

## GEORGE ELIOT AND PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

GEORGE ELIOT, who was remarkably diffident for a person of great genius, was thirty-seven years old when she wrote her first fiction, and even then only at the peremptory command of George Henry Lewes. She did not believe that she had the proper sort of talent for novel-writing. Her self-distrust was a specific doubt,—that is to say, she knew she had enough intelligence, but she did not believe that she had the right sort of talent for novel-writing. She was already a literary person; had translated a work which assisted in making an intellectual epoch, a sad epoch,—Strauss's "Life of Jesus"; had translated other German works; had written magazine articles, literary and philosophical; had been one of the editors of the "Westminster Review," an important philosophical radical magazine; had been the respected companion of many of the conspicuous literary men in London.

She could not doubt that she was a woman of unusual intelligence, but she was a woman, and with all her independence in thought and life, the sort of woman that we call "womanly," a circumstance too often forgotten in assessing her astonishing powers. And so she was modest about her abilities, genuinely modest, and hesitant about beginning a new kind of work, or rather about beginning this particular kind of work, for she said that she was "deficient in dramatic power both of construction and dialogue."

She was, I think, correct in her premise, though wrong in her conclusion. She was really "deficient in dramatic power," but she has shown—few more conclusively—that a

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person may be deficient in dramatic power and yet a very great novelist. She was one of the four great British novelists of the nineteenth century, Scott, Thackeray, and Dickens being the other three. She was one of the five great English-speaking novelists of the century, Hawthorne being the fifth. Each of these had his great merits, but also his deficiencies, and George Eliot's deficiency lay precisely where she thought it lay—in dramatic power. She has portrayed human nature with great power, but that power is not dramatic.

To portray human nature is the chief object of the dramatist and the novelist, but they do it in different ways. The dramatist puts his characters on the stage to speak and act for themselves. The audience or critic must explain why the characters act as they do. An interesting example of the dramatic way is in the plays of Ibsen. We know that Ibsen wrote many of his dramas from a definite philosophical point of view, but he was so much the dramatist that he has left to the audience and critic an almost limitless region for debate, for different interpretations of what was perfectly clear and defined in Ibsen's mind, but which he was too much the artist and dramatist to state in abstract, defined, and dogmatic fashion. The novelist combines in himself the functions of creator and critic. He tells what the characters do and say by narrative and dialogue, but he also explains them by comment. According to the proportion of critical comment to dramatic dialogue, we call a writer "creative" or "analytical." George Eliot was a type of the analytical novelist, not content to tell what her characters do and say, but equally anxious to tell what they are. That is philosophical, for philosophy has to do with being, but it is not dramatic, which is concerned with doing.

George Eliot began with a manner less remorselessly

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analytical than the manner of her later novels. She began in what may be called a narrative-creative method, but developed more and more the analytical. "Adam Bede" belongs to her earlier period, "Romola" to her later period. In neither was she distinctly dramatic, but in the second more extremely analytical than in the first. Two passages from these novels will illustrate the distinction. Each passage shows a woman in sharp disillusionment with the man she loves. Each woman still loves the man, but is shocked and perplexed by his conduct. The first shows poor little Hetty after she has received the letter from Arthur Donnithorne telling her they can never marry because of social inequality. We are told what Hetty did, very little of what she felt. The narrative does just what a competent actress would do by gesture and posture and facial expression:

"Slowly Hetty had read this letter, and when she looked up from it there was the reflection of a blanched face in the old dim glass—a white marble face with rounded childish forms, but with something sadder than a child's pain in it. Hetty did not see the face—she saw nothing—she only felt that she was cold and sick and trembling. The letter shook and rustled in her hand. She laid it down. It was a horrible sensation—this cold and trembling: it swept away the very idea that produced it, and Hetty got up to reach a warm cloak from her clothes-press, wrapped it around her, and sat as if she were thinking of nothing but getting warm. Presently she took up the letter with a firmer hand and began to read it through again. The tears came this time—great rushing tears that blinded her and blotched the paper."

