

GEORGE ELIOT AS A RELIGIOUS TEACHER.

The great woman who lately died will no doubt be remembered in the next century chiefly as a literary artist, who knew mankind well, and held an almost perfect mirror up to nature whenever she chose to portray character. And in the minds of many it is an unimportant task to try to piece together from the writings of a great artist anything like a system of general philosophy, or even of ethics. Why should the words of those who spoke so well the rich flexible language of the living human soul be translated into the poor dry speech of metaphysics? If George Eliot, some one may say, ever lost sight of her vocation as artist, and, as in *Daniel Deronda*, filled pages with tedious disquisitions, why should we try to follow her in her wanderings? Her best teachings are her great creations; and from a truly poetic product you may get inspiration, but you must not try to deduce a formula.

Of course, we must not lose sight of the fact that a work of art is always far more than a

theory, nor ignore the truth that artists do injustice to their art as soon as they begin to mix abstractions with their concrete creations. But we must also remember that not all art is alike remote from the world of thought. The man who writes an abstract account of the ethical teachings conveyed in the works of some musical composer may indeed keep within the bounds of reason, but he is at least in great danger of talking nonsense. But if one writes a commentary on the doctrines of the Book of Job, the fact that his subject is a work of art, and not merely a treatise, does not render his undertaking less appropriate. Poetry is not always, but yet very often, aptly to be named molten thought, thought freed from the chill of the mountain summits, its crystalline perfection of logical form dissolved, no longer ice, but gathered into tumultuous streams that plunge down in musical song to the green fields and wide deserts of the world where men live, far below. He who follows a stream-

course upward to the glaciers whence it has sprung leaves indeed behind him many of the fairest scenes of the lowlands, but he has the satisfaction of assisting at the birth of a river. Mists that have risen from the whole of that great world of the plains—from far beyond, too, in the infinite ocean itself—have come up here to be frozen that they might, by melting again, produce this stream. To suppose that poetry is altogether thought is to see dead forms where one ought to see life; but to refuse altogether to look for the sources in thought whence the stream often comes, is to commit the mistake of the king of Burmah, and to deny that water can ever have been frozen.

George Eliot, furthermore, was by nature quite as much a reflective as a poetical genius, and by training much less a poetical than a reflective writer. We should have supposed beforehand that she would never have produced other than "novels with a purpose." Artist as she actually was, theory was constantly in her mind. The thought of her time governed her. She had occasional glimpses above and beyond it; but if she was Shaksperian in the portrayal of character, she was unlike Shakspeare in her regard for formulas, and no future century will ever be in doubt whether she was Protestant or Catholic. In fine, she certainly wished to teach men, and it is therefore our right and duty to attempt the not very arduous task of formulating and of tracing to their chief sources the teachings that she often but thinly veiled beneath the garment of fiction. In doing this we shall not study the loftiest or the most interesting aspect of her work, but our task will not be void of significance.

Let us first sum up what little we as yet know about George Eliot's growth as a thinker. We know that she was an unwearied student of science, of literature, of history, and of philosophy. We know that she sympathized in great measure with what is called modern positivism. We know also, however, that she was well acquainted with the thoughts and beliefs of a class of English men and women who know and care nothing about modern thought, but who have ideals that she never mentions with contempt, and that she in fact never wholly outgrew. All these elements went together to the making up of her doctrine of life. When her biography is written, we shall know more of their separate growth and of the fashion of their union. But even now, from the facts that are known, we may conjecture much, and the temptation to conjecture about so beloved a teacher is irresistible.

Marian Evans, according to the account of her early life published in the *Pall Mall Ga-*

zette, grew up in an orthodox family, and in the Christian faith. With years she developed remarkable powers of reflection, and the first result of reflection was to make her a very strict Calvinist. The discomfort of this faith urged her to further thought. We do not yet know just what influences made her a free-thinker. At all events, she never rested in the early crude delight of negation, but sought in all directions for more light. In 1850 we find her in London, already in the possession, so Mr. Herbert Spencer tells us, of the wide learning and many-sided thought that have since made her famous. She was now not far from thirty years of age. She had as yet made no attempts, at least in public, to write novels. She was simply a quiet and interesting literary woman, with extraordinary talents and acquirements. Acting under advice, she translated Strauss's *Leben Jesu*, and Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. She became the sub-editor of the *Westminster Review*, and buried a great deal of work in its brief quarterly notices of contemporary literature. Between 1854 and 1860 she also published several essays in the same review, whereof the titles have been given in a late number of the *London Academy*. These essays all show rather the conscientious reviewer than the ambitious genius. Nothing but the style reminds you of *Silas Marner* or of *Romola*. One becomes almost angry in reading work that must have cost such a mind so much labor and that yet must of necessity have but a transient interest. Why wait here, one says, in this den of book-worms, O great teacher? Time is flying, the day is far spent, and the words thou art to speak to all the world are yet but voices in thy dreams. To thy task, before old age comes! Alas! they were well spent and yet ill spent years. Happy were the world if full of such workers. But yet unhappy the world in which such spirits are confined, even for only half their lives, to such tasks. George Eliot was nearly forty years of age when her first tales were published.

