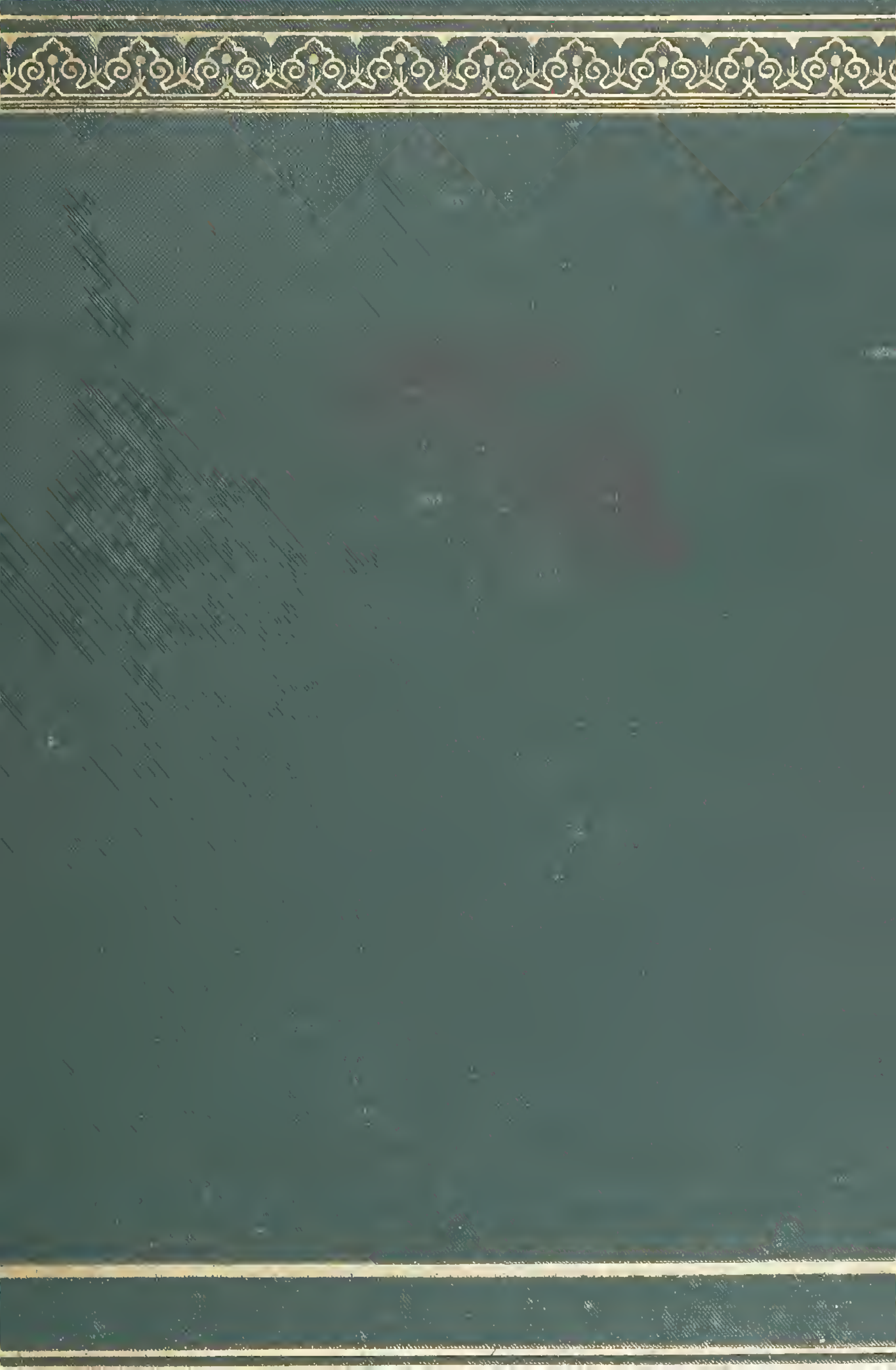

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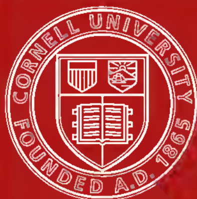

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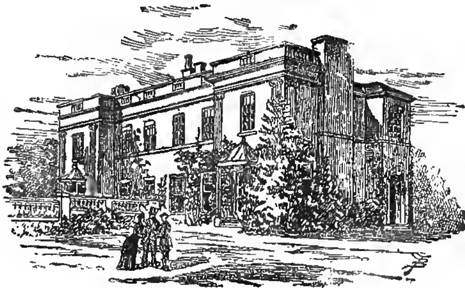

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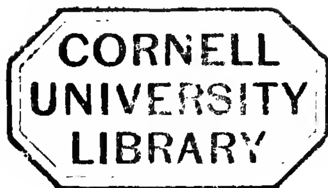

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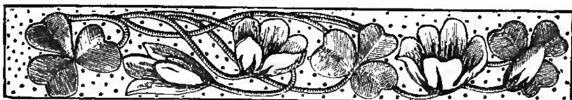
PREFACE.

To the admirers of "George Eliot" no apology will be needed for this attempt to throw light upon her writings by identifying her characters with living persons of whom she had knowledge, and her descriptions of places and scenery with portions of that Midland tract where she spent her youth and early womanhood.

More than most writers of fiction, "George Eliot" took her characters and incidents from actual life, and set them amid scenes with which she herself was familiar and loved; and to the student of her works anything that assists him in testing the fidelity with which she presented the former and pictured the latter, must be of lasting interest. It is in that belief that this volume is given to the public; and it is in the humble capacity of guide that the writer

presents himself. As much as possible the book is a compilation from "George Eliot's" own works: the plan adopted being to allow the gifted authoress wherever possible to speak for herself, in her own inimitable language and style. My chief function has been to point out the objects of interest: it is "George Eliot" who addresses the audience.

S. P.



Scenes from the "George Eliot" Country

"Those long days measured by my little feet
Had chronicles which yield me many a text."

CHAPTER I.

BIRTHPLACE AND EARLY HOME.

IT is the supreme distinction of Warwickshire that it has given to the world both Shakespeare and "George Eliot." Less than thirty miles, as the crow flies, from Stratford-on-Avon, where the "poet of all time" first saw the light, near the town of Nuneaton, was born MARY ANN EVANS ("GEORGE ELIOT"), who stands out from the number of gifted women almost as distinct a personality as is Shakespeare among his brother poets. George Eliot's writings have taken such a hold upon the generation in which she lived, especially upon the more cultured portion of her country men and women, and upon English-speaking people the world over, that everything pertaining to her career is of interest. All, indeed, affecting her early life—her parents, her home, the social position in which she moved, her environment, the people she was brought in contact with, and everything that went to form her character and develop her genius—are of special importance; for it was from the storehouse of her experience gained in those early years that she subsequently gave that gallery of characters contained in her stories, and imparted the local

colouring which have made the world her debtor. I can imagine that in years to come people will go to George Eliot's country, book in hand, as they now go to Shakespeare's, or Scott's, or Charlotte Brontë's, to identify scenes in her novels, and judge for themselves as to the fidelity with which she has presented them; to see those Warwickshire, Staffordshire, and Derbyshire people, from among whom she obtained many of her types of character, and listen to the dialect and idiom in which they discourse.

Nuneaton is neither ignorant of, nor indifferent to, the distinction that has come to it by reason of George Eliot's associations with the district. It has not yet, however, been equal to the enterprise of producing a hand-book which would guide the stranger to spots of interest identified with her life and works. But while you would search the town in vain for a scrap of printed matter bearing upon those places, the chances are that the first adult person you met in the street would give you much of the information you required, and what he or she failed in would be made up by the next person you came across. Years ago I entered the town to make investigations, knowing nothing beyond this, that George Eliot was born near to, that many of the scenes of her earliest stories were in the district, and that the persons and events described in those stories were realities of common knowledge. But within an hour I was sufficiently posted up to cover the whole field of "Scenes of Clerical Life;" and I entered on a three days' tour that yielded excellent results. "Oh, yes," said my pleasant informant, "all the people in 'Scenes of Clerical Life' are real. Dead and gone now, but with relatives still in the town. Janet Dempster was a real character; so was her husband, the lawyer, and the main features of their story are but a statement of actual facts. The house in which they dwelt could be seen.

It was not far from the church. Hard by was the inn where Dempster planned and got up the demonstration against the curate, Mr. Tryan, who died of a broken heart. Poor loving and lovely Milly Barton, too, was a reality. Her grave could be seen in Chilvers Coton church-yard, and her tombstone would tell me something of her many virtues," and so on. Subsequent visits have added to the stock of information then gained, and it is the object of these pages to communicate it to the reader.

GRIFF HOUSE, GEORGE ELIOT'S HOME.

George Eliot's father was Robert Evans, a Staffordshire man, from Ellaston, near Ashbourn, who rose from being carpenter to be forester, and who from forester came to the estate of the Newdegate family, at Nuneaton, as land agent. The house in which he first lived was South Farm, Arbury, and here his daughter, Mary Ann Evans, was born on the 22nd November, 1819. It has often been stated that her birth took place at Griff House, but that is incorrect, though she was taken there

when a baby six months old, on the removal of her father to the larger residence, and at Griff House she remained until she was 21, with the exception of an interval when she was boarded at school at Coventry. South Arbury Farm stands within the confines of Arbury Park, and is approached from the carriage drive through a short avenue of lofty elms. It is a small, low-roofed farmhouse, nestling in behind a clump of trees, and with open, flat fields stretching away southward. Without anything striking about it, it looks from its neat and well-kept garden, and grounds and surroundings, a cosy little place. The great attraction is that here was born the child who in after years was to give the district a pre-eminence over all the rest of Warwickshire, with the exception of that south-western corner that Shakespeare has immortalised.

Within a day's walk of this little farmhouse are all the spots and places made interesting from their association with George Eliot's three earliest stories,—"Scenes of Clerical Life," as well as the home of her childhood. Looking up the short avenue of elms, and across the grassy park, one sees, at a distance of less than a mile, the main front of Arbury Hall, the Cheverel Manor of "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story." To the left, on regaining the carriage drive, on through the western entrance of the park —something over a mile—topping a hill, stands Astley Church, the "Knebley Church" of the story. To the right, out of the eastern entrance, a mile away in the other direction, is Griff House; crowning a hill to the north of the hall is Stockingford, the "Padiham Common" of "Janet's Repentance;" two miles further off, down in the "flat, low-lying fields," is the town of Nuneaton, the "Milby" of the same story; and contiguous to it—a straggling suburb—is Chilvers Coton, made famous as the "Shepperton" of the story of "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton."

Griff House, to which Mary Ann Evans was brought a baby, and which she left a woman, stands on the high road between Nuneaton and Coventry, at a little more than a mile from the former town. It is a two-storeyed picturesque old residence, more manor-house than farm-house, and indeed, without a suggestion of the latter until you walk round to the back and see the farm buildings. Built of red brick, toned down by time to the colour that harmonises so sweetly with this Midland landscape, and ivy clad, it stands back sufficiently from the road to have a lawn in front dotted with tall trees and planted with abundant holly and privet, two stately Norway firs flanking the entrance-gate; looking in the February sunshine bright and cheerful, and suggesting in its quaintness an old-world knowledge of which the spectator is in ignorance.

My first visit to the house, years ago, is memorable because of having been shown around it, and having had a long conversation with the nephew of George Eliot respecting the childhood of his illustrious aunt. The house was then and now is occupied by Mr. Isaac Evans, George Eliot's brother, the "Tom Tulliver" of "Mill on the Floss." Mr. Evans, who is now in enfeebled health, still carries on, in conjunction with his son, the business of land agent, combining with it the profession of mining engineer. There are extensive farm-buildings at the back of the house, and kitchen garden, which the nephew informed me was in much the same state as in his aunt's time. It is a delicious old garden, where vegetables, fruits, and flowers grow together in affectionate intermingling and confusion. Here, too, is the old summer-house, furnished with a round table, and here brother and sister must often on "one of their happy days" have eaten strawberries in company, and rubbed together their faces "like two friendly ponies," and, in the same spot when Tom neglected her, Maggie must

have meditated her revenge. No doubt it was to this summer-house, and not at "Uncle Pullets," to which Tom, Maggie, and Cousin Lucy adjourned after dinner to enjoy their dessert, for in the field adjoining the garden is still to be seen the convenient pond into which Maggie, in her fit of jealousy, knocked Lucy.

And what is the character of the scenery to which Mary Ann Evans first lifted up her childish eyes? The surrounding country is gently undulating, well wooded, and sweetly picturesque. Quite a feature of the scenery—and indeed of Warwickshire generally—is, that the hedges are everywhere closely planted with trees, whose height, as well as the riotous wastefulness of the hedge-rows, give evidence of a kindly soil and climate. Close to Griff House are a few labourers' cottages, some of them thatched, and in one of which Mary Ann Evans is said to have taught as a Sunday School teacher. Around those cottages are a great many mounds of earth now grass-grown, the refuse heaps from exhausted coal and iron pits. A quarter of a mile away is the partly coal mining and partly manufacturing village of Griff; and tall chimnies here and there tell of collieries in other directions, especially Stockingford way, which is the centre of a colliery district, for we are here on the Warwickshire coalfield, which extends along the eastern part of the county from Coventry to Tamford, 16 miles, and is about three miles in breadth. But the coal-pits hereabout are but specks on an essentially rural landscape.

At the back of the house the flat fields stretch away towards Griff pits, and through some of those fields are foot-paths leading to the "round-pool," the "rookery elms," and probably to the "Red Deeps," where Maggie Tulliver had her stolen interviews with Philip Wakem. George Eliot's autobiographical poem, "Brother and Sister," is full of allusions to

her early home, to her brother whom she dearly loved, and to the incidents of her girlish life.

> "Long years have left their writing on my brow,
> But yet the freshness of the dew-fed beam
> Of those young mornings are about me now,
> When we two wandered toward the far-off stream."

Almost an ordinary lifetime had elapsed between leaving Griff House, and the writing of those lines; and in them we get a glimpse of the tender tenacity with which memory clung to everything connected with her early home. In the field adjoining the house lofty elms still serve as nesting places for cawing rooks, and one almost expects to get a glimpse of brother and sister as they wend their way hither, and of their mother at the gate, who having "stroked down" her daughter's tippet, and set her boy's frill, followed them "with the benediction of her gaze,"

> "Across the homestead to the rookery elms,
> Whose tall old trunks had each a grassy mound
> So rich for us, we counted them as realms
> With varied products: here were earth-nuts found;
>
> "And here the lady-fingers in deep shade;
> Here sloping toward the moat the rushes grew,
> The large to split for pith, the small to braid;
> While over all the dark rooks cawing flew:
>
> "And made a happy strange solemnity,
> A deep-toned chant from life unknown to me."

These lines convey an exact picture of the scene as it still exists. A few hundreds of yards away is the "brown canal," on whose banks she describes herself as sitting "in dreamy peace," watching as—

> "Slowly the barges floated into view,
> Rounding a grassy hill to me sublime,
> With some unknown beyond it, whither flew
> The parting cuckoo toward a fresh spring time.

"The wide-arched bridge, the scented elder flowers,
The wond'rous watery rings that died too soon,
The echoes of the quarry, the still hours
With white robe sweeping-on the shadeless noon:

"Were but my growing self, a part of me,
My present Past, my root of piety.

Then the fishing incident is related—an incident known to be autobiographical, and which is also given in "Mill on the Floss." "They were on their way to the Round Pool—that wonderful pool, which the floods had made a long while ago; no one knew how deep it was; and it was mysterious, too, that it should be an almost perfect round, framed in with willows and tall reeds, so that the water was only to be seen when you got close to the brink. The sight of the old favourite spot always heightened Tom's good humour, and he spoke to Maggie in the most amicable whispers, as he opened the precious basket and prepared their tackle. He threw her line for her, and put the rod into her hand. Maggie thought it probable that the small fish would come to her hook, and the large ones to Tom's. But she had forgotten all about the fish, and was looking dreamily at the glassy water, when Tom said in a loud whisper, 'Look, look, Maggie,' and came running to prevent her from snatching her line away."

A big fish was caught, and the gardener's observation was "that the little lass had luck," and she learnt that "luck is with glory wed."

CHAPTER II.

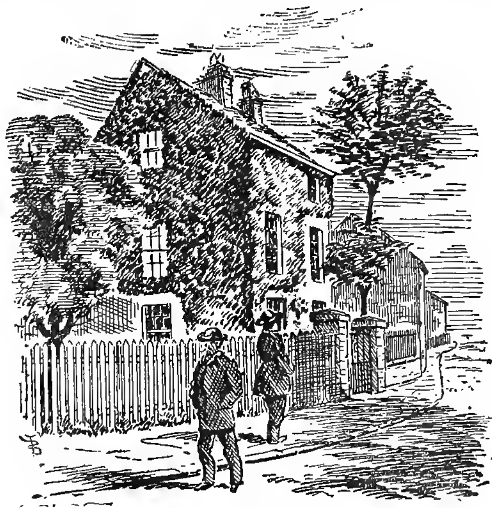
SCHOOL DAYS.

THE childhood of Mary Ann Evans was passed in the days prior to the introduction of steam, of railways, and of the electric telegraph. When she was a girl the "glory had not yet departed from the old coach roads; the great roadside inns were still brilliant with well-polished tankards, the smiling glances of pretty barmaids, and the repartees of jocose ostlers; the mail still announced itself by the merry notes of the horn; the hedge-cutter or the rick-thatcher might still know the exact hour by the unfailing yet otherwise meteoric apparition of the pea-green 'Tally-ho' or the yellow 'Independent'; and elderly gentlemen in pony chaises, quartering nervously to make way for the rolling, swinging swiftness, had not ceased to remark that times were finely changed since they used to see the pack-horses and hear the tinkling of their bells on this very highway." This description from the introduction to "Felix Holt" is a reminiscence of childhood. The coach running between Birmingham and Stamford passed Griff House twice daily, and it was the most sensational incident of each day for Mary Ann Evans and her brother Isaac to watch for its appearance from the front windows of their home. Long ago the coaches ceased from the road, for it is no doubt also

a bit of her own experience at Griff that a day came bringing with it "a crowd of burly navvies, with pickaxes and barrows, and while hardly a wrinkle is made in the fading mother's face, or a new curve of health in the blooming girl's, the hills are cut through or the trenches between them spanned; we choose our level, and the white steam pennon flies along it." And so for many years a railway has run past Griff House. That is one of the changes between then and now. Others are the result of the extension of coal mining in the district, the gathering together into factories of the spinners of silk and the weavers of cotton, and the thinning of a rather heavily timbered country. Sixty years ago the remains of Shakespeare's Forest of Arden could still be seen from the windows of Griff House.

Griff House is in the parish of Chilvers Coton, and when the time came for Mary Ann Evans to be sent to school, she first went to a dame-school in a cottage at Griff, and next to the National School at the village of Chilvers Coton, along with her brother Isaac. This would involve a walk of about a mile night and morning along the pleasant highway—the coach road—which has a certain dignity about it from its great width and being splendidly kept. It commands rather extensive views on either side; there are great undulations of wood and pasture; red-brick houses dot the landscape, and an occasional tall chimney betokens the site of a colliery, or a factory, once ribbon or cotton, but now probably devoted to the even more prosaic industry of felt-hat making. Near to Chilvers Coton the road rapidly dips, the canal is crossed, and you are in the village. For a short time only did Mary Ann attend the Chilvers Coton school, being soon removed to a school at Nuneaton, which would involve a walk of about half a mile farther.

