceived the idea

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<sup>2</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. XVIII, p. 302.

<sup>3</sup> Social Science, Vol. XII, p. 260.



that social, like physical, phenomena might be reduced to laws of science, and that all philosophy should be focused upon the moral and political improvement of mankind. His purpose was to "create a Philosophy of the Sciences as a basis for a new social faith"<sup>4</sup>. Believing that the evolution of the human mind proceeded according to definite laws, he set forth in his Positive Philosophy the Law of the Three States, or the fundamental Law of human development. According to his declaration:

There are but three phases of intellectual evolution - for the individual as well as the mass - the Theological (Supernatural), the Metaphysical, and the Positive. In the Supernatural phase the mind seeks causes; it aspires to know the essences of things, and the How and Why of their operation. It regards all effects as the productions of supernatural agents. In the Metaphysical phase, a modification takes place; the supernatural agents are set aside for abstract forces or Entities supposed to inhere in various substances and capable of engendering phenomena. In the Positive phase, the mind, convinced of the futility of all inquiry into causes and essences, restricts itself to the discovery of the laws of phenomena.<sup>5</sup>

The first and greatest aim of the positivist philosophy is to advance the study of society into the third of the three stages - to remove social phenomena from the sphere of theological and metaphysical conceptions, and

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<sup>4</sup> Lewes, Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences, Vol. I, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 10-11.

to introduce among them the same scientific observation of their laws which has given us physics, chemistry, and physiology. Before Comte "no one had ever schemed a Social Science; that the phenomena of society - men aggregated in masses - were governed by laws as absolute and rigorous as those governing the cosmical phenomena, was barely suspected, and nothing had been done toward their systematic coordination."<sup>6</sup> Comte's disclosure of the necessity of treating all social thought as an interrelated whole had a most profound influence upon the subsequent development of the various social sciences; but for the purposes of this thesis, the moral or religious principles later set forth by Comte are more significant.

When Comte had completed his great work in Positive Philosophy and his scientific elaboration was over, he was ready to enter upon the great problems of Social Life. Fortunately at this time, when Comte was forty-five, he fell in love; and a year of chaste and exquisite affection changed his life. It was then that he began to feel in all its intensity the truth which he had perceived before; namely, "that in the mass, as in the individual, predominance is due to the affections, because

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<sup>6</sup> Lewes, Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences, Vol. I, pp. 10-11.

the intellect is really no more than the servant of the affections."<sup>7</sup> Under this new influence he learned to appreciate the abiding and universal importance of the affections: he grew deeply religious and aspired to become the founder of a new religion - the religion of Humanity. This phase of his philosophy he outlined in the Systeme de politique positive.

Inasmuch as George Eliot, the subject of this thesis, preached a religion of Humanity, the principles set forth by Comte should be kept in mind. The central thesis of the Systeme is the necessity of unifying all divergent beliefs and practices through the establishment of a religion of Humanity, with emphasis on the improvement of the social organism by a moral development rather than mere political mechanism. "If Comte's system has one capital distinction more remarkable than another, it is the absolute predominance of the moral point of view - the rigorous subordination of the intellect to the heart."<sup>8</sup> Comte taught that a moral transformation must precede any real advance, and that the aim of both public and private life is to secure to the utmost possible extent the victory of the social feeling

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<sup>7</sup> Lewes, Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences, Vol. I, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 9.

over self-love, or altruism over egoism. Feeling, or the heart, is the instrument for securing the subordination of self; and the subordination can be effected only by means of a religion. The characteristic basis of any religion is the existence of a power without us, so superior to ourselves as to command the complete submission of our whole life. According to Comte's system, that power is Humanity conceived as the Great Being. It is possible, through such a conception, to make religion permeate every human action, thought, and emotion. Control of all action, whether political, economic, or international, by moral judgment came to be a cardinal duty imposed on Positivists in all places and at all times.

So well did this new idea of religion fit in with the flow of English thought, which had begun to look upon matters of fact with something like reverence, that Positivism became the religion and philosophy of the day. In England the system grew to such an extent that institutions were set up for instruction in Positivism, their object being to inculcate positive convictions with a view to Positivist life. The history of the progress of these Positivist institutions is extremely interesting, but it is beside the purpose of this discussion. The cardinal principles of the system

as set forth by Comte and his disciples, particularly Lewes and Spencer, will be the means of determining the extent of George Eliot's compliance with the movement. Inasmuch as the immediate purpose of this chapter is to show how she came into contact with the Comtian philosophy, the interpretations of Lewes and Spencer, through whom she made the contact, will be reserved for further discussion. Lest there be any doubt about the underlying principles of Positivism, they are here set forth more explicitly. The first essential to be kept in mind is that the true positivist spirit consists in always substituting the study of laws for that of causes - the how for the why. It insists that all reforms must be gradual, complicated, spiritual, and moral - not material and legislative. Its distinctive aim is to promulgate the conception of a real religion based on positive science. Its ideal is gradually to form the sense of a religion of Humanity. Its benefits are best set forth in the words of Frederic Harrison, whose name became synonymous with Positivism:

Religion will be part of the citizen's daily life: more social than personal, more civic than domestic, more practical than mystical; it will be the guidance of right living by the light of personal and social duty as taught by a systematic sociology; its worship will be the expression of loyalty to Humanity in all its phases.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Giles, Great Religions, p. 180.

With these cardinal ideas in mind, let us observe that period of George Eliot's experience when she was brought into contact with Positivist influences.

As was mentioned at the close of Chapter One, Miss Evans accepted a position as assistant editor of the Westminster Review in 1851. Through her translations and the review of The Progress of the Intellect she had aroused the interest of Mr. Chapman, the publisher, to the extent that he had made frequent visits to Rosehill, chiefly for the purpose of making further investigation of Miss Evans's talents. He was soon convinced that her wide knowledge of foreign and English literature, and her willingness to perform any kind of drudgery, were admirable qualifications for the position. Previous to her actual employment on the staff, however, Mr. Chapman obtained her assistance in "the publication of a catalogue raisonne of philosophic literature - his own philosophic publications particularly - and also in the reviving and resuscitating of the Westminster Review as a periodical of Liberal views in philosophy and literature".<sup>10</sup> Part of this work was done by correspondence, but most of it was done while Miss Evans was a boarder in the home of Mr. Chapman. A great deal of importance

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<sup>10</sup> Haldane, George Eliot and Her Times, p. 74.

is attached to the latter arrangement because of the fact that it was Miss Evans's introduction to an unconventional life that was to prove an awakening force to her. But the fact that Miss Evans was entrusted with the responsibility of such work as Mr. Chapman had given her is of much greater importance. Did it not indicate that her own philosophy was substantially that held by the editor and his contributors? A letter written by Miss Evans hardly nine months after she assumed her duties includes a statement that makes an affirmative answer plausible.

I had a long call from George Combe yesterday. He says he thinks the "Westminster" under my management, the most important means of enlightenment of a literary nature in existence.<sup>11</sup>

A brief statement in regard to the Westminster Review will further support the view that Miss Evans already entertained Liberal views. Originally a Benthamite organ, the magazine became a rejuvenated publication under Chapman, and the organ of the Positivist philosophy. The periodical had always had, because of its advocacy of Radical philosophy, a rather struggling existence; but regardless of that fact, it became under Mr. Chapman the advocate of the boldest

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<sup>11</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 208.

and most fearless philosophy of the time. Among its contributors were Spencer, Froude, Mill, Lewes, and Harriet Martineau. Spencer had just brought out his Social Statics, pronounced by Lewes to be the best book on the subject; Froude was becoming a disciple of the prophet Carlyle; Mill, though at this time much of a recluse, was a warm disciple of Comte; Miss Martineau was compiling an abridgement of Comte's work; and George Henry Lewes had written as an adherent of Comte's doctrine. According to Elizabeth S. Haldane's George Eliot and Her Times, "George Eliot was also a contributor, besides doing the editorial work." These facts - the characteristics of the Westminster Review, the personnel of its contributors, and the nature of Miss Evans's work - are evidence that Mr. Chapman had employed one who would not be antagonistic to positivist views.

The nature of Miss Evans's work soon made her more or less familiar with all the eminent writers on the side of intellectual advancement, and her presence at the fortnightly gatherings at Mr. Chapman's home in the Strand brought her into even closer contact with the scientific and positivist thinkers. She was thrown

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<sup>12</sup> Op. cit., p. 76. (Italics not Miss Haldane's.)



into a new social environment, and was soon shocked to find that the relations between men and women were the pivot on which other relations moved. Her passionate nature, so long restrained by philosophic and intellectual studies, was aroused to this new point of view; and life took on new color for her. Her interest in the intellectual ideas of her associates was heightened by a new enjoyment of life itself. In the new environment and the new friends she found an answer to the passionate cry for recognition and reciprocity that had been characteristic of her from childhood.

The only clear conception of Miss Evans's activities during her association with the Westminster Review is one obtained by reading her letters in their proper sequence. From the beginning the letters are indicative more of a newly awakened happiness in life than of any new understanding derived from purely intellectual contacts. There is nothing whatever to indicate that she was experiencing any difficulty in adapting herself to new intellectual ideas, a fact in itself conclusive proof that the positivist trend of thought was not disturbing to her. A mere collection of statements and opinions appearing in the letters written during her first year in London offers, even in its brevity, proof that the social aspects of life were her greatest

interest:

Dr. Brabant returned to Bath yesterday. He very politely took me over to the Crystal Palace, the theatre, and the Overland Route. On Friday, we had, among some other nice people, a Mr. Herbert Spencer, who has just brought out a large work on "Social Statics". .... I am reading with great amusement J. H. Newman's "Lectures on the Position of the Catholics". .... We went to quite a gay party at Mrs. Mackay's on Saturday. .... I had two offers last night - not of marriage, but of music, - which I find it impossible to resist. Mr. Herbert Spencer proposed to take me on Thursday to hear "William Tell", and Miss Parkes asked me to go with her to hear the "Creation" on Friday. .... The opinions on the various articles in the "Review" are, as before, ridiculously various. .... We had quite a brilliant soiree yesterday evening. W. R. Greg, Forster (of Lawdon), Francis Newman, the Ellises, and Louis Blanc were the stars of the greatest magnitude. .... My days have slipped away in a most mysterious fashion lately, - chiefly, I suppose, in long walks and long talks.<sup>13</sup>

Among the acquaintances in Miss Evans's letters, there was one that soon developed into a lasting friendship - that with Mr. Herbert Spencer, the most radical of the Positivist philosophers. Spencer was the most frequent of the visitors at the Chapman home; hence Miss Evans saw much of him. At the time of their acquaintance Miss Evans was thirty-two years of age and wholly without personal attractiveness. Spencer was a cold-hearted, self-sufficient philosopher who had never been in love, but Miss Evans's great intellect, conjoined with her womanly qualities and manner, so

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<sup>13</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, pp. 191-207.

attracted him that he was usually at her side at the fortnightly gatherings. "She was, however, nothing more than an interesting phenomenon to him. In his mind the two were simply good comrades, whose minds were set on things higher than love in its concrete form."<sup>14</sup> But Miss Evans's attraction to Mr. Spencer was somewhat different, as may be seen from the following successive remarks about him during the first year of their acquaintance:

I went to the Opera on Saturday with 'My excellent friend Spencer', as Lewes calls him. We have agreed that there is no reason why we should not have as much of each other's society as we like. He is a good, delightful creature, and I always feel better for having been with him. .... My brightest spot, next to my old friends, is the deliciously calm new friendship that Herbert Spencer gives me. We see each other every day, and have a delightful camaraderie in everything. But for him my life would be desolate enough.<sup>15</sup>

The real esteem in which George Eliot held Spencer is indicated by the fact that for a time he alone held the secret of the authorship of "Scenes of Clerical Life".

In consideration of the high place that Spencer held among the philosophers of his day, and in view of the fact that he was George Eliot's friend for more

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<sup>14</sup> Haldane, George Eliot and Her Times, p. 83.

<sup>15</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, pp. 205-207.

than twenty years, it is necessary to point out as definitely as possible the cardinal principles of his philosophy in an effort to determine its effect upon George Eliot.