But to understand the origin and nature of her later religious views, we must analyze as well as we are able the influences that during these years must have been forming our author's creed. When a strong faith has left a man, he must do one of two things: either he must fly to the opposite extreme of pure and scornful negation, or he must try to find some way in which to save for himself what was essential to the spirit of the old faith, while he rejects its accidental features, such as its ritual, its claim to give power over physical forces, its promises of material good fortune, or its asserted miracles. Now, George Eliot belonged too much

to the nineteenth century to fall under the power of the purely negative tendency. She might be an unbeliever, but she never could be a scoffer; and so the search after the essential in the religious consciousness became for her a practical necessity. This search it was, without doubt, that led her to the translation of Strauss and of Feuerbach. To understand the effort that runs all through George Eliot's life-work—the effort to find and to portray the religious consciousness as it exists in men's minds independently of the belief in supernatural agencies—we must glance at the views of these Germans whose thought she first transferred to English soil. They expounded theories that she afterward sought to test by an appeal to living human experience.

Let us speak first of Strauss and of the positive element in religion that this thinker, in the early Hegelian period when the first *Leben Jesu* was written, tried to separate from the supernatural elements of tradition. To understand this matter we must look back a little. German philosophy, ever since Lessing's tract on the *Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, had been trying to discover the ultimate significance of religion, natural and revealed. Lessing himself, in the mentioned tractate, saw in revelation the process by which God taught the race from its infancy up. The doctrines of a revelation are, therefore, for him absolute truth, but not all the truth, and by the ignorant race, to whom they are at first revealed, they are only half understood, and therefore often misunderstood. But the purpose of the revelation is not to reveal what is beyond all human insight. The purpose of revelation, like the purpose of individual education, is to hasten and make definite a process of development that could conceivably have gone on without external aid. "Revelation gives the race nothing that human reason, left to itself, would not attain; but it gave and gives to the race the weightiest of these things earlier than they would otherwise be attained" (*Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, § 4). Therefore, on the other hand, nothing in revelation is to be free from the investigations of reason; and the work of reason is to translate into the language of thought the figurative or obscure doctrines of revelation. In every such doctrine reason is to see not a stumbling-block, but a guide; and, on the other hand, not an incomprehensible mystery, but an intelligible truth, kindly revealed beforehand that we may know whither to direct our thought. That revelation is not all truth, or that it is dark truth, proves nothing against it, since all teachers give the pupil only what helps him to work for himself, and do not explain to him everything.

On the other hand, the darkest truth is revealed that it may in time become clear to reason. Revelation is given to the end that man may outgrow it. There will come "the time of completion when man, however persuaded he is of a better future, will have no need to borrow of that future motives for his actions, since he will do good because it is good, not because arbitrary rewards are offered; for these rewards were but intended in the foretime to fix and strengthen his wavering sight to know the inner and better rewards of goodness. It will come, the time of the new Everlasting Gospel, promised even in the New Testament books" (*Erziehung des Menschengeschlechts*, §§ 85, 86).

These thoughts of Lessing worked as a ferment in the great philosophic movement of subsequent years. Lessing's own point of view was forsaken for others, but his spirit dominates nearly all later German thought on this subject. Religion, according to one view, is the veiled utterance, the imperfect and poetical grasping of truth that can be and must be otherwise expressed and justified. Religion is, therefore, the necessary path to the higher insight that is to come through philosophy. Or, on the other hand, as Schleiermacher has it, religion is an expression of a feeling; *viz.*, of the sense of dependence, of finite incompleteness, of need of God. This sense, as pure feeling, is the essential element of religion, and the work of philosophical reflection is to find this essential element in all faith, to purify the religious sense from all disturbing doubt, and to prepare the soul to stand alone with God in the undisturbed enjoyment of the satisfaction of its greatest want. These two views—the one for which religion is largely theoretical in content, the expression of an intuitive, uncriticised, impure, or else poetically veiled knowledge; the other for which religion is the effort to express an emotion, a felt need of support, or of something to worship—both contend for the supremacy in modern German religious philosophy. Both have in common, first, the effort to transcend the uncritical faith of unlearned piety, and, secondly, the discontent with the negations of pure rationalism. The two differ often very widely in the consequences that are drawn from them.

Now Strauss, in the *Leben Jesu*, after applying criticism to the gospel histories, found their content to be throughout, as he held, mythical. His work completed, the question arose, What must we do with the faith whose support seems thus taken away? The answer was, Religion has not deserted us; only the perishable form in which our thought clothed itself has dissolved. The hidden inner sense is revealed