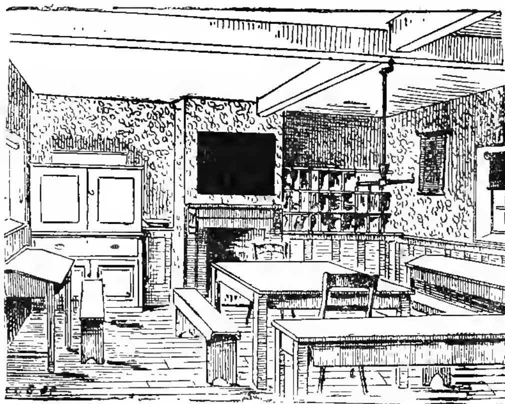
The school selected at Nuneaton was a private school for young ladies, standing in the pleasantest suburb of the town, opposite to the fine old parish church, and with the open fields stretching away beyond. It still exists, and that in much the same condition as when Mary Ann Evans was a pupil, and is yet used as a school. It is a sweet little dwelling-house in which the schoolmistress resides, with a certain picturesqueness in its ivy-covered front. There is, too, a small garden in front, and if you pass through the



THE SCHOOL HOUSE, NUNEATON.

wicket-gate and enter at the door, you will find a little porch or entrance hall, and proceeding through this to the right are the dwelling rooms, whilst on the left is the little school-room, plain, neat, rather narrow and low-roofed, with accommodation for about twenty scholars, and everything about it scrupulously orderly and cleanly. If you are so minded, the

pleasant and courteous schoolmistress will show you through the place, and then sit down and chat with you about the wonderful girl who was once a scholar there, respecting whom memories yet linger about the place, and whose name will be associated with the ivy-clad house and the little schoolroom as long as they endure. It was no doubt from what occurred at school when Mary Ann Evans was a pupil, that she long subsequently drew the sketch given in "Janet's Repentance" of the sensation caused by the visit of the Bishop at a Confirmation service at the parish church hard by. "The pupils at Miss Townley's were absolved from all lessons, and were going to church to see the Bishop, and to hear the Honourable and Reverend Mr. Prendergast, the rector, read



INTERIOR OF THE SCHOOLROOM.

the prayers—a high intellectual treat, as Miss Townley assured them. It seemed only natural that a rector who was honourable should read better than old Mr. Crewe, who was only a curate, and not honourable; and when little Clara Robins

wondered why some clergymen were rectors and others not, Ellen Marriott assured her with great confidence that it was only the clever men who were made rectors." Then follows a description of her school-fellows—Ellen Marriott, "a short, fair, plump girl, with blue eyes and sandy hair, which was this morning arranged in taller cannon curls than usual, for the reception of the episcopal benediction;" Maria Gardner, "who being also about to take upon herself the vows made in her name at baptism, had oiled and twisted her ringlets with especial care;" and Mary Dunn, whose "pale lanky hair could never be coaxed into permanent curl, and this morning the heat had brought it down to its natural condition of lankness earlier than usual."

By people still living, Mary Ann Evans is remembered at this time as an awkward girl, reserved, and serious far beyond her years, but observant, and addicted to the habit of sitting in corners and watching her elders. When not at school she was the constant companion of her brother, accompanying him in his fishing expeditions, and, indeed, taking part in every recreation in which he indulged, and having in those early years all the tastes of a boy. It was literally true, as she says in "Brother and Sister":—

> "We had the self-same world enlarged for each,
> By loving difference of girl and boy;
> The fruit that hung on high beyond my reach
> He plucked for me, and oft he must employ
>
> "A measuring glance to guide my tiny shoe,
> Where lay firm stepping-stones, or call to mind
> This thing I like my sister may not do,
> For she is little, and I must be kind."

Top-spinning, marble-playing, and digging for earth-nuts were indulged in together, and she speaks of her brother's sorrow

being her sorrow, and his joy sending "little leaps and thrills" through all her frame, and

> "My doll seemed lifeless, and no girlish toy
> Had any reason, when my brother came."

The only rival to her brother in her affections, was her father, to whom she was most devoted to the last; and he was passionately fond of the "little wench," just as Mr. Tulliver was of Maggie. It was to the rides and drives along the lanes around Griff in company with her father that she refers in "Looking Backward," when speaking of herself in the masculine gender. She says, "Indeed, my philosophical notions, such as they are, continually carry me back to the time when the fitful gleams of a spring day used to show me my own shadow as that of a small boy on a small pony, riding by the side of a larger cob-mounted shadow over the breezy upland which we used to dignify by the name of hills, or along by-roads with broad grassy borders and hedgerows reckless of utility, on our way to outlying hamlets, whose groups of inhabitants were as distinctive to my imagination as if they had belonged to different regions of the globe."

At twelve years of age Mary Ann Evans's school was again changed. She was taken from Nuneaton and sent to a boarding-school at Coventry. This school had a great repute in the locality. It was kept by two sisters, the Misses Franklin, of whom the younger, Miss Rebecca Franklin, was a woman of rare attainments, and she is credited with having imparted to Mary Ann Evans the careful precision of speech which afterwards distinguished her. The house where the Misses Franklin lived and carried on their school is situated in Little Park Street, not far from the famous Parish Church of St. Michael; and the curious may yet identify it in "No. 48." The street is a narrow one, and though near the centre of

the town is still almost entirely residential. "No. 48" has a plain brick front, with nothing noticeable about it, excepting an undue allowance of windows. At Coventry Mary Ann Evans was distinguished by devotion to her school studies, by her isolation from the other girls, and inwardly by her spiritual and religious struggles, the description of the like struggles of Maggie Tulliver being but a faithful reflex of her own at this and at a later period of her life.

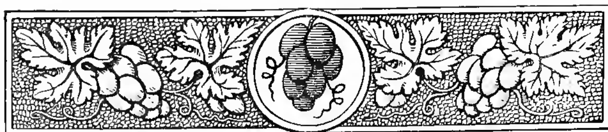
It would be when at school here that she experienced that "growing away" from her brother, which is not an uncommon experience, but which she so pathetically describes.

> "School parted us; we never found again
> That childish world where our two spirits mingled,
> Like scents from varying roses that remain
> One sweetness, nor can evermore be singled.
>
> "Yet the twin habit of that early time
> Lingered for long about the heart and tongue;
> We had been natives of one happy clime,
> And its dear accent to our utterance clung,
>
> "Till the dire years, whose awful name is Change,
> Had grasped our souls still yearning in divorce,
> And, pitiless, shaped them in two forms that range,
> Two elements which sever their life's course.
>
> "But were another childhood-world my share,
> I would be born a little sister there."

Mary Ann Evans remained at the school at Coventry until the end of her sixteenth year, when she was called home by the illness of her mother, who died in the summer of 1836. The cares of the house at Griff now entirely devolved upon her sister Christiana and herself; and during the next year, the former having married, Mary Ann was, after this brief probation, saddled with all the responsibilities of her father's housekeeper. Between the two sisters there was a strong

family love; but they were unlike in character, and there was no intellectual sympathy. Lucy in "Mill on the Floss" and Celia in "Middlemarch" have many of the characteristics of Christiana. Besides his business as land agent, Mr. Evans carried on a farm of his own, and at Griff the ordinary duties of a farmhouse had to be carried out by or under the supervision of his daughter. He offered to procure a housekeeper, but she preferred taking the entire management herself, and she devoted herself to the work with all the conscientiousness that might have been expected from her. She was a great adept at butter-making, and years after at Coventry she would explain that her right hand was broader than her left owing to the quantity of butter she had made at Griff. Only a person who had had experience would be likely to describe a dairy and the process of making butter as George Eliot has done in "Adam Bede." "The dairy was certainly worth looking at; it was a scene to sicken for, with a sort of calenture in hot and dusty streets—such coolness, such purity, such fresh fragrance of new-pressed cheese, of firm butter, of wooden vessels perpetually bathed in pure water; such soft colouring of red earthenware and creamy surfaces, brown wood and polished tin, grey limestone and rich orange-red rust on the iron weights and hooks and hinges." Then as to the butter-maker:—"And they are the prettiest attitudes and movements into which a pretty girl is thrown in making up butter—tossing movements that give a charming curve to the arm, and a sideward inclination of the round white neck; little patting and rolling movements with the palm of the hands, and nice adaptations and finishings, which cannot at all be effected without a great play of the pouting mouth and the dark eyes. And then the butter itself seems to communicate a fresh charm—it is so pure, so sweet-scented; it is turned

off the mould with such a beautiful firm surface, like marble in a pale yellow light." And she not only superintended the house, but carried on her own studies—languages and music; spent much time in organising clothing-clubs, visiting the poor, and other works of charity; and got through a great deal of miscellaneous reading.



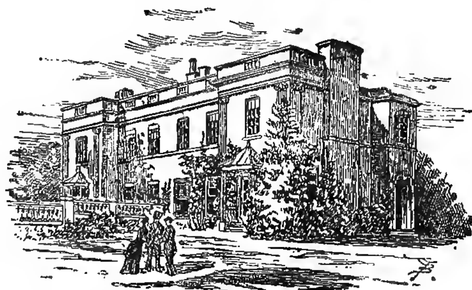
CHAPTER III.

REMOVAL TO COVENTRY.

THIS life at Griff continued for five or six years, and was then brought to a close by Mr. Evans relinquishing his business to his son, and removing with his daughter—when she was 23 years of age—to Foleshill, Coventry. Foleshill, though outside of the borough of Coventry, is really a straggling suburb of the town. The house which Mr. Evans occupied stands by the side of the Foleshill road. It is considerably altered since he occupied it. It is a pretty residence, commanding an extensive view over the fields to the town; is surrounded by ornamental grounds; and is partially shut out from the noise and bustle of the highway that runs in front, by a fringe of tall trees and shrubs. The house is now occupied by a manufacturer, whose cotton mill crowns the rising ground a few hundred yards away. Life here would be considerably different from what it was at Griff; for the isolated farmhouse was exchanged for the suburban villa, with the bustle of a considerable town in the air. Here Mary Ann Evans was still indefatigable in pursuing her studies; she continued deeply imbued with the necessity of living a religious life; and it is evident from her letters that she had deep spiritual aspirations.

But what most influenced her character and her subsequent life, was the friendship she formed with the Brays. Mr. Charles

Bray, a wealthy ribbon manufacturer, with his wife and her sister, lived in a pretty suburb of Coventry, a few minutes' walk from the house at Foleshill. They were highly cultivated people, devoted to philosophical and metaphysical inquiries, and interesting themselves in social and political questions, and in charitable work. When Mary Ann Evans was introduced to them they welcomed her to their small circle with all the ardour and friendship they could give to one whom they felt at once to be a kindred spirit; and to herself it was the opening up of a new world. She had on coming to Foleshill continued from the first her study of French, Italian, and



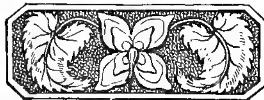
MR. EVANS'S RESIDENCE, FOLESHILL.

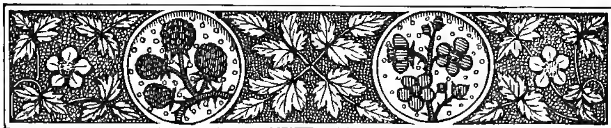
German, adding to these Greek and Latin, and continuing also her musical studies; but now she entered on that wider range of culture, embracing scientific, philosophical, and metaphysical subjects, which her writings show her to have possessed in a degree that no other English writer of fiction ever brought to his or her work. Under the stimulus of the friendship and sympathy of those cultivated people, her intellectual development went on quickly, and the period was also marked by a gradual but decided change in her religious views, sketched to some extent in the inward struggles of

Maggie Tulliver. At Coventry no doubt she experienced that

> "Hopeless hour,
> When all the voices of the soul are dumb,
> When o'er the tossing seas
> No light may come;
> When God and right
> Are gone, and seated on the empty throne
> Are dull philosophies and words of wind,
> Making HIS praise their own."

It was through the Brays that George Eliot was introduced to literature, her first work being the translation of Strauss's "Life of Jesus." She also translated Feuerbach's "Essence of Christianity," and Spinoza's *De Deo;* and through these translations—admirably executed—she became known to some of the most distinguished scholars and thinkers of the day. In 1849, her father died, and the home at Foleshill was broken up. After spending a short time on the Continent, George Eliot returned to Coventry, taking up her residence with the Brays, with whom she remained for about a year, and then went to London to assist in editing the *Westminster Review.* This was the beginning of an altogether new life for her.





CHAPTER IV.

REMOVAL TO LONDON.

THE Warwickshire life of George Eliot ended in 1851, when she was 32 years of age. Her training for the work she was to do was practically completed. A student all her life, and a close observer, she had, during those years, been absorbing the knowledge and gaining the experience that were to live again in her writings, and give to the world those pictures of English provincial life, whose vividness and fidelity have only been equalled by Shakespeare. Over and over again—sometimes in vigorous outlines thrown in in masterly dashes, at others with a photographic minuteness of detail quite startling—we have this Warwickshire scenery put before us; we hear the sounds that accompany its mixed agricultural, manufacturing, and mining life; and we learn to know the people by whom she was surrounded—those of her own household, her schoolfellows, the clergyman, the doctor, the neighbours—as we know only our most intimate friends. Endowed with the requisite power, her position in life, and the conditions surrounding her, were such as to give her peculiar qualifications for her work. She had lived amid a mixed population, and had therefore opportunities for noting the peculiarities and conditions of each; and her father's position

as land agent as well as farmer, gave her special opportunities for contact with those above him in social position, and those on the same level as farmers. Their own life was specially identified with agriculture and the work of the farm; but she could not move many yards away from the house at Griff without meeting specimens of "certain pallid undersized men, who, by the side of the brawny country-folk, looked like the remnants of a disinherited race;" or seeing "powerful men walking queerly with knees bent outward from squatting in the mine." And from early childhood she was in the habit of accompanying her father in his rounds on the various estates for which he was agent, and these estates numbered five or six as time went on. In "Looking Backward" she says—"For several years I was my father's constant companion in his outdoor business, riding by his side on my little pony, and listening to the lengthy dialogues he held with Darby or Joan, the one on the road or in the fields, the other outside or inside her own door."

To the observant, impressionable girl, on whose memory every incident was photographed, and whom no trait or peculiarity of character escaped, one can imagine of what value such opportunities as those rides afforded would be. Her vivid pictures of English life were indeed the results of those early observations, modified and acted upon by after experience. She observes:—"I am rather fond of the mental furniture I got by having a father who was well acquainted with all ranks of his neighbours." And again—"I have always thought that the most fortunate Britons, are those whose experience has given them a practical share in many aspects of the national lot, who have lived long among the mixed commonalty, roughing it with them under difficulties, knowing how their food tastes to them, and getting acquainted with

their notions and motives, not by inference from traditional types in literature, or from philosophic theories, but from daily fellowship and observation." Such a "fortunate Briton" was she, and all her fellow Britons are sharers in her good fortune in having had presented to them the gallery of characters, which, beginning with "the Rev. Amos Barton" ends with "Daniel Deronda," and embraces such widely varying types as Milly Barton and the Countess Czerlaski, Tina and Miss Assher, Captain Wybrow and Mr. Gilfil, Janet Dempster and her drunken husband, Adam Bede and Arthur Donnithorne, Hetty Sorrell and Dinah Morris, Mrs. Poyser and Mr. Craig, Maggie Tulliver and Lucy Dean, Mr. Tulliver and Lawyer Wakem, Tom Tulliver and Stephen Guest, Bob Jakin and Uncle Pullet, Godfrey Cass and Silas Marner, Felix Holt and Mr. Jermyn, Esther Lyon and Mrs. Transome, Dorothea Brooke and Rosamond Vincy, the Rev. Mr. Casaubon and Mr. Brooke, Gwendolen Harleth and Anna Gascoigne, Daniel Deronda and Mr. Grandcourt, Ezra Cohen and Hans Meyrick.

The larger number of George Eliot's characters were drawn from types coming within her Warwickshire experience, and one cannot meet those Warwickshire men and women in the street, on the road, or by the fireside, without seeing that a great amount of individuality looks out of their good-humoured faces.

CHAPTER V.

"THE SAD FORTUNES OF THE REV. AMOS BARTON."

AFTER a few years of magazine and miscellaneous literary work in London, George Eliot ventured upon the particular field in which she was to win fame. Her first story—"The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton"—was published in *Blackwood's Magazine* in January, 1857. "Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story" and "Janet's Repentance" saw the light in the same year, and these two, with the first mentioned, form the three short stories embraced in "Scenes of Clerical Life." The first story of the series was the result of a suggestion of Mr. G. H. Lewes, and through his encouragement and the favourable verdict generally pronounced, the others were undertaken. All three stories are taken from George Eliot's early experience, the scene of each being in the neighbourhood of that "warm little nest" where her "affections were fledged."

The precise locality of "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton" is Chilvers Coton, a village that is really a suburb of Nuneaton. The story opens with a description of Shepperton (Chilvers Coton) Church, which in all essentials applies to it now as truthfully as when first written. "Shepperton Church was a very different looking building five-and-twenty years ago. To be sure, its substantial stone tower

looks at you through its intelligent eye, the clock, with the friendly expression of former days; but in everything else what changes! Now there is a wide span of slated roof flanking the old steeple; the windows are tall and symmetrical; the outer doors are resplendent with oak graining, the inner doors reverentially noiseless with a garment of red baize; the walls—you are convinced no lichen will ever again effect a settlement on—they are smooth and innutrient as the summit of the Rev. Amos Barton's head, after ten years of baldness and supererogatory soap. Pass through the baize doors and you will see the nave filled with well-shaped benches, understood to be free seats; while in certain eligible corners, less

CHILVERS COTON (SHEPPERTON) CHURCH.

directly under the fire of the clergyman's eye, there are pews reserved for the Shepperton gentility. Ample galleries are supported on iron pillars, and in one of them stands the very clasp or aigrette of Shepperton Church adornment, namely, an organ, not very much out of repair, on which a collector of small rents, differentiated by the force of circumstances into an organist, will accompany the alacrity of your departure after the blessing by a sacred minuet or an easy Gloria."

This Church, where she was baptised, Mary Ann Evans attended with her parents as a child, and, indeed, during the

entire period of her residence at Griff, for it was their parish church, and the nearest there was to their residence. The church as just described was not, however, quite the church of her childhood, and presently, having pictured the building as it then existed, she allows her imagination to do "a little Toryism by the sly," and goes on to "regret that dear, old, brown, crumbling, picturesque inefficiency is everywhere giving place to spick-and-span new painted, new varnished efficiency, which will yield endless diagrams, plans, elevations, and sections, but, alas! no picture." She acknowledges "an occasional tenderness for old abuses," lingers with a certain fondness "over the days of nasal clerks and top-booted parsons," and heaves a sigh for the "departed shades of vulgar errors." It is not surprising, therefore, that she recalls "with a fond sadness Shepperton Church as it was in the old days, with its outer coat of rough stucco, its red-tiled roof, its heterogeneous windows patched with desultory bits of painted glass, and its little flight of steps with their wooden rail running up the outer wall, and leading to the school children's gallery. Then inside, what dear old quaintnesses! which I began to look at with delight, even when I was so crude a member of the congregation, that my nurse found it necessary to provide for the reinforcement of my devotional patience, by smuggling bread and butter into the sacred edifice." We get in this opening chapter of her first story, a specimen of that fine humour which plays over all she wrote with the kindliness of sunshine. Thus, further describing the interior of the church, she says:—"No low partitions allowing you, with a dreary absence of contrast and mystery, to see everything at all moments; but tall, dark panels, under whose shadow I sank with a sense of retirement through the Litany, only to feel with more intensity my burst into the conspicuousness of public

life, when I was made to stand up on the seat during the psalms or the singing." Then the description of the singing is amusing. "It was no mechanical affair of official routine; it had a drama. As the moment of psalmody approached, by some process to me as mysterious and untraceable as the opening of the flowers, or the breaking out of the stars, a slate appeared in front of the gallery, advertising in bold characters the psalm about to be sung, lest the sonorous announcement of the clerk should still leave the bucolic mind in doubt on that head. Then followed the migration of the clerk to the gallery, where, in company with a bassoon, two key-bugles, a carpenter understood to have amazing power of singing 'counter,' and two lesser musical stars, he formed the complement of a choir regarded in Shepperton as one of distinguished attraction, occasionally known to draw hearers from the next parish."

Chilvers Coton village stands in the same flat, low-lying valley in which is Nuneaton, and has almost precisely the same physical characteristics that pertain to that "dingy town." "A flat, ugly district this; depressing enough to look at even on the brightest days. The roads are black with coal dust, the brick houses dingy with smoke, and at that time—the time of handloom weavers—every other cottage had a loom at its window, where you might see a pale, sickly-looking man or woman pressing a narrow chest against a board, and doing a sort of treadmill work with legs and arms. A troublesome district for a clergyman—at least to one who, like Amos Barton, understood the 'cure of souls' in something more than an official sense: for over and above the rustic stupidity furnished by the farm labourers, the miners brought obstreperous animalism, and the weavers an acrid Radicalism and Dissent. Indeed,

Mrs. Hackit often observed that the colliers, who many of them earned better wages than Mr. Barton, passed their time in nothing better than swilling ale and smoking, like the beasts that perish (speaking, we may presume, in a remotely analogical sense); and in some of the ale-house corners the drink was flavoured by a dingy kind of infidelity, something like rinsings of Tom Paine in ditch water."