Spencer's significance in the history of English thought depends upon his effort to apply the evolution theory to every field of study. Spencer claimed that he was always an evolutionist, but it is quite evident that his idea of evolution developed gradually. His theories varied from his initial conception that the existing order of nature is the result of a gradual process to his final conception that evolution is the supreme law of the universe. He began to publish about 1842, and the topics of his essays range from Comtism, the nebular hypothesis, and personal beauty to railway policy and the philosophy of style.<sup>16</sup> His Synthetic Philosophy, published in 1860, was an effort to apply one large key-conception to matter, to life, to mind, and to society. In his First Principles, 1862, he set forth the theory that ultimate scientific ideas are inconceivable; that is, representations of realities that cannot be comprehended. Later he came to look upon religion as well as science in the light of the Unknowable

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<sup>16</sup> Elton, A Survey of English Literature, Vol. III, p. 70.

or Inconceivable, and came to the conclusion that all<sup>17</sup> ultimate religious ideas are logically inconceivable. His inquiries also penetrated the realm of morals. He taught that application of the law of natural selection to conduct would make conduct, like anything else, good or bad according as it was well adapted to the ends of life. He insisted that duty will become less and less obligatory and necessary in the future, because action will be in harmony with the impulses of the inner man and with the conditions of environment. This idea of the evolution of morals he made applicable to the race as well as to individuals. He explained his belief that every generation of social living deepened the impulses to mutual aid as follows:

Unceasing social discipline will so mould human nature that eventually sympathetic pleasures will be spontaneously pursued to the fullest extent advantageous to all. The sense of duty, which is the echo of generations of compulsion to social behavior, will then disappear; altruistic actions having become instinctive through their natural selection for social utility, will like every instinctive operation, be performed without compulsion and with joy.<sup>18</sup>

In the matter of religion Spencer was much more of a rationalist than some of his contemporaries. He rejected the idea that the reality of religion is purely

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<sup>17</sup> Durant, The Story of Philosophy, p. 395.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 425.

subjective. The underlying principles of the religion of Humanity he criticized as countenanced neither by induction nor by deduction. Such were the beliefs held by the man with whom George Eliot had formed a close friendship. That she differed from him in some respects will be pointed out in the course of this discussion; that she admired him greatly has already been shown by citing her own remarks concerning him. Regardless of what his direct influence upon Miss Evans was, he was responsible for her introduction to the man who unquestionably exerted a great influence over her during the last twenty-five years of her life.

In a letter to Mrs. Bray, written in September, 1851, Miss Evans records her introduction to Mr. Lewes as follows: "I was introduced to Lewes the other day in Jeff's shop, - a sort of miniature Mirabeau in appearance." According to Cross (Life of George Eliot), this was merely a formal and casual introduction, and the fact that George Eliot was ever brought into close relation with Lewes was due to Herbert Spencer's having taken him to call on her in the Strand later in this  
 19 year. The next mention of Mr. Lewes in the letters is recorded in this manner:

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<sup>19</sup> Op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 196-197.

Lewes says his article on "Julia von Krudener" will be glorious. He sat in the same box with us at the "Merry Wives of Windsor", and helped to carry off the dolourousness of the play.<sup>20</sup>

From that time forward Lewes is spoken of in terms of respect and admiration, though it is apparent that Miss Evans was not especially attracted to him at first: "Mr. Lewes is especially kind and attentive and has quite won my regard, after having had a good  
<sup>21</sup>deal of my vituperation."

The friendship that developed between Miss Evans and George Henry Lewes was, as every reader of George Eliot knows, a momentous one. At the time of their first acquaintance, Lewes had already secured for himself a wide reputation in the literary world, one that made his opinion on any subject valuable. He was also a man of such extraordinary versatility and remarkable social charm that it was impossible to be dull in his company; hence it is not surprising that Miss Evans enjoyed his friendship. If, however, one may judge from the relationship in which Lewes is mentioned in her letters, her real attraction to him must have been due to the deeper side of his character and to his intellectual interests. In the course of their friendship,

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<sup>20</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 197.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 228 (Italics are the present writer's.)

she points out that "like a few other people in the world, he is much better than he seems - a man of heart and conscience wearing a mask of flippancy".<sup>22</sup>

Likewise we find her apparently defending his philosophic conceptions:

Harriet Martineau, with incomprehensible ignorance, jeers at Lewes for introducing psychology as a science in his Comte papers. Why, Comte himself holds psychology to be a necessary link in the chain of science. Lewes only suggests a change in its relations.<sup>23</sup> .... Pray do not lay the sins of the Atomic theory to poor Lewes's charge. It is as remote from his style, both of thinking and writing, as anything can be.<sup>24</sup>

The letters also become indicative of a deep, personal interest. She mentions that she is correcting Leader proofs for Mr. Lewes, and frequently comments on the state of Lewes's health, which is entirely unsatisfactory. Just when the relationship became serious enough for the consideration of marriage is not discernible; but there are remarks which, viewed in the light of later occurrences, indicate that she must have been considering marriage with him more than a year previous to their union.

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<sup>22</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 228.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 214.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 222.



We had a pleasant evening last Wednesday. Lewes, as always, genial and amusing. He has quite won my liking, in spite of myself. Of course Mr. Bray highly approves the recommendation of the Commissioners on Divorce.<sup>25</sup>

The next indication, other than a general tone of deepening friendship, occurs in 1854 in a letter to Charles Bray, when she very casually mentions a trip to the continent. "It is quite possible that I may wish to go to the Continent, or twenty other things."<sup>26</sup> Less than a month later, July 20, 1854, the most important event of her life occurred - she entered into a union with G. H. Lewes without legal sanction. The affectionate nature that had cried out since childhood for some one on whom to lean had found an object for its devotion.

The whole tenor of the life that follows is the best basis on which to form a judgment on this momentous question of her union, but there are certain circumstances related to the act that should be explained. First of all it should be made plain that the union was not a deliberate defiance of conventionality. Mr. Lewes was married to a young woman who deserted her home for the company of one of a group of

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<sup>25</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 227.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 238.

young men who lived with the Leweses in a large house at Kensington. When she repented the act, Lewes forgave her and received her back into his home; but she left him a second time. According to the laws of England at that time, his condonement of the act made it impossible for him to secure a divorce; hence, since they could not be married legally, he and Miss Evans agreed to live together without the formality of the marriage vow. No one who has read George Eliot could believe that there was any passionate, individualistic defiance of law in her case. Throughout her novels she exalts marriage and treats it as one of the most sacred of all human relations. Always she represents it as a pure, holy, binding tie, a sacred obligation. When Romola is leaving Florence and her husband, Savonarola bids her turn back, and declares to her that the obligation of marriage holds when all love is gone, even though it calls for renunciation and personal humiliation.

My daughter, there is the bond of a higher love. Marriage is not carnal only, made for selfish delight. .... If the cross comes to you as a wife, you must carry it as a wife. You may say, 'I will forsake my husband, but you cannot cease to be a wife. .... Make your marriage sorrows an offering, too, my daughter: an offering to the great work by which sin and sorrow are being made to cease.'<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Romola, pp. 94-95 (Book Two).

The secret of Miss Evans's attitude toward her marriage is best set forth in the words she later put into the mouth of Rufus Lyon: "The right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule, and not to wander in mere lawlessness."<sup>28</sup> She believed that there was a law of nature and social obligation higher than any rule of Parliament, and she entered into the union with Mr. Lewes in obedience to that higher law. Obviously she saw in marriage a sacredness far greater than the matter of legal sanction, just as she had seen in religion a spiritual devotion greatly superior to an adherence to creeds. It is possible that the influence of Comte was felt in the case of both Mr. Lewes and Miss Evans, inasmuch as they saw in the marriage form a fulfillment of human, not of legal, requirements; but it was to Miss Evans primarily the answer to a deep desire expressed many years before:

The only ardent hope I have for my future life is to have given to me some woman's duty, - some possibility of devoting myself where I may see a daily result of pure calm blessedness in the life of another.<sup>29</sup>

The point of view from which she regarded her action is, fortunately, on record in a letter written to Mrs. Bray:

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<sup>28</sup> Felix Holt, p. 222.

<sup>29</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 177.

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. .... 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. .... We are leading no life of self-indulgence, except indeed that, being happy in each other, we find everything easy. We are working hard to provide for others better than we provide for ourselves, and to fulfill every responsibility that lies upon us.<sup>30</sup>

According to those who have written of the union, including Mr. Cross, it was in all save legal sanction one of remarkable devotion and happiness, one that helped both Miss Evans and Mr. Lewes to a more perfect work and to a truer life. That there was no willful rejection of the legal sanction is unquestionably borne out in the end by the fact that George Eliot's marriage to Mr. Cross was carried out in the most orthodox and conventional manner possible.

In order to show the extent to which George Eliot's mode of thought agreed with positivist ideas, it now becomes necessary to state the basic philosophy of George Henry Lewes, with whom she lived for the next twenty-four years. The scope of Mr. Lewes's work indicates that he was more of a popularizer of science and philosophy than an original writer, a man whose gifts were literary rather than philosophical. He gained an

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<sup>30</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 243.

enviable reputation by the publication of his Biographical History of Philosophy in 1845. This he followed with two novels and the Life of Robespierre. He also made voluminous contributions to the leading English periodicals of the day, particularly the Edinburgh Review, Westminster Review, Blackwood's Magazine, and Fraser's Magazine. In 1849 he became literary editor of The Leader, a weekly journal of radical thought and politics that came to an end in 1854. In 1852 he published a series of eighteen articles on Comte's Positive Philosophy, and in 1854 republished them under the title of Comte's Philosophy of the Sciences. He then turned his attention to physiological studies. His Physiology of Common Life, 1858, proved an extremely popular work because of the simple, comprehensive style in which he discussed the relations of body and mind. The last years of his life were devoted to the preparation of a systematic exposition of his physiological philosophy. All phases of his expositions were given to the public in readable and popular books, making his philosophy suited to the wants of the general reader. Mr. Lewes was one of the earliest English disciples of Comte, and as such he probably did more than any other person to introduce Comtian philosophy to English students. In the preface of his Biographical History of Philosophy

he announced with great audacity that philosophy had had its day, and was to be superseded by Comte's Positivism. Comte's positive philosophy he made his own, but he went beyond Comte in psychological research with the doctrine of the dependence of the human mind on the social medium. He not only held that the human mind is the product of experience in contact with the external world, transmitted by heredity and built up into mental processes, but he maintained that the social medium is a much greater factor. In his interpretation of the evolution philosophy he resembled the leading German transcendentalists, differing from them largely in a more scientific interpretation of heredity and environment. Lewes did not accept the religious side of Comte's later philosophy. He accepted man's need of spiritual culture and religious development, but according to his philosophy a man must find his spiritual realities and moral ideals within the limits of the universe as known to philosophy and in the organic life of the race. His treatment of many of the aspects of philosophy was highly superficial, but the establishment of Positivism in England was largely due to his efforts.

Let us see now wherein George Eliot was in accord with the Positivist philosophy of which Lewes was a life-long disciple. George Eliot had come to London a

grave young lady profoundly interested in philosophy. Already she had passed through a spiritual crisis in which she had been liberated from the dogmas of religious belief. Though Darwin's Origin of the Species had not appeared, she was highly sympathetic with the evolutionary tendencies of her age and was fond of drawing illustrations from science. Through her translations and her study of foreign literature she was familiar with the leading ideas of continental thought, but she had not definitely accepted any system of thought. As a student she had expressed an ardent desire that she might live to reconcile the philosophy of Locke with that of Kant. During her years at Coventry, she had adopted a view of life that differed from the current trend of thought only in systematic expression. As proof of the fact that she found her own unsystematized beliefs largely confirmed in the theories of the Positivists, we have only to observe the words that represented the ideas of each; namely, experience, heredity, altruism, development, law, feeling, subjective immortality. A decade before her contact with the Comtists she had looked upon society as "a wide nursery of plants, where the hundreds decompose to nourish the future ten"<sup>31</sup>. She had called the master-key to Mackay's

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<sup>31</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 57.

revelation of the influence of the past his recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world. She had declared that the human mind should study and obey with patience the teachings of the inexorable law of consequences. The recognition of the priestly function which one human being may bear to another had been a part of her thoughts from early girlhood days. Was she not already interpreting social existence in accordance with the theories of man and nature? Although she did not at any time affect to be an original philosopher, as early as 1847 she was contemplating a composition on the subject of "the superiority of the consolations of philosophy to those of (so-called) religion".<sup>32</sup> As an author she became what might be termed an artistic philosopher, for she explained in terms of life the same theories which her contemporaries explained in terms of science, ethics, and philosophy. But let us turn aside from the examination of her established ideas and consider other evidence that bears upon the evaluation of her experience.

"George Eliot was preeminently a novelist and a poet; but she was the truest literary representative the nineteenth century afforded of its positivist and

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<sup>32</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 123.



