

This, Father, scatter from the soul,  
 and grant that we the wisdom  
 May reach, in confidence of which,  
 Thou justly guidest all things;  
 That we by Thee in honour set,  
 with honour may repay Thee,  
 Raising to all thy works a hymn  
 perpetual; as beseemeth  
 A mortal soul: since neither man  
 nor god has higher glory  
 Than rightfully to celebrate  
 Eternal Law all-ruling.\*

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ART. IV.—GEORGE ELIOT AS A MORAL TEACHER.

NOVELS are the journals or records of manners," is a definition to be found in "The Conduct of Life." Mr. Ruskin, on the other hand, has just described fiction as a "feigned, fictitious, artificial, put-together-out-of-one's-head thing," and gives us, as the best type of it, a Greek vase. Something between the two is perhaps what a good novel should be, not a mere journal of the outward manners of the world, without any ruling design to give nobility and light to the correctness of detail; nor yet only a "put-together-out-of-one's-head thing," without that foundation of carefully observed and well considered fact, which lends dignity to imagination and gives meaning to fictitious creations. Mr. Ruskin's vivid fancy makes him prefer suggestion to description, simile to definition; and doubtless he perceives in a Greek vase the type of every quality essential to good fiction. For less splendid imaginations it is easier to consider that the best sort of novel should resemble a finely conceived picture, where the details are true and simple to the recognition of the least artistic of us all, but where there is also such an arrangement of light, shade, line, and colour, as to bring out the nobler and more lasting beauties of the scene, and suggest, if not reveal, to us the deeper meaning and more permanent law, working over and through the common things that hide them from dull eyes.

A novel has been called also an epic in prose, but the tendency of modern fiction to develop itself more and more through the sparkling rivulets of dialogue, less and less through the broad river of narrative, brings it nearer to the drama than it was in its earlier days. True pictures of men and women, revealed in

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\* From the Hymn of Cleanthes, translated by Mr. Francis Newman in *The Soul*, p. 73, fifth edition.

speech and action, are what we most urgently demand from it; the use of it seems to be the bringing in clear light before us of fine ideals which we may be inspired to follow, and the revelation to us of our own responsibility, both in thought and action, by the tracing of far off and unimagined consequences, towards which we may have been surely travelling, though they lay beyond our horizon or hidden by nearer things.

Since the death of George Eliot we have heard much of her literary power and excellent artistic manner; but her value as a moral teacher, that continual working towards good in her writings which might be described as a "making for righteousness," has not been sufficiently pointed out. It is this quality which constitutes her a master of prose-fiction in its noblest aspect, that of virtue teaching truth, and of effort-inspiring revelation.

Fiction has been made a vehicle for the conveyance of moral lessons since the days of David, son of Jesse, when Nathan the prophet came with his story of the ewe-lamb to the guilty king. It was used abundantly eighteen centuries and a half ago, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee and among the hills of Judea. And to-day it performs still its highest office, more or less worthily, but not with so much directness. We have no longer the allegory in which we are to read out our own lesson step by step, nor yet the amusing story of adventure with a brief moral tacked on to the end of it as a sort of apology for its existence: but we have fiction as a work of art, self-sustaining and self-explaining, truth revealed to us under the keen light of lofty and virtue-loving thought. It is true that we have novels that teach us nothing, and novels that teach us evil; but we do not find these among the works of George Eliot.

In the beginning of this century historical romance was very popular; the action of novels was thrown back into the picturesque past, and the heroes and heroines were clad in attractively unfamiliar attire. The tendency of later years has been to study and depict the present, to occupy ourselves more with life-studies from our contemporaries and less with fancy portraits of our ancestors. The world has perhaps been the gainer for this change: Sir Walter Scott could take the old pictures down from the walls and breathe human souls into their ancient figures, touching them with fervour and passion until they lived and walked among us as friends; but there is a danger in having beauty and nobility always depicted to us afar off, existing only in other places and times than our own; we need to be taught to perceive the great possibilities of our own life, the subtle beauties of our own surroundings, and the unremarked virtues of our neighbours.

"I do distrust the poet who discerns  
 No character or glory in his times,  
 And trundles back his soul five hundred years,  
 Past moat and drawbridge, into a castle-court.

Nay, if there's room for poets in this world  
 A little overgrown (I think there is),  
 Their sole work is to represent the age,  
 Their age, not Charlemagne's—this, live, throbbing age,  
 That brawls, cheats, maddens, calculates, aspires,  
 And spends more passion, more heroic heat,  
 Betwixt the mirrors of its drawing-rooms  
 Than Roland with his knights at Roncesvalles."