more clearly when we see the mythical element in the popular faith. To determine this inner sense of Christianity, Strauss had recourse to the doctrines of his master, Hegel, which he interpreted—not as Hegel would have done, but as at least one great tendency of the Hegelian philosophy suggested. From the point of view that Strauss adopts,* the religious consciousness appears as largely theoretic; *viz.*, as in the intuitive knowledge of the infinite, the recognition in nature, in mind, in history, of the presence of an all pervading, all governing reason, of an absolute spirit in whom are all things. Not as a philosophic theory, but as a purely immediate sense or belief the religious soul makes and accepts this doctrine. But if this is the essence of religious faith, it is not the whole of faith. Unphilosophic as the religious consciousness is, it necessarily embodies its faith in a mythical form. The direct consciousness of the infinite is expressed in the documents of the faith as if it were a particular historical revelation, occurring at some point of time. The presence of the infinite reason in the universe is conceived as the action of a law-giver, working after the fashion of men. The progress of the race, or the growth of the religious consciousness in the individual, is related as if it were a series of miracles. The eternal, in short, is conceived under the form of the transient, the infinite is mythically made to appear finite. So, again, in particular with the Christian doctrines. The knowledge that the human spirit is in essence one with the divine spirit, that man is to rise to the actual sense of his unity with God, is veiled under the myth of a historical incarnation. The understanding of the myth is the revealing of its essential content. We do not, reasons Strauss, lose the knowledge of the infinite, nor of our essential unity with it, when we learn the mythical nature of the religious doctrine. This mythical form was an absolute necessity to train men for a knowledge of the truth. We must reject the shell of the dogma, but the kernel of the dogma is our eternal treasure.

It is certain that George Eliot must have been influenced by these views. She looked everywhere for teaching, and we may be sure that she did not translate Strauss merely for the sake of disturbing her countrymen's faith. Of course, she did not accept the Hegelian metaphysic; but just as little is she in her novels willing to express perfect satisfaction with the flat negations of many of the English positivists. Nearer, in some respects, to her actual

views, because less given to transcendent speculation than Strauss, may, perhaps, have been Feuerbach, whose *Wesen des Christenthums* she also translated. Feuerbach has, at present, little more than historical interest. What he has concluded as a consequence of his early Hegelianism others have said or thought independently of him. The following account depends upon that in Pflëiderer's late work, *Religionsphilosophie auf Geschichtlicher Grundlage*. Feuerbach's view of religion is intensely skeptical, and yet not wholly unappreciative. He sees in religion the expression of a subjective want, which assumes the deceptive guise of knowledge. See through this disguise, and religion has no truth; and yet the disguise is not the one essential thing in religion, for the want creates the disguise. Man in religion treats his own being as if it were another. Dissatisfied with a world that oppresses him, he creates in his despair a supernatural all-powerful being, enthroned over the world, and worships this ideal Self as the perfect one. The ideal has no truth, but the indefinite variety of its forms, the strength of the want that creates it, make its power over life prodigious. In the thought "there is a God, an image of Me, a perfect, an unlimited Self, outside of the sphere of change and misery" religion begins. But this thought is not enough. God must be put in relation to the world. Only as God the Son, as God appealing to the human heart, knowing our frailties, sympathizing with our needs, hearing our prayers, does the infinite ideal become truly divine. And it is but an objectifying of the unhappy world-weary consciousness of disappointed humanity to conceive this God as himself suffering and overcoming suffering, as the risen and exalted Self, that has overcome the world.

But in all this Feuerbach finds only a stupendous phantasm. He will admit nothing in religion as religion that can endure criticism. Yet see what after all will remain to one who accepts Feuerbach's premises, but regards this purely fantastic exercise of the religious spirit as after all intensely and eternally significant. Such a one will say, Men did indeed make to themselves ideals of God, and these ideals were phantasms; but the spirit of religion that produced the phantasm is still ours. We reject the product that made the world seem so sublime and significant, but we work as if we were in a world where such things were true. We know ourselves to be but strangers, who find in the whole real universe nothing that quite satisfies these our highest longings; but then, we can and will try to make the world as much as possible the realization of our longings. Ours

* V. Pflëiderer, *Religionsphilosophie*, p. 238. Cf. the account in Hausraath, *D. F. Strauss u. d. Theologie Seiner Zeit*, vol. i, the chapter on the first *Leben Jesu*.

it will be to give life a divine significance, even if no Providence has already done this for us before our birth. Did George Eliot draw this conclusion herself? We shall have reason to believe that she did.

By training, then, as we may say, our author was at least in part identified with the great characteristic thought-movement of the first half of our century, with the movement that aimed at the understanding and appreciation of the essential elements of religion. This movement was not one of harmony, but of vigorous and often bitter discussion, and no original thinker would be apt to submit himself to the mere formulas of any one of its representatives. Yet in it all there was the one easily appreciated effort to decipher this strange, beautiful language of the pious heart, and to see whether the writing, once deciphered, would furnish any one word that the enlightened mind can accept as eternal truth. With this effort George Eliot was in deep sympathy.

Another influence on George Eliot's religious philosophy must be mentioned, but I see at present no good reason to lay much stress upon it. This is the influence of Comte and of his formulated *Religion of Humanity*. When some one of the most straitest sect of the religious positivists, who is at the same time acquainted with German thought, shall have made clear to us just what, if any, was Comte's original and genuine contribution to the philosophy of religion, beyond his theory of the three stages of the human mind, we shall be able to appreciate the importance of a general sympathy with positivism for the mind of one who knew German religious philosophy so well. Till this information is given I do not see why George Eliot need have been much other than she was had Comte or his later period of thought never existed. She did, as we are told, sympathize with the Positivist sect. But of the ritual and the observances, the fanatical solemnity, and the pharisaical vanity of that sect, she certainly never in her printed works showed any signs. The religion of humanity she did profess, but she exhibits in her writings no tendency to accept the inhuman exclusiveness of any arbitrary dogmatic system of living. If the Positivists were her friends, we may be sure that freedom was a greater friend.