Passing the vicarage on the right, you enter the well-kept churchyard, and looking up to the fabric, if you put your first thought into words they would probably take the form of an exclamation—"What a funny little church!" It has no pretensions to architectural beauty—indeed anything like architectural style has been ignored; and you wonder if this is an immense improvement on the older fabric of which George Eliot speaks as existing when she was a child, what that older fabric could have been like. But if there is any reverence at all in a man's nature, surely it must be stirred at the sight of an old church, no matter how built, around which cluster so many memories, and standing as this does amid so many memorials of the dead. "Thick as autumnal leaves that strew the brooks in Vallombrosa," are the little hillocks in the old churchyard, where all ages and conditions sleep together. Pass around to the back of the building, and you see still preserved what I believe is a unique feature in an English church, "the little flight of steps with their wooden rail running up the outer wall, and leading to the children's gallery." One might infer from the description given in the story that these steps had been removed; but they are here just as they existed in George Eliot's childhood. But to enter the church. Pass through "the inner doors reverentially noiseless with a garment of red baize," and "what dear old

quaintnesses" are revealed notwithstanding all improvements. There is the children's gallery in one corner, on the opposite side a second gallery for the general congregation, the nave is occupied partly by old-fashioned pews and partly by benches, the organ takes up space at the west end, the walls are colour-washed, and though very quaint, everything betokens a well-kept, well-cared-for village church. Small boards bearing inscriptions have taken the place of the "inscriptions on the panels of the singing gallery, telling of benefactions to the poor of Shepperton," and from one of these one learns that the alterations and extensions which George Eliot in her womanhood bewailed as having spoiled the picture of her childhood, took place in 1834, when she would be 15 years of age, for in that year the fabric was enlarged, whereby a number of additional sittings were obtained.

Close by the church is the vicarage, a pleasant looking old-fashioned house, with a pretty garden in front, and everything around neat and well ordered. It was here that Mr. and Mrs. Barton with their six children lived, endeavouring to solve the problem of supporting themselves and family on £80 a year, for the Rev. Amos was not the incumbent, but the curate only, and he occupied the vicarage because the incumbent, being a pluralist, lived at another place. The Rev. Amos Barton was in reality the Rev. John Gwyther, B.A., and Milly Barton his wife Emma. We may get a glimpse of Mr. Gwyther, as returning from the supper party at Mr. Farquhar's, he "winds through the little churchyard" towards the vicarage in the moonlight. "The silver light that falls aslant on church and tomb enables you to see his slim black figure, made all the slimmer by tight pantaloons, as it flits past the pale gravestones." As to Mrs. Gwyther,

"she was a lovely woman; a large, fair, gentle Madonna, with thick, close, chestnut curls beside her well-rounded cheeks, and with large, tender, short-sighted eyes. The flowing lines of her tall figure made the limpest dress look graceful, and her old frayed black silk seemed to repose on her bust and limbs with a placid elegance and sense of distinction, in strong contrast with the uneasy sense of being no fit that seemed to express itself in the rustling of Mrs. Farquhar's *gros de Naples*."

The contemplation of Milly's personal beauty and grace calls forth a passage as eloquent as anything contained in George Eliot's subsequent work. "Soothing, unspeakable charm of gentle womanhood! which supersedes all acquisitions, all accomplishments. You would never have asked at any period of Mrs. Amos Barton's life if she sketched or played the piano. You would even perhaps have been rather scandalised if she had descended from the serene dignity of *being* to the assiduous unrest of *doing*. Happy the man, you would have thought, whose eye will rest on her in the pauses of his fireside reading—whose hot, aching forehead will be soothed by the contact of her cool, soft hand—who will recover himself from dejection at his mistakes and failures in the loving light of her unreproaching eyes! You would not, perhaps, have anticipated that this bliss would fall to the share of precisely such a man as Amos Barton, whom you have already surmised not to have the refined sensibilities for which you might have imagined Mrs. Barton's qualities to be destined by pre-established harmony. But I for one do not grudge Amos Barton his sweet wife. I have all my life had a sympathy for mongrel, ungainly dogs, who are nobody's pets; and I would rather surprise one of them by a pat and a pleasant morsel, than

meet the condescending advances of the loveliest Skye terrier who has his cushion by my lady's chair. That, to be sure, is not the way of the world. If it happened to see a fellow of fine proportions and aristocratic mien, who makes no *faux pas*, and wins golden opinions from all sorts of men, it straightway picks out for him the loveliest unmarried woman, and says, There would be a proper match! Not at all, say I; let that successful, well-shapen, discreet, and able gentleman put up with something less than the best in the matrimonial department; and let the sweet woman go to make sunshine, and a soft pillow for the poor devil whose legs are not models, whose efforts are often blunders, and who in general gets more kicks than half-pence. She —the sweet woman—will like it as well, for her sublime capacity for loving will have all the more scope; and I venture to say, that Mrs. Barton's nature would never have grown half so angelic if she had married the man you would perhaps have had in your eye for her—a man with sufficient income and abundant personal *éclat*. Besides, Amos was an affectionate husband, and, in his way, valued his wife as his best treasure."

A fuller light is thrown upon Amos as the story proceeds. "A certain amount of religious excitement created" by Amos's predecessor "had nearly died out, and the religious life of Shepperton was falling back towards low-water mark," and in "this stronghold of Satan" it was Mr. Barton's mission "to stand single-handed and summon it to surrender." But Amos's oratory "resembles rather a Belgian railway horn, which shows praiseworthy intentions inadequately fulfilled," than the trumpets before which the walls of Jericho fell down. "Though Amos thought himself strong, he did not feel himself strong. Nature had given him the opinion,

but not the sensation. Without that opinion he would probably never have worn cambric bands," but he might have been, notwithstanding his halting rhetoric and faulty English "a shining light in the Dissenting circle of Bridgeport." "A tallow dip of the long-eight description is an excellent thing in the kitchen candlestick, and Betty's nose and eye are not sensitive to the difference between it and the finest wax; it is only when you stick it in the silver candlestick, and introduce it into the drawing-room, that it seems plebeian, dim, and ineffectual. Alas for the worthy man who, like that candle, gets himself into the wrong place! It is only the very largest souls who will be able to appreciate and pity him—who will discern and love sincerity of purpose amid all the bungling feebleness of achievement."

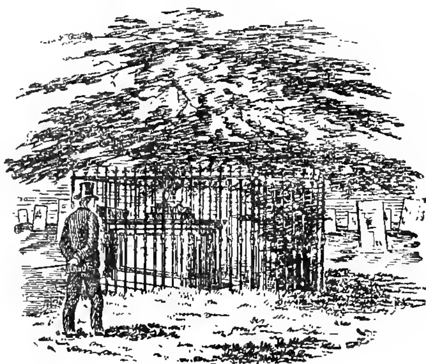
Mrs. Hackit is a sketch of George Eliot's mother, and we get a portrait of her as she takes tea at Mrs. Patten's. But prior to that we have related "the sweet history of genuine cream" as only the woman who could give the description of a dairy, and of butter-making, contained in "Adam Bede" could write it. "Do you know the dulcet strength, the animating blandness of tea sufficiently blended with real farmhouse cream? No—most likely you are a miserable town-bred reader, who thinks of cream as a thinnish white fluid, delivered in infinitesimal pennyworths down area steps; or perhaps from a presentiment of calves' brains, you refrain from any lacteal addition, and rasp your tongue with unmitigated bohea. You have a vague idea of a milch cow, as probably a white-plaster animal standing in a butterman's window, and you know nothing of the sweet history of genuine cream, such as Miss Gibbs's; how it was this morning in the udders of the large sleek beasts, as

they stood lowing a patient entreaty under the milking-shed; how it fell with a pleasant rhythm into Betty's pail, sending a delicious incense into the cool air; how it was carried into that temple of moist cleanliness, the dairy, where it quietly separated itself from the meaner elements of milk, and lay in mellowed whiteness, ready for the skimming-dish which transferred it to Miss Gibbs's glass cream-jug." Then follows the sketch of Mrs. Hackit who "declines cream; she has so long abstained from it with an eye to the weekly butter-money, that abstinence, wedded to habit, has begotten aversion. She is a thin woman with a chronic liver-complaint, which would have secured her Mr. Pilgrim's entire regard and unreserved good word, even if he had not been in awe of her tongue, which was as sharp as his own lancet. She has brought her knitting—no frivolous fancy knitting, but a substantial woollen stocking; the click, click of her knitting-needles is the running accompaniment to all her conversation, and in her utmost enjoyment of spoiling a friend's self-satisfaction, she was never known to spoil a stocking."

The story of the Gwyther family—their struggle with poverty, the scandal caused by the Countess Czerlaski selfishly imposing herself upon them, the troubles that ensued to Mr. Gwyther in consequence, others brought about by his own wrong-headedness, and the death at last of Mrs. Gwyther, borne down by the cares of a large family and a scanty income—was well known in the locality when George Eliot was a girl; and as Mrs. Evans befriended Mrs. Gwyther in her illness, every detail would naturally enough become known to the daughter. The deathbed scene and the funeral so simply described, are as full of real pathos as anything in fiction. "They laid her in the grave

—the sweet mother with her baby in her arms—while the Christmas snow lay thick upon the graves."

And here, opposite the old church tower, with a tombstone over it, and shaded by a yew tree, Milly's grave is seen. In a lengthy inscription the poor desolate husband has tried to convey to all who may pause to read something of the virtues of his wife, and to express some of his love. From this inscription one learns that Emma Gwyther died November 4th, 1836, at the age of 34 years. "The snow lay thick upon the graves, and the day was cold and dreary; but there was many a sad eye watching that black procession as it passed from the vicarage to the church, and from the church to the open grave. There were men

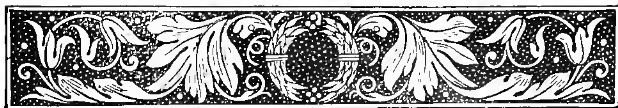


MILLY'S GRAVE

and women standing in that churchyard who had bandied vulgar jests about their pastor, and who had lightly charged him with sin; but now, when they saw him following the coffin, pale and haggard, he was consecrated anew by his great sorrow, and they looked at him with respectful pity. All the children were there, for Amos had willed it so,

thinking that some dim memory of that sacred moment might remain even with little Walter, and link itself with what he would hear of his sweet mother in after years."

The revulsion of public feeling in favour of Mr. Gwyther was complete, but, alas! "Just when Shepperton had become the place where he most wished to stay—where he had friends who knew his sorrows—where he lived close to Milly's grave," he received intimation from the vicar that he had resolved on coming to reside at Shepperton, and Mr. Gwyther must therefore leave. The night before leaving Chilvers Coton he went to the churchyard, and, throwing himself on the grave, clasping it with his arms, and kissing the cold turf, he exclaimed, "Milly, Milly, dost thou hear me? I didn't love thee enough, I wasn't tender enough to thee, but I think of it all now." . . . "Only once again in his life has Amos Barton visited Milly's grave. It was in the calm and softened light of an autumnal afternoon, and he was not alone. He held on his arm a young woman, with a sweet, grave face, which strongly recalled the expression of Mrs. Barton's, but was less lovely in form and colour. She was about thirty, but there were some premature lines around her eyes which told of early anxiety." . . . . "Milly did not take all her love from the earth when she died. She had left some of it in Patty's heart."



CHAPTER VI.

MR. GILFIL'S LOVE STORY.

"MR. GILFIL'S Love Story" has been described as an Italian romance dropped down upon English soil. So it is: Italian not only in the nationality of the heroine, but in sentiment—in the passionate love excited in Catarina's bosom, in the frenzied jealousy that disappointment arouses, in the outburst of revengeful feeling, and in the tragic results that ensue. The story begins where most stories end—at the hero's death, when "there was general sorrow in Shepperton: and if black cloth had not been hung round the pulpit and reading-desk by order of his nephew and principal legatee, the parishioners would certainly have subscribed the necessary sum out of their own pockets, rather than allow such a tribute of respect to be wanting." In the first glimpses we get of the living Rev. Maynard Gilfil, he is already an old man, who has a habit of cracking jokes with his parishioners; is given to teasing the children by asking them questions, which give them "the meanest opinion of his intellect," but taking care always to have his pockets stuffed with sweets for them; and who sits at nights by his own lonely fireside "smoking his pipe, and maintaining the pleasing antithesis of dryness and moisture by an occasional sip of gin and water." But gin and water "does not

exclude a vast amount of antecedent romance," and Mr. Gilfil had his love story, as most men have, "between the ages of teetotum and tobacco."

The Shepperton where Mr. Gilfil was vicar, is the same Shepperton (Chilvers Coton) at which Amos Barton was curate. Half a century had passed since the time when Maynard Gilfil, a lad of fifteen, and ward of Sir Christopher Cheverel, began to spend his vacations at Cheverel Manor, and "found there no playfellow so much to his mind as Catarina." In all his outdoor pleasures "it was his delight to have Catarina as his companion, to call her little pet names, answer her wondering questions, and have her toddling after him as you may have seen a Blenheim spaniel trotting after a large setter. Whenever Maynard went back to school there was a little scene of parting."

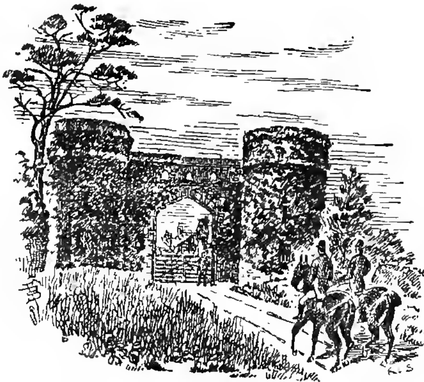
The "Sir Christopher Cheverel" here mentioned was Sir Roger Newdegate; "Cheverel Manor" is Arbury Hall, near Nuneaton; and Catarina was an Italian maiden whom Sir Christopher and his lady had adopted at the request of her dying father, an Italian artist. Arbury Hall, which has been designated the "Strawberry Hill of Warwickshire," is an imposing and beautiful mansion. Set amid an extensive and well-wooded park, within the confines of which and in sight of the house, George Eliot, as has been before stated, was born, and within a mile of which she spent the first twenty-three years of her life. Just as is represented in the story, the great work of Sir Roger Newdegate's life was the architectural transformation of the family seat. "By and bye the happy monotony of Cheverel Manor was broken in upon" in a way that led to a great deal of criticism of Sir Roger's conduct. "The roads through the park were cut up by waggons carrying loads of stone from a neighbouring

ARBURY HALL (CHEVEREL MANOR).

quarry, the green courtyard became dusty with lime, and the peaceful house rang with the sound of tools. For the next ten years Sir Christopher was occupied with the architectural metamorphosis of his old family mansion; thus anticipating, through the prompting of his own individual taste, that general reaction from the insipid imitation of the Palladian style toward a restoration of the Gothic, which marked the close of the eighteenth century."

In time Sir Roger's work was completed, so far as the mansion was concerned, and as he left it it still exists. It is a picturesque castellated aggregation of Gothic stone-work, copied with its ornaments from ancient Gothic ecclesiastical edifices; set round with flower gardens, emerald lawn, and finely laid out grounds; bounded by ornamental water and a little meandering stream; looking over grassy expanses of park broken by clumps of fine old timber; and approached on every side by lordly avenues of tall elms, beeches, and oaks. In all this sweet midland country is no fairer scene. Approach it from the south to the edge of the ornamental water that bounds the private grounds, and you will see two mansions—one the beautiful edifice that Sir Roger created, the other down in the pool that sparkles in the sunhine, an etherealised replica of the former. But George Eliot's description on the evening when she first introduces the reader to it is worth reproducing. "And a charming picture Cheverel Manor would have made that evening, if some English Watteau had been there to paint it; the castellated house of grey-tinted stone, with the flickering sunbeams sending dashes of golden light across the many-shaped panes in the mullioned windows, and a great beech leaning athwart one of the flanking towers, and breaking, with its dark flattened boughs, the

too formal symmetry of the front; the broad gravel walk winding on the right, by a row of tall pines, alongside the pool—on the left branching out among swelling grassy mounds, surmounted by clumps of trees, where the red trunk of the Scotch fir glows in the descending sunlight, against the bright green of limes and acacias; the great pool where a pair of swans are swimming lazily with one leg tucked under a wing, and where the open water-lilies lie calmly accepting the kisses of the fluttering light sparkles; the lawn with its smooth emerald greenness, sloping down to the rougher and browner herbage of the park, from which it is invisibly fenced by a little stream that winds



NORTH ENTRANCE TO ARBURY PARK.

away from the pool, and disappears under a wooden bridge in the distant pleasure ground." This description of mansion and surroundings is strikingly applicable to them as they still exist, and it may also be mentioned that their possession continues in the Newdegate family.

As the years went on and Maynard Gilfil's vacations

multiplied, he left Arbury Hall on each successive occasion more deeply in love than before with Catarina, who on her part had no eyes excepting for Captain Wybrow, the heir, who made love to her clandestinely. By and bye Maynard left college, took holy orders, and came to live at the hall as chaplain. As for Captain Wybrow, "he really felt very kindly towards her (Catarina), and would very likely have loved her—if he had been able to love anyone. But nature had not endowed him with that capability. She had given him an admirable figure, the whitest of hands, the most delicate of nostrils, and a large amount of serene self-satisfaction; but, as if to save such a delicate piece of work from any risk of being shattered, she had guarded him from the liability to a strong emotion." Then came the stately Miss Assher, who was intended for Captain Wybrow's bride, and poor Catarina's misery began, culminating only in the catastrophe of the story, when, going to keep an appointment with Captain Wybrow in the Rookery, and with the dagger concealed in her dress, and some undefined notion of vengeance in her mind, she found him lying dead. Tina recovers from the long illness that ensues, and in time Maynard Gilfil's love is rewarded and she becomes his wife. "But the delicate plant had been too deeply bruised, and in the struggle to put forth a blossom, it died. Tina died, and Maynard Gilfil's love went with her into deep silence for evermore."

And this is why Mr. Gilfil in his old age sits alone in Shepperton Vicarage, and why those who did not know his story looked upon him as a bachelor. "That is the conclusion to which you would probably have come if you had entered his sitting-room, where the bare tables, the large old-fashioned horse-hair chairs, and the threadbare Turkey

carpet, perpetually fumigated with tobacco, seemed to tell a story of wifeless existence that was contradicted by no portrait, no piece of embroidery, no faded bit of pretty triviality, hinting of taper fingers and small feminine ambitions. And it was here that Mr. Gilfil passed his evenings, seldom with other society than that of Ponto, his old brown setter, who, stretched out at full length on the rug with his nose between his forepaws, would wrinkle his brows and lift up his eyelids every now and then to exchange a glance of mutual understanding with his master. But there was a chamber in Shepperton Vicarage, which told a different story from that bare and cheerless dining-

SHEPPERTON VICARAGE.

room—a chamber never entered by anyone besides Mr. Gilfil and old Martha, the housekeeper, who, with David her husband, as groom and gardener, formed the vicar's entire establishment. The blinds of this chamber were always down, except once a quarter, when Martha entered, that she might air and clean it. She always asked Mr. Gilfil for the key, which he kept locked up in his bureau, and returned it to him when she had finished her task. It was a

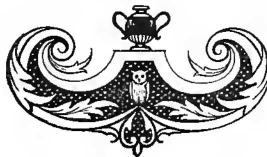
touching sight that the daylight streamed in upon, as Martha drew aside the blinds and thick curtains, and opened the Gothic casement of the oriel window. On the little dressing-table there were a dainty looking-glass in a carved and gilt frame; bits of wax candle were still in the branched sockets at the sides, and on one of these branches hung a little black lace kerchief; a faded satin pincushion, with the pins rusted in it, a scent bottle, and a large green fan, lay on the table; and on a dressing-box by the side of the glass was a work-basket, and an unfinished baby cap, yellow with age, lying in it. Two gowns, of a fashion long forgotten, were hanging on nails against the door, and a pair of tiny red slippers, with a bit of tarnished silver embroidery on them, were standing at the foot of the bed Two or three water-colour drawings, views of Naples, hung upon the walls; and over the mantelpiece, above some bits of rare old china, two miniatures in oval frames. One of these miniatures represented a young man about seven-and-twenty, with a sanguine complexion, full lips, and clear grey eyes. The other was the likeness of a girl, probably not more than eighteen, with small features, thin cheeks, a pale southern-looking complexion, and large dark eyes. The gentleman wore powder; the lady had her dark hair gathered away from her face, and a little cap with a cherry-coloured bow, set on the top of her head—a coquettish head-dress, but the eyes spoke of sadness rather than of coquetry. Such were the things that Martha had dusted and let the air in upon, four times a year, ever since she was a blooming lass of twenty; and she was now in this last decade of Mr. Gilfil's life, unquestionably on the wrong side of fifty. Such was the locked-up chamber in Mr. Gilfil's house; a sort of visible symbol of the secret

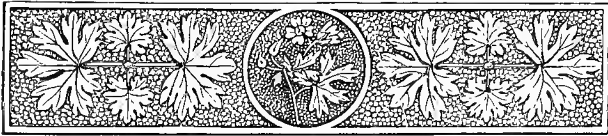
chamber in his heart, where he had long turned the key on early hopes and early sorrows, shutting up for ever all the passion and the poetry of his life."