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scientific tendencies." The truth of this statement refutes the belief that it was possible for George Eliot to have formulated her philosophic ideas during the brief period of Comtist influence preceding her career as an author. A new theory may be intellectually accepted as soon as its teachings are comprehended, but its absorption into the moral tissues is a long and difficult process. Is it not remarkable then that as the contemporary of Comte, Spencer, Darwin, and Lewes, George Eliot should be able to give true literary expression to their ideas? Every new way of interpreting nature and life grows into form gradually and under many different influences. So it was with George Eliot. She did not take up her residence in London until she was thirty-two years of age, and previous to that time her acquaintance with positivist leaders was slight. She had already come under a body of philosophic influences that determined her thought, and the changes that occurred thereafter were in the direction of the philosophy already accepted. In her own words she at various times declared that her standpoint in philosophy was arrived at quite independently of positivist influence. Concerning Spencer she wrote as follows:

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33 Cooke, George Eliot. 166.

Of Herbert Spencer's friendship I have had the honor and advantage for twenty years, but I believe that every main bias of my mind had been taken before I knew him. Like the rest of his readers, I am, of course indebted to him for much enlargement and clarifying of thought.<sup>34</sup>

Concerning Comte she had this to say: "I cannot submit<sup>35</sup> my intellect or my soul to the guidance of Comte." Of Lewes she wrote not of indebtedness for a body of ideas but of gratitudes for love: "To the husband, whose perfect love has been the best source of her insight and strength, this manuscript is given by his devoted wife, the writer."<sup>36</sup> May we not take as final evidence her own statement in regard to the truths set forth in her novels? "My books are deeply serious things to me, and come out of all the painful discipline, all the most hardly learnt lessons of my past life."<sup>37</sup>

George Eliot's career as an author began at Lewes's suggestion and through his encouragement a few months after their marriage. George Eliot confesses that she had always cherished a "vague dream" that some time she might write a novel, but she had never gone further

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted by Phelps, "Last Words of George Eliot", Harper's Magazine, Vol. LXIV, p. 568.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., Vol. LXIV, p. 568.

<sup>36</sup> Inscription to Romola.

<sup>37</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. II, p. 306.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 306.

towards the actual writing than an introductory chapter describing Staffordshire village. Lewes recognized from this chapter, and from what he already knew of her literary talent, that her field was novel writing; consequently, the introductory chapter was expanded into Scenes of Clerical Life,<sup>39</sup> published in 1858, and George Eliot's literary career was determined. In rapid succession she gave to the world a group of novels embodying a philosophy that was truly representative of the nineteenth century.

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<sup>39</sup> The title is correctly written Scenes of Clerical Life, though many reputable writers use Scenes from Clerical Life. In her letters George Eliot wrote Scenes of Clerical Life.

# CHAPTER IV

## GEORGE ELIOT'S EXPERIENCE AS REFLECTED IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF HER NOVELS

The preceding chapters of this discussion have dealt with George Eliot's experience prior to her career as an author. The nature of her experience during the thirty-two years of her life previous to contact with Comtist influences was shown in Chapter Two; likewise her entrance into the Comtist milieu was explained in Chapter Three. It is the purpose now to examine each of her novels with a view to explaining the philosophic ideas therein in their relation to her former experience. The novels will be discussed in the chronological order of their appearance in order to show the continuity and logical development of George Eliot's philosophy.

The appearance of Scenes of Clerical Life marked the beginning of a new era for George Eliot, and its success determined her literary career to be that of<sup>1</sup> a novelist. The three stories included in the book were submitted separately by Lewes and published anonymously in Blackwood's Magazine. In submitting

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<sup>1</sup> "The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton"; "Janet's Repentance"; "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story".

them Lewes explained that they were to be "a series of tales and sketches illustrative of the actual life of our country clergy solely in its human and not at all in its theological aspects"<sup>2</sup>. So well did George Eliot accomplish this purpose that the publishers and general public immediately concluded that the author could be none other than a clergyman. The anonymity was preserved, however, until the authorship was attributed to a Mr. Liggins, a Warwickshire clergyman who refrained from disavowing that he was the author. Thereupon the real author revealed herself to her publisher under the name of George Eliot.

In her representation of clerical life, George Eliot drew upon her own life and the surroundings of her childhood so accurately that most of the characters and places could be clearly identified, a mistake which should not occur again, she declared.<sup>3</sup> The plots, too, were more or less a reproduction of remembered incidents. Though it is difficult to point out such distinctive teachings as appear in her later work, Scenes of Clerical Life bears her stamp on every page. Apparently her motive in each of the stories

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Haldane, George Eliot and Her Times, p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen, George Eliot, p. 56.

was to arouse sympathy for figures who at first sight repel more cultivated and intelligent persons. Mr. Amos Barton, a clergyman who preached Low-Church doctrine, made a High Church assertion of ecclesiastical functions, and meant to bruise Dissent in Shepperton, was an extremely common-place person; but "common-place people bear a conscience and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right"<sup>4</sup>. Mr. Gilfil, apparently the old "high and dry" parson, and Mr. Tryan, to whom Wilberforce represented the most exalted form of religion, both possessed true and tender natures beneath their superficial oddities. Through her constant suggestion of the depths below the surface of such commonplace life as theirs, George Eliot gives an impressive dignity to the whole work. In Milly Barton, who never "descended from the serene dignity of being to the assiduous unrest of doing"<sup>5</sup>, we have George Eliot's first example of a spirit of loving sacrifice and resignation. In her portrayal, the element of pathos surpasses that in the case of Romola, a character whose name has become synonymous with self-sacrifice. Likewise in Caterina, in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story", we have an introduction to the doctrine

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<sup>4</sup> Scenes of Clerical Life, p. 63.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

of retribution so forcefully portrayed later in such characters as Hetty Sorrell and Gwendolen Harleth. In each case the doctrines are subordinated to a realistic representation of the society with which George Eliot was familiar in her youth; yet she looks unflinchingly at human nature and represents its faulty as well as its nobler traits. She enters with loving sympathy into the delineation of each of the characters; and though the tragic note is dominant, it is relieved by a belief in the inherent goodness of human nature. The stories are freer from didactic reflections than her later works, but they are not free from philosophic thought, as will be seen by examining carefully some of her comments. In "Janet's Repentance" the influence of one human being upon another, a favorite doctrine of George Eliot's, is eloquently presented:

Blessed influence of one true loving human soul on another! ... Ideas are often poor ghosts; our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us in vapor, and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes they are made of flesh; they breathe upon us with warm breath; they touch us with soft responsive hands; they look at us with sad, sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; they are clothed in a living human soul, with all its conflicts, its faith, and its love. Then this presence is a power; then they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> "Janet's Repentance", Scenes of Clerical Life, pp. 297-298.

Another oft-repeated doctrine of George Eliot's was the unbending nature of law and man's relation to it. This she has portrayed in "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story", in describing Tina's sorrows:

While this poor little heart was being bruised with a weight too heavy for it, Nature was holding on her calm inexorable way, in unmoved and terrible beauty. The stars were rushing in their eternal courses. The stream of human thought and deed was hurrying and broadening onward. The astronomer was at his telescope; ... sleepless statesmen were dreading the possible crisis of the morrow. What were our little Tina and her trouble in this mighty torrent, rushing from one awful unknown to another? Lighter than the smallest center of quivering life in the waterdrop, hidden and uncared for as the pulse of anguish in the breast of the tiniest bird that has fluttered down to its nest with the long-sought food, and has found the nest torn and empty.<sup>7</sup>

These philosophical ideas are of frequent recurrence in George Eliot's novels. In the early stories they are merely less explicitly stated, a fact that will be borne out as we proceed in the analysis of her philosophy.

Upon the issuance of Scenes of Clerical Life, George Eliot took refuge from the inconveniences accompanying a successful publication by going abroad, a practice which she followed for each succeeding novel. The composition of Adam Bede, however, was

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<sup>7</sup> Op. cit., Scenes of Clerical Life, p. 90.



begun previous to her departure; and the pleasure of foreign travels was enhanced by the fact that the new novel was progressing steadily. In Germany numerous interesting people came George Eliot's way, and her old acquaintance with Strauss was renewed. Nothing brought more happiness to George Eliot at this time, however, than the helpful companionship of Lewes, to whom each chapter of Adam Bede was being read. Some insight into the attitude which she adopts in Adam Bede may be gained from certain statements of hers made during the composition of the book. Recorded in her Journal on December 31, 1857, is her own evaluation of the state which she has attained:

My life has deepened unspeakably during the last year. I feel a greater capacity for moral and intellectual enjoyment; a more acute sense of my deficiencies in the past; a more solemn desire to be faithful to coming duties than I remember at any former period of my life. And my happiness has deepened too: the blessedness of a perfect love and union grows daily.<sup>8</sup>

Her own experience and development were deepening every day her conviction that one's moral progress is measured by the way in which he sympathizes with individual joy. That conviction was an excellent equipment for the task she was undertaking in Adam Bede.

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<sup>8</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 354.

In many respects Adam Bede is the reproduction of a chapter in George Eliot's early experience, but it is a mistake to regard it wholly as such. George Eliot admitted that the germ of the plot had come from a story related to her by her aunt, Mrs. Evans, in 1840, and that some of the characters bore resemblance to various relatives; but she declared that the materials for the book were "much more a combination from imperfectly known and widely sundered elements than the 'Clerical Scenes'".<sup>9</sup> For the setting of this first novel she goes back to the opening year of the nineteenth century and recreates with remarkable vividness the smug complacency of a British middle class still undisturbed by the great biologic discovery of Lyell, the passage of the Reform Bill, or the religious reaction of the Oxford Movement. The religion which she describes is that of an age which was but faintly lit up with the "after-glow of Methodism" and in which the new revival of church feeling had not yet made old-fashioned parsons like Mr. Irwine uncomfortable. At the time that she was re-creating this period, she had already accepted the most advanced opinions; but she had a strong religious sentiment which asserted itself the more as she

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<sup>9</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. II, p. 93.

abandoned the dogmatic system. This she emphatically stated in a letter to M. D'Albert, an old friend in whose home she had once spent several months in Geneva:

I think I hardly ever spoke to you of the strong hold evangelical Christianity had on me from the age of fifteen to twenty-two. When I was at Geneva, I had not yet lost the attitude of antagonism which belongs to the renunciation of any belief. Ten years of experience have wrought great change in that inward self. I have no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves. I have not returned to dogmatic Christianity, but I see in it the highest expression of the religious sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind, and I have the profoundest interest in the inward life of sincere Christians in all ages.<sup>10</sup>

It is therefore intelligible that she should take as her heroine a representative of the theological school with which her whole nature was most entirely at dissonance.

There is in Adam Bede a deeper recognition of Christian belief than in any other of George Eliot's novels, a fact well worth remembering in tracing the development of her philosophy. In each of her early novels George Eliot was mirroring her earliest experiences; hence the yearning after a religious life of higher motives exemplified in Dinah Morris and Seth and Adam Bede. She struck the keynote of this

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<sup>10</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. II, p. 113.

story by opening it with Dinah's sermon and prayer, which have a truly Christian tone of thought. Throughout the story Dinah's sincerity indicates that the author must have been acquainted with her nature through experience rather than observation. Though the heroine of the story, Dinah seems to have no function except to ascertain the difficulties of her fellow characters and do as much as possible toward alleviating them. Her entire life is given to a loving self-sacrifice and an effort to attain a higher life. As the characters are brought into action, Dinah's influence reaches each of them, especially Hetty, Adam, and Seth. Though her friends and associates looked upon Methodism as rather an intruding and questionable force, they never questioned Dinah's spiritual zeal. No person came into contact with her without being made better; thus, in living for others, she is the incarnation of a belief George Eliot developed early in life.

It is Adam Bede, rather than Dinah Morris, however, who embodies the greatest number of George Eliot's ideas of religion. Early in the story we learn that he is opposed to Seth's argumentative spiritualism. His was a mental combination humble in the region of mystery and keen in the region of knowledge; "it was the depth of his reverence quite

as much as his hard commonsense which gave him his disinclination to doctrinal religion<sup>11</sup>. What could be more like the religious views of Marian Evans in her young womanhood? Adam had come to this belief after associating with Dissenting ministers whom his brother Seth brought to their home:

It isn't notions sets people doing the right thing, - its feelings; ... for what have we got either inside or outside of us but what comes from God? If we've got a resolution to do right, he gave it us, I reckon, first or last; but I see plain enough we shall never do it without a resolution, and that's enough for me.<sup>12</sup>

The strong admiration that the reader has for Adam is due largely to his unceasing devotion to the principles of right. When he was strongly convinced of any proposition, it took the form of a principle in his mind. The hardness he manifested toward his drunken father resulted from the fact that he did not temper his desire for right with fellow-feeling, a fault about which George Eliot had this to say:

He had too little fellow-feeling with the weakness that errs in spite of foreseen consequences. Without this fellow-feeling, how are we to get enough patience and charity towards our stumbling, falling companions in the long and changeful journey? And

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<sup>11</sup> Adam Bede, p. 68.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 269.

there is but one way in which a strong, determined soul can learn it, - by getting his heart strings bound round the weak and erring, so that he must share not only the outward consequence of their error, but their inward suffering.<sup>13</sup>

The book is full of an eager desire to make men realize their need of each other and to show them how much better the world would be if there were more sympathetic feeling.