But still another influence remains to be mentioned here, the influence of the study of Spinoza upon George Eliot's life-theory. Of this influence we may be sure; for it has been announced since her death on good authority (in the *Pall Mall Gazette*) that a translation of the whole of the *Ethics* exists in manuscript, prepared by her own hand during this early period

of apprenticeship. But just what the influence of Spinoza was it will be her biographer's duty to discover and tell us. Meanwhile there seems to be an inviting field open for philological investigation in the comparison of Spinoza's famous treatise on the passions and their control (*Ethics*, books iii-v), with George Eliot's own numerous remarks on the same subject. In reading this part of the *Ethics* one may notice the great likeness of many of the observations in style and in matter to George Eliot. This likeness ought to be examined and tested. Spinoza is, after all, one of the fathers of religious philosophy. His direct influence upon the first religious philosopher that ever wrote great novels would be a problem of no little interest.

Leaving the study of the causes, let us go on to the effects. Not long before the publication of the *Scenes from Clerical Life*, we find in the *Westminster Review* an essay under the title, "Worldliness and Other-worldliness: the Poet Young." This essay is by George Eliot. The poet Young is here reviewed with a good deal of severity. The article has in it something of that dash and boldness in speaking of serious subjects that endeared the *Westminster* of those days to the radical mind, and to young radicals in particular. But the hand is the hand of Marian Evans. Nor do we fail to find in passages her own more moderate tone, such as she used when not in the editorial chair. Young is described in this essay as "a poet whose imagination is alternately fired by the 'Last Day,' and by a creation of peers, who fluctuates between rhapsodic applause of King George and rhapsodic applause of Jehovah." One of Young's "most striking characteristics is," says the essayist, "his radical insincerity as a poetic artist. No writer whose rhetoric was checked by the slightest truthful intention could have said:

'An eye of awe and wonder let me roll,
And roll forever.'"

Furthermore, Young wants genuine emotion. "There is hardly a trace of human sympathy, of self-forgetfulness in the joy or sorrow of a fellow-being" in all of the *Night Thoughts* outside of passages in "Philander," "Narcissa," and "Lucia." As a consequence, Young's theory of ethics lacks the element of sympathy, and finds a basis for morality only in the belief in an immortality of rewards and punishments. And here the personal views of the essayist burst forth: "Fear of consequences is only one form of egoism which will hardly stand against half a dozen other forms of egoism bearing down upon it. . . . In proportion as a man would

care less for the rights and the welfare of his fellow if he did not believe in a future life, in that proportion is he wanting in the genuine feelings of justice and benevolence, as the musician who would care less to play a sonata of Beethoven's finely in solitude than in public, where he was to be paid for it, is wanting in genuine enthusiasm for music." "Certain elements of virtue, . . . a delicate sense of our neighbor's rights, an active participation in the joys and sorrows of our fellow-men, a magnanimous acceptance of privation or suffering for ourselves when it is the condition of good to others—in a word, the extension and intensification of our sympathetic nature—we think it of some importance to contend that they have no more direct relation to the belief in a future state than the interchange of gases in the lungs has to the plurality of worlds. Nay, to us it is conceivable that in some minds the deep pathos lying in the thought of human mortality—that we are here for a little while and then vanish away, that this earthly life is all that is given to our loved ones and to our many suffering fellow-men—lies nearer the fountains of moral emotion than the conception of extended existence." The thought of mortality then is favorable to virtue as well as the thought of immortality. "Do writers of sermons and religious novels prefer that men should be vicious in order that there may be a more evident political and social necessity for printed sermons and clerical fictions? Because learned gentlemen are theological, are we to have no more simple honesty and good-will? We can imagine that the proprietors of a patent water supply have a dread of common springs; but for our own part we think there cannot be too great a security against a lack of fresh water or of pure morality. To us it is matter of unmixed rejoicing that this latter necessary of healthful life is independent of theological ink, and that its evolution is insured by the interaction of human souls as certainly as the evolution of science or of art, with which indeed it is but a twin ray, melting into them with undefinable limits." The principal sources of our author's quarrel with Young are thus indicated. But yet more to our present purpose are her criticisms on his conception of religion. "Young has no conception of religion as anything else than egoism turned heavenward; and he does not merely imply this—he insists on it." "He never changes his level so as to see beyond the horizon of mere selfishness." And again: "He sees Virtue sitting on a mount serene, far above the mists and storms of earth. He sees Religion coming down from the skies, with this world in her left hand and the other world in

her right. But we never find him dwelling on virtue or religion as it really exists—in the emotions of a man dressed in an ordinary coat, and seated by his fireside of an evening, with his hand resting on the head of his little daughter; in courageous effort for unselfish ends, in the internal triumph of justice and pity over personal resentment, in all the sublime self-renunciation and sweet charities which are found in the details of ordinary life." At the end of the essay Young is contrasted with Cowper, much to the advantage of the latter. "In Young we have the type of that deficient human sympathy, that impiety toward the present and the visible, which flies for its motives, its sanctities, and its religion to the remote, the vague, and the unknown. In Cowper we have the type of that genuine love which cherishes things, in proportion to their nearness, and feels its reverence grow in proportion to the intimacy of its knowledge."