"This was Mr. Gilfil's love story, which lay far back from the time when he sat, worn and grey, by his lonely fireside in Shepperton Vicarage. Rich brown locks, passionate love, and deep, early sorrow, strangely different as they seem from the scanty white hairs, the apathetic content, and the unexpectant quiescence of old age, are but part of the same life's journey; as the bright Italian plains, with the sweet *Addio* of their beckoning maidens, are part of the same day's travel that brings us to the other side of the mountain, between the sombre rocky walls, and among the guttural voices of the Valais."

The "Knebley Church" mentioned in the story is Astley Church, lying about a mile to the west of Arbury Park. It is an interesting old place, topping a hill with an outlook over lovely reaches of undulating country. Close by are the ruins of Astley Castle, now utilised as a gentleman's residence. It is covered with ivy, and church and castle form a striking picture, set amid the tall trees, and commanding views of typical Warwickshire scenery. The church contains some ancient monuments, now considerably defaced. It was to Astley that Mr. Gilfil, having preached in the morning at Shepperton (Chilvers Coton), rode in the afternoon, "where he officiated in a wonderful little church, with a checkered pavement, which had once rung to the iron-tread of military monks, with coats of arms in clusters on the lofty roof, marble warriors and their wives without noses, occupying a large proportion of the area, and the twelve Apostles, with their heads very much on one side, holding didactic ribbons, painted in fresco on the walls. Here, in

absence of mind to which he was prone, Mr. Gilfil would sometimes forget to take off his spurs before putting on his surplice, and only became aware of the omission by feeling something mysteriously tugging at the skirts of that garment as he stepped into the reading-desk. But the Knebley farmers would as soon have thought of criticising the moon as their pastor. He belonged to the course of nature, like markets and toll gates, and dirty bank notes." But notwithstanding all faults, and though he had something of the "knotted whimsical character of a lopped oak," the vicar "had yet been sketched out by nature as a noble tree. The heart of him was sound, the grain was of the finest, and in the grey-haired man, who filled his pocket with sugar-plums for the little children, whose most biting words were directed against the evil-doing of the rich man, and who, with all his social pipes and slipshod talk, never sank below the highest level of his parishioners' respect, there was the main trunk of the same brave, faithful, tender nature that had poured out the finest, freshest forces of its life-current in a first and only love—the love of Tina."





CHAPTER VII.

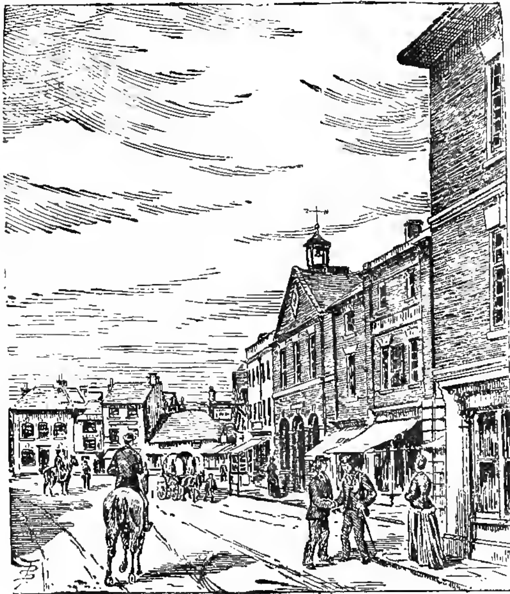
"JANET'S REPENTANCE."

IF Nuneaton were deprived of the fame George Eliot has conferred upon it by describing it in one of her stories, and by taking a series of characters and incidents from its people and its everyday history, there would remain but little rising above the level of ordinary life in a small provincial town to claim the attenton of a stranger. History has little to say about it, except that it is a market town of considerable antiquity; that Robert, Earl of Leicester, in the reign of King Stephen, founded and liberally endowed a convent of nuns there; that at the Dissolution the site was granted to Marmaduke Constable, whose effigy may be seen in the parish church; and that it has for long contained, and does so still, a mixed agricultural and manufacturing population. It also boasts a fine church in the Decorated style; has an endowed school; some remains of the Abbey still exist; and since the days when George Eliot first knew it, it has added a railway station, has lighted its streets with gas, and has gathered together its weavers and spinners into factories. For the rest, the town is built of red brick, the streets wander stragglingly along the main roads leading out of it to the distant towns of

NUNEATON (MILBY) CHURCH AND VICARAGE.

importance, or the more populous neighbouring villages; it has its full share of workmen's cottages, which too often betray a predilection for very small windows, as though daylight were an article to be economised; and it possesses a market place which, at least, is very busy on market days.

But everywhere there are gardens, tall elms glorify the hedge-rows, the cottagers' windows, though small, have space for plants; and foliage and flowers, birds and sunshine, give



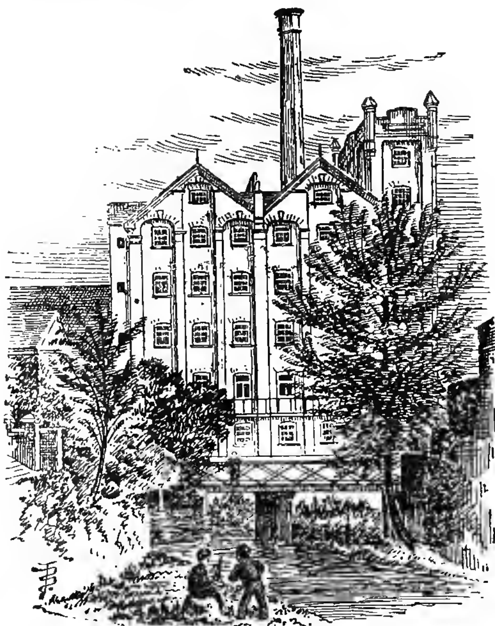
NUNEATON MARKET PLACE.

a charm even to this unimposing provincial town. Describing it in "Janet's Repentance" as it was in the pre-railway days, George Eliot says:—"To a superficial glance, Milby was nothing but dreary prose; a dingy town surrounded by flat

fields, lopped elms, and sprawling manufacturing villages, which crept on and on with their weaving shops, till they threatened to engraft themselves on the town." As it was then to the "superficial glance" so it will be now, though in the meantime Nuneaton has grown and advanced; but George Eliot saw in it a great deal more than "dreary prose," for in the next sentence she says: "But the sweet spring came to Milby, notwithstanding; the elm tops were red with buds; the churchyard was starred with daisies; the lark showered his love music on the flat fields; the rainbows hung over the dingy town, clothing the very roofs and chimneys with a strange transfiguring beauty. And so it was with the human life there, which at first seemed a dismal mixture of griping worldliness, vanity, ostrich feathers, and the fumes of brandy. Looking closer, you found some purity, gentleness, and unselfishness, as you may perhaps have observed a scented geranium giving forth its wholesome odours amidst blasphemy and gin in a noisy pot-house."

The scene of "Janet's Repentance" is Nuneaton: the characters are drawn from there, and the main incidents of the story are based upon actual occurrences. Dempster was a well-known lawyer, as he is represented in the story; Janet, his wife, lives still in the memory or traditions of the people as one of the sweetest of women; the Rev. Mr. Tryan was curate at the Stockingford Chapel of Ease; Mr. Pilgrim was a well-known doctor, and several of the minor characters are also sketches from real life. The persecution of the Evangelical curate led by the lawyer is an actual incident in Nuneaton history. So, too, are Janet's fall into a degrading vice through the harshness of a cruel husband; her rescue by Mr. Tryan's influence, and Mr. Tryan's early death, attributed in a considerable degree to the persecution

he had undergone. So much people still living in Nuneaton will tell you, and whilst obviously there is danger of narrowing the story too much to actual incident, and to known characters, and leaving too little to the imagination of the writer, there can be no doubt that in the main "Janet's Repentance" is a chapter of Nuneaton life, and a portrait gallery of Nuneaton worthies.



MILBY MILL, NUNEATON.

The name "Milby" applied in the story to Nuneaton, was taken from a corn-mill in the town, standing on the river Anker, which runs through it, and which is still known as Milby Mill. Some time ago the mill of George Eliot's

day was burnt down, but another was at once erected on the spot. It is a conspicuous object owing to its great height. Along a narrow street leading from the mill, and near to the market-place, is the Red Lion, as it is named in the story—but actually the Bull Hotel—where the story opens. "It was very warm everywhere that evening, but especially in the bar of the Red Lion at Milby, where Mr. Dempster was seated mixing his third glass of brandy and water." The Bull Hotel, an old-fashioned inn, entered through an archway leading to a yard, and inside built upon

BULL (RED LION) HOTEL.

no particular plan, full of small rooms in unexpected corners, and yet a comfortable hostelry, is in much the same condition as at the date of the events narrated in the story. There is a vigorous sketch of Mr. Dempster

himself. "He was a tall and rather massive man, and the front half of his large surface was so well dredged with snuff, that the cat, having inadvertently come near him, had been seized with a severe fit of sneezing; an accident which, being cruelly misunderstood, had caused her to be driven contumeliously from the bar. Mr. Dempster habitually held his chin tucked in, and his head hanging forward, weighed down, perhaps, by a preponderant occiput and a bulging forehead, between which his closely-clipped coronal surface lay like a flat and new-mown table-land. The only other observable features were puffy cheeks, and a protruding yet lipless mouth. Of his nose I can only say that it was snuffy; and as Mr. Dempster was never caught in the act of looking at anything in particular, it would have been difficult to swear to the colour of his eyes."

Mr. Pilgrim, the Nuneaton doctor, who was also introduced into the Rev. Amos Barton's story, deserves a little more attention than he has yet received. "The doctor's estimate, even of a confiding patient, was apt to rise and fall with the entries in the day-book; and I have known Mr. Pilgrim discover the most unexpected virtues in a patient seized with a promising illness. At such times you might have been glad to perceive that there were some of Mr. Pilgrim's fellow-creatures of whom he entertained a high opinion, and that he was liable to the amiable weakness of a too-admiring estimate. A good inflammation fired his enthusiasm, and a lingering dropsy dissolved him into charity. Doubtless this *crescendo* of benevolence was partly due to feelings not at all represented by the entries in the day-book; for, in Mr. Pilgrim's heart, too, there was a latent store of tenderness and pity which flowed forth at the sight of suffering. Gradually, however, as his patients

became convalescent his view of their characters became more dispassionate. When they could relish mutton-chops, he began to admit that they had foibles, and by the time they had swallowed their last dose of tonic, he was alive to their most inexcusable faults. After this the thermometer of his regard rested at the moderate point of friendly backbiting, which sufficed to make him agreeable in his morning visits to the amiable and worthy persons who were yet far from convalescent."

But notwithstanding much drinking at the publichouses, much backbiting, and chronic antipathy between Churchmen and Dissenters, "assuredly Milby had that salt of goodness which keeps the world together in greater abundance than was visible on the surface: innocent babes were born there, sweetening their parents' hearts with simple joys; men and women withering in disappointed worldliness, or bloated with sensual ease, had better moments, in which they pressed the hand of suffering with sympathy, and were moved to deeds of neighbourly kindness. In church and in chapel there were honest-hearted worshippers, who strove to keep a conscience void of offence; and even up the dimmest alleys you might have found here and there a Wesleyan, to whom Methodism was the vehicle of peace on earth and good-will to men."

We first learn something of Janet's earlier history in Mrs. Linnet's parlour, when Mrs. Pettifer declares that "she made the handsomest bride that ever came out of Milby Church. Such a very fine figure! and it showed off her white poplin so well. And what a pretty smile Janet always had! Poor thing, she keeps that now for all her old friends. I never see her but she has something pretty to say to me —living in the same street, you know, I can't help seeing

her often, though I've never been to the house since Dempster broke out on me in one of his drunken fits. She comes to me sometimes, poor thing, looking so strange. Anybody passing her in the street may see plain enough what's the matter; but she's always got some little good-natured plan in her head, for all that. Only last night when I met her, I saw five yards off she was not fit to be out; but she had a basin in her hand, full of something she was carrying to Sally Martin, the deformed girl that's in a consumption." But presently the conversation of the ladies runs away from Janet to Mr. Tryan, and then the Evangelical curate entering the room we have a sketch of him. "The strange light from the golden sky falling on his light-brown hair, which is brushed high up round his head, makes it look almost like an aureole. His grey eyes, too, shine with unwonted brilliancy this evening. They were not remarkable eyes, but they accorded completely in their changing light with the changing expression of his person, which indicated the paradoxical character often observable in a large-limbed sanguine blond; at once mild and irritable, gentle and overbearing, indolent and resolute, self-conscious and dreamy. Except that the well-filled lips had something of the artificially compressed look, which is often the sign of a struggle to keep the dragon undermost, and that the complexion was rather pallid, giving the idea of imperfect health, Mr. Tryan's face in repose was that of an ordinary whiskerless blond, and it seemed difficult to refer a certain air of distinction about him to anything in particular, unless it were his delicate hands and well-shapen feet."

The uproar in the town is described, the procession of anti-Tryanites with banners, bearing the inscriptions presenting Mr. Tryan in the most odious lights, and the second

scene at the Black Lion, when Dempster addresses the crowd. Then Dempster "having done as much justice to the punch as any of the party," makes his way slowly home. "His (Dempster's) house lay in Orchard Street, which opened on the prettiest outskirt of the town—the church, the parsonage, and a long stretch of green fields. It was an old-fashioned house with an overhanging upper storey; outside it had a face of rough stucco, and casement windows with green frames and shutters; inside, it was full of long passages and rooms with low ceilings."

For "Orchard Street," read "Church Street," and there those curious in the matter may yet see the house where Janet lived through the tragedy of her married life into the serene autumn of widowhood. And not only so, but the house is still the property of the family; for though Janet is represented in the story as not having had any children, she in reality had two daughters, one or both of whom is yet living, and to whom the house belongs. But this by the way. "The thunder" of Dempster's knock when he reached his own door "resounded through Orchard Street, and after a single minute there was a second clap louder than the first. Another minute and still the door was not opened, whereupon Mr. Dempster, muttering, took out his latch-key, and with less difficulty than might have been expected, thrust it into the door. When he opened the door the passage was dark." Janet was summoned, and presently we see her advancing. "Yet a few seconds, and the figure of a tall woman, holding aslant a heavy-plated drawing-room candlestick, appeared at the turning of the passage that led to the broader entrance. She had on a light dress, which sat loosely about her figure, but did not disguise its liberal graceful outline. A heavy mass of straight jet-black

hair had escaped from its fastening, and hung over her shoulders. Her grandly-cut features, pale with the natural paleness of a brunette, had premature lines about them, telling that the years had been lengthened by sorrow, and the delicately-curved nostril, which seemed as if made to quiver with the proud consciousness of power and beauty, must have quivered to the heart-piercing griefs which had given that worn look to the corners of the mouth. Her wide-open black eyes had a strangely fixed, sightless gaze, as she paused at the turning, and stood silent by her husband." Those who have read the story know what followed, and there is no need to repeat it here. But there is a pathetic passage worth quoting addressed to the portrait of Janet's mother, which hung over the mantelpiece. "Poor grey-haired woman, is it for this you suffered a mother's pangs in your lone widowhood five-and-thirty years ago? Was it for this you kept the little worn morocco shoes Janet had first run in, and kissed them day by day when she was away from you, a tall girl at school? Was it for this you looked proudly at her when she came back to you in her rich pale beauty, like a tall white arum that had just unfolded its grand pure curves to the sun?"

A little later, however, we get a different picture of Janet —a cheerful one—"The morning was sunny, the bells were ringing, the ladies of Milby were dressed in their Sunday garments. And who is this bright-looking woman walking with hasty step along Orchard Street so early, with a large nosegay in her hand? Can it be Janet Dempster, on whom we looked with such deep pity, one sad midnight hardly a fortnight ago? Yes; no other woman in Milby has those searching black eyes, that tall graceful unconstrained figure, set off by her simple muslin dress and black lace shawl

that massy black hair now so neatly braided, in glossy contrast with the white satin ribbons of her modest cap and bonnet. No other woman has that sweet speaking smile, with which she nods to Jonathan Lamb, the old parish, clerk. And ah!—now she comes nearer—there are those sad lines about the mouth and eyes on which the sweet smile plays like sunbeams on the storm-beaten beauty of the full and ripened corn." Janet was on her way to visit her mother before going to church for the confirmation service. She "looked glad and tender now—but what scene of misery was coming next? She was too like the cistus flowers in the little garden before the window, that, with the shades of evening, might lie with the delicate white and glossy dark of their petals trampled in the road-side dust. When the sun had sunk, and the twilight was deepening, Janet might be seen sitting there, heated, maddened, sobbing out her griefs with selfish passion, and wildly wishing herself dead." As for her poor mother, "she tried to have hope and trust, though it was hard to believe that the future would be anything else than the harvest of the seed that was being sown before her eyes. But always there is seed being sown silently and unseen, and everywhere there comes sweet flowers without our foresight and labour. We reap what we sow, but Nature has love over and above that justice, and gives us shadow and blossom and fruit that spring from no planting of ours."

As the persecution of Mr. Tryan increases in bitterness, so it is clear also that matters are becoming worse and worse between the Dempsters, and the culmination of Janet's misery is soon reached. "There would have been dead silence in Orchard Street but for the whistling of the wind, and the swirling of the March dust on the pavement.

Thick clouds covered the sky; every door was closed; every window was dark. No ray of light fell on the tall, white figure that stood in lonely misery on the door-step; no eye rested on Janet as she sank down on the cold stone, and looked into the dismal night. She seemed to be looking into her own blank future. The stormy street, the bitter north-east wind and darkness—and in the midst of them a tender woman, thrust out from her husband's home in her thin night-dress, the harsh wind cutting her naked feet, and drawing her long hair away from her half-clad bosom, where the poor heart is crushed with anguish and despair. The drowning man, urged by the supreme agony, lives in an instant through all his happy and unhappy past; when the dark flood has fallen like a curtain, memory, in a single moment, sees the drama acted over again. And even in those earlier crises, which are but types of death—when we are cut off abruptly from the life we have known, when we can no longer expect to-morrow to resemble yesterday, and find ourselves by some sudden shock on the confines of the unknown—there is often the same sort of lightning-flash through the dark and unfrequented chambers of memory. When Janet sat down shivering on the door-stone, with the door shut upon her past life, and the future black and unshapen before her as the night, the scenes of her childhood, her youth, and her painful womanhood rushed back upon her consciousness, and made one picture with her present desolation."

In the misery that follows, Janet can think of only one hope, and that is in Mr. Tryan. An interview takes place, she tells her story, and, influenced by him, the work of reclamation begins. "Blessed influence of one true loving human soul on another! Not calculable by algebra, nor

deducible by logic, but mysterious, effectual, mighty as the hidden process by which the tiny seed is quickened, and bursts forth into tall stem and broad leaf, and glowing tasseled flower." Meanwhile, as regards Dempster the catastrophe is approaching. "Nemesis is lame, but she is of colossal stature, like the gods; and sometimes while her sword is not yet unsheathed, she stretches out her huge left arm and grasps her victim. The mighty hand is invisible, but the victim totters under the dire clutch."

Janet, though often tempted to return to the old vice, resists, and in the end "even anti-Tryanite prejudice could not resist the fact that Janet Dempster was a changed woman—changed as the dusty, bruised, and sun-withered plant is changed when the soft rains of heaven have fallen on it—and also that this change was due to Mr. Tryan's influence. The last lingering sneers against the Evangelical curate began to die out; and though much of the feeling that had prompted them remained behind, there was an intimidating consciousness that the expression of such feeling would not be effective—jokes of that sort had ceased to tickle the Milby mind." The power of one human being over another, to rescue and elevate is a favourite study of George Eliot's, and is introduced again and again in her subsequent stories.

The Paddiford Common of the story is Stockingford—a village of "rows of grimy houses darkened with hand-looms"—the centre of a colliery district, a couple of miles or so over the uplands from Nuneaton, and lying between that town and Arbury Park, the scene of "Mr. Gilfil's Love Story." It was to Stockingford that Janet came in one of her temptations to see Mr. Tryan, and one may take the very path through the fields that she took on her return

walk to Nuneaton. "That walk in the dewy starlight remained for ever in Janet's memory as one of those baptismal epochs, when the soul, dipped in the sacred waters of joy and peace, rises from them with new energies, with more unutterable longings."