In the second passage Romola is beginning to see what Tito really is, and is trying not to see it—it is a way that women have. Here, it will be observed, the author takes her character to pieces, explains her state of mind, and ex-

plains it on a theory of universal human nature. First there is a general postulate, a basic human principle, and afterward an application of the principle to *Romola* herself:

"It belongs to every large nature, when it is not under the immediate power of some strong unquestioning emotion, to suspect itself and doubt the truth of its own impressions, conscious of possibilities beyond its horizon. And *Romola* was urged to doubt herself the more by the necessity of interpreting her disappointment in her life with *Tito* so as to satisfy at once her love and her pride. Disappointment? Yes, there was no other milder word that would tell the truth. Perhaps all women had to suffer the disappointment of ignorant hopes, if she only knew their experience. Still there had been something peculiar in her lot: her relation to her father had claimed unusual sacrifices from her husband. *Tito* had once thought his love would make those sacrifices easy; his love had not been great enough for that. She was not justified in resenting a self-delusion. No! resentment must not arise; all endurance seemed easy to *Romola* rather than a state of mind in which she would admit to herself that *Tito* acted unworthily."

The trouble with the analytical method is that it tends to substitute psychology for character-delineation, criticism for creation. And that was George Eliot's chief temptation. A very able psychologist may be a very poor novelist. The wife of an eminent psychologist, whose specialty was child psychology, observed that her husband knew a great deal about child psychology, but nothing at all about children. A psychologist may tell us all about the way the human mind works and yet be unable to explain the workings of John Smith's mind. The business of the dramatist is to show us, not the general laws of the human mind, but the specific qualities of John Smith's mind.

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One sometimes reads rather futile criticism based on the supposition that *a* man or *a* woman would not do thus and so, as the dramatist or novelist has represented. Who under the canopy can say what *a* man will not do? He will do anything, everything—has done all the things that have been done since human nature began. The proper question is, Would this particular man or this particular woman do this thing? The philosophical critic may declare that *a* woman would not go into a room where a man has just been murdered, cup up his blood in her hands and smear it over the faces of drunken men asleep in the chamber, in order that suspicion of murder may attach to them. The critic may be entirely correct in assuming that his mother, his wife, or his sister would not. For the sake of his own peace of mind and the prolongation of his life, it is to be hoped that he is correct. He certainly would be correct in saying that a gentle Ophelia would not. But he is certainly incorrect if he says that Lady Macbeth would not, for that is precisely what she did, and Shakespeare knew what he was about when he made her do it. This act is conformable to the character as it is set forth in her other acts and all her words. In short, the character of Lady Macbeth is sustained and consistent. But there is little question here of the general laws of psychology. The consistency grows out of the fact that when Shakespeare created Lady Macbeth, he did not stop to analyze human nature in general or Lady Macbeth in particular,—he *was* Lady Macbeth. When Shakespeare's imagination was really on fire with one of his great conceptions, that imagination was inerrant. He could have his moods of blundering and nodding like great Homer, like great everybody else who has undertaken to make literature; but when once a conception like that of Lady Macbeth had taken hold of him, his intuitions carried him infallibly to the right conclusion.

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I am not quite certain that George Eliot was inerrant. I am rather inclined to think that Sir Leslie Stephen was correct when he said that George Eliot erred when she allowed Maggie Tulliver to fall in love with Stephen Guest. Of course, girls have been known to fall in love with even greater coxcombs than Stephen; but if such a girl as Maggie is going to succumb, the paradox should be made more convincing than George Eliot has made it.