We have been taught, eloquently and truly, in the works of Mr. Ruskin, that no falseness, no shirking of fact, can produce beauty. It has been demonstrated to us that the fineness of Greek architecture becomes almost ugliness in Northern climes; and that the incongruity of flat roofs and windy porches under English skies can only be regarded as an outrage against true taste. We have been instructed to clothe our needs with beauty, and not to pursue elegance of outline as something apart from use and fitness. We have been encouraged to give up stale imitations of Doric temples, to attempt a combination of beautiful form with serious purpose which shall be worthy the name of *design*, and to find opportunities of decoration in the light-giving windows, the smoke-conveying chimneys, the rain-draining roofs of our Northern climate. After having been taught in this way to perceive that in the common-place requirements of our life may lie concealed the foundations of artistic beauty, we need not go much farther to discover, amid our experiences of every day, noble types and poetic pictures of our common humanity. Jeanie travelled in a stage-coach in 1736, had she lived in 1881 she would not perhaps have refused the accommodation of an omnibus; and her errand would have been not less devoted, her heart not less true, in one conveyance than in the other. We cannot abolish cabs and tram-cars, but it is left to us to be and to picture noble human beings using the unpicturesque vehicles, and living the unadventurous lives of our own times. In this century, as in every other, the spirit can elevate, if it cannot dictate, the form of life.

The fact, however, that much modern fiction represents the life of to-day, limits the possibility of adventure, and brings character into prominence as a cause as well as a resisting power. Men and women are depicted to us surrounded by temptation instead of bodily danger, and exposed to moral instead of physical hardship. In past times courage and constancy on the part of the hero, beauty and constancy on the part of the heroine,

carried them through all troubles; most of the heroes and heroines had indeed no other distinguishing qualities, and all had these in common; they were young, they were handsome, they were true; they were, in short, types rather than characters. The young man was generous because he never troubled himself about money, others provided it for him; the young woman was sweet-tempered because she rarely had anything to do except to look pretty and to insist on marrying the right young man. Both lived above the reach of the trivial cares that oppress so many of us; the trials of daily life were put out of sight behind picturesque sorrow, and life—as well as human beings—was clad in the garb of romance. This is better, perhaps, than a morbid dwelling on sordid details, but better still is a picture of natural life poetically rendered.

Except in "Romola," George Eliot went back into no remote past, and sought no far lands for the inspiration of her stories. Among English orchards and meadows, over English hills she leads us, and we see familiar English faces and hear familiar English voices, as they are in our own time, as they were in our fathers', or as they used to be in the days our grandfathers have told us of. If every word of the Scotch dialect of Sir Walter Scott is worthy of careful study, what must be the English dialect of George Eliot, the dialect which was our Shakespeare's, and which is true and pure enough to be used to-day in explanation of a knotty point in "Hamlet"?

"I hate the sound of women's voices; they're always either a-buzz or a-squeak—always either a-buzz or a-squeak. Mrs. Poyser keeps at the top o' the talk like a fife," George Eliot wrote in the latter half of the nineteenth century; while Shakespeare, in the beginning of the seventeenth, spoke of "an aiery of children, little eyases, that cry out on the top of question," *i.e.* talk.

George Eliot's perfection of dialect is, however, only part of that excellent literary method, to which—with two distinguished exceptions—ample justice has already been done by the best of her contemporaries. The end to which she applied the wonderful means at her command is a separate question for consideration, and surely we have only to study her works in order to perceive that she belonged to the remarkable few who have united the highest gifts to the noblest intentions.

Among the many styles of novel-writing popular to-day, two great and extreme schools may be singled out for cleverness and contrast. The one is a partisan of passion, the other a worshipper of conventionality. The first breaks free from all social law, to proclaim the sovereignty of feeling and impulse; the second paints human life as necessarily bound in the fetters of fashion and custom. In a certain class of French novelists we find the first

of these singular types of modern thought. It represents to us vice rampant under the more attractive title of Nature, and without the sequence of punishment which Nature visits on the so-called votaries who profane her name. It depicts to us, in eloquent writing, physical indulgence without limit, and also without the consequent diseases which are its natural result; caprice of feeling encouraged in both sexes to their mutual satisfaction, without the concomitant caprice of weariness, leading to neglect and desertion on the one side, to melancholy or jealousy on the other. To complete this theory, and indeed to render it possible or endurable to any but the basest minds, the world is pictured to us as holding only one generation. There are—in these strange studies of human existence—no aged persons suffering for the vices of their youth, no young children bearing the burden of their parents' sins, no sons and daughters dependent for comfort on the result of their father's conduct. The present is everything; and the present belongs only to those who are young at the moment. No action brings an indirect and undesired sequence. It is made to appear that if the unjust and arbitrary punishment of social opinion could be removed, there would be no punishment left for individual excess, no silent inevitable working of that great Mother Nature who has been profaned, and who bears in her bosom disease and death, as well as life and love, the destruction of her children as well as their nourishment.