The transition in mood is but slight from the last words of this essay to the *Scenes from Clerical Life*. As one reads these one is impressed with the fact that George Eliot has, for the time, resolutely turned away her mind from the learning and speculation with which she is so familiar, and has determined to seek the essential elements of the higher life in the world of simple ignorance, doing penance, as it were, for too much philosophy by refusing at present to portray a character capable of abstract thought, or perhaps rather seeking rest from the heated war of ideas in a refreshing bath in the secluded, slowly flowing river of commonplace human life. In the *Scenes*, artistic motives seem nevertheless to be struggling still with didactic motives, and the author stops too often to justify herself for thus leaving cultivated life behind her. The born story-teller—such a man as Chaucer, or William Morris, or Paul Heyse, or Turgeneff, or Heinrich von Kleist—never, unless in the absence of the Muse, is guilty of excusing himself for having chosen a given subject, any more than the popular ballad-maker of the Middle Ages thought of explaining why just this tale of all tales must over his lips. In fact, the great curse of George Eliot's art, from *Amos Barton* to *Daniel Deronda*, is her tendency to speak in her own name to the reader for the sake of explaining why she does thus and so. But, apart from their artistic faults, the *Scenes* are full of suggestive thoughts. "These commonplace people," she says (in an often quoted passage in *Amos Barton*, speaking of the mass of the English nation),—"many of them—bear a conscience, and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right; they have their un-

spoken sorrows and their sacred joys; their hearts have perhaps gone out toward their first-born, and they have mourned over their irreclaimable dead. Nay, is there not a pathos in their very insignificance—in our comparison of their dim and narrow existence with the glorious possibilities of that human nature which they share?" In the minds of these men, then, we are to find the religious life in its essence exemplified. Here is simple human nature. A religious philosophy that would be universal must bear the test of finding whether these instances fall within the scope of its sounding universal premises.

In *Amos Barton* we meet with a few suggestions bearing directly on this point. A story intended by the pathos of its unromantic events to appeal directly to our sense of the interest of life as life cannot go very deeply into problems. But the author does not avoid giving hints of her doctrines. Thus, for example, after telling of Mrs. Barton's funeral, she speaks of our anguish, when we mourn over our own dead, at the thought that "we can never atone for the little reverence that we showed to that sacred human soul that lived so close to us, and was the divinest thing God had given us to know." What, then, the reader asks, are we to worship those that stand or that have stood nearest us, and is this to be our religion? This, the author seems to say, is the religion death teaches.

But one suspects all teachings that are founded on death alone. The emotions suggested by death, one might reply to George Eliot, are among the highest we know, and yet it is hard to draw any ethical conclusions from them. Quite apart from our beliefs or doubts about immortality, we say when a good man dies, "It is well, his work is nobly done;" and when a bad man dies, "It is well, the world is rid of him." If an old man dies, we say, "The debt of nature is paid, let us not mourn;" if a young maiden, we still say, "Death has saved this fair life from pain and decay, let us cease mourning." Sir Walter Raleigh, in the famous passage at the end of his history, calls death eloquent. One might well rejoin that death is rather the great sophist: argue as we will, he refutes us. He is an evil; but who would live always? a good; but who would forsake life? Death as the seeming end of desire appears at once undesirable, and yet perfectly satisfying; at once a sacred presence that sanctifies whatever it touches, so that we naturally worship the memory of the dead, and a horrible nightmare that pursues the living, so that the free man becomes free only when, as Spinoza said, he learns to think not at all of death, but solely of life. What doctrine shall then be founded

on our contemplation of death? Death is the infinite night, wherein, as the rough-voiced adage had it, all cows are black. Let us disregard it, and ask our teacher what she has to tell us about life. What shall we worship in world of the living?