Because in her earlier books George Eliot was depending more upon her recollections of her girlhood and less upon her scientific observations of people, she was less minutely analytical than in her later works. In the earlier books, "Scenes of Clerical Life," "Adam Bede," "The Mill on the Floss," and "Silas Marner," George Eliot was drawing on her stores of memory, and recording scenes and people out of her childhood and girlhood recollections. That is an excellent recipe for good literature, to turn into books what we learned and saw when children. As we grow older we learn more things, but we learn them less intensely. Nothing is ever quite so vivid as the experiences of childhood. A man in his maturity may traverse the Seven Seas, but he will get no thrill like that which he had from the creek in which he learned to swim. He may hobnob with royalty, and play golf with prime ministers, but none will seem so great as the Fourth of July orator back in the home village. To the man of forty the world is a little place, but to the boy of eight the cow pasture is a universe.

George Eliot kept her early impressions strong and sweet within her. She found her ideal hero, Adam Bede, in her recollections of her father, so clean and strong and honest—a plain man with a great nature. And she found her heroine, Maggie Tulliver, in the recollections of her own quaint self (looking back on herself in that detached and impersonal

way in which artists so often see themselves, as something quite disassociated, something as objective as all the other people are),—the strange, wayward little girl, growing up in illiterate surroundings, and making companions of the strangest fancies and reading the strangest books for little girls, like Defoe's "History of the Devil" and Goldsmith's "Animated Nature," and feeling very lonely, and not understanding why, and finding "the need of being loved the strongest need in her nature"—just like George Eliot herself, who simply had to be loved.

In returning to these early scenes for her material, George Eliot showed more discrimination than we realize unless we understand her position in the great world and the experiences through which she had passed when she first "commenced author." There had been two events in her later life which might well have overshadowed and rendered relatively unimportant the small things that belonged to her obscure childhood. The first of these events, if so it may be called, was her abandonment of Christianity as a definite faith founded on divine authority. Religious to the depths of her soul and in all her processes of thought, she had been from childhood and continued to the end of her life. In comparison with such novels as "Romola" and "Adam Bede," the novels of Dickens and Thackeray seem almost pagan, so lightly do they touch spiritual things. Yet Dickens and Thackeray were fundamentally Christian, with a broad though not very intense faith, and George Eliot was certainly not Christian in any sense that has any definite meaning. When she and her father moved to Coventry, she being then twenty-one years of age, she came much into the society of two families, the Brays and Hennells, people of advanced religious views. Hennell wrote a book on the origin of Christianity which no less a person than David

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Friedrich Strauss regarded as so important that he arranged to have it translated into German. Three years previously Strauss had published his "Das Leben Jesu," which had such important effects upon subsequent higher criticism, a book wherein the historical Jesus was explained away on the theory of the mythus. The translation of this famous book into English was George Eliot's first literary work. She gave two laborious years to it, and when it was published she was twenty-seven years old. She had become a skeptic, and felt that it was inconsistent for her to attend church.

This cessation from church-going made a breach between her father and herself. Robert Evans, the carpenter, was an intelligent, hard-working British artisan, upright, conservative, a sound adherent of the Established Church and the British Constitution. His idealized portrait is Adam Bede, and yet not idealized out of recognition; for when the book appeared an old neighbor exclaimed, "That's Robert; that's Robert to the life!" How noble he must have been to be thus recognized in the devoted daughter's portrait of him is understood by those who have read the book. How painful must have been a breach between them is easily imagined. After a time the daughter's love for her father overruled her scruples. She resumed church-going, and the father seems to have refrained throughout the remainder of his life from inquiring into her views. But though there could not be complete intellectual sympathy between the two, their mutual love was undiminished. She nursed her father through his last prolonged illness, and when he died she was all but prostrated.

After his death she went to London as assistant editor of the "Westminster Review" and formed a circle of acquaintances among the radical scientific and philosophical



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men and women of the city. She came to know intimately the younger men of science. It is amusing now to read in her letters of her first meetings with some of these men who were destined to be so famous. Thus she writes that she has just met "a Mr. Herbert Spencer," and, in another letter, "we had an agreeable evening Wednesday—a Mr. Huxley being the centre of interest." Under the influence of such men she acquired a profound interest in natural science and the new theory of evolution, which then seemed so incompatible with revealed religion.