The reverse of this school is one which is highly popular in England just now, being happily more tolerable to an English mind than the eloquent glorification of vice can yet make itself. It is a school which deifies custom and regards fashion almost as a sacred thing. In the pages of its votaries no one endures hunger, or runs about houseless; but some of the heroines suffer keenly because the tablecloths are put on crookedly at their homes, or the maid-servants present an untidy appearance when they open the door to visitors. We have pictures of poverty always closely pursued by vulgarity, and discomfort for ever treading on the heels of limited incomes. The adherents of this school do not deal, like Shakespeare and the poets, with the permanent heart of humanity, which throbs with the same great and simple impulses through all time. Their novels are little more than pictures of a code of manners and tone of thought which are woven out of the latest fashion, and will depart with the newest. The heaven of the personages moving therein is a higher social circle; the amelioration of character to which some of them are led through various trials is only an improvement of manners; a favoured few are translated from the miserable pit of vulgarity to a delightful knowledge of social etiquette: still more of them are made happy by a sufficient staff of servants

and an income large enough to secure a perpetual supply of the right sort of furniture. In a clever novel which appeared a few years ago, the heroine's happiness is represented as hopelessly lost while she persists in walking out in a bright silk dress; but when she renounces that sin against fashion, and enters into the ways of good taste as translated by the brief caprice of the day, life unfolds itself with bright promise before her; love and admission to good society hasten, like twin goddesses, to her embrace.

To neither of these two modern schools of fiction, did George Eliot belong, and the best refutation of their sophistries or their prejudices is to be found in her pictures of human life, which surpass those of either school both in truth and beauty, and make us understand that, on the one hand, no human soul is at peace with itself or of use to the world until it grasps—amid the narrow needs of to-day—the duties and capabilities of a whole life; and, on the other hand, that a pure man or woman, living in true and simple relationship to surrounding persons and things (which cannot be without the fulfilment of duty), is free of fashion, and stands above the stupid, unelastic laws of conventionalism.

"Adam Bede" is, perhaps, her masterpiece; it is the book which, of all she has written, keeps the nearest to the broad perpetual stream of persistent human interests. Its style is clear enough almost to escape our observation, the very perfection of the medium causing it to elude admiration; its suggestions of natural scenery fill up the background of the characters without diverting our attention from them, and rest in our minds longer than full descriptions could do; the wit of its secondary personages is no mere sparkle of words, but full of tender and humorous revelation of character: lastly, its plot is simple and clear, fulfilling Mr. Ruskin's demand that it should be "handled handily. . . . Comprehensible, not a mass that both your arms cannot get round; tenable, not a confused pebble heap of which you can only lift one pebble at a time." And it is worked out with so much power and pathos, such a strong hand of truth carries the tragedy on to the end, that our pitying protests are silenced; as the great poets silence us when they move us most, convincing us that *so*—just as they have said it—it was, and could not otherwise be. And we rise from its perusal with a feeling that nothing can be said about this book which it does not say for itself; only one answer need be given to those who question its excellence, "Read it." If this does not suffice, no dissertation or explanation can make a difference.

The story begins, like the actual tragedies of life, without threats or evil omens, in clear gay sunlight, and minus the growling of any melodramatic thunder. It goes on amid carelessness

and laughter, amid ploughing, churning, and cooking, in an atmosphere of scolding and kisses, gossip and flirtation, work and leisure, and culminates so to a tragic and natural end. There is nothing arbitrary here, no introduction of extraneous machinery to punish the wrong-doers; there is indeed no interference of obnoxious social and so-called artificial laws until the worst of the tragedy is over. Hetty is not driven to her great sin because she is cast away by her friends; they are still ignorant of her first fault when she strives to destroy its unthought-of consequences by a second. She is even convinced that she might find refuge and help, beyond the need of further sin, with the pure and loving Dinah; but she wants more than this. She had begun by playing at life like an irresponsible kitten, only to find afterwards in her own heart the complicated needs of a woman, self-esteem, respect of friends, an assured position, a natural guardian for her child; all these she discovered to be necessary for her own happiness, as well as the kisses and praise in summer weather for which she had forfeited them all. No unnatural picture is here presented to us of remorse in a nature too narrow to understand sin in the abstract, Hetty is sorry for herself, not repentant of her wrong-doing. This blind and cruel Mother Nature whose instincts she has followed (without any of those limitations of intelligence and self-restraint, and outlook towards consequences to others or ourselves, which we call virtue) has led her onwards through the paths of self-indulgence to the way of self-destruction. There is none of the original light-hearted Hetty left when she emerges from the wood where her infant lies forsaken.