Along with a reproduction of her strictly religious beliefs, George Eliot teaches the doctrine of retribution as positively, though not so emphatically, as in any later novel. The doctrine is closely interwoven with the plot, which hinges on a thoughtless act of self-indulgence on the part of Arthur Donnithorne, a promising young squire, and Hetty Sorrell, the pretty, vain little country girl to whom Adam Bede is engaged. On the eve of her marriage to Adam, Hetty leaves on the pretense of a visit to Dinah Morris; but in reality she goes in search of Donnithorne. In the course of her fruitless journey, her child is born. In her desperation she murders the child, is apprehended and condemned to be hanged, but is finally released to life imprisonment through a reprieve obtained by Arthur Donnithorne. Through this plot the tendency of selfishness and wrong to develop misery is fully unfolded. Of Donnithorne's

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<sup>13</sup> Adam Bede, p. 309.

unstable character George Eliot says that "it is the favorite stratagem of our passions to show a retreat, and to turn sharp round upon us at the moment we have made up our minds that the day is our own,"<sup>14</sup> a theory which she presents with much greater psychological insight in Tito Melema. Mr. Irwine, the village clergyman, is the spokesman through whom George Eliot preaches her sermon on the consequences of Arthur's deeds. To Arthur's question whether a man who struggles against a temptation is as bad as the man who never struggles at all, Mr. Irwine made this answer:

No, certainly; I pity him in proportion to his struggles, for they foreshadow the inward suffering which is the worst form of Nemesis. Consequences are un pitying. Our deeds carry their terrible consequences, quite apart from any fluctuations that went before, - consequences that are hardly ever confined to ourselves; and it is best to fix our minds on that certainty, instead of considering what may be the elements of excuse for us.<sup>15</sup>

When Adam, in resenting Arthur's baseness for bringing guilt and shame upon Hetty, says, "I'd sooner do a wickedness as I could suffer for by myself,"<sup>16</sup> Mr. Irwine voices George Eliot's sincere belief thus:

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<sup>14</sup> Adam Bede, p. 254.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 254.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 195. (Part Two).

There is no sort of wrong deed of which a man can bear the punishment alone; you can't isolate yourself, and say that the evil which is in you shall not spread. Men's lives are as thoroughly blended with each other as the air they breathe; evil spreads as necessarily as disease ... So does every sin cause suffering to others besides those who commit it.<sup>17</sup>

Much of the fascination of Adam Bede comes from the high moral tone of the story, which is produced not so much by long passages of reflection and comment as through the speeches of Mr. Irwine. Herein lies one of the differences between this early novel and the later ones, which are sometimes over-weighted with philosophical comments. Throughout the novel George Eliot reveals her own personal interest in the study of the problems which she gives her characters to solve in such a way as to warrant this conclusion: her deep sense of moral obligation, her love of uprightness in dealing, of simple sincerity in thought and deed, were a direct inheritance from the belief which her youth had so fervently cherished, or had come to her indirectly through parentage and early home training.

Adam Bede had not been long in the hands of readers when The Mill on the Floss was begun, but writing had become such an anxiety for George Eliot

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<sup>17</sup> Adam Bede, p. 196. (Part Two).



that the new book was not undertaken with any spirit of elation. She was not exalted by the popularity of Adam Bede, for her success was accompanied by a sense of responsibility that almost overawed her; and she was still vexed about the Liggins myth. She was laboring daily under the pain of a tormenting headache that kept her in rather low spirits, despite the happiness of her life with Lewes. She was also troubled by home worries, especially the care of three sons and anxieties about Lewes's health. Yet, despite these difficulties, she was finding time for much reading, just as she had in the days of her youth and young womanhood. She was reading alone Thomas á Kempis, and she and Lewes were reading together Darwin's Origin of the Species, which had just been published. Inasmuch as she had long believed in the development theory, it is interesting to note her opinion about Darwin's book:

We are reading Darwin's book on Species, just came out after long expectation. It is an elaborate exposition of the evidence in favor of the Development Theory, and so makes an epoch. ... But to me the Development Theory, and all other explanations of processes by which things came to be, produce a feeble impression compared with the mystery that lies under the processes.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. II, pp. 108 and 111.

It is interesting to note also that in The Mill on the Floss she made Thomas á Kempis, and not Origin of the Species - the most outstanding book of the century - the turning point in her heroine's life. Lewes's Physiology of Common Life was also being published, but George Eliot made no use of it in her new story. Instead of a subject closely allied to some phase of scientific thought, she chose - in an age when books on science were best sellers - an important period in her own career as the basis for The Mill on the Floss.

George Eliot took herself for the heroine of this new novel, and gave in the first two volumes virtually a spiritual autobiography. Maggie is the earliest in the sequence of the author's heroines par excellence - Romola, Dorothea, and Gwendolen being the others - but George Eliot throws herself so frankly into Maggie's position and dwells so lovingly upon all her joys and sorrows that the character glows with a more tender charm than any of the other heroines. She may not be the heroine of the greatest of George Eliot's novels, but The Mill on the Floss was the one into which George Eliot poured most abundantly the experiences of her own life so that none of her books appeal with the same directness to the personal

sympathies of her readers. Considered simply as a story, the novel suffers from the disproportionate development of the earlier part; this George Eliot admitted:

To my feeling there is more thought and a profounder veracity in The Mill than in Adam; but Adam is more complete and better balanced. My love of the childhood scenes made me linger over them, so that I could not develop as fully as I wished the concluding 'book' in which the tragedy occurs, and which I had looked forward to with much attention and premeditation from the beginning.<sup>19</sup>

The reader does not wish, however, for a change which would sacrifice the revelation of character to the requirements of plot. Although many of the best novels in the language are autobiographical, there is hardly one which gives so vivid and direct a representation of the writer's most intimate characteristics as The  
<sup>20</sup>  
Mill on the Floss.

The novel covers a period of ten years in the lives of Tom and Maggie Tulliver, who are twelve and nine years of age respectively when the story opens. Interwoven with an account of their early childhood and their school days is a graphic and dramatic representation of Mr. Tulliver's downfall and the

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<sup>19</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. II, p. 219.

<sup>20</sup> Stephen, George Eliot, p. 87.

resultant valley of humiliation for the entire family. After the first crisis, Mr. Tulliver's downfall, the interest centers in Maggie, whose life of restlessness and renunciation is climaxed by an apparently clandestine love affair that brings disgrace to herself and her family. The story of Philip Wakem, a deformed young man of artistic temperament and the son of the man who wrought Mr. Tulliver's downfall, is the story of his love for Maggie from the time he is sent away to school until the last scene in the story, when he views Maggie's grave. Some of George Eliot's finest work is in the portrayal of minor characters, especially Bob Jakin and the Dodson sisters; but, interesting as it is, it does not come within the scope of this discussion. The fact must not be overlooked that George Eliot's novels are being examined for the purpose of determining the extent to which they are a reflection of her experience; hence that part of The Mill on the Floss that does not deal directly with the heroine will be omitted here.

George Eliot, like Carlyle and numerous other individuals in the nineteenth century, underwent a momentous spiritual change as a result of the general scientific and sceptic environment in which her sensitive and inquiring mind was nurtured. Like her creator,

Maggie Tulliver also represents the restlessness of the nineteenth century and goes through a period of fervid piety. After the financial collapse that resulted in the virtual breaking-up of her home, Maggie's sense of loneliness and utter privation of joy deepened with each succeeding day. Of her school life there was nothing left but a little collection of school books that were barren of comfort. There was no flavor, no strength in the hard dry questions on Christian Doctrine. Sometimes she thought she could have been contented with absorbing fancies; yet they were hardly what she wanted. "She wanted some explanation of this hard, real life: she wanted some key that would enable her to understand, and in understanding, endure, the heavy weight that had fallen on her young heart."<sup>21</sup> Her discouragement deepened as the days went on; she rebelled against her lot and was seized with such fits of anger and hatred that she became frightened with a sense that it was not difficult for her to become a demon. Then her brain, in search of something less sordid and dreary, would give way to wild romances in which she sought refuge in some great man, Walter Scott perhaps. This is an interesting point of comparison

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<sup>21</sup> The Mill on the Floss, p. 426.

with George Eliot, who attributed her first unsettle-  
 ment of Orthodox views to Sir Walter Scott.<sup>22</sup> Maggie's  
 romantic vision never lasted long, and she was soon as  
 lonely in her trouble as if she had been the only girl  
 in the civilized world who had come out of her school-  
 life with a soul untrained for inevitable struggles.  
 She had much futile information about Saxon and other  
 kings of doubtful example, but she was "unhappily  
 quite without that knowledge of the irreversible laws  
 within and without her, which governing the habits,  
 becomes morality, and, developing the feelings of sub-  
 mission and dependence, becomes religion".<sup>23</sup> But just  
 when she was steeped in deepest gloom, Bob Jakin pre-  
 sented her with a meager collection of thumb-worn  
 books, among which she found one that was a consoler  
 and a liberator from her morbid introspection.

This book that proved such an awakening factor  
 for Maggie was Thomas à Kempis, which, as we have  
 noted, George Eliot had just completed when she was  
 writing The Mill on the Floss. As Maggie read from  
 page to page, her attention was arrested by such state-  
 ments as these:

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<sup>22</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 360.

<sup>23</sup> The Mill on the Floss, p. 429.

Know that the love of thyself doth hurt thee more than anything in the world. ... If thou seekst this or that, and wouldst be here or there to enjoy thy own will and pleasure, thou shalt never be quiet nor free from care. ... Both above and below, which way soever thou dost turn thee, every where thou shalt find the Cross, and every-where of necessity thou must have patience, if thou wilt have inward peace, and enjoy an everlasting crown. ... It is but little thou sufferest in comparison of them that have suffered so much. ... Blessed are those ears that receive the whispers of the divine voice, and listen not to the whisperings of the world. ... All things pass away and thou together with them. ... I have often said unto thee, and now again I say the same, Forsake thyself, resign thyself, and thou shalt enjoy much inward peace.<sup>24</sup>

The strange thrill of awe that passed through Maggie while she read, "as if she had been awakened in the night by a strain of solemn music, telling of beings whose souls had been astir while hers was in stupor,"<sup>25</sup> reminds us not only of the joy that George Eliot experienced when self-abnegation became her leading principle, but also of the great happiness of Carlyle when he came into a full knowledge of the philosophy of German transcendentalism. Maggie "knew nothing of doctrines and systems, - of mysticism or quietism; but this voice out of the far-off middle ages was the direct communication of a human soul's belief and experience, and came to her as an unquestioned message."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> quoted in The Mill on the Floss, pp. 430-432.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 431.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 433.

Renunciation seemed to Maggie the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain. Accordingly she entered into a period of self-abnegation with a degree of pride and impetuosity very similar to that manifested by George Eliot when she returned from Coventry with ultra-evangelical tendencies that made her look upon pleasure as a snare and society as a danger. Maggie devoted her time to plain sewing, and enjoyed the self-mortification of purchasing her materials at St. Ogg's rather than at a less popular place. She not only objected to any form of personal adornment, but she also refused to read literature that she delighted in on the ground that it made her in love with the world again. When she fell in love with Philip Wakem, whom she could not acknowledge as her lover, she asked, "Is it not right to resign ourselves entirely, whatever may be denied us?" Philip's answer, the truth of which she soon realized, was a condemnation of her attitude:

You are shutting yourself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dulness all the highest powers of your nature. Joy and peace are not resignation: resignation is the willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed, - that you don't expect to be allayed.

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<sup>27</sup> The Mill on the Floss, p. 50. (Part Two).



Stupefaction is not resignation; and it is stupefaction to remain in ignorance, - to shut up all the avenues by which the life of your fellow-men might become known to you.<sup>28</sup>

A few years later, when Maggie had crushed the heart of her cousin and disgraced herself and her family by going away with Stephen Guest, she realized that Philip had been right when he told her she knew nothing of resignation: she had thought it was quiet ecstasy; but now that she had brought sorrow into the lives of others, she saw that it was a sad, patient, loving strength that bowed beneath a cross of inward silent endurance. This latter spirit of self-sacrifice was one of the chief principles in the philosophy George Eliot evolved after she had gone through the period of negation immediately following her avowal of disbelief.