She and Tennyson and Browning are, perhaps, the chief nineteenth-century makers of English literature who felt most keenly the conflict of science and religion. Tennyson and Browning weathered the storm, Tennyson holding to faith in spite of evolution, Browning finding in evolution one of his most potent arguments for dynamic Christianity. But George Eliot's faith in Christianity was gone not to return, though she revered Jesus as a teacher of the highest morality and spirituality.

When the positivist philosophy of Auguste Comte began to make an impression on radical Englishmen, George Eliot accepted it, for it seemed to answer some of her difficulties. She could not believe in individual immortality, but the immortality of the race and of the individual's influence on the race she did believe in with all her mind, and perhaps the chief purpose of her novels was to emphasize the enormous responsibility which each individual has to mankind, and the absolute indestructibility of deeds. She could not believe in a personal God, but she did believe intensely in the organic growth of civilization according to regular laws. Positivism told her that the Great Being is Mankind, and with Positivism she cast in her lot. But she sweetened the somewhat barren creed with all a woman's tenderness, with all the

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yearning of a true lover of humanity, and with all the tolerance of one of the broadest natures of which we have a record.

Among her radical philosophical friends in London was George Henry Lewes, a brilliant man who was doing much to make the higher German speculations known in England. George Eliot's union with this man was the second great event of her life. Lewes's wife was living but had twice deserted him. Twice had he taken her back and forgiven her. He was living with her when he met George Eliot. I am not going into the details of this famous case. I have neither time nor inclination. The data for a judgment are these: The general divorce law had not been passed in England—was not passed until it was too late to serve the needs of George Eliot and Lewes. Under any conditions divorce could be had only by special act of Parliament, at great expense, and Lewes was poor. But even if he could have afforded expensive legislation, divorce would have been impossible in his case, for under the law he had forfeited his right to legal separation when he took his wife back and renewed his marital relationship with her. George Eliot believed in marriage as one of the most beautiful of human institutions, but she did not believe in it as a right of the state's to enforce. She believed that under the circumstances she had a moral right to take Lewes for her husband, though the union could get no sanction from the state. It was on her part a deep spirit-love of a deeply spiritual woman; on his part, devotion to a woman who embodied for him the best of womanhood. They followed no whim of passion, and violated no principle of conscience. Though many of their friends had been disaffected by this union, they came in time to modify their adverse views, to recognize that, though these things are dangerous to society, these

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two were exceptionally high-minded people in exceptional circumstances. Those are the facts. I shall certainly not attempt to pronounce judgment. Any reader can judge for himself, if he feels it necessary to judge. There are some things in the world which seem to call chiefly for silence.

Without the union we should probably never have had George Eliot the novelist, for, as was said at the outset, it was Lewes who fairly forced her to become a novelist. He was her chief counselor and critic, and shielded her from the annoyances which attend authorship, being especially careful to keep from her the adverse reviews of her books. According to one explanation of her pseudonym, she took the name "George" because it was his name, and took the name "Eliot" because it was "a good mouth-filling, easily pronounced word." And she took for the scenes of her first novels the old home memories.

Thus I return to my point that she showed discrimination in the choice of her scenes. She had accumulated so much other material which she might have used: the material of a wide experience of people and affairs; of a deep experience of life in her own career; even of a sensational experience. Radical indeed were some of her ideas, and daring was her conduct under the influence of these ideas. But none of this radicalism gets into her novels. There is no attack on marriage there. She still believed in marriage as one of the most beautiful of human institutions, though her own marriage was without the sanction of church or state. For some reason, perhaps a reluctance to shake the religious and social faith of others, perhaps sheer affection for the old simple things of her early days, she turned away from all this radicalism to the old memories. She had known great people, for among her friends were not only men of science and the philosophers, but also the greater literary men, Carlyle,

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Tennyson, and Dickens. If a novelist has mingled with the great world it is a temptation to put that world into books—a temptation seldom resisted. A clever woman likes to display her own cleverness by analyzing the clever people she knows. But George Eliot was not clever; she was only great. And so she instinctively followed her heart back to the old home with its humors and its tragedies. She saw how comical were these rural types, but she loved them with all her extravagant power of loving, and she believed in them; she even believed in their religion for them. Intellectually she could not agree with them, but says she herself, "We turn to the *truth of feeling* as the one universal bond of brotherhood."