And yet, at the beginning, Hetty has been shown to us as a natural picture of what is called by most persons innocence. She has no evil intentions, she bears malice against no one, and has no apparent leaning towards what is depraved and vicious. She only loves herself, Hetty Sorrel, very well indeed; has a limited appreciation of any other motive for action than the pleasure of Hetty Sorrel; refuses to see any distinction between right and wrong except as they visibly affect the present enjoyment of Hetty Sorrel. She intends just to please herself and to mind what no one else says; and this terrible and unexpected end comes upon her. The great dumb laws of Nature, which give us no kindly warnings when we are breaking them, fall like an avalanche on this feeble creature, and crush her utterly. In the terrible consequences of her fault she looks back at the temptation to it and finds it insufficient, not worth its results. The selfish indulgence which brought her to this position makes her keenly miserable in it. She wants to be comfortable; she wants to be well thought of; she wants to be married to a man who is fond of her; she wants, in fact, good things which she can only

get from other people, and of which she has already dissipated the price. She would conceal her fault if she could, even now, at the cost of murder, and go on cheating her friends with false coin after the real is spent.

But here, also, she cannot succeed. She is not strong enough anywhere. She has no more self-restraint in times of danger than in times of delight; she only weaves the web of fate (which is the sequence of character) more closely about her stumbling feet. No dark and repulsive visions of that character rose before us when she tripped in her loveliness and vanity through the summer woods, nothing in the world seeming (in her own esteem) too good for Hetty Sorrel; and yet, when we look back, we see the end in that beginning. The harvest has ripened fast; but it is the natural fruit of the seed sown.

The mysterious laws of Nature permit the partner of her wrongdoing to go freer than his companion from actual immediate personal punishment. The consequences of his fault do not so directly interfere with the circumstances of his life, and if he had been a worse man he would have suffered less. But in his sufferings George Eliot teaches us to perceive the best hope for him. A man who could be happy while others endured misery for his sin would have had to live afterwards with a companion little better than a beast; that companion being himself. His penalty would have been the degradation of his own nature.

The tragic story of Adam Bede is rendered doubly tragic by its simplicity, by the absence of extraneous accident and adventure. We feel that this is no romance of fiction, but rather a simple history of those easy beginnings of wrong which may all, and which do some of them, work on to such an end. We understand, with Arthur Donnithorne, that we may be guilty of a crime, even when we have not directly intended it, but have only accepted the possibility of it in working out our own pleasures. Scott has chosen a similar subject in "The Heart of Mid-Lothian," but he has not pictured Effie's nature as so much hardened by her sin as was Hetty Sorrel's; he has also given to Effie a strong maternal feeling. It is, however, one of the most terrible consequences of such a fault as Hetty's that it tends to destroy the affections as well as the sacredness of motherhood, and to convert that which should be a blessing into a burden and disgrace. Certainly, the end of Hetty, the poor miserable prisoner, never given back to the warm happy life she loved, stirs us more keenly, and with a fuller sense of truth, than the uneasy grandeur and dissatisfied fine-lady life of Effie Staunton. There is another point in Sir Walter Scott's great romance in which—perhaps because, as men suffer less in such a tragedy than women, a man must be less keen than a woman to perceive all its work-



ings—he falls short of the perfect justice which ought to follow poetic perception, and deals out judgment like a mere novelist who permits himself to have favourites among his characters. This point is the history of Madge Wildfire. The great romancist makes us feel in the delineation of George Robertson, or Staunton, that his character would have been utterly repulsive if he had not felt keenly Effie's sufferings, and desired to make her the best reparation in his power. And yet we perceive him indifferent to the sad result of his earlier sin in the pitiable condition of Madge Wildfire; we are expected to be indifferent ourselves: because the poor creature is not revealed to us in the strong light of the novelist's compassion her madness becomes only an interesting incident in so much as it affects the fate of Effie Deans.

Again, a higher note of feeling is touched in the tenderness of Dinah than even in the sisterly devotion of Jeanie Deans. The brave Scotch lassie is inspired by the hope of saving her unhappy sister's life; the quaint Methodist maiden sees no such blessed chance before her, but she has a full assurance that all is not lost even if Hetty must suffer the extreme punishment, an assurance so sublimely strong that she feels capable of conveying it to the poor miserable girl herself. Sin is worse than death, love is stronger than either, is the divine teaching of every word and action of hers, from the moment she appears at the prison door until the terrible hour when she clasps Hetty in her arms within sight of the scaffold.

On this one theme, then, George Eliot has worked out a truer tragedy, because more sublimely simple and less involved in the intricacies of romance, than her great predecessor.