Throughout The Mill on the Floss there are numerous evidences, other than Maggie's spiritual struggles, that support the idea that the author was reproducing her own life. As one reads of the pleasant gatherings in the home of Lucy Deane, where music, song, and conversation held sway, his mind immediately recalls the pleasant evenings the author spent in the

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<sup>28</sup> The Mill on the Floss, p. 50. (Part Two).

home of Chapman. Just as Lewes was the radiant personality around whom all interest centered there, so was Stephen Guest in the meetings with Maggie, Lucy, and Philip Wakem. Maggie's whole social environment was strikingly similar to George Eliot's surroundings when she first assumed her duties with the Westminster Review. All such matters as these, however, are secondary, and as such, are a means of strengthening the author's presentation of her inner life in youth and young womanhood as it appeared to her own consciousness. Though the incidents in the plot are not to be understood as actual occurrences in the life of George Eliot, the principles which governed Maggie's life are identical with those that governed the life of her creator; and the book may reasonably be taken as George Eliot's spiritual autobiography.

George Eliot's next novel represents not so much a definite stage in the development of her philosophy as a concise restatement of the essence of her teaching in previous novels and an introduction to the more scientific treatment that she employs in succeeding novels. Silas Marner is the last of the author's stories of idyllic country life; and, whereas the former ones stress some particular phase of life, it shows the vast importance of human relations on the

whole of life. It is characterized by the same pure moral tone, spiritual atmosphere, and keen ethical instinct; but it stresses, as the theme of the novel, man's need of social ties and connections, and thus introduces George Eliot's theory of the social basis of the higher life of man. In the treatment of cause and effect in the unfoldment of character there is also the first real indication of the author's scientific bent of mind, a characteristic that becomes more and more pronounced in each succeeding novel. George Eliot's own remarks on the nature of the story throw a great deal of light on its place in her works and thought:

I am writing a story which came across my other plans by a sudden inspiration. ... It is a story of old-fashioned village life, which has unfolded itself from the merest millet-seed of thought. ... I hope you will not find it at all a sad story, as a whole, since it sets - or is intended to set - in a strong light the remedial influences of pure, natural human relations. ... My chief reason for wishing to publish the story now is that I like my writings to appear in the order in which they are written, because they belong to successive mental phases, and when they are a year behind me, I can no longer feel that thorough identification with them which gives zest to the sense of authorship.<sup>29</sup>

As we examine the book thus described by its author, let us note the relation which it sustains to George

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<sup>29</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. II, pp. 218-224.

Eliot's body of thought as reflected in preceding and succeeding novels.

The "millet seed of thought" from which the plot of Silas Marner germinated was the sight, in early childhood, of a linen-weaver with a bag on his back. Out of this simple fact George Eliot wove the story of Silas Marner, a weaver who, when his best friend betrayed him, had left his old home in Lantern Yard and taken up residence in Raveloe, where his soul gradually withered under the influence of gold until it was reclaimed through the influence of a child. Though the influence of Eppie, the child, is the force that brings about the rebirth of Silas, George Eliot shows very minutely how other human relations contributed to the degradation and reclamation of Silas's soul. Until Silas went to Raveloe, his life had been filled with the mental activity and close fellowship characteristic of the life of an artisan incorporated in a narrow religious sect. He was believed to be an exemplary young man, and his neighbors and fellow-churchmen manifested a peculiar interest in him. So deeply was he attached to the traditions of this early environment that Lantern Yard appeared to him the altar-place of high dispensations. The whitewashed walls, the pews where well-known figures sat, the

pulpit where the minister delivered unquestioned doctrine, the pauses between the couplets of the hymn - "these things were divine influences to Silas. They were the fostering home of his religious emotions, - they were Christianity and God's kingdom upon earth."<sup>30</sup> Silas was vaguely conscious of that primitive belief which held that each territory was inhabited and ruled by its own divinities, whose presence was confined to the streams and the groves and the hills.

When Silas was suddenly transported to a new land, where the people around him knew nothing of his history and shared none of his ideas, he found it difficult to keep a fast hold on his habitual views of life. Instead of the religious atmosphere in which his soul had been nurtured at Lantern Yard, he found at Raveloe farmers turning in at the Rainbow, women laying up a stock of linen for the life to come, and men lounging in their own doors and gazing at the church during service time. These things had no divine influence for Silas:

There were no lips in Raveloe from which a word could fall that would stir Silas Warner's benumbed faith to a sense of pain. ... It seemed to him that the Power he had vainly trusted in among the streets

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<sup>30</sup> Silas Warner, p. 259.

and at the prayer-meetings was very far away from this land in which he had taken refuge, where men lived in careless abundance, knowing and needing nothing of that trust which, for him, had been turned to bitterness. The little light he possessed spread its beams so narrowly that frustrated belief was a curtain broad enough to create for him the blackness of night.<sup>31</sup>

Thus does George Eliot exemplify through Silas Marner her belief in the social basis of the higher life of man. When Silas forsook his old life - the old ties, obligations, and associations, - his ideal aims perished; and he lived a selfish and worthless creature.

As a means of livelihood, and primarily as a means of forgetting the injustice that had caused his removal to the unpleasant surroundings of Raveloe, Silas Marner devoted his entire time to weaving, and gladly gave himself up to practically total seclusion. Year after year he lived in solitude; and in proportion as the monetary rewards of his work increased, his life narrowed and hardened itself into a satisfaction that had no relation to any other being. "His life had reduced itself to the functions of weaving and hoarding, without any contemplation of an end towards which the functions tended."<sup>32</sup> But in the fifteenth

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<sup>31</sup> Silas Marner, pp. 259 and 260.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 266.

year of this mechanical life a second great change came over Marner's life, and his history was blended with the life of his neighbors. During his absence from his home one night, his gold was stolen; and as a result of his trouble, people became kinder to him. No complete transformation took place in Silas's life, however, until by chance a small child, the unacknowledged daughter of a young squire in Raveloe, found her way to his home and was accepted by him as a substitute for his gold. From that time on, there was no repulsion about Silas, either for young or old; the child linked him once more with the world. He began to think of Raveloe life entirely in its relation to Eppie; "and he listened docilely, that he might come to understand better what this life was, from which for fifteen years he had stood aloof as from a strange thing, wherewith he could have no communion".<sup>33</sup> The coins he earned after the loss of his long-stored gold brought no thrill of satisfaction; but when Eppie replaced his hoarded gold, there was a growing purpose to the earnings which drew his hope and joy continually onward beyond the money. Thus was Silas Marner's moral and spiritual regeneration

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<sup>33</sup> Silas Marner, p. 434.

brought about, not by God but by mankind. In commenting on his change, George Eliot voiced a phase of her philosophy that is always apparent; namely, that man is to expect no help and consolation except from his fellow-man:

In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from threatening destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be but a little child's.<sup>34</sup>

In her representation of the boundless influence for good that one individual may exercise over the lives of his fellow creatures, George Eliot was making an application of a theory of life in which she had long believed. As has already been pointed out in the preceding chapters of this thesis, her correspondence, beginning with the Coventry period, includes numerous comments on the unalterable effect of one human being upon another. Likewise, in discussing each of the literary productions preceding Silas Marner, attention has been called to the author's emphasis upon human relations, particularly concerning a deed

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<sup>34</sup> Silas Marner, p. 434.



and its consequences. Thus it is possible to see that the theme of Silas Marner is but the explicit treatment of a philosophic principle treated previously in component parts. If we review the life experiences of George Eliot or look into the teachings of succeeding novels, we find that the doctrine of the remedial influence of human relations is but a forerunner of the great religion of Humanity which the author preaches more forcefully as her mind becomes more philosophical. As in The Mill on the Floss, there are no allusions in Silas Marner to the great Darwinian theory that was everywhere arousing man's interest, but the forces of cause and effect are as evident in the unfoldment of Silas Marner's character as in Darwin's evolution philosophy. In this sense Silas Marner is a forerunner of the evolution philosophy represented in Titon Melena and Bulstrode, and our assertion that it is a transition chapter in the author's philosophy is warranted. George Eliot's own statement, made just previous to her preparation for Romola, indicates that there are to be additional strata in her philosophic thought: "It is time that I should go and<sup>35</sup> absorb some new life, and gather some fresh ideas."

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<sup>35</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. II, p. 124.

So far George Eliot had derived her subject-matter chiefly from personal experience; but, as we have seen from her own statement, the inspiration of early experience was to some degree exhausted, and it became necessary to turn to fresh sources. The memories of early days were no longer to be the dominant factor in her imaginative world. Hereafter, because of ill health and domestic circumstances which prevented her mingling in society, she was to be forced to use materials derived from books rather than from actual observation. Therein lies the essential difference between the earlier and later books, a difference due rather to materials used than to any change in purpose or belief. In writing of the distinction drawn between her works, George Eliot said:

Though I trust there is some growth in my appreciation of others and in my self-distrust, there has been no change in the point of view from which I regard our life since I wrote my first fiction, the Scenes of Clerical Life. Any apparent change of spirit must be due to something of which I am unconscious. The principles which are at the root of my effort to paint Dinah Morris are equally at the root of my effort to paint Mordecai.<sup>36</sup>

When one rereads the early novels, after having read

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<sup>36</sup> Quoted by Phelps, "Last Words from George Eliot", Harper's Magazine, Vol. 64, p. 570.

the later ones, he agrees with this statement of George Eliot's: her aim once having come clearly to view, it is not difficult to see how large an element it was in her earlier novels. From the first we feel these early novels to be characteristic of a thoughtful mind and to imply the mode of treatment that we call philosophical, but a more conscious intention marks her later books. Her doctrinal aim became more clear and pronounced as she became more thoroughly conscious of her powers and of her purpose to use the novel as a means of propagating ideas. Truths that she once accepted in their simplest form appeared to her in the more exact and formal presentation of a philosophy, and what had once appealed to the emotions made its appeal to the intellect also.

At this particular time George Eliot had religion and its problems much on her mind, and it is significant that she was deeply interested in Positivism. That the old religious forms had a deep hold on her mind, despite her break with them, is evidenced by the fact that she still adored the Bible, not as a manual of fine literature, but in and for itself. She also loved Newman's Apologia and sympathized with the forms and ceremonies of the Catholic Church, and it was this that made a religious struggle such as that in the

time of Savonarola so intensely interesting to her. But George Eliot wanted to show her faith in the working out of higher possibilities than the Catholic or any other Church presented.<sup>37</sup> The religion of Humanity as taught by the Positivists, with whom she never became affiliated, was more nearly than any other creed the medium to serve George Eliot's purpose. That her constant association with philosophic and scientific thinkers of the Positivist inclination had much to do with moulding her thought is undeniable, but we must not lose sight of the fact that in her early novels she had emphasized the conviction that life is only valuable in so far as it enables us to help on the progress of the world and to improve the general conditions for others. Though the method of presentation is lacking in positivist language and method of expression, this was essentially the Positivist religion of Humanity.

Although George Eliot spent almost two years in familiarizing herself with Florence during the renaissance movement, her primary object was not the interpretation of Florentine life in the time of Savonarola. She used this portion of history because it furnished

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<sup>37</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. II, p.

an excellent opportunity to unfold her ideas about life: to contrast worldliness and spirituality, or individualism and altruism as social forces. Romola, the heroine whom she places in this historical period, is a beautiful Florentine girl who lives with her father Bardo de Bardi, a blind and somewhat selfish scholar, whose consuming desire is that the library he has collected will be preserved to Florence after his death. Because of his willingness and ability, Tito Melema, a young Greek scholar of ingratiating personality, is accepted as Bardi's amanuensis, with the result that he becomes Romola's husband. From that point the story deals with Tito's spiritual and moral degradation in his effort to rise through duplicity and in his base denial of Baldassarre Calvo, his foster father. Romola's self-renunciation is a consequent development of Tito's baseness and her contact with Savonarola, and it is this phase of the story that we wish to examine in our effort to determine further the basis of the author's philosophy.

If we disregard the historical paraphernalia, Romola remains a singularly powerful representation of the ordeal through which a lofty nature has to pass when brought into collision with characters of baser composition. There is hardly any novel, except

The Mill on the Floss, in which the stages of the inner life of a thoughtful and tender nature are set forth with so much tenderness and sympathy, and there is within Romola almost as much of George Eliot as in Maggie Tulliver, however differently she was drawn. Our first interest in Romola's inward struggles arises when Tito, her husband, sells Bardi's library, which Romola has been taught to look upon as a sacred trust. When this and other things have opened her eyes to Tito's baseness, she decides to leave him, and starts for Bologna. As she is leaving the city, in the disguise of a religious garb, she is stopped by Savonarola, who addresses her thus:

It is declared to me that you are seeking to escape from the lot God has laid upon you. You wish your true name and your true place in life to be hidden, that you may choose for yourself a new name and a new place, and have no rule but your own will. ... I know you have been brought up in scorn of obedience. But it is not the poor monk who claims to interfere with you: it is the truth that commands you. And you cannot escape it. Either you must obey it, and it will lead you; or you must disobey it, and it will hang on you with the weight of a chain which you will drag forever.<sup>38</sup>

These words arouse Romola to anger and to the point of explaining to Savonarola that he cannot know the

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<sup>38</sup> Stephen, George Eliot, p. 141.