And so this heretic drew sympathetic pictures, one after another, of simple preachers and "exhorters," some belonging to the Established Church, some to the dissenters, the most conspicuous, of course, being Dinah Morris. She did not believe what these people believed in their terms, but she had the utmost sympathy with their spiritual aspirations and their spiritual sorrows. Dickens loudly summoned aid for those unjustly oppressed whom government can assist; George Eliot pleaded for sympathy for that which no law can remedy, the saddened soul. "Depend upon it," she wrote in "The Rev. Amos Barton," "you would gain unspeakably if you would learn with me to see some of the poetry and the pathos, the tragedy and the comedy, lying in the experience of a human soul that looks out through dull grey eyes and speaks in a voice of quite ordinary tones."

Every one must have thought of this dualism, the outward man and his inner life. You go into an office to transact a piece of business. The man talks to you in the crisp phrases of business, or the easy inutilities of social small talk, but at that very moment there may be in his soul all the

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elements of the tragedies that the poets have tried to express. What do you know of this man's inner life, its anguish and its transports? He veils them in conventional speech. What does he know of your inner life? You also play the game. On life's stream play many lights and pleasant ripples and dimpling counter-currents and sparkling sprays and frothy spume flakes, but under these surface shows of things is the steady current making irresistibly for that ocean which is Destiny. To mark the course of those silent undercurrents was part of George Eliot's purpose. So she injected her deep religious experience into her memories of the simple folk who dwelt about Griff and Nuneaton, and created a wider sympathy for those who lead obscure lives.

I must confess that in my opinion her best work is in these earlier biographical books. But this is merely *obiter dicta*, not intended to influence the opinion of anybody who happens to think otherwise. There are those who prefer "Middlemarch," and those who prefer "Daniel Deronda," and even some who prefer "Romola" to the earlier books which are my preference—"The Mill on the Floss," "Adam Bede," "Silas Marner." Where there are so many claimants, evidently there is much excellence. Unlike Scott and Dickens, George Eliot did not write a vast number of novels, and, also unlike them, she wrote none distinctly beneath her genius. But the habit of analysis increases in the later books, the story is overweighted with philosophy, and the "novel of purpose," with so many melancholy sequels, becomes apparent in "Daniel Deronda."

One character prevails in these books, the girl with a soul cramped by narrow or untoward conditions, striving for liberty and light, for breathing-space and an opportunity to express herself as a free individual. She appears as Maggie Tulliver, Dorothea Brooke, Romola, Gwendolen Harleth.

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Of course she is George Eliot herself, with modifications, but she is also the woman who has been evolved by changing conditions in the social, educational, and economic world. She belongs to the new era of woman's participation in the intellectual life of the world. She is in the American college, the Parisian studio, the musical conservatory, the social settlement, the battle for political freedom, the struggle for economic independence. Hers is the tragedy of all transitions, the readjustment of what is fundamentally natural to what is unconventional and new. Hers is the tragedy of experiment, far sharper than with men, for whom so much is predetermined by age-long usage. She has a sensibility such as few men have, and suffers as few men can suffer. For these noble unhappy ones George Eliot has spoken; she has created them as surely no one else ever has.