When we come to her love-story—almost every great writer having produced one love-tragedy pure and simple, as Shakespeare wrote "Romeo and Juliet," Sir Walter Scott "The Bride of Lammermoor"—we find the deficiency of a somewhat unworthy hero. The tragedy of "The Mill on the Floss" is essentially one of modern life; in the parting of the lovers the voluntary sacrifice so often demanded to-day plays the part of the cruel persecution of old times. It is only by a delicate treatment of a difficult subject that we are enabled to understand how Maggie can be weak enough to drift into an affection for Stephen, and yet strong enough to refuse to marry him. A sense of freedom to love, or obligation not to love has, among persons living in habits of self-control, more to do with the voluntariness of affection than the theory of *Wahlverwandschaften* would lead us to believe. But Maggie's situation was peculiar enough to leave her a sense of freedom of feeling until the time for action came, then she realized that she was bound. The perplexities of opposing desires had grown strong enough meanwhile to destroy her peace

of mind, but she was able to cling with a touching persistence to the one conviction that it could not be right to work out her own happiness through the misery of others. The sense of what was due to those who had trusted her, was as deep within her as the passionate longing to be at last happy herself. She says, in one of her moments of strongest temptation, "The real tie lies in the feelings and expectations we have raised in others' minds. Else all pledges might be broken when there was no outward penalty. There would be no such thing as faithfulness." And, again, "If life did not make duties for us before love comes, love would be a sign that two people ought to belong to each other." Wherein, simply spoken, lies the moral of the whole matter.

From bright and handsome Maggie Tulliver to a miserly old weaver the distance in subject is very great; but "The Mill on the Floss" and "Silas Marner" both give us the same charming pictures of English country life in the near past, and of quaint English country people, with their simple ways and their curious mode of talk. The sketches of childhood which they present to us, like those in "Adam Bede" and in "Scenes from Clerical Life," are full of tender womanly touches, justifying Mr. Swinburne's words of praise:—

"Duty divine and Thought with eyes of fire,  
Still following Righteousness with deep desire,  
Shone sole and stern before her and above,  
Sure stars and sole to steer by; but more sweet  
Shone lower the loveliest lamp for earthly feet;  
The light of little children, and their love."

Silas Marner, the poor old weaver himself, is a unique and pathetic figure in literature. He is no miser from natural greediness; his life has been narrowed for him, by the wrongdoing of others, to the smallest circle of interests on which a human soul can starve without actually dying. He is in himself a good and simple old man, whom injustice may perplex, but cannot sour. He recedes more and more from human companionship as he finds it hurtful and fraught with pain, but he is not embittered, only full of wonder.

George Eliot has a gift for the sympathetic rendering of the characters of such good old men. She has given us a companion picture in the minister in "Felix Holt." Not a few of us keep in our memories a sacred place for some whom we have known long ago, and who were not wholly unlike these pictures; men who were unlearned in the wisdom of this world, and yet knew how to guide an infant's steps with precepts which would help him in after-life more than the books of the philosophers or the counsels

of the worldly wise; men so pure in their unselfishness, so simple in their truthfulness, so patient in their persistent diligence in the performance of duty, so unambitious in their expectations of reward, so bravely straightforward and kind in the face of a lying and cruel world, that we keep the memory of their lives as a refreshing thought in the midst of the hideous careers and almost as hideous precepts which are not uncommon in society, to-day and always. Such of us who have reason to cherish these sacred memories hold it not the least of George Eliot's claims to our gratitude that she has known how to depict to us, not unworthily, this simple and excellent, this unlearned but wholly incorruptible type of human nature. Others might have sketched for us the same characters; but they would have been exaggerated probably into oddities, oddities whom we liked, but at whom we must be permitted to laugh. And whoever thinks of laughing at the poor old weaver, Silas Marner? Who does not rather regard him with absolute tenderness, with a desire to smooth the road for his failing steps, to keep the warp and weft of life straight for his perplexed fingers?

The youthful heroines of "Felix Holt" and "Silas Marner" are different in many particulars and similar only in one. Hester has a natural longing for luxury and refined society; she acts the fine lady and visits fine people, while Eppie hardly knows of a higher world than the village circle in which she moves. But they are both alike in their affection for the old men whom they call father; and it strikes us as no unnatural thing in the one or the other that she should finally refuse to step out of the lowly life to which her so-called father belongs, in order to possess riches and dwell in grand houses. Faithfulness to her first lover is entailed in the final choice of each girl, but we cannot consider that the *cause* of the choice. It is rather the influence of the quiet old man with whom she has lived so long, who has represented to her all that is simplest, truest, and best in life; the permanent good among fleeting attractions; and whose image she cannot imagine transferred to the grander houses, the finer society to which she is invited. The supreme sincerity of George Eliot is proved in nothing more strongly than in the fact that she leaves us satisfied that her heroines should choose poverty rather than wealth. We have no lingering regrets for the luxuries and the good society which they lose thereby (regrets which would prove that the spirit of the book had not prepared us sufficiently for its end, which would make that end only an ambitious and incomplete effort), we do not even think that Hester or Eppie has behaved nobly, she seems only to have acted *naturally* in refusing riches. How could the triumph of the author's principles be more complete?