Orchard (Church) Street has a prominent part in the story. It was up this street that Mr. Tryan passed "through a pelting shower of nicknames and bad puns, with an *ad libitum* accompaniment of groans, howls, hisses, and hee-haws." After this, "once more only did the Evangelical curate pass up Orchard Street, followed by a train of friends; once more only was there a crowd assembled to witness his entrance through the church-gates. But that second time no voice was heard above a whisper, and the whispers were words of sorrow and blessing. That second time Janet Dempster was not looking on in scorn and merriment; her eyes were worn with grief and watching, and she was following her beloved friend and pastor to the grave." We are told that there is a simple gravestone to the memory of the curate in Milby churchyard. "But there is another memorial of Edgar Tryan, which bears a fuller record; it is Janet Dempster rescued from self-despair, strengthened with divine hopes, and now looking back on years of purity and helpful labour. The man who has left such a memorial behind him must have been one whose heart beat with true compassion, and whose lips were moved by fervent faith."

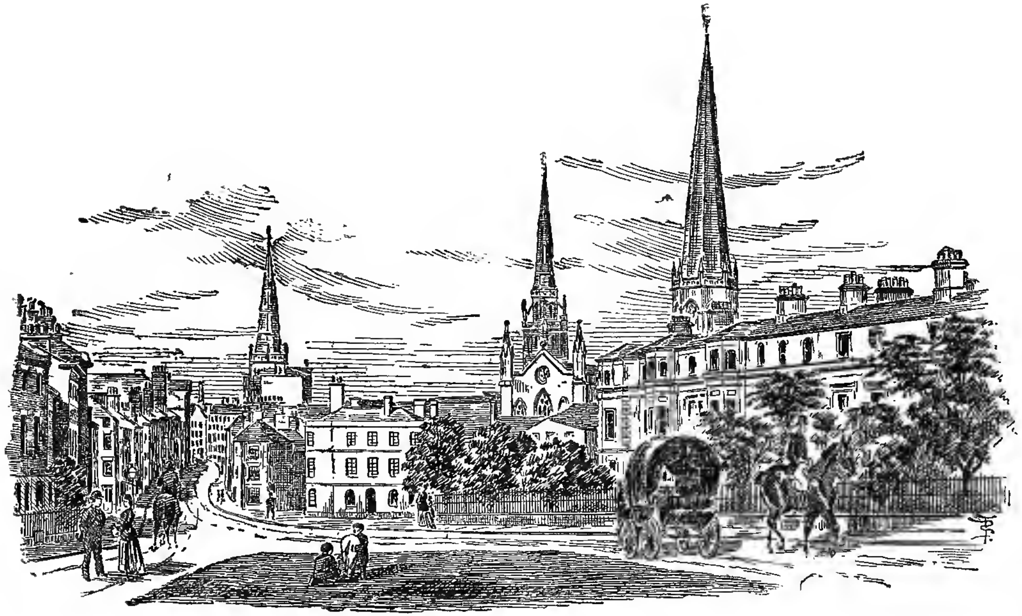
People living in Nuneaton and district will tell you that a memorial tablet in Stockingford Church perpetuates the memory and virtues of the Evangelical curate described by George Eliot; but it is only right to add that in her letters she says that "Mr. Tryan is not a portrait of any clergyman

living or dead. He is an ideal character, but I hope probable enough to resemble more than one Evangelical clergyman of his day." In regard to the rest of the story, she says that so far as its elements were suggested by real persons, those persons had been long in "eternity" at the date of writing. She adds that a persecution of the kind she describes did actually take place; but she only knew the outline of the real story.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHARACTER OF WARWICKSHIRE SCENERY.

IT is pathetic to witness with what fond lovingness George Eliot, to the last day of her life, continually turned her eyes to the scenery and the life of that Midland tract which had been familiar to her in her youth, and of which her native county is the heart. Since her Griff and Foleshill days, she had "learned to care for foreign countries, for literatures, foreign and ancient; for the life of continental towns dozing round old cathedrals; for the life of London, half sleepless with eager thought and strife, with indigestion, or with hunger," but yet her eyes had "kept their early affectionate joy in our native landscape." The alphabet through which she learned to read her native England was "not within the boundaries of an ancestral park," but "among the Midland villages and markets, along by the tree-studded hedgerows, and where the heavy barges seem in the distance to float mysteriously among the rushes and the feathered grass." Thus she wrote in "Looking Backward" (*Theophrastus Such*), as late as 1879—an autobiographical essay, philosophic, pathetic, and with an undercurrent of exquisite humour. We have seen that her three earliest stories were pictures of Nuneaton life, and her subsequent work also was very largely drawn from the



COVENTRY.

experience and observation of her early years. The scene of the development of "Adam Bede" is laid on the borders of Staffordshire and Derbyshire; that of "The Mill on the Floss" is in Lincolnshire; whilst "Silas Marner," "Felix Holt," and "Middlemarch" all pertain to that more central portion which embraces Warwickshire within its boundaries.

Warwickshire is a county where the vision ranges over extensive tracts of flat low-lying plains, separated by ridges of higher ground; of rivers creeping slowly along between loamy banks; of heavy fallows; rank meadows, and breezy uplands; of sweet lanes, with wide grassy margins and wild straggling hedges, everywhere closely planted with the tall wych-elm, the oak and the ash, and where the holly runs riot, and gives brightness even in winter; a comfortable-looking country well clothed with timber, without angles, and without sharp contrasts, where everything looks well-fed, well-finished, and rounded off; which seen from the uplands inspirits by the wide area embraced within the vision, and which, looking nearer—to the lane along which you are travelling, with its grassy borders and tree-planted hedges that shut it in, to the newly-upturned red soil of the fallow beyond, to the red-brick farmsteads standing back from the road, and the cottages and villages by the wayside, with their strips of garden,—gives pleasure in every harmonious detail. But a narrow strip of it from Coventry to Nuneaton and northward, also affords not a little blackened landscape from coalpits; whilst handloom weaving, common in the vicinity of both those towns when George Eliot was a girl, has everywhere given place to factories.

With photographic minuteness and fidelity, and with the poet's appreciation of all its subtle charms, and the poet's power of making one *feel* as well as *see* the picture, George

Eliot has given in the introductory chapter to "Felix Holt" a description of the scenery of Warwickshire and adjoining counties. It is what in the old coaching-days a traveller might have witnessed from the box-seat, and is as exquisite a piece of word-painting as is to be found in all English literature. "Suppose only," she says, "that his journey took him through that great central plain, watered at one extremity by the Avon, at the other by the Trent. As the morning silvered the meadows with their long lines of bushy willows marking the watercourses, or burnished the golden corn-ricks clustered near the long roofs of some midland homestead, he saw the full-uddered cows driven from their pasture to the early milking. Perhaps it was the shepherd, head-servant of the farm, who drove them, his sheep-dog following with a heedless, unofficial air, as of a beadle in undress. The shepherd, with a slow and slouching walk, timed by the walk of grazing beasts, moved aside, as if unwillingly, throwing out a monosyllabic hint to his cattle; his glance, accustomed to rest on things very near the earth, seemed to lift itself with difficulty to the coachman." After some reflections on the mental and social condition and the views of the shepherd, she continues her sketch of the scenery. "He and his cows were soon left behind, and the homestead, too, with its pond overhung by elder-trees, its untidy kitchen-garden, and cone-shaped yew tree arbour. But everywhere the bushy hedgerows wasted the land with their straggling beauty, shrouded the grassy borders of the pastures with catkined hazels, and tossed their long blackberry branches on the corn-fields. Perhaps they were white with may, or starred with pale pink dog-roses; perhaps the urchins were already nutting among them or gathering the plenteous crabs. It was worth the journey only to see those

hedgerows, the liberal homes of unmarketable beauty—of the purple-blossomed, ruby-berried nightshade, of the wild convolvulus climbing and spreading in tendrilled strength till it made a great curtain of pale-green hearts and white trumpets; of the many-tubed honeysuckle which, in its most delicate fragrance, had a charm more subtle and penetrating than beauty. Even if it were winter the hedgerows showed their coral, the scarlet haws, the deep crimson hips, with lingering brown leaves to make a resting-place for the jewels of the hoar-frost. Such hedgerows were often as tall as the labourers' cottages dotted along the lanes or clustered into a small hamlet, their little dingy windows telling, like thick-filmed eyes, of nothing but the darkness within. The passenger on the coach-box, bowled along above such a hamlet, saw chiefly the roofs of it—probably it turned its back on the road and seemed to lie away from everything but its own patch of earth and sky, away from the parish church by long fields and green lanes, away from all intercourse, save that of tramps." The tramps—"the big, bold, gin-breathing tramps"—have a few words devoted to them, and then the traveller enters a country presenting more cheerful features. "But there were trim, cheerful villages, too, with a neat or handsome parsonage and grey church set in the midst; there was the pleasant tinkle of the blacksmith's anvil, the patient cart-horse waiting at his door; the basketmaker peeling his willow wands in the sunshine; the wheelwright putting the last touch to a blue cart with red wheels; here and there a cottage with bright transparent windows, showing pots full of blooming balsams or geraniums, and little gardens in front all double daisies or dark wall-flowers; at the well, clean and comely women carrying yoked buckets, and towards the free-school small Britons

dawdling on, and handling their marbles in the pockets of unpatched corduroys adorned with brass buttons. The land around was rich and marly, great corn-stacks stood in the rick yards—for the rick-burners had not found their way hither; the homesteads were those of rich farmers who paid no rent, or had the rare advantage of a lease, and could afford to keep their corn till prices had risen. The coach would be sure to overtake some of them on the way to their outlying fields or to the market town, sitting heavily on their well-groomed horses, or weighing down one side of an olive-green gig. They probably thought of the coach with some contempt, as an accommodation for people who had not their own gigs, or who, wanting to travel to London and such distant places, belonged to the trading and less solid part of the nation. The passenger on the box could see that this was the district of protuberant optimists, sure that Old England was the best of all possible countries, and that if there were any facts that had not fallen under their own observation they were facts not worth observing; the district of clean little market-towns without manufactures, of fat livings, an aristocratic clergy, and low poor rates. But as the day wore on the scene would change: the land would begin to be blackened with coal-pits, the rattle of hand-looms to be heard in hamlets and villages. Here were powerful men walking queerly with knees bent outward from squatting in the mine, going home to throw themselves down in their blackened flannel and sleep through the daylight, then rise and spend much of their high wages at the ale-house with their fellows of the Blue-pit Club. Here the pale, eager faces of hand-loom weavers, men and women, haggard from sitting up late at night to finish the week's work, hardly begun till the Wednesday.

Everywhere the cottages and the small children were dirty, for the languid mothers gave their strength to the loom: pious Dissenting women, perhaps, who took life patiently, and thought that salvation depended chiefly on predestination, and not at all on cleanliness. The gables of Dissenting chapels now made a visible sign of religion, and of a meeting-place to counterbalance the ale-house, even in the hamlets." Next we come into a region dominated by the spirit of a contiguous big manufacturing town. "The breath of the manufacturing town, which made a cloudy day and a red gloom by night on the horizon, diffused itself over all the surrounding country, filling the air with eager unrest." But even in this region "there were the grey steeples, too, and the churchyards, with their grassy mounds and venerable headstones, sleeping in the sunlight; there were broad fields and homesteads, and fine old woods covering a rising ground, or stretching far by the road side, allowing only peeps at the park and mansion which they shut in from the working-day world. In these Midland districts the traveller passed rapidly from one phase of life to another; after looking down on a village dingy with coal-dust, noisy with the shaking of looms, he might skirt a parish all of fields, high hedges, and deep rutted lanes; after the coach had rattled over the pavement of a manufacturing town, the scene of riots and trades-union meetings, it would take him in another ten minutes into a rural region, where the neighbourhood of the town was only felt in the advantages of a near market for corn, cheese, and hay, and where men with a considerable banking account were accustomed to say that 'they never meddled with politics themselves.' The busy scenes of the shuttle and the wheel, of the roaring furnace, of the shaft and the pulley, seemed to make but crowded nests in the midst of the large-spaced,

slow-moving life of homesteads, and far-away cottages and oak-sheltered parks. Looking at the dwellings scattered among the woody flats and the ploughed uplands, under the low grey sky which overhung them with an unchanging stillness as if Time itself were pausing, it was easy for the traveller to conceive that town and country had no pulse in common, except where the hand-looms made a far-reaching straggling fringe about the great centres of manufacture."

A ride through Warwickshire from Stratford-on-Avon by way of Warwick, Coventry, and Nuneaton to the northern border of the county, yields all the changes of scenery here sketched, and the varieties of life arising from the varying industrial and social conditions. Again, in the essay before alluded to, she says:—"But our woodlands and pastures, our hedge-parted corn-fields and meadows, our bits of high common where we used to plant the windmill, our quiet little rivers here and there fit to turn a mill-wheel, our villages along the old coach-roads, are all easily alterable lineaments that seem to make the face of our mother-land sympathetic with the laborious lives of her children. She does not take their ploughs and waggons contemptuously, but rather makes every hovel and every sheepfold, every railed bridge or fallen tree trunk an agreeably noticeable incident; not a mere speck in the midst of unmeasured vastness, but a piece of our social history in pictorial writing. Our rural tracts—where no Babel chimney scales the heavens—are without mighty objects that fill the soul with the sense of an outer world unconquerably aloof from our efforts. The wastes are playgrounds (and let us try to keep them such for the children's children, who will inherit no other sort of demesne); the grasses and reeds nod to each other over the river, but we have cut a canal close by; the very heights laugh with corn in August, or lift the plough team

against the sky in September." Then comes the reference to "a crowd of burly navvies" and the changes they quickly produce, and proceeding, she says, "But because our land shows this readiness to be changed, all signs of permanence upon it raises a tender attachment instead of awe. Some of us at least love the scanty relics of our forests, and are thankful if a bush is left of the old hedgerow. A crumbling bit of wall where the delicate ivy-leaved toad-flax hangs its light branches, or a bit of grey thatch with patches of dark moss on its shoulder and a troop of grass stems on its ridge, is a thing to visit. And then the tiled roof of cottage and homestead, of the long cowshed where generations of the milky mothers have stood patiently, of the broad-shouldered barns, where the old-fashioned flail once made resonant music, while the watch-dog barked at the timidly venturesome fowls making pecking raids on the out-flying grain—the roofs that have looked out from among the elms and walnut trees, or beside the yearly group of hay and corn stacks, or below the square stone steeple, gathering their grey or ochre-tinted lichens and their olive-green mosses under all ministries—let us praise the sober harmonies they give to our landscape, helping to unite us pleasantly with the generations who tilled the soil for us before we were born, and paid heavier and heavier taxes with much grumbling, but without that deepest root of corruption—the self-indulgent despair which cuts down and consumes, and never plants."

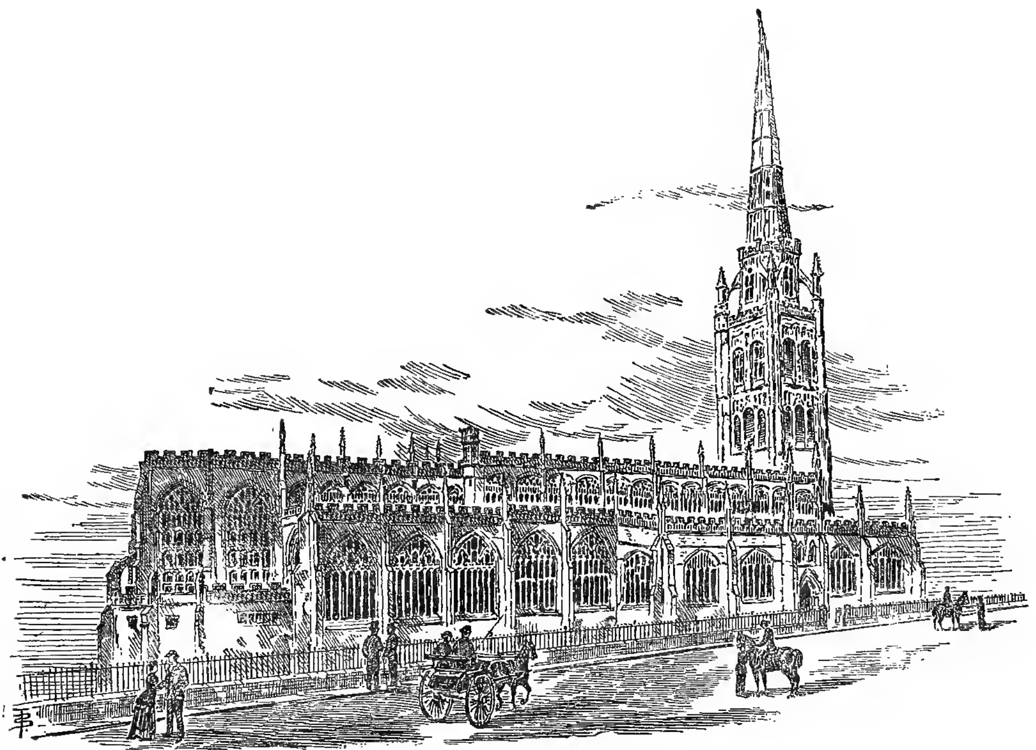
It is a little singular that George Eliot did not draw more upon her experience at Coventry than she has done. Historically it is one of the most interesting of Midland towns. Its memorials of the time when it was the "chamber of princes," its pieces of antiquated street architecture, its public buildings, of which St. Mary's Hall is pre-eminently interesting,

and above all its specimens of ecclesiastical architecture, give it a superlative position in the eyes of the student and the lover of art. Its parish church (St. Michael's) is one of the largest, as it is certainly one of the most imposing churches in England. It was pronounced by so high an authority as Sir Christopher Wren to be a masterpiece. It consists of nave with aisles, chancel with aisles, transepts and tower, the last surmounted by a magnificent spire rising to a height of 303 feet. This spire, with the spires of Trinity Church and Christ Church, are conspicuous objects for a considerable distance, and have gained for Coventry the designation of "the city of the three spires." Then it is within a few miles of many famous historic spots, including Kenilworth, Warwick, and Stratford-on-Avon. But of none of these things has George Eliot anything to say.

But the little she did take from "the city of the three spires" was at all events of a high order, for it yielded Rufus Lyon—an altogether quaint, lovable, and faithful portraiture of the Dissenting preacher of fifty years ago. A lady whose mother was at school with Mary Ann Evans, at the Misses Franklin's, gave interesting particulars respecting those ladies in an article written in 1881. They were the daughters of a Coventry Baptist minister who, during the many years of his pastorate there, inhabited a house in the Chapel Yard almost exactly resembling that of Rufus Lyon in "Felix Holt." "For this venerable gentleman," says the writer, "Miss Evans, as a school-girl, had a great admiration, and I, who can remember him well, can trace in Rufus Lyon himself many slight resemblances, such as the 'little legs,' and the habit of walking up and down when composing." When the reader is first introduced to Rufus Lyon he is in his study among his books, walking about "with his hands clasped behind him, an attitude

in which his body seemed to bear about the same proportion to his head as the lower part of a stone Hermes bears to the carven image that crowns it." . . . "At the first glance every one thought him a very odd-looking, rusty old man; the free-school boys often hooted after him, and called him 'Revelations;' and to many respectable Church-people old Lyon's little legs and large head seemed to make Dissent additionally preposterous. But he was too short-sighted to notice those who tittered at him—too absent from the world of small facts and petty impulses in which titterers live. With Satan to argue against on matters of vital experience as well as of Church government, with great texts to meditate on, which seemed to get deeper as he tried to fathom them, it had never occurred to him to reflect what sort of image his small person made on the retina of a light-minded beholder. The good Rufus had his ire and his egoism; but they existed only as the red heat which gave force to his belief and his teaching."

In Esther Lyon's attention to dress, her neatness and nattiness, and her fastidiousness respecting colours and perfumes, as in her attention to the niceties of words, we have some of the characteristics of George Eliot herself. "She (Esther) had one of those exceptional organisations which are quick and sensitive without being in the least morbid; she was alive to the finest shades of manner, to the nicest distinctions of tone and accent; she had a little code of her own about scents and colours, textures and behaviour, by which she secretly condemned or sanctioned all things and persons. And she was well satisfied with herself for her fastidious taste, never doubting that hers was the highest standard. She was proud that the best-born and handsomest girls at school had always said that she might be taken for a lady born. Her own pretty instep, clad in a silk stocking, her little heel just rising



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from a kid slipper, her irreproachable nails and delicate wrist, were the objects of delighted consciousness to her; and she felt that it was her superiority which made her unable to use without disgust any but the finest cambric handkerchiefs and freshest gloves."