George Eliot's favorite masculine character was of the type of Adam Bede. His calm, plain, honest, clear outlook on life, his power to stand firm against all the winds of fate and passion, his complete reliability, made this type her favorite. Less thoughtful women than George Eliot may admire a man because he is clever; George Eliot had known many clever men, had "married" one, but when she came to depict her ideal hero she chose one not clever but strong. Social position and education were of no more consequence than cleverness. Let him be a man with all the simple virtues which the brave old name of "man" implies—courage, constancy, power to dare and to do. And so her memory yearned back to her own father, honest, plain Robert Evans, and from that memory she idealized her own most honored hero.

Every reader, man or woman, must admire him; but, after all, he is created rather as a woman would look upon a strong man than as a man would see him; that is to say, a

woman would see him stronger, more nearly perfect than he really is. A hero in a woman's eyes is more heroic than in a man's. Mr. Dooley—Mr. Martin Dooley—once turned literary critic, in order to remark on this. He notes the circumstance that the heroes of women novelists are so much more heroic than those that men manufacture. He says in effect that when a hero knocks down six ruffians with his right hand without removing his left from the heroine's waist, we may be sure the author of the book was a woman. A man novelist cannot help wondering what the other fellow would be doing all the while. Mr. Dooley finds the explanation in the fact that every man's hero is himself, and therefore a man has some broad conceptions about the limitations of a hero. But Mr. Dooley declares that every woman's hero is some popular "romantic" actor.

You remember Dobbin in "Vanity Fair." His traits of character are much the same as those which George Eliot had in mind, but you will observe that, with all his nobility, Dobbin is a bit of a fool. Thackeray loved him, and we love him; but it is of "poor Dobbin" that Thackeray writes, and we generally think of him as "poor Dobbin." It is rather an interesting contrast, that of Dobbin *versus* Adam Bede, Thackeray *versus* George Eliot, a man's way of depicting an almost faultless fellow and a woman's way. It is not necessarily cynicism; Thackeray is not making the deduction that all good men are just a little foolish,—not at all. He is rather saying, by implication, that no man is perfect; each has some defect; on the fairest flesh nature will leave some blemish. Dobbin just happens to be rather a fool; if he were not that, he would be something else undesirable. Had Thackeray been creating Adam Bede, he would not have hinted that Adam was a fool, for assuredly Adam is no fool; but I think I know exactly what Thackeray

would have done: in that confidential, personal way of his, he would have leaned out from the pages and whispered in our ear, just for us and nobody else to hear, that Adam's conversation is just a little dull. And so it is. But George Eliot did not know it,—she so believed in her hero.

But she has her revenge. She shows what a fool a man is to be captivated by a pretty head with nothing in it. The view which Mrs. Poyser takes of Hetty (a "strutting little peacock") is probably just the view which George Eliot took of her until a great tragedy had made Hetty impressive. Suppose George Eliot had created Amelia Sedley,—the Amelia whom Thackeray loved,—her keen sense of humor would pretty certainly have played about poor little helpless ineffectual Amelia, and she would have shown what a veritable goose the child really is. Lucy Ashton, Dora Copperfield, Amelia Sedley,—there are three famous heroines! Scott and Thackeray created theirs for the world to admire, Dickens created his for the world to pity. It would have added to the gaiety of nations if George Eliot, who has commented upon such women in general, had expressed her frank opinion of these three heroines. It would have increased the world's store of humorous literature. If a man finds a woman's hero a little uninteresting, a woman sees right through a man's heroine.