This question of poverty has been dealt with very variously by different writers; we may suppose that each has treated it from the point of view at which it touched most keenly his own nature. With many of the popular writers of the day poverty is represented as being very vulgar or very uncomfortable. It is not admitted that we may live in a simpler way, with fewer appliances for pleasure and ease than others of our own rank, without being ashamed and unhappy; unless indeed we have a deficiency of good taste.

With Thackeray poverty was always mean. He touched its consequences more from the spiritual than the material side, but still he made its influence debasing. He does not tell us, in "Vanity Fair," that Emmy's parents, when they lost their fortune, had to sit on horsehair chairs and drink out of cracked cups; but he sours the kindly mother's nature strangely indeed. And we know of nothing sadder in fiction, or more humiliating to human nature, than the picture of Clive's home in "The Newcomes," after misfortune had overtaken the household. The horrible temper of the mother-in-law, the mean acquiescence of the silly wife, the weak-spiritedness of the husband himself, form a picture which even the courage of the old colonel fails to redeem. To see a fine nature daily tormented by small insults, because only of the poverty of the family and the angry discontent of the women, is too painful a spectacle. We want to shut our eyes and turn another way.

Dickens, on the other hand, whether he liked poverty himself or not, had a knack of depicting it as the most cheerful and delightful thing in existence. As long as there was abundance of money every one was melancholy, nobody behaved properly; but when once want had looked in at the doorway, provided that he did not actually force an entrance, all the world was as blithe as a lark from morning to-night.

To live in a kitchen compels vulgarity in Mrs. Oliphant's novels; it necessitates meanness in Thackeray's; but in Dickens' it is an assurance of joy, honesty, and content. A shining kettle is a more inspiring sight than any quantity of polished silver; and a man has hard work indeed to reach the highest pitch of excellence if he is not also poor. Are not these views exaggerated or one-sided? Is there not a truer and a nobler picture possible, in which the precise amount of income is a mere incident, not a predominating influence on the lives of men and women?

We find such pictures in Shakespeare and the poets, and if we study carefully the stories of George Eliot we shall find in her also a fine perception of the value of inward over outward things in human life. She hardly touches upon the quality of her heroines' dresses or the number of their servants. If the question

of costume comes in at all, it is with a consciousness that Eppie may look as well in her print gown as Nancy Lammeter did years before in her silvery silk. Lesser writers, when they are intending an ultimate triumph to poverty and fine principles, cannot forbear yielding little side tributes to the delights of the opposite position; they will not go back to the flesh-pots of Egypt, but they must describe them, how excellently the flesh was cooked, in what delightfully artistic pots it was served. When Godfrey Cass and his wife visited Eppie and her adopted father, it would have been easy to indulge in a little description of the superiority of Mrs. Cass's dress and manners. Eppie might have been represented as overcome by them at first, although her filial affection for the weaver would have ultimately triumphed. We should have known that she had proved her moral position superior to that of the greater people, but we should have had an uncomfortable consciousness of an outward inferiority at the same time.

Eppie's profound and yet natural simplicity saves her from this humiliation. Having no longing for the actual good things of a sphere above her own, she has no desire for even the outward appearance of them. Her dress, her style of living, the absence of much furniture in her home, do not, for a moment, embarrass her clear mind or suggest the shadow of shame. Why should she blush to be without things that it would be wrong for her to get? Why should she feel discomposed because she had not that polish of speech which she could only have obtained by neglecting her actual duties? She is the right thing in the right place, and it would have shown more idiocy than intelligence to feel remorseful because she would not prove the right thing in another place, which was not hers.

One of the most healthful, because the most natural, pictures of middle-class poverty which literature has given to us is that of the home of the Garths in "Middlemarch." It is a sketch which shows to us the probable troubles of such poverty, the want of means to apprentice the boys, the necessity for the girls to leave home, and so on; but false shame has no place there. Mrs. Garth goes on washing-up the breakfast things while the vicar makes his call; and we straightway wonder why we ever thought her occupation less lady-like than crewel work; it does not blunt refinement or debar intelligence. If she had wiped her hands hastily and sat down, hot and discomposed, and tried to look as if she had been doing nothing of the sort, we might indeed have blushed with her, and ought perhaps to have blushed for her. But if the authoress had been clever enough (as this authoress would have been if she had put her talent in harness to the prejudices of her time) we should have sympathized with