<sup>39</sup> Romola, pp. 85 and 86.

reasons which compel her to go. But Savonarola is persistent:

You are seeking your own will, my daughter. You are seeking some good other than the law you are bound to obey. But how will you find good? It is not a thing of choice: it is a river that flows from the foot of the Invisible Throne, and flows by the path of obedience. I say again, man cannot choose his duties. ... There is, my daughter, the image of a Supreme Offering, made by Supreme Love, because the need of man was great. ... Conform your life to that image, my daughter; make your sorrow an offering: and when the fire of Divine charity burns within you, and you behold the need of your fellowmen by the light of that flame, you will not call your offering great. ... The higher life begins for us, my daughter, when we renounce our own will to bow before a Divine law.<sup>40</sup>

Savonarola's words had come to Romola as if they were an interpretation of that new fellowship with suffering which had already been awakened in her. His arresting voice had brought a new condition into her life, which made it seem impossible to her that she could go on her way as if she had not heard it, but she shrank from the new path. As Savonarola spoke further, however, Romola felt herself possessed by the glow of his passionate faith. "The chill doubts all melted away; she was subdued; she was subdued by the sense of something unspeakably great to which she was being called by a strong being who roused a new strength

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<sup>40</sup> Romola, pp. 90-93.

within herself. In a voice that was a low, prayerful cry, she said, -- 'Father, I will be guided. Teach me! I will go back.'<sup>41</sup> Thus, from being an unbeliever, Romola became a devoted follower of the great Dominican preacher, whose sermons were stirring all Florence. Let us see now what the resultant effect on her life was upon her return to Florence.

Romola went back to a life that could be only a daily, life-long crucifying, for there was no longer any love between her and Tito Melema. For some time, however, she made touching appeals to Tito in an effort toward winning him back to truth and right; but his duplicity in both diplomatic and domestic affairs came to be more than she could tolerate. In rapid succession she learned of his base designs for rising to power, of his cruel denial of Baldassare, and his having another wife in Florence. She had drunk in deeply the spirit of that teaching by which Savonarola had urged her to return to her place, and she had striven hard to fulfill the bond; but she saw now all the conditions which made the fulfillment gradually forsaking her. The one effect of her marriage-tie seemed to be the stifling predominance over her of a

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<sup>41</sup> Romola, p. 96.



nature that she despised; the relation for her had become simply a degrading servitude. "It flashed upon her mind that the problem before her was essentially the same as that which had lain before Savonarola, - the problem where the sacredness of obedience ended, and where the sacredness of rebellion<sup>42</sup> began." She resolved to leave Tito, but she did not desire to leave him clandestinely again, or to forsake Florence. "She would tell him that if he ever felt a real need of her, she would come back to him. Was not that the utmost faithfulness to her bond that could be required of her?"<sup>43</sup> Before the bond was broken, however, she learned of one more act of baseness: Tito was responsible for the imprisonment of her god-father, Bernardo del Nero. In her anxiety she turned hopefully to Savonarola, only to find that he had hoodwinked his conscience for the benefit of his sect and would not spare Bernardo. George Eliot has vividly shown the effect of this fall upon Romola, and has given deep insight into the result of losing our trust in those great souls who have been our guide. "No one who has ever known what it is thus to lose

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<sup>42</sup> Romola, pp. 252-253.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 253.

faith in a fellowman whom he has profoundly loved and revered, will lightly say that the shock can leave<sup>44</sup> the faith in the Invisible Goodness unshaken." Romola had striven after the impossible; so she fled again, wishing that death might come.

This time there was no arresting voice for Romola in her flight. She found herself in the midst of a plague-stricken people, and gave her life to an assuagement of suffering and sorrow. "Many legends were afterwards told in that valley about the blessed Lady who came over the sea, but they were legends by which all who heard might know that in times gone by a woman had done beautiful deeds there, rescuing<sup>45</sup> those who were ready to perish." Romola's experience, like a new baptism to her, was George Eliot's religion of Humanity. In Florence the relationship of the human being to his fellow-men had been complicated for Romola with all the special ties of marriage, the State, and religion; but when she stretched out her arm to the fainting, she became purified, calm, and noble.

This altruistic teaching developed in connection with Romola is the epitome of George Eliot's religious

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<sup>44</sup> Romola, p. 302.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 389.

belief - a belief whose faith was not in God but in man. It was the religion of Humanity as interpreted by a woman. "It differed from Comte's as the work of a poet differs from that of a philosopher, as that of a woman differs from that of a man."<sup>46</sup> Comte's positive religion gives the impression of being invented, and is apparently artificial; whereas George Eliot's is living and full of compassion. Whereas Comte remodels Catholicism to fit the religion of Humanity, George Eliot gives a new spiritual meaning to the old faith and rejects nothing of the piety and symbolism of Christianity. The best single interpretation of her idea of this positivist religion is seen in her advice to Tessa's child, who says that he would like to lead a life which would give him a great deal of pleasure:

That is not easy, my Lillo, ... We can only have the highest happiness, such as goes along with being a great man, by having wide thoughts, and much feeling for the rest of the world as well as ourselves; and this sort of happiness often brings so much pain with it that we can only tell it from pain by its being what we would choose before everything else, because our soul sees it is good.<sup>47</sup>

Great religious and moral principles, such as

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<sup>46</sup> Cooke, George Eliot, p. 251.

<sup>47</sup> Homola, p. 421.

those just discussed in Romola, constitute almost the whole of George Eliot's philosophy; but political ideas, though given slight consideration in her whole body of writing, form an interesting phase of her development. In the two years immediately following the publication of Romola, her reading and thinking dealt almost solely with politics; but her letters indicate that what brought the political side of things so definitely before her mind was not that she was thrown into personal contact with the political questions of the day, but that Lewes had undertaken the editorship of the Fortnightly Review. The fact that this work was being done brought her into contact with such eminent men as Huxley, Warren, and Bagehot, and probably resulted in her decision to write Felix Holt, her only political novel. As in the case of Romola, George Eliot resorted to books as the source of material for her new novel; and the work of investigation was almost overwhelming. Fawcett, Mill, Neale, Hallam, and Blackstone were all perused; and, since the scene was to be laid in the days of the Reform Bill, George Eliot went through The Times of the years concerned. In speaking of this preparation, she said: "I took a great deal of pains to get a true idea of the period. My own recollections of it

are childish, and of course disjointed, but they help to illustrate my reading. I went through the 'Times' of 1832-33 at the British Museum to be sure of as many details as I could.<sup>48</sup> During this time of preparation, Huxley, Beesly, Spencer, and Frederick Harrison were frequent visitors at the Priory, the new home of the Leweses, and George Eliot consulted them for much information concerning certain legal matters which she wished to make use of in the novel. In writing to Mr. Harrison, on whom she relied most, she explained her position thus:

On a few moral points, which have been made clear to me by my experience, I feel sufficiently confident, - without such confidence I could not write at all. But in every other direction I am so much in need of fuller instruction as to be constantly under the sense that I am more likely to be wrong than right.<sup>49</sup>

This conscientious effort to eliminate all errors in the representation of legal procedure stifled much of George Eliot's imaginative power, but it resulted in the most compact plot the author ever produced. Despite that fact, Felix Holt is for the average reader the least interesting of George Eliot's novels; though it is valuable as a representation of her

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<sup>48</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. II, p. 332.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 328.

ideas of political and social reform.

As a means of propagating her ideas on reform, George Eliot laid the scene of her story in the little town of Treby Magna, a polling-place whose life was characterized by all the complexities resulting from mines, manufactures, and mixed political conditions. When the story opens, the inhabitants are awaiting the arrival of Harold Transome, who has for fifteen years been in Smyrna, but who is returning, they think, to run as the Tory candidate in the approaching election. Great excitement prevails when he announces as a Radical and enters vehemently into the campaign. Because she is unwilling to lose an opportunity for treating great moral truths, George Eliot increases the interest in Transome by involving him in difficulties of such perplexing moral aspects that attention is transferred from his candidacy to the question of his moral uprightness. Brought into relationship with Transome are a group of characters whose portrayal the author has hardly surpassed; but they are involved in a plot far too complicated for our consideration here. The various threads of the plot set forth George Eliot's ideas on heredity, environment, renunciation, and retribution; but all of these phases of her philosophy are secondary to the development of her political ideas.

Felix Holt, the Radical, is the embodiment of George Eliot's ideas of reform; hence it will be sufficient here to deal with him only.

An examination of Felix Holt reveals the fact that George Eliot considered the secret of true reform to be found not in any particular measure or program of measures, but in the resolution of the working classes to learn to think and act for themselves. This kind of radicalism, though far from being either vague or visionary, is that of an idealist, and as such the principles of Felix Holt are presented in contrast with the Toryism of the Debarrys and the opportunism of Harold Transome. Evidently George Eliot meant Felix Holt for a moral hero of the working class, a prophet of the laborers. The account he gave of his conversion contains her conception of what is to be done by all working men who rightly understand what social reform is and how it can be most truly brought about:

If I had not seen that I was making a hog of myself very fast, I should never have looked life fairly in the face to see what was to be done with it. ... This world is not a very fine place for a good many of the people in it. But I've made up my mind it shan't be the worse for me, if I can help it. They may tell me I can't alter the world, - that there must be a certain number of sneaks and robbers in it, and if I don't lie and filch somebody else will. Well, then, somebody else shall, for I won't. That's the upshot of my conversion.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Felix Holt, p. 90.

In keeping with these resolutions that accompanied his conversion, Felix Holt wished to show by his own conduct how the workingman was to attain a higher life and thus make his class necessary to the prosperity of his country. But he was not a demagogue who sought office or personal advancement through his class:

I want to be a demagogue of a new sort; an honest one, if possible, who will tell the people they are blind and foolish, and neither flatter them nor fatten on them. I have my heritage, - an order I belong to. I have the blood of a line of handicraftsmen in my veins, and I want to stand up for the lot of the handicraftsmen as a good lot, in which a man may be better trained to all the best functions of his nature than if he belonged to the grimacing set who have visiting cards, and are proud to be thought richer than their neighbors.<sup>51</sup>

As a means of elevating his class, he wished to introduce universal education, to teach the great principles of right living, and to inculcate the spirit of helpfulness and mutual service. As a brave, earnest, pure-minded lover of humanity, he represented George Eliot's ideal working man and the true social and political reformer.

Through Felix Holt George Eliot also set forth one of her most distinctive teachings; namely, that true social reform is not to be secured by ballot or

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<sup>51</sup> Felix Holt, p. 382.



act of Parliament. Long before the time at which she was writing, it was her deep conviction that all worthwhile achievement is the result of an improvement of man's inner nature and not of external forces. She opposed the ballot on the part of workingmen, and in his election speech Felix Holt stated that it was his belief that if workingmen "go the right way to work<sup>52</sup> 'they' may get power sooner without votes". The right way he explained as follows:

I'll tell you what's the greatest power under heaven, ... and that is public opinion, - the ruling belief in society about what is right and what is wrong, what is honourable and what is shameful. That's the steam that is to work the engines. ... And while public opinion is what it is, - while men have no better beliefs about public duty, while corruption is not felt to be a damning disgrace, I say, no fresh scheme of voting will much mend our condition.<sup>53</sup>

His idea was but another enforcement of the theory that it is not rights men are to seek after but duties; that social and political reform is not to be secured by insistence on rights, but by manly adherence to the principles of altruism. This is the basic principle of George Eliot's political philosophy. In his Address to Working-men, Felix Holt stated the principle

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<sup>52</sup> Felix Holt, p. 429.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 430-431.

in a most convincing manner:

So long as there is selfishness in men; so long as they have not found out for themselves institutions which express and carry into practice the truth, that the highest interest of mankind must at last be a common and not a divided interest; so long as the gradual operation of steady causes has not made that truth a part of every man's knowledge and feeling, ... so long, I say, as men wink at their own knowingness, or hold their heads high because they have got an advantage over their fellows, so long class interest will be in danger of making itself felt injuriously. ... It's human nature we have got to work with all bound, and nothing else.<sup>54</sup>

Aside from their actual worth as remedial forces, the political ideas advocated by George Eliot have a special value in the determination of the origin of her philosophy. The striking similarity of her ideas to the principles laid down by Comte for the improvement of society is readily apparent; hence the question that naturally arises is, To what extent was George Eliot indebted to Comte for her political ideas? The chapters of this thesis dealing with George Eliot's experience are an endeavor to establish the fact that every main bias of her belief was established before her contact with Positivism, with due recognition of the fact that her ideas were systematized under Comtist influences. A further answer to the question is to be

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<sup>54</sup> Op. cit., Essays, pp. 342-343.

found in her diary and in her letters. According to her diary, George Eliot began Felix Holt on March 29, 1865. Among the items recorded on May 28 of the same year is this: "Have just begun again Mill's 'Political Economy', and Comte's 'Social Science'."<sup>55</sup> Felix Holt was finished on May 31, 1866, and in the preceding January the author was reading Comte's Synthese, from which she expected "to understand three chapters well enough to get some edification".<sup>56</sup> These facts indicate that the political ideas in Felix Holt were in all probability moulded by Comte's principles, but our acquaintance with George Eliot's early experience convinces us that the ideas germinated in the conservative bias that she inherited from her Tory father.