If George Eliot's ideal hero is a little wooden, she has created one masculine type which is terribly true. This is the man who goes bad because he tries to justify his own motives to himself, the man who goes to the dogs by a process of self-sophistication. He reappears several times, is most clearly seen as Captain Arthur Donnithorne and Tito Melema. When young Captain Arthur Donnithorne, in "Adam Bede," starts on that ill-omened fishing-trip, he is, in his own opinion, as honest and clean a fellow as you would find



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in England. When he meets Hetty in the woods he suddenly realizes that he is captivated by her fresh young beauty. Panic fear of dishonor seizes him, and he leaves her abruptly. The man is safe, and the girl is safe. The brief battle is over, the victory won. There is nothing to do now but take up life bravely and live it gladly. But he is not content; he reviews the episode, recalls his abrupt departure and her startled look. *He must go back and explain that he did not mean to hurt her feelings.* He is a man of tender sympathies. He must remove the impression that he meant to be cruel. It is right to go back. In his heart of hearts he knows that his wish to see her is mingled with the honest motive to relieve her mind, but he reasons with himself until he is convinced that it is right to see her again, that not to see her would be wrong.

And so he goes back and is more deeply enmeshed, and yet there is time for safety, only it must come from without now. He will call on his old friend Mr. Irwine, tell him all, get support for his good resolution. But he gives the old man a hypothetical case instead of a frank confession, even falls to arguing that some men are more intricately bound up in "circumstances" than other men. With his hands on the horns of the altar of safety, he again grows sophistical, and tries to plead with his conscience that the worse is the better part. When at length the old clergyman asks him directly if it is of himself he is speaking, he denies it, says it is only a hypothetical case, and allows the old man to shift the conversation to impersonal and trivial things. Even as he does so, Arthur knows that he is lost. As George Eliot puts it, "the opportunity was gone. While Arthur was hesitating the rope to which he might have clung had drifted away—he must trust now to his own swimming." And I may add, he can't swim. Those who know the book know the sequel,

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and those who do not know the book, will have little trouble in guessing it. The man sophisticated himself and another away from salvation.

The case of Tito Melema is classic. Fascinating to men and women alike, almost childlike in his purity, he slips his moorings, and we follow his soul to the Gehenna which he deliberately prepares for himself by arguing with himself that every wrong he is about to commit is, under the circumstances, right. His plain duty is to go in search of his father, but his pleasure lies in Florence. He raises in his mind one argument after another to satisfy his conscience that his search would be a fool's errand, that his father is in all probability dead, and that he owes it to himself to remain in Florence. As is characteristic of such natures, he does not finally abandon all idea of the search until he has said to himself the actual words, "I believe he is dead." So he meets every duty with sophistry, justifying himself to himself, until he loses the love of his wife, the respect of his friends, and we see him, in the end, a drenched corpse on the banks of the Arno, with the fingers of his wronged father twisted in his throat.

In after years Romola reads his epitaph to the child Lilo, summing up his character and career in these awful words—all the more awful because of the simple vocabulary adapted to a child's understanding: "There was a man to whom I was very near, so that I could see a great deal of his life, who made almost every one fond of him, for he was young and clever and beautiful, and his manners to all were gentle and kind. I believe when I first knew him he never thought of anything cruel or base. But because he tried to slip away from everything that was unpleasant, and cared for nothing else so much as his own safety, he came at last to commit some of the basest deeds—such as make men infamous. He

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denied his father, and left him to misery; he betrayed every trust that was reposed in him, that he might keep himself safe and get rich and prosperous. Yet calamity overtook him."

The careers of such men were in George Eliot's eyes among the worst of earth's blasphemies, for they violated the fundamental tenets of her moral philosophy—our responsibility to ourselves and others for what we do, and the absolute indestructibility of our deeds. "Our deeds are like children that are born to us, they have an indestructible life apart from us. Nay, children may be strangled, but deeds never"—so she writes in "The Mill on the Floss." Remorse and its better-begotten son Repentance, George Eliot recognized, but she held that all the penitence in the world cannot alter the condition wrought by men's deeds on earth. In heaven we may escape the consequences of our deeds, but never on earth. Or, as another has said:

"It is a good and soothfast saw,  
Half roasted never will be raw,  
No flour is changèd back to meal,  
No crock reshaped on the wheel,  
No curds changed back to milk again,  
Nor 'Now,' by wishing, back to 'Then';  
When once you 've tasted stolen honey,  
You can't buy innocence for money."