Mrs. Garth, and might have thought, "Could not her husband contrive *somehow* to keep a servant to do this work?" and our hot indignation would have gone out to him; we should have said that it was his duty to give up theories and to make money; that a man's highest virtue was to look after the members of his family and to place them in the best possible position. If they begin life by keeping no servant he must strain his faculties to procure them one; if they begin with one he must toil his utmost to secure them two; and so on up all the steps of the arbitrary social scale; and, if we could have had our own way, a good man would have been spoiled; while clever, capable Mrs. Garth would have sat with her hands before her in her front parlour, trying to enjoy the nominal ease which her husband had purchased too dearly. Mr. Garth had his faults, however; and it was a great fault, almost an inexcusable fault in so good a man, to make himself a surety for the good-for-nothing Fred. He had no possible right to endanger the future of his children, in order to oblige a self-indulgent, extravagant, rich man's son. He did not fail in his duty when he preferred good work with little pay to bad work and more money; but he did fail when he could not say "no" to an unreasonable demand. Good nature is sometimes a criminal form of self-indulgence; it is succumbing to the weakness of a moment; buying ease and approbation on one occasion for ourselves at the cost of terrible trouble and disappointment in the future, which will not fall on ourselves only, but on others also who have a right to expect thoughtful protection from us.

This novel of "Middlemarch" deals, more than George Eliot's earlier works, with the intricacies of an advanced civilization; and as sad as Dorothea's blind seekings after a finer type of life than was open to her in her limited sphere is the history of Lydgate's failures. The heroes of old time, the men who were stronger than their fellows, are depicted to us struggling against the brute forces of Nature, or warring against avowed adversaries. The heroes of to-day must fight against their friends. Man has, in a great degree, subdued Nature; he has bridged the Atlantic with his steamers, brought far distant lands within speaking distance with his cables; made, as we have often been assured, the fire his servant and the lightning his messenger; but he has become a more complicated animal than his forefather was, and is more dependent on his fellow creatures. It is hard for him to be entirely noble to-day, entirely free to choose the best course; and Lydgate, though he began life from a good starting-point for independence, and was not crippled by narrowness in his desires or prejudices in his judgment, was not likely to keep his freedom long. He had too much scorn of other men and of their influence

on his life ; and yet it was partly by and through these men that he had to work ; he could not be entirely independent, for they were his instruments ; he grasped the weapon of intercourse carelessly, like a knife with which he meant to cut his way to knowledge and success ; and the blade maimed him, where the handle might have helped. His chosen pursuit lay amongst his fellow men ; freedom to carry it out depended in a measure on their approbation ; and yet he thought himself at liberty to follow his own ideas entirely ; he believed that the clue to his success lay altogether in his single-mindedness. He was single-minded enough to deserve a better fate : but he was practically wrong ; even from his own scientific point of view. If he had had to calculate the course of a planet, he would have been too wise to ignore the smaller influences while he gave the full weight to the greater attractions. Yet he left out of the calculation for his own course of life the innumerable small social bodies, highly charged with heavy prejudices, through which he had to move. The one act of his life which, taken singly, maimed him more than any other, was his marriage. A good woman might have helped him in many crises where Rosamond hindered. Dorothea had made the mistake of supposing that the quality of tenderness was not essential in a husband ; Lydgate followed it by the error of believing that intellect was not necessary in a wife. It is astonishing how many men, self-indulgent, strongly perceptive of the requirements of their own comfort in other respects, deny themselves the luxury of a household companion who is capable of entering into their ideas and furthering their ambitions. It was not, however, poverty of resource which compelled Lydgate to put up with an inferior wife ; it was not that he was without the qualities that would have entitled him to win a noble woman. He married Rosamond solely because he thought that she possessed everything which a man required to find in his wife ; he was not blinded by passion so much as led astray by a want of consideration of the ultimate importance of the subject ; just as he had been in his dealings with the Mawmseys and Gambits, the grocers and apothecaries of Middlemarch. If any one persists in looking at his intended goal without regarding the obstacles about his feet, he may easily break his leg over a wheelbarrow, at a moment when a strong man would have opposed his progress in vain.

Lydgate, the capable man baffled by his own mistakes, the man of heroic resolve entangled in the web of other people's meanness, is a solitary picture in George Eliot's works. Adam Bede kept his course straight to the end, and Tito Melema never possessed any noble qualities. But Dorothea had her prototype in Romola.

Both these heroines made mistakes in their marriages; they failed to find in their husbands the true men of their imagination, and in their histories there is much noble teaching for the women of to-day. Surely the thought of Dorothea that "however just her indignation might be, her ideal was not to claim justice, but to give tenderness," may keep, in the memories of all good women, a place beside the lessons learnt from "The Queen's Garden" for help and inspiration. And for men and women alike what subtle warning and suggestion are to be found in these words from "Romola":—"We prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil which gradually determines character."

In "Armgart" we are told that

"We must bury our dead joys,  
And live above them with a living world."

And, further, it is beautifully suggested to us—

"Mothers do so, bereaved; then learn to love  
Another's living child."

For even sorrow has no right to be selfish; there is always left to us the hope of ministering to the joy of another.