In "Janet's Repentance," the third of the *Scenes*, we are brought face to face with one of the problems that have most interest for the mind of George Eliot. It is the problem afterward treated in *Romola*. Suppose a soul, capable of higher life, but shut out for years from the thought of it, living in worldliness. Suppose a trouble that arouses in this soul a sense of wrong, of loneliness, of the desolation of the universe when there is no object in it that seems worth our striving. How shall such a soul become reconciled to life? How shall it attain religious earnestness, and strength, and peace? Janet, a high-spirited, self-reliant girl, is persistently ill treated by her husband. At first she cannot bear to think that their love should have all come to this. Then she takes refuge in sullen defiance, broken by passionate outbursts. Now and then she upbraids her mother fiercely, and without reason; but most of the time she tries to keep silence. She never thinks of religious solace; her one hope is that in some way her husband may come to love her again. If he is jovial and good humored for a day, she is happy. But such times are rare. At last she falls into the habit of drinking secretly, to forget her troubles. And so bad becomes worse, until a climax is reached in her husband's temper, and he turns her out of the house at midnight. She takes refuge with a neighbor. The next day her husband drinks enormously, drives alone, meets with a serious accident, and is brought home to his death-bed, raving in *delirium tremens*. Meanwhile, Janet has had time to review her life; her despair is complete; the world is dark, her conscience bad, her future inconceivable. At this point, the day of her husband's fatal drive, she is visited by the new evangelical parson, a hard-working, somewhat fanatical consumptive, who has the ascetic sincerity of a mediæval saint. Remorse for a youthful crime had driven him into his present life; and his special task is the seeking out of great sinners and of despairing souls of all classes. Janet's husband had been this man's bitterest enemy, and she herself had always before scorned his very name. Now, at the first sight of him, at the first experience of his earnestness and kindness, she feels that here is a new influence. She soon pours out to him her whole heartful of misery and of longing: "I thought that God was cruel. I suppose it is wicked to think so. . . . I feel as

if there must be goodness and right above us, but I can't see it; I can't trust in it. And I have gone on that way for years and years. . . . I shall always be doing wrong, and hating myself after; sinking lower and lower, and knowing that I am sinking. Oh, can you tell me of any way of getting strength? Have you ever known any one like me that got peace of mind and power to do right? Can you give me any comfort, any hope?" To answer to this appeal the parson gathers all his strength. He sees in this woman his own old despairing self. He speaks to her out of the fullness of an experience of torture. He uses the conventional terms of orthodoxy, to be sure; but we feel, as we read, that the force is not intended by the author to be in them. Janet accepts the message; but why? Not because of the essential might of the orthodox formula. The devil is not cast out in the name of any power, but by the force of direct present sympathy. Janet feels that here is another, with like nature, tried, tempted, fallen also, but enabled to rise by seeing the vast world of human life about him in which there is so much to be done, in which there is such a mass of suffering and sin, to which his life is but a drop, and for which, as he sees, he must work. "As long," he tells her, "as we live in rebellion against God, desiring to have our own will, seeking happiness in the things of this world, it is as if we shut ourselves up in a crowded, stifling room, where we breathe only poisoned air; but we have only to walk out under the infinite heavens, and we breathe the pure, free air that gives us health, and strength, and gladness. It is so with God's spirit. As soon as we submit ourselves to his will, as soon as we desire to be united to him, and made pure and holy, it is as if the walls had fallen down." This is language that men of a hundred nations and creeds might understand. Wherein lies its force? What is the religious idea at the bottom of it? Hear the author:

"Blessed influence of one true loving human soul on another! Not calculable by algebra, not deducible by logic, but mysterious, effective, mighty as the hidden process by which the tiny seed is quickened. . . . Ideas are often poor ghosts. Our sun-filled eyes cannot discern them; they pass athwart us in thin vapor, and cannot make themselves felt. But sometimes they are made 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 their 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."

Religious knowledge and life come to us then, our author teaches, through the influence of individual souls, whose sympathy and counsel awaken us to a new sense of the value of life, and to a new earnestness to work henceforth not for self, but for the Other than self. This Other, as you see, is always at least negatively infinite; it takes in this philosophy the place of the supernatural. You know not its boundaries. This grand ocean of life stretches out before you without discovered shore. You are brought to the strand. Will you embark? To embark and to lose yourself is religion; to wait on the shore is moral starvation. Such seems to be our author's life-doctrine. The infinite is conceived as known only in this world of fellow-beings.

For Janet this new insight means acceptance, and so new life. Her dying husband is to be nursed, and then afterward her neighbors are to be helped. Her religion sustains her. What, then, in her own consciousness, is this religion? A sense of the value and beauty of life, a trust in the parson, a wish to do good, a looking out into the world with trust and resignation. All must be well, for are we not willingly at work? So lambs think, no doubt, as they look up from the tender grass they are cropping. And of such kind, as it seems, George Eliot conceives to be the state of the soul when raised to the plane of this higher life. There is an indefinite sense of worship arising from the depths of a peaceful mind that feels at home in the world, and that, while so feeling, contemplates life. Call this worship by what name you will.