Following the publication of Felix Holt (1866), there was a period of five years in which George Eliot, who had by this time become the leading English novelist, published no fiction; but we are not to suppose that she was idle. On the contrary her life was being broadened by influences that were to have an unmistakable effect on her future work. Much pleasure and a great deal of knowledge were obtained from foreign travel, including visits to Spain, Germany,

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<sup>55</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. II, p. 313.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 322.

and Italy: and continued association with the best literary and scientific minds of the day heightened her own intellectual powers. She was developing more and more a psychological and analytical frame of mind which she was to apply, rather too strongly, to the remainder of her writing. She was living a somewhat secluded life, estranged from general society, but she was intensely interested in the problems that were engaging the attention of thoughtful people. Humanitarian reforms, the education of women, and the development of the science of medicine were apparently of most concern to her, for they are the aspects discussed in her correspondence and utilized in her novels. Her life was broadened by the responsibilities of educating Mr. Lewes's sons, and the death of Thorne, the oldest son, had brought a sorrow that was deeply felt; yet the domestic side of life was especially appealing to her at this time. Her letters are filled with just such details of home life as she employs in Middlemarch; hence we are not surprised that her next representation of life, as recorded in Middlemarch, should deal with the individual in his relation to domestic life and the whole of society.

According to George Eliot's original conception of the story, Middlemarch was to have been limited to

the description of life in a provincial town, and to the struggle of an ambitious, high-minded man with the forces of commercialism. According to this plan, Lydgate would have been the central figure, and the book would have dealt exclusively with Middlemarch society. After six months' work on this plan, George Eliot began work on the "Vincy and Featherstone parts" and decided to include the problem of provincial hospitals. Side by side with this idea, she was developing another, intended to be embodied in a separate book - the sacrifice of a young and ardent woman to the needs of a pedantic scholar. By 1871 she had decided upon the fusion of this story with the other two, with the result that Middlemarch is not a story but a combination of three stories: the affairs of Dorothea and Casaubon, of Rosamond Vincy and Lydgate, and of Mary Garth and Fred Vincy, all of which are interwoven with the story of Bulstrode. The various actions become mixed as they would naturally do, and thus George Eliot works out the consequent development of human character.

Dorothea Brooke is George Eliot's typical heroine struggling for the higher life. She is presented as capable of becoming a saint, a woman who yearned after some lofty conception of the world that was to be made

an actual fact about her. Our first realization of her desire to do great deeds and prove herself worthy comes when we learn her attitude toward marriage.

With all her eagerness to know the truths of life, she retained very childlike ideas about marriage. She felt sure that she would have accepted the judicious Hooker, if she had been born in time to save him from that wretched mistake he made in matrimony; or John Milton, when his blindness had come on; or any of the other great men whose odd habits it could have been glorious piety to endure<sup>57</sup>

Accordingly, she rejected Sir James Chettam, a young baronet, and became the wife of Mr. Casaubon, a middle-aged and pedantic clergyman, through whom she saw her way to a higher life by making herself useful to him in his work on The Key to All Mythology. "The union which attracted her was one that would deliver her from girlish subjection to her own ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide who would take her along the greatest path."<sup>58</sup>

The pathos of Dorothea's marriage is that it was the beginning of a life of martyrdom; for a few weeks after she became the wife of Casaubon, she discovered "that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were

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<sup>57</sup> Middlemarch, Vol. I, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 36.

replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither"<sup>59</sup>. In the years that followed, Dorothea found herself constantly hindered by the conditions in the midst of which she lived. Casaubon not only forfeited her love by his selfishness and steady snubbing, but he jeopardized her chances for future happiness by including in his will an insulting provision concerning the possibility of her marriage to Will Ladislaw, Casaubon's cousin. As we witness the unfoldment of Casaubon's character, we are convinced that Dorothea's mistake was that she married "a stick instead of a man"<sup>60</sup>. Dorothea's whole life was shaped according to George Eliot's theory of unembittered resignation to the restrictions imposed by society. Because the vision of life in her soul was higher than that which society had worked out for her, Dorothea's life was wasted in her unhappy marriage. George Eliot's belief that high and noble action is hindered by the social conditions in which we live is best stated in her remarks regarding Dorothea's second marriage:

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<sup>59</sup> Middlemarch, Vol. I, p. 284.

<sup>60</sup> Stephen, George Eliot, p. 178.

Those who had not seen anything of Dorothea usually observed that she could not have been a "nice woman", else she would not have married either the one or the other. Certainly those determining acts of her life were not ideally beautiful. ... Among the many remarks passed on her mistakes many mentioned that it could not have happened if the society into which she was born had not smiled on propositions of marriage from a sickly man to a girl less than half his own age - on modes of education which make a woman's knowledge another name for motley ignorance - on rules of conduct which are in flat contradiction with its own loudly asserted beliefs. While this is the social air in which mortals begin to breathe, there will be collisions such as those in Dorothea's life, where great feelings take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion. For there is no creature whose inward being is so strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it.<sup>61</sup>

A second example of the tragic failure of an individual to realize a lofty aim occurs in the case of Lydgate, a young doctor who came to Middlemarch, where a new hospital had been established, ambitious to be a leader in medical science. In contrast to Casaubon, he was thoroughly familiar with the latest authorities and had a capacity for really falling in love. Unfortunately he fell in love with Rosamond Vincy, "a model of one of the forms of stupidity against which the gods fight in vain".<sup>62</sup> Being utterly incapable of understanding her husband's aspirations, she fixed her mind on the vulgar kind of success; and,

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<sup>61</sup> Middlemarch, Vol. III, p. 236.

<sup>62</sup> Stephen, George Eliot, p. 180.



through a strength of will which had come from a limitation to one aim, she paralyzed all Lydgate's energies. A brief consideration of Rosamond's character will help us to judge Lydgate's position:

He had regarded Rosamond's cleverness as precisely of the receptive kind which became a woman. He was now beginning to find out what that cleverness was - what was the shape into which it had run as into a close network aloof and independent. No one quicker than Rosamond to see causes and effects which lay within the track of her own tastes and interests: she had seen clearly Lydgate's preeminence in Middlemarch society, and could go on imaginatively tracing still more agreeable social effects when his talent should have advanced him; but for her, his professional and scientific ambition had no other relation to these desirable effects than if they had been the fortunate discovery of an ill-smelling oil.<sup>63</sup>

In an effort to gratify Rosamond's selfish wishes in regard to personal and household expenses, Lydgate became entangled in financial difficulties, which in turn forced him into further relations with Mr. Bulstrode, the banker. In order to understand fully the extent to which external influences occasioned Lydgate's failure, some attention must be given just here to the development of Bulstrode's character.

In Bulstrode George Eliot's psychological analysis is at its best. In contrast with the lofty ideals of Dorothea and Lydgate, the ideal to which he adhered

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<sup>63</sup> Middlemarch, Vol. II, pp. 354-355.

was a vulgar one suggested by a low form of religion. He was a Churchman and a public benefactor, but his philanthropy was an effort to atone for past misdeeds. With incomparable skill George Eliot describes the blundering motives and the ingenious self-deception which enabled Bulstrode to maintain his own self-respect. The following example, typical of the careful analysis which she makes, presents an accurate picture of him:

At six o'clock he had already been long dressed, and had spent some of his wretchedness in prayer, pleading his motives for averting the worst evil if in anything he had used falsity and spoken what was not true before God. For Bulstrode shrank from a direct lie with an intensity disproportionate to the number of his more indirect misdeeds. But many of the misdeeds were like the subtle muscular movements which are not taken account of in the consciousness, though they bring about the end that we fix our mind on and desire. And it is only what we are vividly conscious of that we can vividly imagine to be seen by Omniscience.<sup>64</sup>

Such was the nature of the man who was with Rosamond jointly responsible, to a large extent, for Lydgate's failure. Lydgate's relationship with him began when Bulstrode appointed him physician to the new hospital. Unfortunately for Lydgate, already somewhat unpopular because of his new ideas about medical science, a

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<sup>64</sup> Middlemarch, Vol. III, p. 15.

general dislike for Bulstrode was extended to him. Likewise when Bulstrode became involved in a scandal, after having lent money to Lydgate, the latter was unjustly implicated in it. The combined forces, apparently working toward Lydgate's failure, resulted in his abandoning his literary aspirations and, as we are told in the epilogue, in his settling down to the life of a fashionable doctor in London:

Lydgate's hair never became white. He died when he was only fifty, leaving his wife and children provided for by a heavy insurance on his life. He had gained an excellent practice, alternating, according to the season, between London and a Continental bathing-place; having written a treatise on Gout, a disease which has a good deal of wealth on its side. His skill was relied on by many paying patients, but he always regarded himself as a failure: he had not done what he once meant to do.<sup>65</sup>

To show how a person capable of great work can be entangled in the ordinary affairs of life to the extent of losing the power of realizing his youthful vision is the purpose developed in the career of Lydgate.

Many other characters appear in Middlemarch, each having some part to perform in the complicated play of life, and each some scarce understood influence on all. Tragedy and comedy, selfishness and renunciation, greed and charity, love and jealousy mingle in

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<sup>65</sup> Middlemarch, Vol. III, p. 231.

the plot as in life. Many of the characters are remarkable portraitures; but all of them, noble or otherwise, had their place in the social structure. Man's relation to society was always a matter of great concern for George Eliot. In many of her books the individual is sacrificed to his social environment, though none of her characters are wholly the victims of environment: with Dorothea, intellectual ambition mistook pedantry for true learning; with Lydgate, the desire to carry a creed into practice made compromise necessary, and compromise passed into surrender. The principle underlying the development of the plot in which these various characters were involved was one George Eliot stated in Felix Holt: "but there is no private life which has not been determined by a wider public life"<sup>66</sup>. Middlemarch represented George Eliot at the height of her reflective powers, and is the most perfect example among her novels of her purpose to show how man is guided, controlled, and modified in his thought and action by the whole society of which he forms a single atom.

Regardless of the preponderance of philosophic thought and the depth of reflective power that

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<sup>66</sup> Felix Holt, p. 71.

characterize Middlemarch, its sales outnumbered anything produced by the author; and it met with such approval that both readers and author despaired of another production at the hands of George Eliot that would be comparable to it. But the author had not reached the height of her ability, for the "big book" that she was "slowly simmering towards" in 1873 was to give most clearly her message to mankind. George Eliot recognized, as we have just seen in Middlemarch, that social life in England - deficient in spiritual power, moral purpose, and noble sentiment - crippled and betrayed the individual; but the new novel, Daniel Deronda, made it clear that she believed that society might become the true inspirer of the individual through adherence to a spiritual life developed by tradition. The aim of Daniel Deronda, spiritual renewal and upbuilding, was ideal and religious, much more than intellectual and scientific; and in its nature indicated something of the empirical basis of the author's philosophy. Though she was steeped in Positivism when she was writing this new novel, there is no mistake about her conviction concerning the importance of religion - that she prized its spiritual

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<sup>67</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. III, p. 179.

hopes, found satisfaction in its enthusiasms and aspirations.