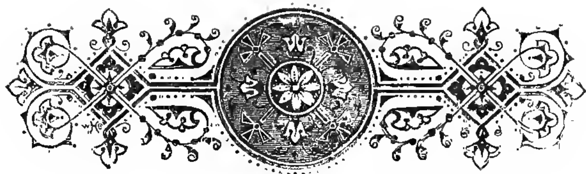
The reader is not in sympathy with Esther at first, suspecting, with Felix, that she answers to his description of a fine lady, "As a squirrel-headed thing, with small airs and small notions about as applicable to the business of life as a pair of tweezers to the clearing of a forest." But as the story advances we get to love and admire her, and before it concludes she is on the heroine's pedestal. The earlier interviews particularly, between Esther and Felix, are piquant and powerfully described. Through the mouth of Felix on the occasion of his first meeting with Esther, we get some of George Eliot's literary views. Byron is "a misanthropic debauchee, whose notion of a hero was that he should disorder his stomach and despise mankind. His corsairs and renegades, his Alps and Manfreds, are the most paltry puppets that were ever pulled by the strings of lust and pride." Again, on another visit, picking up a copy of Réné belonging to Esther, he exclaims, "Why, what worth calling a reason could make any mortal hang over this trash?—idiotic immorality, dressed up to look fine, with a little bit of doctrine tacked to it, like a hare's foot on a dish, to make believe the mess is not cat's flesh."

Felix is always interesting, notwithstanding his arrogance and egotism; his humour is refreshingly original, and there is much philosophy in his paradoxical utterances. At their first interview Rufus Lyon reads him a lesson on humility, reminding him that "the scornful nostril and the high head gather not the odours that lie on the track of truth. The mind that is too ready at contempt and reprobation is, I may say, as a

clenched fist that can give blows, but is shut up from receiving and holding ought that is precious—though it were Heaven-sent manna." But a mutual feeling of friendliness is excited. Felix acknowledges that he is "perhaps a little too fond of banging and smashing," and, proceeding, he has a hit at the phrenologists who were much more believed in then than now. He says: "A phrenologist at Glasgow told me I had large veneration; another man there who knew me laughed out and said I was the most blasphemous iconoclast living. 'That,' says my phrenologist, 'is because of his large ideality, which prevents him from finding anything perfect enough to be venerated.' Of course I put my ears down and wagged my tail at that stroking." Then there is his advice to the deacon who was perplexed with the headstrong conduct of the chapel singers: "Follow the light of the old-fashioned Presbyterians that I've heard sing at Glasgow. The preacher gives out the psalm, and then everybody sings a different tune as it happens to turn up in their throats. It's a domineering thing to set a tune and expect everybody else to follow it. It's a denial of private judgment." When love of children is adduced as a reason for marrying, he exclaims, "That's a reason for not marrying. A bachelor's children are always young; they're immortal children—always lisping, waddling, helpless, and with a chance of turning out good." His aspirations are summed up in the sentence:—"I want to be a demagogue of a new sort; an honest one, if possible, who will tell the people they are blind and foolish, and neither flatter them nor fatten on them."

The election riot in which Felix came to grief is an actual incident in Nuneaton history. It occurred in the year 1832, and was witnessed by Mary Ann Evans, then a girl of thirteen. It made a deep impression upon her, and she turns it to excellent account in "Felix Holt." The riot is thus described in the local newspapers:—"On Friday, the 21st December, at

Nuneaton, from the commencement of the poll till nearly half-past two, the Hemingites occupied the poll; the numerous plumpers for Sir Eardley Wilmot and the adherents of Mr. Dugdale being constantly interrupted in their endeavours to go to the hustings to give an honest and conscientious vote. The magistrates were consequently applied to, and from the representations they received from all parties they were at length induced to call in aid a military force. A detachment of the Scots Greys accordingly arrived; but it appearing that that gallant body was not sufficiently strong to put down the turbulent spirit of the mob, a reinforcement was considered by the constituted authorities as absolutely necessary. The tumult increasing as the detachment of the Scots Greys were called in, the Riot Act was read from the windows of the Newdegate Arms; and we regret to add that both W. P. Inge, Esq., and Colonel Newdegate, in the discharge of their magisterial duties, received personal injuries. On Saturday the mob presented an appalling appearance, and but for the forbearance of the soldiery numerous lives would have fallen a sacrifice. Several of the officers of the Scots Greys were materially hurt in their attempt to quell the riotous proceedings of the mob. During the day the sub-sheriffs at the different booths received several letters from the friends of Mr. Dugdale, stating that they were outside of the town and anxious to vote for that gentleman, but were deterred from entering it from fear of personal violence. Two or three unlucky individuals, drawn from the files of the military on their approach to the poll, were cruelly beaten and stripped literally naked. We regret to add that one life has been sacrificed during the contest, and that several misguided individuals have been seriously injured."



CHAPTER IX.

"ADAM BEDE."

WITH much that is imaginative there is interwoven a great deal of reality in what many people regard as George Eliot's greatest work, and which at all events is the most popular—" Adam Bede." The hero himself is a portraiture of the writer's own father, Robert Evans; whose altering social position and conditions of life were identical in many respects with those of Adam Bede in the novel. Robert Evans was in his younger days a carpenter, who rose from that position to be forester, and from forester to be land-agent, and those are precisely the three steps that mark the advancement of Adam Bede. This in itself would be little, but the self-reliance, the unswerving integrity, the high recognition of duty, and the deep reverence and religious feeling underlying all, and of which all these great qualities were but the natural outcome, characteristic of the hero of the story, were actually embodied in the life of George Eliot's father. It is true that George Eliot denied that Adam was her father's portrait, though acknowledging that the character was suggested by incidents in her father's earlier life; but in the characteristics enumerated, as well as in early environment, there is such complete identity between the hero of the novel and the actual Robert

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Evans, that we may, as those who knew her father and were acquainted with his career, did, regard the two men as one. There was, a short time ago, and no doubt is yet, in the old house at Griff a portrait of Robert Evans as "Adam Bede," and with it was preserved some specimens of his handiwork as a carpenter. But George Eliot herself has supplied us with a sketch of her father, which is very much to the point of identification with "Adam Bede."

Some one having spoken of her after the appearance of the story as a "self-educated farmer's daughter," she wrote as follows to Mr. Bray in 1859:—"My father did not raise himself from being an artisan to be a farmer. He raised himself from being an artisan to be a man whose extensive knowledge in very varied practical departments made his services valued through several counties. He had large knowledge of building, of mines, of plantations, of various branches of valuation and measurement—of all that is essential to the management of large estates. He was held by those competent to judge as unique among land-agents for his manifold knowledge and experience, which enabled him to save the special fees usually paid by landowners for special opinions on the different questions incident to the proprietorship of land. So far as I am personally concerned, I should not write a stroke to prevent any one, in the zeal of antithetic eloquence, from calling me a tinker's daughter; but if my father is to be mentioned at all—if he is to be identified with an imaginary character—my piety towards his memory calls on me to point out to those who are supposed to speak with information what he really achieved in life."

Hayslope, where the story unfolds itself, is the village of Ellaston, in North Staffordshire. The river Dove is the division here between Staffordshire and Derbyshire, and

Ellaston lies just across the bridge that spans the stream near Norbury Railway Station. It is a lovely village of scattered houses and gardens dotting the fertile slopes, with church and schools set in the midst and adjacent to the Green—looking like the abode of Arcadian simplicity and happiness. George Eliot in felicitous phraseolgy has described the scene, the Loamshire she speaks of being Staffordshire, and Stonyshire being Derbyshire. "The Green lay at the extremity of the village, and from it the road branched off in two directions, one leading further up the hill by the church, and the other winding gently down towards the valley. On the side of the Green that led towards the church, the broken line of thatched cottages was continued nearly to the churchyard gate; but on the opposite, north-western side, there was nothing to obstruct the view of gently-swelling meadow, and wooded valley, and dark masses of distant hill. That rich, undulating district of Loamshire to which Hayslope belonged lies close to a grim outskirt of Stonyshire, overlooked by its barren hills as a pretty blooming sister may sometimes be seen linked in the arm of a rugged, tall, swarthy brother; and in two or three hours' ride the traveller might exchange a bleak, treeless region, intersected by lines of cold grey stone, for one where his road wound under the shelter of woods, or up swelling hills, muffled with hedgerows, and long meadow grass, and thick corn; and where at every turn he came upon some fine old country-seat nestled in the valley or crowning the slope, some homestead with its long length of barn and its cluster of golden ricks, some grey steeple looking out from a pretty confusion of trees and thatch and dark-red tiles. It was just such a picture as this last that Hayslope Church had made to the traveller as he began to mount the gentle slope leading to its pleasant uplands, and now from his station near the Green

he had before him in one view nearly all the other typical features of this pleasant land. High up against the horizon were the huge conical hills, like giant mounds intended to fortify this region of corn and grass against the keen and hungry winds of the north; not distant enough to be clothed in purple mystery, but with sombre greenish sides visibly specked with sheep, whose motion was only revealed by memory, not detected by sight; wooed from day to day by the changing hours, but responding by no change in themselves—left for ever grim and sullen after the flush of morning, the winged gleams of the April noon-day, the parting crimson glory of the ripening summer sun. And directly below them the eye rested on a more advanced line of hanging woods, divided by bright patches of pasture or furrowed crops, and not yet deepened into the uniform leafy curtains of high summer, but still showing the warm tints of the young oak and the tender green of the ash or lime. Then came the valley, where the woods grew thicker, as if they had rolled down and hurried together from the patches left smooth on the slope that they might take the better care of the tall mansion which lifted its parapets and sent its faint blue summer smoke among them. Doubtless there was a large sweep of park and a broad glassy pool in front of that mansion, but the swelling slope of meadow would not let our traveller see them from the village green."

"The broken line of thatched cottages continued to the church" no longer exists, having made way for an improved access to the churchyard; but to every other essential feature of the village and surrounding scenery this description applies. Further on we got another view. "And here was dear old Hayslope at last sleeping on the hill, like a quiet old place as it was, in the late afternoon sunlight; and opposite to it the great shoulders of the Binton Hills, below them the purplish

blackness of the hanging woods, and at last the pale front of the Abbey, looking out from among the oaks of the Chase, as if anxious for the heir's return." And there is yet another picture of it in the slanting rays of the declining sun. "As Adam was going homeward on Wednesday evening in the six o'clock sunlight, he saw in the distance the last load of barley winding its way towards the yard-gate of the Hall Farm, and heard the chant of 'Harvest Home' rising and sinking like a wave. Fainter and fainter, and more musical through the growing distance, the falling, dying sound still reached him as he neared the Willow Brook. The low westering sun shone right on the shoulders of the old Binton Hills, turning the unconscious sheep into bright spots of light; shone on the windows of the cottage, too, and made them a-flame with a glory beyond that of amber or amethyst. It was enough to make Adam feel that he was in a great temple, and that the distant chant was a sacred song."

The Willow Brook here mentioned runs at the bottom of the slope at a short distance from the cottage where the Evans family lived, and is the stream in which Thias Bede is represented as having been drowned. It was in this cottage that Robert Evans (George Eliot's father) and his three brothers, Samuel, William, and John, lived with their parents, their father being the village wheelwright. The site of the cottage is shown, but if any portion of the original structure exists it is only as part of a much larger dwelling that now occupies the spot. William Evans succeeded to or established a business as builder, and as his position improved he enlarged his house. He was succeeded by his son William, who extended the business and became well known as a Gothic architect and builder, among his more important work being the restoration of Lichfield Cathedral. His fortunes so improved that he died

a wealthy man, but he clung to the last to the old house which by his father and himself had been transformed into a unique residence, where every detail tells of the taste and genius of the two men. The house is at present occupied by Mr. Meakin, there being now no representative of the late William Evans's family excepting a daughter, who is the wife of a clergyman living near to Derby. Both men lie buried in Ellaston churchyard—a church which the elder had improved and enlarged. Of it, as it existed at the date of the story, George Eliot says:—"I cannot say that the interior of Hayslope Church was remarkable for anything except for the grey age of its oaken pews—great square pews mostly, ranged on each side of a narrow aisle. It was free, indeed, from the modern blemish of galleries. The choir had two narrow pews to themselves in the middle of the right-hand row, so that it was a short process for Joshua Rann to take his place among them as principal bass, and return to his desk after the singing was over. The pulpit and desk, grey and old as the pews, stood on one side of the arch leading into the chancel, which also had its grey square pews for Mr. Donnithorne's family and servants. Yet, I assure you, these grey pews, with the buff-washed walls, gave a very pleasing tone to this shabby interior, and agreed extremely well with the ruddy faces and bright waistcoats. And there were liberal touches of crimson towards the chancel, for the pulpit and Mr. Donnithorne's own pew had handsome crimson cloth cushions; and, to close the vista, there was a crimson altar-cloth, embroidered with golden rays by Miss Lydia's own hand." The little church, which is in the Perpendicular style, and contains an altar-tomb with effigies to the family of Fleetwood of Calwich, was enlarged and improved by William Evans. Near to the village is Calwich Abbey, occupying a thickly wooded slope overlooking a beau-

tiful reach of the river Dove. Only a fragment of the original abbey remains. The modern dwelling has an interest for Yorkshire people, for it is owned by a branch of the Duncombe family, and it was here that the late Dean of York (Dr. Duncombe) resided when he was created Dean.

The Donnithorne Arms of the story is the Bromley Arms of Ellaston village, a stone building approached by a flight of stone steps—a house of considerable pretensions once, but now looking out of repair and the worse for age—where the traveller will still require the cheer of the inn to "console him for the ignorance in which the weather-beaten sign left him as to the heraldic bearings of that ancient family, the Donnithornes." From the older inhabitants of the village one may glean many reminiscences of the Evans family. An old lady I conversed with, whose name would have delighted Dickens, and would at once have been entered in his note-book for future use, remembered very well hearing Dinah Morris preach near the stone-pit at the bottom of the village ; and an aged farmer whose father, a carpenter, had worked at the bench with Robert Evans, was particular in emphasising the information that Robert Evans was Adam Bede, but that Samuel, and not Robert, married Dinah Morris. It was evident that among those old people the names of Adam Bede and Seth Bede were more familiar for the persons meant than were their actual patronymics, Robert and Samuel Evans. I was told also that the father of this generation of Evans came from Roston to settle at Ellaston, and that Dinah Morris had preached on Roston common, Roston being on the Derbyshire side of the Dove, about three miles distant. Inquiring for the Hall Farm, where the Poysers lived, there was pointed out to me, at the top of the village, a whitewashed, thatched farmhouse, which neither in physiognomy nor topographically

answers the conditions described by George Eliot. It appears that at one time this farm was occupied by a family of the name of Poyser, and hence the origin of the notion that this is the Hall Farm. A recent writer identifies Manor Farm, Mappleton, as the Hall Farm.

The Oakbourne of the novel is the town of Ashbourn, five miles distant from Ellaston; Snowfield, the home of Dinah Morris, is Wirksworth; by Eagledale, at least twice mentioned in the story, is undoubtedly meant Dovedale; Norbourne is in all probability Norbury; and Donnithorne Chase is regarded by many as being Wootton Park, the residence then of the Bromley-Davenport family, two miles from Ellaston. There is, however, in the description of the coming-of-age festivities a reference to the place where the tenants and others on the estate assembled, which might apply to Calwich Abbey. "The house would have been nothing but a plain square mansion of Queen Anne's time, but for the remnant of an old abbey to which it was united at one end, in much the same way as one may sometimes see a new farmhouse rising high and prim at the end of older and lower farm-offices." But the village is in reality surrounded by mansions set amid ancestral parks, any one of which might be the scene of some of the incidents described in the novel. George Eliot appears to have made only two or three visits to the locality, coming with her father from her Warwickshire home to visit her Staffordshire and Derbyshire relatives; and it is, therefore, all the more remarkable that she should have succeeded in giving the local colouring that stamps "Adam Bede" as a story of Staffordshire and Derbyshire life. To a considerable degree she must have been beholden to her father for this success, and she says in one of her letters:—"The details which I know as facts, and have made use of for my picture, were gathered from such

imperfect allusion and narrative as I heard from my father in his occasional talk about old times." But her descriptions of scenery as efforts of memory are very remarkable, and the deflections from strict accuracy just what might occur in writing years after her final visit.

We first get a glimpse of Adam Bede in Jonathan Burge's workshop:—"The afternoon sun was warm on the five workmen there, busy upon doors and window frames and wainscoting. A scent of pinewood from a tent-like pile of planks outside the open door mingled itself with the scent of the elder-bushes which were spreading their summer snow close to the open window opposite; the slanting sunbeams shone through the transparent shavings that flew before the steady plane, and lit up the fine grain of the oak panelling which stood propped against the wall. On a heap of those soft shavings a rough grey shepherd dog had made himself a pleasant bed, and was lying with his nose between his fore-paws, occasionally wrinkling his brows to catch a glance at the tallest of the five workmen, who was carving a shield in the centre of a wooden mantelpiece. It was to this workman that the strong baritone belonged which was heard above the sound of plane and hammer. . . . Such a voice could only come from a broad chest, and the broad chest belonged to a large-boned muscular man, nearly 6ft. high, with a back so flat and a head so well poised that when he drew himself up to take a more distant survey of his work, he had the air of a soldier standing at ease. The sleeve rolled up above the elbow showed an arm that was likely to win the prize for feats of strength; yet the strong, supple hand, with its broad finger tips, looked ready for works of skill. In his tall stalwartness Adam Bede was a Saxon, and justified his name; but the jet black hair, made the more noticeable by its contrast with the

light paper cap, and the keen glance of the dark eyes that shone from under strongly-marked, prominent, and mobile eyebrows, indicated a mixture of Celtic blood. The face was large and roughly hewn, and when in repose had no other beauty than such as belongs to an expression of good-

NORBURY CHURCH—INTERIOR.

humoured, honest intelligence." So much for Adam physically. By-and-bye we see him at his work, learn something of the conditions out of which the man had been evolved, and the influence such types of character exert in their own sphere.

Sweetly picturesque in itself, Ellaston has imposing surroundings, whilst the entire locality is classic ground. A few miles away in one direction is Alton Towers, the magnificent Staffordshire seat of the Earl of Shrewsbury, standing in Gothic grandeur in the romantic valley of the Churnet; and within a few miles more in another direction you enter upon the strikingly beautiful scenery of Dovedale, with its memories of Izaak Walton, Cotton the poet, Dr. Johnson, Tom Moore, and Rousseau. Norbury Church on the other side of the river is worth a visit, not only because of its architecture, stained glass, screen, stalls, and alabaster tombs, but because it is said to have been repewed by Adam Bede (Robert Evans) himself.

As to Dinah Morris, the most striking personality in the story and one of the most remarkable characters in fiction dealing with religious ardour, George Eliot acknowledges that she was suggested by her aunt, Mrs. Elizabeth Evans, wife of Samuel Evans (Seth Bede). But no one attempting to trace the history and fix the characteristics of Mrs. Evans, but will probably come to the conclusion that there was a great deal more than mere suggestion, and that in many respects Dinah Morris is a portraiture of Elizabeth Evans just as much as Adam Bede is of Robert Evans. She is, however, of sufficient importance to be dealt with separately, and her story and that of her husband (Seth Bede) will be related in a subsequent chapter. Bartle Massey was in reality as is represented in the novel, the village schoolmaster who taught Robert Evans to "figure," and who was in great repute alike for his scholarship and his cynical sayings. The name "Poyser" was at one time rather common in the locality, and at Wirksworth may yet be seen adorning the signboard over a shop door-way. Another local name used in the novel is that of Maskery.

CHAPTER X.

"DINAH MORRIS AND WIRKSWORTH."

AS to the extent to which the life and the character of Mrs. Elizabeth Evans, wife of Samuel Evans (Seth Bede), are reflected in "Dinah Morris" there is considerable conflict of authorities. It is, however, the highest testimony to the power of the writer, that the leading characters in "Adam Bede" were eagerly seized upon, on the appearance of the novel, by residents in Ellaston, Ashbourn, and Wirksworth as being representations of persons who were or had been well known in those localities. The beautiful character of Dinah Morris, instinct as it is with self-sacrificing zeal and devotion to a high ideal, was claimed by Wirksworth people as a portraiture of the character and life of Elizabeth Evans. Elizabeth Evans seems to have been a native of Leicestershire. She left Newbold, in that county, when quite a young girl, and after spending a short time at Nottingham, settled at Wirksworth, where she probably earned a living in her younger days by working in a tape-mill, just as Dinah is represented as doing. She early took to preaching among the Wesleyans, and her gifts as an orator, and the deep spirituality which redeemed her life, humble as it was, from any taint of vulgarity, produced an impression which lives still—lives in the memories of the older people of Wirksworth, and in tradition for the younger.