But the process of the religious life is not yet fully described, for one of the hardest problems remains untouched. Given the awakened soul, a Janet after her first conversation with the parson, a Romola when Savonarola has sent her back to her husband and has called upon her to live for the Florentines even if she cannot live for her own home, such a soul, as we have seen, is largely under the influence of the person that has been the awakener. But this person is only a man, whose breath is in his nostrils. He may represent, but he is not humanity. He will die, or, worse than that, he will show weakness or will betray some hidden sinful tendency. What, then, is to be done for the poor soul that has depended upon this mortal prop? Must the reclaimed fall whenever the helper stumbles? This problem is more fully developed in Romola. The heroine here is by nature enthusiastic, but by training a Neopagan, caring for none of these things. Aroused

when in great trouble and despair to the value of the higher life through the words of Savonarola, Romola leans spiritually upon him, makes of him the human deity. What is the result? It is brought bitterly home to her that her spiritual father is not perfect, that he is selfish like other men, and can on occasion, misled by ambition, do her and others irreparable wrong. Thus the one support is taken away. There is nothing worth the trouble of life. What is Florence if its best man is such a man? Romola flees into the wilderness, caring not what becomes of her. Coming to the sea, she embarks alone, and the wind bears her to another shore, where she finds a plague-stricken village. The sight of suffering arouses the old fervor. As George Eliot remarks in substance elsewhere, in presence of pain you need no theories, you have but to work, and with the work the old faith comes back. The world needs me, and it is good to be needed. Such seems Romola's thought; and so the faith in humanity, the sense that life is significant, is made independent of the trust in the one master who first opened her eyes. He may not be what he seemed or aspired to be; but the light is still there.

The first teacher, the awakener, is therefore often necessary; but the awakened soul must learn to live without this personal presence, in the power of self-sustained enthusiasm. The very faults of the teacher are then seen in a new light, not as disheartening chasms in our way that cannot be overleaped, but as incitements to more earnest work. We are all weak, teachers as well as taught; so much the greater is the demand for unwearied exertion. The process thus indicated reminds one of the well known Platonic myths in the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. The idea of the beautiful, says Plato, is the only one of the eternal ideas that has an earthly representative directly appealing to the senses. At the sight of a beautiful being the soul is awakened from the dreamy life of nature, and a longing for the old home in the heavens is aroused. This longing is human love. Followed upward, love leads to the knowledge of the eternal, of which itself is the beginning. But because love is divine, it does not follow that the love of the one earthly object is enough. No; the object is nothing of itself. As a thing of sense it may not with safety be pursued or possessed. Only as pointing the soul to the eternal, only as arousing us to look beyond itself and to forget what is transient in it and in everything else, is the beloved object of true worth. Just so now in George Eliot the knowledge of the enduring and significant in life comes to us in the words and

deeds of perhaps a single human teacher. But we must learn to outgrow the direct influence of the teacher, as Janet outgrows the need of her pastor, as Romola outgrows Savonarola, as Deronda learns to do without the prophetic voice of Mordecai, or as Gwendolen hopes to do without the personal magnetism of Deronda. We must even learn, as Maggie learns, in *The Mill on the Floss*, to endure when everything forsakes us, and when there is no thought left but that we once did our duty and destroyed our earthly happiness. From the transient we must come to the knowledge of the abiding; from trusting in a teacher we must come to trust in the worth of the higher life. From revering the man we must come to revere the infinity of consciousness whereof he was a representative.

So much, then, for a brief account of the religious consciousness as a process. We come next to speak of this same consciousness as a present fact in the minds of all earnest men and women, whether or no their life has risen or can rise to a very high conscious plane. Silas Marner, the weaver, crushed by early disappointment, loses all faith, almost forgets religion, and becomes a miser. His gold is stolen, but the child is found on his hearth, the little girl whose mother had been frozen in the snow. In bringing up this child the weaver learns to live again; she means for him his religion. Now again, with time, he becomes known to his fellow-men and awakened to the memory of what he was. Life as a problem rises before his unlearned mind, and with it the old puzzles of destiny. Why was it that I was thus tried and tortured? What did Providence, if there is any, mean with me? Hear, then, the weaver reasoning high with Dolly Winthrop, a village matron whose religion is a matter of faith only, and sometimes of wavering faith, too. "It always," she says, "comes into my head when I am sorry for folks, and feel as I can't do a power to help 'em, not if I was to get up 'i' the middle o' the night—it comes into my head as Them above has got a deal tend'rer heart nor what I've got—for I can't be any better nor Them as made me; and if anything looks hard to me, it's because there's things I don't know on; and for the matter o' that, there may be plenty o' things I don't know on, for it's little as I know—that it is. And so, while I was thinking o' that, you come into my mind, Master Marner, and it all came pouring in; if I felt 'i' my inside what was the right and just thing by you, isn't there Them as was at the making on us and knows better and has a better will? And that's all as ever I can be sure on, and everything else is a big puzzle to me when I

think on it. For there was the fever come and took off them as were full-grown, and left the helpless children, and there's the breaking o' limbs. . . . Eh, there's trouble i' this world, and there's things as we can niver make out the rights on. And all as we've got to do is to trusten, Master Marner—to do the right thing as fur as we know, and to trusten. For if us as knows so little can see a bit o' good and rights, we may be sure as there's a good and rights bigger nor what we can know—I feel it i' my own inside as it must be so. And if you could but ha' gone on trustening, Master Marner, you wouldn't ha' run away from your fellow-creatures, and been so lone."