We have seen how George Eliot could expound to us the broad claims of the world's brotherhood on individual lives, how she could reveal to us in the human heart the small beginnings of great crimes, how she could leave us satisfied with poverty and unafraid of death: but she could also feel and express with simplicity all the intensity of passionate personal devotion:—

"Sweet evenings come and go, love,  
They came and went of yore:  
This evening of our life, love,  
Shall go and come no more.

"When we have passed away, love,  
All things will keep their name;  
But yet no life on earth, love,  
With ours will be the same.

"The daisies will be there, love,  
The stars in heaven will shine:  
I shall not feel thy wish, love,  
Nor thou my hand in thine.

"A better time will come, love,  
And better souls be born:  
I would not be the best, love,  
To leave thee now forlorn."



In the line "I shall not feel thy wish, love," is revealed all the unselfishness which belonged to George Eliot's conception of love. She breathed an elevating spirit into every subject that she touched, and her highest claim to our gratitude is not her literary excellence, great as that is; not her wit, humour, or pathos; but the noble purpose which gave to her genius a larger life. She

"Saw the human nature broad,  
At both sides, comprehending too the souls',  
And all the high necessities of art."

And she always remained true to her highest perceptions.

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#### ART. V.—WORKING-CLASS INSURANCE AS IT IS.

1. *Reports of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies for the year ending December 31, 1879.* Part I. (A.) 373—Sess. 2. 1880.
2. *Life Assurance Companies.* Statements and Abstracts of Reports for 1880. Parl. Papers. 1881. No. 216.
3. *Paupers, Indoor* (Members of Benefit Societies). Parl. Papers. 1881. No. 444.

**T**HE Annual Report of the Chief Registrar of Friendly Societies is a document which deserves far more attention than it usually receives. Its contents are of interest and value to a much larger class than that which comprises the officers and members of the Societies with whose affairs it specially deals. The whole nation is concerned in the welfare of institutions into whose exchequers such vast sums are being poured by its industrial population every year. These associations are far more to the working classes than assurance companies are to the middle and wealthier classes. To the latter, a life assurance policy is often but a supplementary provision for the family when the bread-winner is removed; but for the immense majority of wage-earners, the Friendly Society or the Industrial Assurance Company takes all that they can afford to put by against the "rainy days" and the dark days that are sure to come. The "Society," as they commonly call it, is their only resource, and if that goes, everything goes, so far as provision for their families is concerned. But, in the very nature of the case, the evil results of failure cannot be limited to the immediate sufferers; the Poor-law must, sooner or later, make good the loss, and that, of course, means that the entire community shares in the disaster.

In the opinion of the Chief Registrar, "the current estimate of £2,000,000 yearly as being virtually saved to the Poor-rates, through the operation of Friendly Societies, must be far within

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the mark." If this be the case, then on this ground alone, to say nothing of higher considerations, the question of the soundness or unsoundness of these valuable institutions must be one which concerns every person in the kingdom.

No more important document has ever been presented by the Chief Registrar to Parliament and the country, than the Report for 1879 which has been issued during the present year. It enables us, for the first time, accurately to estimate the financial condition of a not inconsiderable proportion of all the registered Friendly Societies in England and Wales. For many years serious doubts have been felt as to the actual solvency of a number of these Societies, and, in order to test the truth of these suspicions, Parliament enacted in 1875 that a valuation of the liabilities and the assets of all Friendly Societies should be made, at least once in every five years, by a competent valuer. The form to be used in making a "Return" of these valuations to the department was prescribed, and the date within which the first returns were required to be sent in was fixed at December 31, 1880. Only eighteen valuation returns were received by the Chief Registrar in 1877, and no more than forty during 1878, although in each Annual Report issued since the passing of the Act, the obligation to make such returns has been most strongly insisted upon. In 1879, however, 948 valuation returns were received by the department; and, in an Appendix of sixty-seven pages, the Chief-Registrar gives an abstract of these returns, in the last Report presented by him to Parliament. (Friendly Societies, &c., Report, 1879. Part. I.—(A).

It would be impossible to exaggerate the importance of the information contained in this Appendix. At the date of this report there were 15,379 Registered Friendly Societies and Branches in England and Wales, 12,300 of which had made the usual annual returns, showing an aggregate membership of 4,672,175, and total accumulated funds amounting to £12,148,609. From this it appears that nearly one-fifth of the entire population of the country were directly interested in the continued stability of Friendly Societies; any evidence which can be adduced upon this point must, therefore, be of the greatest possible value, especially when, as in this case, it is evidence which is thoroughly reliable. It is on this account that we invite the attention of our readers to the valuation returns, of which an abstract is placed before us by the Chief Registrar; we have, however, summarized its voluminous contents, and give the results in a form which we trust no one can fail to understand.

Perhaps, however, it may be desirable briefly to explain what a valuation is, and how it should be made, to be acceptable to the authorities, and of real value to the members of the Friendly