Ellaston, where Samuel Evans (Seth Bede) was, like his brother Robert, brought up a carpenter, is fifteen miles from Wirksworth; and it was probably in that village that Samuel Evans first met the woman who became his wife, for she actually preached on Ellaston (Hayslope) Green, as represented in the story, and in other villages in that border country. She joined the Methodists in 1797, and in her ardent zeal, as she afterwards herself narrated, she gave up all her old companions, she saw it her duty "to leave off all superfluities of dress; and while still a young girl, attired with the severest simplicity, she tramped from village to village all over the bleak, treeless Derbyshire hills, and into the fertile undulating country of the adjoining county, gathering the poor around her, and speaking to them of the belief which suffused her own life." "I saw it my duty," she says, "to be wholly devoted to God, and to be set apart for the Master's use." After their marriage, Samuel, who had also become a Wesleyan, and his wife settled at Wirksworth, the former leaving his own trade as a carpenter, and becoming manager and afterwards part proprietor of a tape-mill. There are two statements in the novel respecting Dinah Morris inconsistent with Elizabeth Evans's actual experience, which it may be well to point out here, viz., that she is represented as marrying "Adam Bede" (Robert Evans), and that she gave up preaching immediately on her marriage. As has been stated, she actually married Samuel Evans, and she continued to preach for many years after her marriage, and that notwithstanding her being forbidden to exercise her powers in a Wesleyan pulpit.

Dinah was to preach on Ellaston Green, and it is through the same imaginary stranger to whom we are indebted for a description of the village and its surroundings, that we get the first introduction to Dinah. "The stranger was struck with

surprise as he saw her approach and mount the cart—surprise, not so much at the delicacy of her appearance, as at the total absence of self-consciousness in her demeanour. He had made up his mind to see her advance with a measured step, and a demure solemnity of countenance; he had felt sure that

ELIZABETH EVANS ("DINAH MORRIS.")

her face would be mantled with the smile of conscious saintship, or else charged with denunciatory bitterness. He knew but two types of Methodism—the ecstatic and the bilious. But Dinah walked as simply as though she was going to market, and seemed as unconscious of her outward appearance

as a little boy. There was no blush, no tremulousness, which said, 'I know you think me a pretty woman, too young to preach;' no casting up or down of the eyelids, no compression of the lips, no attitude of the arms, that said, 'But you must think of me as a saint.' She held no book in her ungloved hands, but let them hang down lightly crossed before her as she stood and turned her grey eyes on the people. There was no keenness in the eyes; they seemed rather to be shedding love than making observations; they had the liquid look which tells that the mind is full of what it has to give out rather than impressed by external objects. She stood with her left hand towards the descending sun, and leafy boughs screened her from its rays; but in this sober light the delicate colouring of her face seemed to gather a calm vividness, like flowers at evening. It was a small oval face, of a uniform transparent whiteness, with an egg-like line of cheek and chin, a full but firm mouth, a delicate nostril, and a low perpendicular brow, surmounted by a rising arch of parting between smooth locks of pale reddish hair. The hair was drawn straight back behind the ears, and covered, except by an inch or two, above the brow, by a net Quaker cap. The eyebrows, of the same colour as the hair, were perfectly horizontal and firmly pencilled; the eyelashes, though no darker, were long and abundant; nothing was left blurred or unfinished. It was one of those faces that make one think of white flowers with light touches of colour on their pure petals. The eyes had no peculiar beauty beyond that of expression; they looked so simple, so candid, so gravely loving, that no accusing scowl, no light sneer could help melting away before their glance." The effect Dinah produced upon the very mixed audience facing her is indicated in a very few words, carrying with them, the quiet humour which is one of the many charms of George

Eliot's style—"Joshua Rann gave a low cough, as if he were clearing his throat in order to come to a new understanding with himself; Chad Cranage lifted up his leather skull-cap and scratched his head; and Wiry Ben wondered how Seth had the pluck to think of courting her." As she proceeded with her address—"Her pale face became paler; the circles under the eyes deepened, as they do when tears half gather without falling; and the mild loving eyes took an expression of appalled pity, as if she had suddenly discerned a destroying angel hovering over the heads of the people. Her voice became deep and muffled, but there was still no gesture. Nothing could be less like the ordinary type of the Ranter than Dinah. She was not preaching as she heard others preach, but speaking directly from her own emotions, and under the inspiration of her own simple faith."

Seth's devotion to Dinah—it is represented as hopeless—is exquisitely delineated; and so, too, is that ardent Methodism which they typify. "He was but three-and-twenty, and had only just learned what it is to love—to love with that adoration which a young man gives to a woman whom he feels to be greater and better than himself. Love of this sort is hardly distinguishable from religious feeling. . . . . And this blessed gift of venerating love has been given to too many humble craftsmen since the world began, for us to feel any surprise that it should have existed in the soul of a Methodist carpenter half a century ago, while there was yet a lingering after-glow from the time when Wesley and his fellow-labourers fed on the hips and haws of the Cornwall hedges, after exhausting limbs and lungs in carrying a divine message to the poor. That after-glow has long faded away; and the picture we are apt to make of Methodism in our imagination is not an amphitheatre of green hills, or the deep shade of the broad-

leaved sycamores, where a crowd of rough men and weary-hearted women drank in a faith which was a rudimentary culture, which linked their thoughts with the past, lifted their imagination above the sordid details of their own narrow lives, and suffused their souls with the sense of a pitying, loving, infinite Presence, sweet as summer to the houseless needy. It is, too, possible that to some of my readers Methodism may mean nothing more than low-pitched gables up dingy streets, sleek grocers, sponging preachers, and hypocritical jargon—elements which are regarded as an exhaustive analysis of Methodism in many fashionable quarters. That would be a pity; for I cannot pretend that Seth and Dinah were anything else than Methodists—not, indeed, of that modern type which reads Quarterly Reviews and attends in chapels with pillared porticoes; but of a very old-fashioned kind. They believed in present miracles, in instantaneous conversions, in revelations by dreams and visions; they drew lots and sought for Divine guidance by opening the Bible at hazard, having a literal way of interpreting the Scriptures which is not at all sanctioned by approved commentators, and it is impossible for me to represent their diction as correct, or their instruction as liberal. Still—if I have read religious history aright—faith, hope, and charity have not always been found in a direct ratio with a sensibility to the three concords, and it is possible, thank Heaven, to have very erroneous theories, and very sublime feelings."

In her journal, given in Mr. Cross's life of his wife, George Eliot gives the following account of the history of "Adam Bede":—"The germ of 'Adam Bede' was an anecdote told me by my Methodist Aunt Samuel (the wife of my father's younger brother)—an anecdote from her own experience. We were sitting together one afternoon during her visit to me at

Griff, probably in 1839 or 1840, when it occurred to her to tell me how she had visited a condemned criminal—a very ignorant woman who had murdered her child and refused to confess; how she had stayed with her praying through the night, and how the poor creature at last broke into tears and confessed her crime. My aunt afterwards went with her in the cart to the place of execution, and she described to me the great respect with which this ministry of hers was regarded by the official people about the gaol. The story told me by my aunt with great feeling affected me deeply, and I never lost the impression of that afternoon and our talk together; but I believe I never mentioned it, through all the intervening years, till something prompted me to tell it to George (Mr. Lewis) in December, 1856, when I had begun to write the 'Scenes of Clerical Life.' He remarked that the scene in the prison would make a fine element in a story; and I afterwards began to think of blending this and some other recollections of my aunt in one story, with some points in my father's early life and character. The problem of construction that remained was to make the unhappy girl one of the chief *dramatis personæ*, and connect her with the hero. At first I thought of making the story one of the series of the 'Scenes,' but afterwards, when several motives had induced me to close these with 'Janet's Repentance,' I determined on making what we always called in our conversation, 'My Aunt's Story,' the subject of a long novel, which I accordingly began to write on the 22nd October, 1857. The character of Dinah grew out of my recollections of my aunt, but Dinah is not at all like my aunt, who was a very small, black-eyed woman, and (as I was told, for I never heard her preach) very vehement in her style of preaching. She had left off preaching when I knew her, being probably sixty years old, and in delicate health; and

she had become, as my father told me, much more gentle and subdued than she had been in the days of her active ministry and bodily strength, when she could not rest without exhorting and remonstrating in season and out of season. I was very fond of her, and enjoyed the few weeks of her stay with me greatly. She was loving and kind to me, and I could talk to her about my inward life, which was closely shut up from those usually around me. I saw her only twice again, for much shorter periods—once at her own home at Wirksworth, in Derbyshire, and once at my father's last residence, Foleshill. The character of Adam, and one or two incidents connected with him, were suggested by my father's early life; but Adam is not my father, any more than Dinah is my aunt. Indeed, there is not a single portrait in 'Adam Bede'; only the suggestions of experience wrought up into new combinations. When I began to write it, the only elements I had determined on besides the character of Dinah were the character of Adam, his relation to Arthur Donnithorne, and their mutual relations to Hetty—*i.e.*, to the girl who commits child murder—the scene in the prison being, of course, the climax towards which I worked. Everything else grew out of the characters and their mutual relations. Dinah's ultimate relation to Adam was suggested by George, when I had read to him the first part of the first volume: he was so delighted with the presentation of Dinah, and so convinced that the reader's interest would centre in her, that he wanted her to be the principal figure at the last. I accepted the idea at once, and from the end of the third chapter worked with it constantly in view."

The girl whom George Eliot's aunt visited in prison, and accompanied to the place of execution, was named Voce, convicted of child murder at Nottingham Assizes. No reprieve arrived in this instance, and the culprit suffered the extreme penalty for her crime.

Wirksworth is an old market-town lying between Matlock and Ashbourn. Its situation, and the occupations of its people, probably account for the quaintness which is the most striking characteristic alike of the town and of its inhabitants. One has the feeling of looking upon a piece of English country life that one feared was altogether extinct—a cameo out of the middle of the last century—so old-fashioned and unprogressive does everything seem. Surely, if there had been a local Rip Van Winkle who went to sleep a hundred years ago, he might wake up now and find things still unchanged. Set amid bare hills, which give it, even more than mere distance, a remoteness from the larger centres of population, with its people contentedly pursuing their hereditary callings of lead-mining and quarrying, it is altogether a unique place, apparently having little in common with the world lying beyond. The people have strongly-marked characteristics, and are famed for religious ardour. In a population of between 2000 and 3000 souls are ten places of worship, viz., the parish church and no less than nine Dissenting chapels. One narrow street, Chapel Lane, contains four or five of those chapels, and in one of these Mrs. Evans often preached. It contains a memorial to her, of which more hereafter. Compared with the district around Ellaston, one can understand George Eliot speaking somewhat disparagingly of Wirksworth. But yet it is far from being an unattractive town, considered solely with regard to its physical surroundings even. Indeed many people would think it not so much charming as inspiriting by reason of its open, wide-spreading views of both earth and sky. It occupies the slope of a great hill which rises up behind it; other hills lift up their heads on either side; and in front—westward—stretches away the green valley through which a stream runs. Everywhere are extensive views, and that sense of freedom

begotten of them. Twice does George Eliot describe the town and the surrounding district under the name of Snowfield. When Hetty Sorrell disappears from the Hall Farm it is thought that she may have gone to Dinah's, and Adam Bede starts off to find her. "It seemed a very short walk, the ten miles to Oakburne (Ashbourn), that pretty town within sight of the blue hills, where he breakfasted. After this, the country grew barer and barer; no more rolling woods, no more wide-branching trees near frequent homesteads, no more bushy hedge-rows; but grey stone walls intersecting the meagre pastures, and dismal wide-scattered grey stone houses on broken lands where mines had been and were no longer. 'A hungry land,' said Adam to himself. 'I'd rather go south'ard where they say it's as flat as a table, than come to live here; though, if Dinah likes to live in a country where she can be the most comfort to folks, she's i' the right to live o' this side, for she must look as if she'd come straight from heaven, like the angels in the desert, to strengthen them as ha' got nothing t' eat!' And when at last he came in sight of Snowfield, he thought it looked like a town that was 'fellow to the country,' though the stream through the valley where the great mill stood gave a pleasant greenness to the lower fields. The town lay grim, stony, and unsheltered, up the sides of a steep hill, and Adam did not go forward to it at present, for Seth had told him where to find Dinah. It was at a thatched cottage outside the town, a little way from the mill—an old cottage, standing sideways towards the road, with a little bit of potato ground before it." Then, later on, when Adam again journeyed to Wirksworth, on a very different errand, we have this description:—"It was more than two o'clock in the afternoon when Adam came in sight of the grey town on the hillside, and looked searchingly towards the green valley for the first glimpse

of the old thatched roof near the ugly red mill. The scene looked less harsh in the soft October sunshine than it had done in the eager time of early spring; and the one grand charm it possessed in common with all wide-stretching woodless regions—that it filled you with a new consciousness of the over-arching sky—had a milder, more soothing influence than usual on this almost cloudless day."

These impressions of Wirksworth attributed to Adam are George Eliot's own, for she journeyed thither more than once to visit her uncle and aunt, who lived for many years in the very cottage where Dinah is represented as lodging with an old couple. About half a mile out of Wirksworth, down the valley, at a spot called Mill Houses, on the right-hand side of the main road to Derby, stands the "ugly red mill," which Samuel Evans managed. It bears upon it the name of the "Haarlam Tape Works." Directly opposite on the other side of the road stands the cottage in which the Evanses lived. It is a small, thatched, stone-built, four-roomed cottage, standing, as described, sideways to the road, and with a bit of potato ground in front. The old couple now occupying it remember both Samuel Evans and his wife, and have heard both of them preach. It was the practice of Mr. Evans to address the mill-hands in the mill. Like Adam, Samuel was noted for feats of strength, and it used to be his boast that he could walk from his home at the mill to Derby in two hours, the distance being thirteen miles. It was at this cottage of which George Eliot speaks of staying a night with her aunt.

It was the people of Wirksworth, especially the Wesleyans and the members of her own family, who on the appearance of the novel, claimed that the original of "Dinah Morris" was Elizabeth Evans, both in character and in the leading incidents of her life. We have already seen what George Eliot says in

her journal on this point. But besides this, she thought it necessary in 1859 to write a long letter to a friend explanatory of some things in the story, and in this letter she states that she first saw her aunt when she was seventeen, when Mrs. Evans visited her father's house at Griff. Of her aunt's conversation during her stay she remembered nothing, excepting the incident of Mrs. Evans being in prison and going to the place of execution with a girl convicted of child murder, and one or two accounts of supposed miracles in which she believed, among the rest, "the Face of the crown of thorns"

SAMUEL AND ELIZABETH EVANS' COTTAGE AT WIRKSWORTH.

seen in the glass. Then she adds:—"I saw my aunt twice after this. Once I spent a day and a night with my father in the Wirksworth cottage, sleeping with my aunt, I remember. Our interview was less interesting than in the former time; I think I was less simply devoted to religious ideas. And once again she came with my uncle to see me, when father and I were living at Foleshill; then there was some pain, for I had given up the form of Christian belief, and was in a crude state of free-thinking. She stayed about three or four days, I think.

This is all I remember distinctly as matter I could write down of my dear aunt, whom I really loved. You see how she suggested 'Dinah;' but it is not possible you should see as I do, how entirely her individuality differed from 'Dinah's.' How curious it seems to me that people should think 'Dinah's' sermon, prayers, and speeches were *copied*, when they were written with hot tears as they surged up in my own mind! As to my indebtedness to the facts of local and personal history of a small kind connected with Staffordshire and Derbyshire, you may imagine of what kind that is when I tell you that I never remained in either of these counties more than a few days together, and of only two such visits have I more than a shadowy, interrupted recollection. The details which I know as facts, and have made use of for my picture, were gathered from such imperfect allusion and narrative as I heard from my father in his occasional talk about old times. As to my aunt's children or grand-children saying, if they did say, that 'Dinah is a good portrait of my aunt,' that is simply the vague, easily satisfied notion imperfectly instructed people always have of portraits. It is not surprising that simple men and women, without pretension to enlightened discrimination, should think a generic resemblance constitutes a portrait, when we see the great public so accustomed to be delighted with misrepresentations of life and character, which they accept as representations, that they are scandalised when art makes a nearer approach to truth."

Unaffected by this disclaimer, however, and strong in the conviction that Dinah Morris and Elizabeth Evans were one person, the Wirksworth Wesleyans in 1873 issued the following appeal:—

"DINAH BEDE."

"A generation has nearly passed away since the death of Mrs. Elizabeth Evans, who was distinguished for extraordinary

piety and extensive usefulness. The remarkable circumstances of her personal history, her preaching talents, and her philanthropic labours, have since been immortalised by a popular author in our standard literature. The name and doings of 'Dinah Bede' are known over the whole world, and yet no memorial whatever of her has been raised in towns where she lived and laboured, or on the spot in Wirksworth Churchyard where her ashes repose. We whose names are hereunto placed having an imperishable recollection of Mrs. Evans' gifts, grace, and goodness, are desirous of placing a memorial tablet in the Methodist Chapel at Wirksworth to perpetuate the memory and usefulness of the so-called Dinah and of Seth Bede, her honoured and sainted husband. If you have any wish to participate in this graceful memorial and monument of these honoured servants of Christ and benefactors of mankind, and desire to contribute even the smallest sum for this object, be so good as to communicate your intention to any of the undermentioned ministers and gentlemen as early as possible:—Adam Chadwick, Steeple Grange; William Buxton, North End; Charles Hall, the Causeway; and Timothy Clarke, North End, Wirksworth."

This appeal resulted in the placing in the Wesleyan Chapel, in Chapel Lane, of a marble monumental tablet bearing the following inscription:—

"Erected by numerous friends to the memory of Elizabeth Evans, known to the world as 'DINAH BEDE,' who during many years proclaimed alike in the open air, the sanctuary, and from house to house, the love of Christ. She died in the Lord, May 9th, 1849, aged 74 years.

"And of Samuel Evans, her husband, who was also a faithful local preacher and class-leader in the Methodist Society. He finished his earthly course December 8, 1858, aged 81 years."

In Wirksworth, at all events, there is no question as to whether "Dinah Morris" is a portrait of Mrs. Evans. In an article from an excellent authority (Miss L. Buckley), which appeared in the *Century* in 1881, the opinions of the locality are well summarised. Miss Buckley states that she had been acquainted with the family of Mrs. Evans for many years, and she relates incidents which had come under her own notice. But here the writer hardly does justice to the excellence of the authority she was able to produce. She had spent the greater part of her life at Wirksworth, and was acquainted with members of Mrs. Evans' family who had also lived in that town; but beyond this the personal experience and knowledge of her parents were at her service. Her father (Mr. J. Buckley, now of Buxton) was in early life closely associated with Samuel Evans in religious work, and her mother (Mrs. Buckley) was the companion in her younger days of Mrs. Evans' daughter. Miss Buckley says:—The description of Dinah's personal appearance and peculiar dress tallies almost exactly with that of Mrs. Evans. The scenes of their labour were identical (for I think no one will attempt to deny that the scenes in "Adam Bede" are laid in Derbyshire and Staffordshire), and the manner of the two women preachers was the same. Dinah felt a conviction that she was "called" to preach the gospel, and that her life had been given her to "devote to the Lord, to help, to comfort, and strengthen the little flock at Snowfield, and to call in many wanderers." And she says:—"My soul is filled with these things from my rising up to my lying down." Mrs. Evans says:—"I believe that the kind hand of God has been upon me all the days of my life. I believe the Lord directed me to leave my father's house when I was little more than fourteen years old. . . . He blessed me with clear light concerning the nature of

preaching." Dinah says:—"My life is too short and God's work is too great for me to think of making a home for myself in this world." Mrs. Evans writes:—"I was powerfully impressed with the shortness of time. I saw it my duty to be wholly devoted to God, and to be set apart for the Master's use." We are told that Dinah and Seth were Methodists of a very old-fashioned kind. They believed in present miracles, in instantaneous conversions, in revelations by dreams and visions. They drew lots, and sought for Divine guidance by opening the Bible at hazard! In like manner Mrs. Evans says:—"I saw in the night seasons the places I must speak in, the roads to some of those places, the people I must speak to, and the thing on which I must stand, together with the opposition I should meet with before I took my journey. If I wanted to know anything I had only to ask, and it was given, generally in a moment, whether I was in the public street or at my work, or in my private room; and many—I think I may say hundreds of times—the Lord shone upon His Word and showed me the meaning thereof."