"You're i' the right," is Marner's answer. "There's good i' this world—I've a feeling o' that now; and it makes a man feel as there's a good more nor he can see, i' spite o' the trouble and the wickedness. The drawing o' the lots is dark; but the child was sent to me: there's dealings with us—there's dealings." Here then is the elementary philosophy of religion, the knowledge that in all the obscurity and mystery of the universe the confidence in the supreme value of duty and of love remains to us. Dolly Winthrop in working for the suffering, Silas Marner in caressing the little girl's golden hair, have they not both of them found a crude elementary religion, wherein there is nothing of sentimentality, but merely a plain, matter-of-fact, every-day recognition of the true object of life? One's mind is borne by the strange contrast of subjects to the words of Ernst Renan, in his London lecture on Marcus Aurelius: "The religion of Marcus Aurelius is the absolute religion, that which results from the simple fact of a high moral consciousness brought face to face with the universe. This religion is of no race, nor of any country. No revolution, no change, no discovery will be able to change it." Is not this, one asks, the religion of Dolly Winthrop as well as of the Roman emperor?

But we cannot wait to give more examples. I have tried to show that George Eliot's effort to express the religious consciousness in terms of natural, not of supernatural, facts is, in part, a sequence from the philosophical movement of her age, the movement that began with Lessing and is not yet ended. But our investigation has led us to see certain peculiarities of George Eliot's own mind and method in viewing these things. She was an appreciative student of many systems, but she let none of them rule her. She heard what they had to say, and then she went to actual human life to see whether the theory held good. In studying the life the theory was not permitted to inter-

fer; unless, to be sure, we must make exception of the unhealthy predominance of analysis, of reflection, and of preconceived opinion over emotion and art in *Daniel Deronda*, or in some of those insufferable dissections of human weakness that fill the first part of *Theophrastus Such*. On the whole, we must see throughout in George Eliot's works an intense earnestness, and a conscientious effort to comprehend the realities of the human heart. She feels what she tells, and to her the religious consciousness whereof she writes is a fact of her own heart. The sermons of Dinah in *Adam Bede* were, as she said in a private letter published since her death, written in hot tears, were the outcome of personal experience, and not, as some have supposed, merely a cold study from observation. Thus in her writings the best power of analytic vision is joined with depth of emotion. She is, then, the best possible witness to her own doctrines. She has seen and felt what she describes as the true religious life. When Deronda says to Gwendolen, "The refuge you are needing from personal trouble is the higher, the religious life, which holds an enthusiasm for something more than our own appetites and vanities," he speaks less from his own experience (for he has not yet had the interviews with Mordecai) than from the author's experience.

George Eliot never finished an abstract statement of doctrine, partly because she was at her best an artist, not a philosophic systematizer, and partly because she was too intensely skeptical to accept easily any one formula. In *Theophrastus* there is a chapter of conversation with an evolution philosopher on the probable practical consequences of indefinite progress, which shows how critical our author remained, to the very last, of even the most familiar doctrines of the school with which she was affiliated. And this skeptical element is one of the most significant features in her works. Nothing has done more harm in the history of religion than the dead formula, held to notwithstanding its failure as an expression of life. And even the successful formula, the true expression of life, is dangerous as soon as we try to substitute it for the life, or to imagine that salvation can come through preaching alone. The destruction of the letter is the great purpose of skepticism. The skeptical spirit is the Mephistopheles of the religious consciousness, the companion that this Faust "no more can do without." And so we welcome the spirit that could look with the Germans for the abiding element in religious life, without cramping poetical freedom from the very beginning by an acceptance of some cut-and-dried system. If

ever we have a religious philosophy, the poets on the one hand, the merciless skeptics on the other, will have helped the speculator at every step in his search for a theory. Without them speculation is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, yet signifying nothing. George Eliot is at once speculative, skeptical, and poetic. Whatever she has done best, depends upon the successful union of these three faculties. When the speculative tendency triumphs she becomes mystical and wearisome; when the skeptical triumphs she becomes wearisome and excessively analytic; while the poetical tendency may be said never, in her writings, to free itself, for more than a moment at a time, from the influence of the other tendencies. And so, the constant presence of self-criticism makes us more confident of whatever we find in our author in the way of positive result.

And now, to leave the work of simple exposition, and to estimate our author's accomplishment in the direction of an understanding of religion, what is the one fact of human nature that is brought into prominence in all these particular instances? It is, as we may make sure upon reflection, the fact of the self-surrendering, of the submissive moment in the

action of free human beings when they are brought face to face with the world of life. Man, especially the higher man, is not even by original nature altogether selfish. Before all training he is prone to submission whenever he meets another being whom he regards as higher, better, more admirable than himself. Training makes definite and potent this original tendency. The soul into which has come the wealth of knowledge that springs from feeling ourselves to be but atoms in a great stream of life, is aroused to an essentially new existence. The main-spring of such a nature is conscious submission to the demands of the world of sentient existence. This motive needs no supernatural faith, but may express itself in the language of a hundred faiths. The spirit involved in it is neither optimism nor pessimism, but simply earnestness, determination to make the world significant. It is a fact, we see, that such consciousness is, and can be. Call this spirit what you will. A sound religious philosophy, such as Lessing dreamed of in *Nathan*, such as our century has been struggling to attain, will, we need not doubt, see in this spirit the essential element of that greatest of higher human agencies, Religion.

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