Or, as Omar Khayyám puts it:

"The moving finger writes, and having writ,  
Moves on; nor all your piety nor wit  
Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,  
Nor all your tears wash out a word of it."

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And this simple moral is the chief message of George Eliot's books. Much might be said, much has been said, about her philosophy. But the practical lesson she came to deliver in many forms and characters is this: that what we do, either of good or ill, either in a small way or a great way, lives on in the affairs of men; it is transmuted through the generations, and it works through generation after generation, forever and forever. This is the conservation of moral energy; this is the correlation of moral forces; this is the immortality in which she believed.

All philosophy is an expression of half truths, or part truths, for the philosopher is mortal, and by reason of his mortality can see truth only in part. George Eliot has seen and expressed a part of the truth, an important part, that people must pay the price of the things they do. There is no escape. The act has its determining influence upon our lives; nothing can ever be as if it had never been; what we do, that we are; we make our own destinies by our acts. All that is absolutely true, and all that is, by implication, in the philosophy of George Eliot. But philosophy ought not to stop there, and unfortunately George Eliot does practically stop there, and that is the reason why the sum total of the impression she makes is saddening.

What George Eliot neglected to point out is that to which the William Blakes, the Nietzsches, even the Bernard Shaws, have summoned our attention, namely, that the power of the will and the recuperative power of Nature are greater than evil, that evil need not be a finality unless we choose to make it so, that after the thing is done and destiny set in motion the case is still not hopeless, that nothing is ever hopeless for people who will rely on the valor of the good will and the readiness of Nature to heal wounds and remove everything but the scar,—the scar is never removed,—that

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even through evil people may pass to good if they have the will and the courage and the perseverance. It is a bitter process, and he who would choose it for the experience of it is a fool; but, once in, it is better to fight the way out than to continue forever in the paralyzing grip of the thought of the deterministic quality of evil.

Physicians warn people against those nerve strains which undermine and wear out the human system; they plead with their patients to shun those perils, as preachers plead with sinners to forsake their sins. But when, in spite of all the warning, the man has broken down, the wise physician does not stand at the bedside wagging a solemn head, saying, "I told you so," prating of the finality of evil, and quoting George Eliot and Omar Khayyám. The wise physician tries to show the way back, to show how great Nature is waiting to work a cure, to show the man the power that is latent in his own will, the power to begin all over again, to be well.

It is far, far better never to violate Nature's sanctities. It is far, far better not to err, not to be stupid and a fool. But when the mischief has been done, it is far better to re-summon the spiritual energy than to sit down in dejection and spend the remainder of life lamenting folly. Remorse is one of the most weakening of the passions, repentance is a tonic; remorse is the mood of despair, repentance the mood of hope. And unless we hope we perish. The world belongs to the valiant, not to the skulkers.

George Eliot did not counsel skulking, but the implication of her novels is that evil is a finality. Evil is not a finality. Evil is tragic, loathsome, strong. But there are stronger things in the universe than evil. A valiant will is stronger, Nature is stronger, God is stronger. And in brave reliance on these efficiencies, the Will and Nature and God, the heroes of mankind have fought their way to glory.

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Even evil itself may be turned into an indirect means of salvation by those who will. Some men have first understood the greatness of their opportunity by first understanding the hideous quality of evil. Not until evil gripped them did they really fight. And except we fight we die. The very ability to carry on the fight necessitates a faith that in some way evil can be turned to good.

That is the other half of the view, the half which George Eliot almost neglected, the half which, had she regarded it, would have illuminated her novels with the beauty of hope. There are in her novels instances—Godfrey Cass for example—which suggest the recuperative idea, but her work, taken as a whole, lays the emphasis on the inevitability of the dire result. Her novels, which are now sternly sad, would have been sternly joyous had she, without mitigating the solemnity of responsibility and the far-reaching influence of deeds, shown that other side, the fresh start and the fighting chance.