In order to set forth her belief in the power of spiritual life, George Eliot chose Judaism, that religion which presents so remarkable an illustration of spiritual aims concentrated into the form of national traditions and aspirations. Again she conceived a plot composed of two stories which interlaced only at certain points. For one she chose a theme that had appeared before in her novels: a study in egotism or selfishness on the part of an attractive young woman; the other parallel narrative had never occurred in her works before: a vivid account of Jewish life and ideals, as well as inherited aspirations. Taken by itself, the first is a piece of social satire; the latter, a plea for the Jews. Daniel Deronda, in his faithfulness to a higher life and in his acceptance of Mordecai for his prophet, draws the two stories together and thus accomplishes George Eliot's purpose of showing the vast significance of a spiritual life in society and the importance of a body of traditions in developing that society. Let us examine the spiritual life of Gwendolen Harleth and of Daniel Deronda and the aspirations of Mordecai. Through them we shall see an illustration of George Eliot's philosophy in its

final stages.

The story of Gwendolen Harleth is another of George Eliot's versions of the paralyzing influence of unmitigated and concentrated selfishness. Gwendolen was a creature who lived for self and with no law outside of her own happiness. She was a type of those souls who have no spiritual anchorage in the religious life and traditions of her people. We are told that she had no home memories, that "the blessed persistence in which affection can take root had been wanting in Gwendolen's life"<sup>68</sup>. We are also told that she had no insight into spiritual realities, that the bonds of spiritual power and moral retribution had not been made apparent to her mind:

Her ideal was to be daring in speech and reckless in braving dangers, both moral and physical. ... She had no permanent consciousness of spiritual restraints, having always disliked whatever was presented to her under the name of religion. ... What she unwillingly recognized, and would have been glad for others to be unaware of, was that liability of hers to fits of spiritual dread, though this fountain of awe within her had not found its way into connection with the religion taught her or with any human relations. ... Solitude in any wide scene impressed her with an undefined feeling of immeasurable existence aloof from her, in the midst of which she was helplessly incapable of asserting herself. ... With human ears and eyes about her, she had always hitherto

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<sup>68</sup> Daniel Deronda, Vol. I, c. 23.

recovered her confidence, and felt the possibility of winning empire.<sup>69</sup>

All of Swendolen's difficulties came out of this egoistic spirit and want of spiritual anchorage and religious faith. At least twice in her career we see the horrible results of her narrow life. The reiterated deeds by which she had prepared herself for sudden choice had been deeds of egoism, wilfulness, and selfishness; hence when she would have scorned Grandcourt, she became his wife; when she would have tossed him the rope that would have rescued him from death, her hands were immovable; when she would have listened to Daniel Deronda's plea to follow the higher life, she was helpless. Until bitter experiences awakened in her a desire for a purer life, no moral ideal, no awe of the divine Genesis, no spiritual sympathy with the larger life of the race was to be found in her thought. In her impoverished life she is the typical representative of that social, moral, and spiritual life bred in the nineteenth century by the disintegrating forces that were everywhere at work; but she differs from the Rosamond Vincy type in that she underwent a spiritual change. Though she was long in forsaking the old life,

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<sup>69</sup> Daniel Deronda, Vol. I, pp. 86-87.



a responsive chord in her higher nature was struck when she first looked upon Daniel Deronda, whose spiritual life we wish to observe next.

"Deronda's circumstances, indeed, had been ex-  
<sup>70</sup>ceptional." He had been reared the ward of Sir Hugo Mallinger, without any knowledge of his parentage, a disadvantage responsible for an early awakened susceptibility in him and a premature reflection on certain questions of life. As a student at Eton, "there had sprung up in him a meditative yearning after wide  
<sup>71</sup>knowledge" which caused him to look upon his studies, not as instruments of success but as a means of feeding motive and opinion. Though educated amidst surroundings almost identical with those which helped to form Gwendolen's character, a very different result was produced in him. In contrast to Gwendolen's love of self, he had an activity of imagination on behalf of others that was continually seen in acts of consideration that struck his companions as moral eccentricity. That eccentricity grew into a sort of inexplicable mysticism, a yearning after a higher life, that can best be explained in George Eliot's comment on his influence over Gwendolen:

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<sup>70</sup> Daniel Deronda, Vol. I, p. 234.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., Vol. I, p. 25.

Her confidence in herself and her destiny had turned into remorse and dread; she trusted neither herself nor her future. This hidden helplessness gave fresh force to the hold Deronda had from the first taken on her mind, as one who had an unknown standard by which he judged her. Had he some way of looking at things which might be a new footing for her, - an inward safeguard against possible events which she dreaded as stored-up retribution? ... It had been Gwendolen's habit to think of the persons around her as stale books, too familiar to be interesting. Deronda had lit up her attention with a sense of novelty: not by words only, but by imagined facts, his influence had entered into the current of that self-suspicion and self-blame which awakens a new consciousness.<sup>72</sup>

One source of explanation for the mysticism that surrounded Deronda lay in the mystery of his birth. In his burning desire to be enlightened about his parentage, he came to look upon the past with a feeling akin to reverence, and felt that he was conscious of some inherited tendency shaping and influencing his life for good. His feeling was greatly strengthened by Mirah Lapidoth, the little Jewess whom he had rescued and who believed that the voice of her mother spoke to her through the past. Deronda's early interest in history had resulted in a resentful feeling toward a severance of the present and past: and when he heard Mirah speak confidently of certain truths that lived in thought and not in action, he understood

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<sup>72</sup> Daniel Deronda, Vol. I, pp. 223-224.

the relationship of which she spoke. Through close association with Mirah, he came to find in the Jewish religion a close kinship with his own inner nature and to understand the spirit that prompted her to say, "It comforted me to believe that my suffering was part of the affliction of my people, my part in the long song of mourning that has been going on through  
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 ages and ages." His association with Mordecai, a Jewish mystic, further opened up to him such avenues of thought and spiritual yearning that he rejoiced upon the disclosure that he was really a Jew. Then it was that he explained, to Mordecai, the nature of his inherited tendencies:

It is through your inspiration that I have discerned what may be my life's task. It is you who have given shape to what, I believe, was an inherited yearning, - the effect of brooding, passionate thoughts in many ancestors, - thoughts that seem to have been intensely present in my grandfather. Suppose the stolen of "spring" of some mountain tribe brought up in a city of the plain, or one with an inherited genius for painting, and born blind, - the ancestral life would lie within them as a dim longing for unknown objects and sensations, and the spellbound habit of their inherited frames would be like a cunningly wrought musical instrument, never played on, but quivering throughout in uneasy mysterious moanings of its intricate structure that, under the right touch, gives music. Something like that I think has been my experience.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Daniel Deronda, Vol. I, p. 307.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 296-297.

It was this inherited sense of a higher life that had developed in Deronda qualities that were absent in Gwendolen. This was the secret of his magnetic influence over her, the secret of his ability to quicken to life in her a desire for purer and nobler existence. Evidently George Eliot meant to indicate in Daniel Deronda's character her conception of a true social reformation, one whose basis was to be the traditional and inherited life of the past.

As a means of illustrating her conception of the value of traditional and inherited tendencies in the establishment of national unity she chose the Jews, a race to whom she was attracted by her own studies and personal intercourse. Their devotedness to their own race and its aims admirably adapted them to develop for her the ideas she wished to express. As spokesman of her theory she chose the Jewish mystic Mordecai, whose aspiration was the reestablishment of a political existence for the Jews. He definitely voiced a favorite opinion of George Eliot's when, at a meeting of Jewish philosophers, he asked, "Unless  
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nationality is a feeling, what force can it have as an idea?" Again he uttered George Eliot's opinion

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<sup>75</sup> Daniel Deronda, Vol. II, p. 359.

national life is, as an embodiment of George Eliot's conception of the functions of national life, full of interest. Of the numerous principles laid down by Mordecai, the following is a typical example of the degree to which he voiced her opinions:

Let the spirit of sublime achievement move in the great among our people and the work will begin. ... What is needed is the heaven - what is needed is the seed of the fire. The heritage of Israel is beating in the pulses of millions; it lives in their veins as a power without understanding; it is the inborn half of memory, moving as in a dream among writings on the walls, which it sees dimly but cannot divide into speech. ... Ours is an inheritance that has never ceased to quiver in millions of human frames. ... I cherish nothing for the Jewish nation, I seek nothing for them, but the good which promises good to all the nations. The spirit of our religious life, which is one with our national life, is not hatred of aught but wrong.<sup>78</sup>

Such statements as these of Mordecai's indicate how thoroughly George Eliot entered into the spirit of Judaism, and the lives of Gwendolen and Deronda, as we have seen, showed how highly she valued spiritual life.

The ideas of self-love, retribution, and renunciation as exemplified in Gwendolen Harleth are themes of frequent recurrence in the novels of George Eliot, and have been touched upon elsewhere in this thesis;

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<sup>78</sup> Daniel Deronda, Vol. II, pp. 375-378.

hence in our effort to find the basis of the ideas developed in Daniel Deronda, we shall consider only her treatment of the Jewish element. It is necessary only to recall George Eliot's early life as a student and translator to understand her acquaintance with the Jews and Jewish history. She was keenly interested in the Semitic race, and studied Hebrew, as we have seen, in the old Coventry days. She had delved extensively into Jewish literature, and was thoroughly familiar with monumental works in German devoted to Jewish history and opinions. Thus we see that in her choice of the Jewish race as a means of illustrating the theories she wished to uphold she was making use of ideas obtained during the formative years of her life. Likewise her interest in race heredity had begun long before she became a novelist. A portion of a letter, written in 1849, and quoted elsewhere in this discussion, contains the germ of her belief: "Poor and shallow as one's own soul is, it is blessed to think that a sort of transubstantiation is possible by which the greater ones can live in us." Her review of The Progress of the Intellect, two years later, stressed her agreement with the idea of race heredity.

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<sup>79</sup> Cross, Life of George Eliot, Vol. I, p. 149.

These are the same ideas that appear in Daniel Deronda, though undeniably they were clarified by much illumination from Comte.

The consideration of Daniel Deronda brings to a close the study of George Eliot's philosophy as it is embodied in her individual novels. It remains now only to call attention to the nature of her philosophy as a whole. There is no doubt as to what that philosophy might have been, for she was too logical and consistent in her mental processes, too earnest in her convictions, too sincere in their expression, not to teach, whether consciously or not, the fundamental social creed in which she so thoroughly believed. Though it is impossible that this philosophy should be fully understood without a study of her novels, the principles dealt with in this thesis are the salient points in her belief, and warrant this summarization of her philosophy. Her religion is without God, without immortality, without a transcendent spiritual aim and duty. It consists in humble submission to the invariable laws of the universe, a profound love of humanity, a glorification of feeling, and a renunciation of personal and selfish desires for an altruistic devotion to the good of the race. Her standard of ethics was based on the conviction that man can find

happiness and true culture only in a moral life, that good and evil are relative, that the forces of Nemesis are unalterably present in the law of moral cause and effect. That this body of philosophic thought was the product of George Eliot's early experience and her innate temperament is borne out by the parallelism between her life and works and justifies the establishment of empiricism as the basis of her philosophy.

This conclusion regarding the basis of George Eliot's philosophy has been arrived at through a careful study of her temperament, her experience, her beliefs, and her philosophic ideas as set forth in her novels. In an effort to determine whether certain characteristic tendencies manifested in her writing were inherent or the result of external influences, particular attention was paid to the formative years of her life. The nature of the views which she held prior to her contact with systematic thinkers was noted, and then analyzed in the light of the philosophic ideas of those with whom she came into contact. By means of a careful explanation of the philosophy set forth in each of her novels, it was shown that the ideas therein were essentially those established independently, and that the novels represented in her career as an author a development corresponding to that



through which she had passed in establishing her views.

The study of George Eliot's life reveals, as has been shown, that in her first twenty-one years, spent in isolated country surroundings, she developed an unusual moral earnestness and directed the greatest part of her thinking toward theology. Her own letters reveal that as a result of her studies and her naturally analytic mind she passed from the ultra-evangelical tendencies of her childhood into a marked restlessness, for which she found no comfort in former religious beliefs. She was highly sensitive to the religious contentions and disturbances of her age, and was already taking a somewhat rational view of religion previous to her removal to Foleshill, at the age of twenty-two. In the theories of the freethinkers at Foleshill, particularly those of Charles Bray, she found a solution for the perplexities that had destroyed her former spiritual happiness; and consequently she renounced her orthodox belief. A growing satisfaction in unbelief, an increasing faith in humanity, and a serious study of life as represented by the best minds of the age marked the ten years spent at Foleshill. In 1851, when George Eliot left Foleshill and assumed her duties with the Westminster Review, she found herself already familiar with, and largely in accord with, the intellectual

trends of her surroundings. Through personal contact with Spencer and Lewes, and the study of Comte, she was able to formulate the unsystematized beliefs that she had previously arrived at independently. In the years that followed she gave to the world, as was pointed out in the treatment of her novels, a body of philosophic thought truly representative of the nineteenth century and based upon the principles established in her formative years.

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