Another item in the controversy is that Mrs. Evans' family asserted that George Eliot visited Wirksworth a second time in 1842, when she stayed a week—not at the cottage on this occasion, but at the house of Samuel Evans, Elizabeth Evans' son, who had a shop in Wirksworth market-place. Of this visit George Eliot makes no mention in her letter. During this week George Eliot met her aunt daily, and had long private conversations with her, which excited the curiosity of other members of the family, and one day Mrs. Evans' daughter said to her, "Mother, I can't think what thee and Mary Ann have got to talk about so much." To this Mrs. Evans replied, "Well, my dear, I don't know what she wants, but she gets me to tell her all about my life and my religious experience, and

DOVEDALE.

she puts it down in a little book. I can't make out what she wants it for." To this information Miss Buckley adds the note that after George Eliot's departure Mrs. Evans said to her daughter, "Oh, dear, Mary Ann has got one thing I did not mean her to take, and that is the notes of the first sermon I preached on Ellaston Green." The contention of Mrs. Evans' family was that the sermon and prayer, as given in the novel, were in reality their mother's first sermon and prayer on Ellaston Green. One may reasonably have a doubt on this point, however; for if the sermon and prayer in "Adam Bede" were Mrs. Evans' own, she was as much a genius as her illustrious niece.

For many years there was a close relationship between aunt and niece. Letters frequently passed between them, and from the character of these letters it is evident that there was much spiritual affinity between the two women. In his "History of Derbyshire," published a little over a year ago, Mr. J. Pendleton says:—"One of the daughters of this noted Elizabeth Evans, living now at Sheffield, preserves with great care the Quaker bonnet, the white net cap, and the spun-silk shawl that were worn by 'Dinah Morris' when she went preaching. This descendant well remembers George Eliot's visit to her mother in 1837; and until recently had in her possession a bundle of letters sent by the novelist to her parents at Millhouses. Being privileged to peruse these letters soon after George Eliot's death, we wrote of them at the time:—'The letters are signed by the talented authoress in her maiden name, "Mary Ann Evans," and they are written from Griff and Foleshill, near Coventry, at which places she lived with her father during the years 1839, 1840, and 1841. Some of them are brown with age, and much worn at the edges, and in the folding creases. Others are in better preservation. The letters, at

least those despatched in 1839, were sent to Wirksworth just a year before Sir Rowland Hill's scheme of penny postage was carried into effect, and before envelopes had come into common use. They are written on old-fashioned post paper, and the address—"Mr. S. Evans, the Millhouses, Wirksworth," appears on the outside sheet. Most of the epistles are addressed to "My dear Uncle and Aunt," and all reveal George Eliot's great talents. The style is elegant and graceful, and they abound in beautiful metaphor; but their most striking characteristic is the religious tinge that pervades them all. Nearly every line denotes that George Eliot was an earnest Biblical student, and that she was, especially in the years 1839–1840, very anxious about her spiritual condition. In one of the letters written from Griff in 1839 she says she is living in a dry and thirsty land, and that she is looking forward with pleasure to a visit to Wirksworth, and likens her aunt's companionship and counsel to a spring of pure water, acceptable to her as is the well dug for the traveller in the desert.'"

The concluding sentence of the letter from which the historian of Derbyshire here quotes is:—"I am thankful to tell you that my dear friends here are all well. I have a faint hope that the pleasure and profit I have felt in your society may be repeated in the summer; there is no place I would rather visit than Wirksworth, or the inhabitants of which have a stronger hold on my affections." The anticipated visit to Wirksworth was made, for in a letter written in June of the following year George Eliot says:—"I shall have, I hope, a little trip with my father next week into Derbyshire, and this 'lark' will probably be beneficial to me; so that do not imagine I am writing you to come and hear moaning when you need all attainable relaxation." Later in the same month she writes again to the same correspondent, making reference to her

return from Staffordshire, and adding,—"I have had some treats on my little excursions, not the least of which was the gazing on some—albeit the smallest—of 'the everlasting hills,' and on those noblest children of the earth—fine, healthy trees —as independent in their beauty as virtue; set them where you will they adorn and need no adornment. Father indulged me with a sight of Ashbourn Church, the finest mere parish church in the kingdom—in the interior; of Alton Gardens, where I saw actually what I have often seen mentally—the bread-fruit tree, the fan-palm, and the papyrus; and last, of Lichfield Cathedral, where, besides the exquisite architectural beauties, both external and internal, I saw Chantrey's famous monument of the Sleeping Children. There is a tasteless monument to the learned and brilliant female pedant of Lichfield, Miss Seward, with a poor epitaph by Sir Walter Scott. In the town we saw a large monument erected to Johnson's memory, showing his Titanic body, in a sitting posture, on the summit of a pedestal, which is ornamented with bas-reliefs of three passages in his life: his penance in Uttoxeter market, his chairing on the shoulders of his school-mates, and his listening to the preaching of Sacheverel. The statue is opposite to the house in which Johnson was born. It is altogether inferior to that in St. Paul's, which shook me almost as much as a real glance from the literary monarch."

The reference here to a visit to Ashbourn is especially interesting, for the reason that it is several times referred to in "Adam Bede" under the name of Oakburne. It is a quaint old-fashioned place, prettily situated on the river Dove, within three miles of the famous scenery of Dovedale, and boasting the magnificent parish church which George Eliot visited. The church is cruciform, chiefly in the Early English style, with additions of a later date. From the intersection rises a

tower and octagonal spire 212 feet in height, spoken of by the inhabitants as the "Pride of the Peak." The interior is remarkably fine, and, in addition to its own beauties, derives interest from its monuments of the Cockayne family, and the Sacheverels, and Langtons, and Boothbys. Among the monuments of the last-named family is the sculptured figure of a child, Banks' master-piece. Everyone who has seen

ASHBOURN CHURCH.

Chantrey's Sleeping Children at Lichfield will appreciate George Eliot's reference. It is said that Chantrey derived his inspiration for those figures from that of Banks' at Ashbourn.

Probably George Eliot never saw the wonders of Dovedale, but her father evidently had; and it was no doubt from his reminiscences that she got the description of it given by Adam Bede. Arthur Donnithorne, to get away from the temptation of again meeting Hetty, rushes off to Eagledale (Dovedale) on

a fishing excursion, and in answer to a question from Hetty, Adam says of it:—"It's a wonderful sight—rocks and caves such as you never saw in your life. I never had a right notion of rocks till I went there." The Dove rushes through a narrow valley hemmed in by huge limestone cliffs and crags; the rocks here and there taking on grotesque forms or a resemblance to towers and churches. An isolated group of columns is known as "Tissington Spires;" another mass of rock is called "Dovedale Church;" and then there are "Reynard's Cave," the "Dove-holes," and the "Watch-box." Dr. Johnson said of the dale that he who had seen Dovedale need not visit the Highlands.

In Dinah's own account in the novel of how she began preaching there is a beautiful reference to the scenery around Wirksworth, which is worth noting. She is walking over the hills on the Sunday morning to a village designated Hetton Deeps, and she says:—"We set out early in the morning, for it was summer-time; and I had a wonderful sense of the Divine love as we walked over the hills, where there's no trees, you know, sir, as there is here, to make the sky look smaller, but you see the heavens stretched out like a tent, and you feel the 'everlasting arms' around you." In the same conversation there is a reference to Leeds. Dinah says:—"But I've noticed in these villages, where the people lead a quiet life among the green pastures and the still waters, tilling the ground and tending the cattle, there's a strange deadness to the Word, as different as can be from the great towns, like Leeds, where I once went to visit a holy woman that preaches there. It's wonderful how rich is the harvest of souls up those high-walled streets, where you seemed to walk as in a prison yard, and the ear is deafened with the sounds of worldly toil. I think, may be, it is because the promise is sweeter when this life is so dark

and weary, and the soul gets more hungry when the body is ill at ease." George Eliot herself visited Leeds in 1868, and speaking of it in a letter to a friend she makes the following uncomplimentary allusion:—"We do not often see a place which is a good foil for London, but certainly Leeds is in a lower circle of the great town—*Inferno.*" But in Leeds she met some pleasant people, she also saw some of the surrounding country, and she has something better to say than that just quoted:—"We went on from Leeds to Bolton, and spent a day in wandering through the grand woods on the banks of the Wharfe. Altogether, our visit to Yorkshire was extremely agreeable. Our host, Dr. Allbutt, is a good, clever, graceful man, enough to enable one to be cheerful under the horrible smoke of ugly Leeds; and the fine hospital, which he says is admirably fitted for its purpose, is another mitigation. You would like to see the tasteful, subdued ornamentation in the rooms which are to be sick wards." From Leeds she journeyed into Derbyshire, calling on the way at Sheffield, of which she says:—"It was a great experience to me to see the stupendous ironworks at Sheffield." But her renewal of her Derbyshire memories is the most interesting portion of her letters. In the novel Adam Bede makes a reference to Arkwrights' mills at Cromford, near Matlock. Opposite the mills, overlooking a beautiful reach of the river Derwent, is the residence of Arkwright, and to these George Eliot refers in her journal. She says,—"On Saturday, the 7th November (1868) we went to Matlock and stayed till Tuesday. I recognised the objects which I had seen with my father nearly thirty years before—the turn of the road at Cromford, the Arkwrights' house, and the cottages with the stone floors chalked in patterns." Then in another letter she says, "I recognised all the spots I had carried in my memory for more than five-and-twenty years.

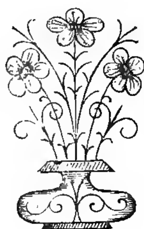
I drove through that region with father when I was a young grig—not very full of hope about my woman's future. I am one of those, perhaps exceptional people, whose early childish dreams were much less happy that the real outcome of life." In yet another letter she says, "Afterwards we turned aside to beautiful Matlock, where I found again the spots, and turns of road, the rows of stone cottages, the rushing river Derwent, and the Arkwright mills, among which I drove with my father when I was in my teens."

With a working carpenter for her hero, her two chief female figures a mill hand, who had devoted herself to a religious life, and a farmhouse servant; among her subordinate characters a farmer's wife and a country schoolmaster; and, with scarcely an incident beyond the ordinary everyday life of a country place, George Eliot gave to English literature and the world a story of provincial life whose presentation and fidelity has never been equalled—exquisite in literary finish, bright with racy humour as a landscape suffused in sunshine; lofty and dignified in tone; and pulsating from opening to finish with deep feeling, pathos, and poetry. One great secret of George Eliot's success in depicting common-place life and events is the deep sympathy she had with the people among whom she was brought up. In a beautiful passage she says:—"There are few prophets in the world; few sublimely beautiful women; few heroes. I can't afford to give all my love and reverence to such rarities. I want a great deal of those feelings for my everyday fellow-men, especially for the few in the foreground of the great multitude, whose faces I know, whose hands I touch, for whom I have to make way with kindly courtesy. Neither are picturesque lazzaroni or romantic criminals half so frequent as your common labourer, who gets his own bread, and eats it vulgarly but creditably with his own pocket-knife."

To those who are not satisfied with those very common people, and who see nothing deserving of their sympathy or regard in everyday life, she says:—"I have observed this remarkable coincidence, that the select natures who pant after the ideal, and find nothing in pantaloons or petticoats great enough to command their reverence and love, are curiously in unison with the narrowest and pettiest." Her antithetical example she finds in Mr. Gedge, the landlord of the Royal Oak, "who used to turn a blood-shot eye on his neighbours in the village of Shepperton," and who summed up "his opinion of the people of his own parish—and they were all the people he knew—in these emphatic words: 'Ay, Sir, I've said it often, and I'll say it again, they're a poor lot i' this parish—a poor lot, Sir, big and little!' I think he had a dim idea that if he could migrate to a distant parish, he might find neighbours worthy of him; and, indeed, he did subsequently transfer himself to the Saracen's Head, which was doing a thriving business in the back-street of a neighbouring market-town. But, oddly enough, he has found the people up that back-street of precisely the same stamp as the inhabitants of Shepperton—'a poor lot, Sir, big and little; and them as comes for a go o' gin are no better than them as comes for a pint o' twopenny—a poor lot.'"

"Adam Bede" was a success from the day of publication. George Eliot's audience was not of course the multitude. It was, is, and always will be, the thoughtful and cultured. Everybody who was anybody read and talked about the novel. Mrs. Poyser was quoted in the House of Commons, the particular remark selected for such distinction being her observation respecting Craig, the gardener at Donnithorne Chase, who, whilst she repudiated the wish to speak evil of the man, she thought "ought to be hatched over again and hatched differ-

ent." Charles Reade said of the book that it was the finest thing since Shakespeare, and praised the style and the way in which the author handled the Saxon language. Lytton, Dickens, Shirley Brooks, and Mrs. Gaskell were delighted with it. John Murray said there had never been such a book; and a learned professor, having neglected his special work to read the first volume, removed further temptation by sending the other two volumes out of his house.

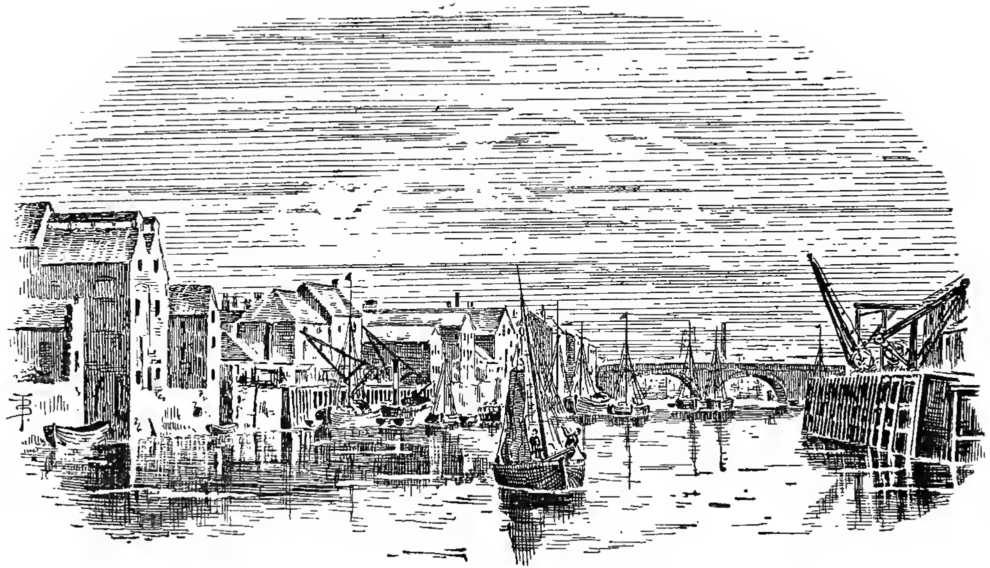


CHAPTER XI.

"THE MILL ON THE FLOSS" AND GAINSBOROUGH.

THE best biography that has yet appeared of George Eliot is that written by herself—scattered over her writings. To get the evolution of the woman, one ought to begin with "Adam Bede," then read "The Mill on the Floss," her short poems, and her two essays "Looking Backward" and "Looking Inward;" next her "Scenes of Clerical Life," and after these her other novels, essays, and poems in the order in which they were given to the public. In the sketch of her father as Adam Bede, and in that of her mother as Mrs. Hackit, we get her parentage; and in Maggie, in "The Mill on the Floss," in her short poems, and the essays mentioned, we get her childhood, her environment, her early struggles between opposing forces in her nature and her development into young womanhood.

There are certain leading features in "The Mill on the Floss" about which there can be no question. The Floss is the river Trent, the town of St. Oggs is Gainsborough; in Maggie Tulliver George Eliot has sketched her own character—the incidents of her childhood, and her spiritual struggles as she got older, being autobiographical; and Tom Tulliver is an equally life-like sketch of the character of her brother, Isaac Evans. The little market-town of Gainsborough, whose life

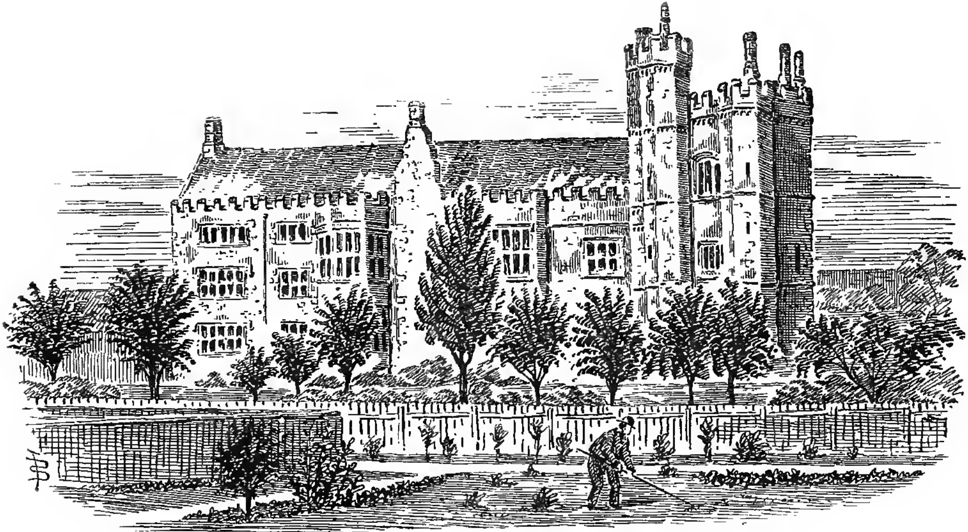


VIEW OF GAINSBOROUGH AND THE TRENT.

now is largely dependent upon the agriculture of the district of which it is the centre, has had an eventful history. It has had experience of nearly every fortune that could befall a community. Saxon and Dane fought for its possession in early times; later it was the battleground of Royalist and Parliamentarian; but though decimated by fire and sword, and contended for by rival parties, it grew and prospered beside the broad sweeping river. But now and again even the stream by which it had been nurtured rose up in wrath as it were against its own child, and threatening to engulf the entire community spread ruin and devastation far and wide. Yet Gainsborough grew. Its people repaired the ravages of war, fire, and flood; the town extended itself more and more along the banks of the stream, its trade developed; warehouses and mills multiplied, the river became busier and busier with craft small and large, until in modern times Gainsborough became a considerable port, the distributing centre, and the *entrepôt* for the commerce of a great district. In 1836, a few years before George Eliot made acquaintance with it, there were more than 100 vessels employed in the river trade upwards, and 30 sloops with steam tugs and packets employed in the Hull and Yorkshire trade. Then its chief industry was the crushing of linseed for the making of cake and oil, and it possessed two shipbuilding yards where vessels of 600 to 800 tons burden were often built. George Eliot's description of the town is vivid and poetic. "In order to see Mr. and Mrs. Glegg at home we must enter the town of St. Oggs—the venerable town with the red-fluted roofs and broad warehouse gables, where the ships unlade themselves of their burthen from the far north, and carry away, in exchange, the precious products, the well-crushed cheese and the soft fleeces which my refined readers have doubtless become acquainted with through the medium of the

best classic pastorals. It is one of those old, old towns which impress one as a continuation and outgrowth of nature as much as the nests of the bower-birds or the winding galleries of the white ants; a town which carries the traces of its long growth and history like a millennial tree, and has sprung up and developed in the same spot between the river and the low hill from the time when the Roman legions turned their backs on it from the camp on the hillside, and the long-haired sea-kings came up the river and looked with fierce, eager eyes, at the fatness of the land. It is a town 'familiar with forgotten years.' The shadow of the Saxon hero-king still walks there fitfully reviewing the scenes of his youth and love time, and is met by the gloomier shadow of the dreadful heathen Dane, who was stabbed in the midst of his warriors by the sword of an invisible avenger, and who rises on autumn evenings like a white mist from his tumulus on the hill, and hovers in the court of the Old Hall by the river side—the spot where he was thus miraculously slain in the days before the Old Hall was built." Then George Eliot relates the legend of Ogg, the son of Beorl, having regard to the visitation of the floods, "which, when they left human life untouched, were widely fatal to the helpless cattle, and swept as sudden death over all smaller living things. But the town knew worse troubles even than the floods—troubles of the civil wars, when it was a continual fighting-place, where first the Puritans thanked God for the blood of the Loyalists, and then the Loyalists thanked God for the blood of the Puritans."

There is no record of the Romans having established a station here, but they came within a few miles of it as the road they constructed bears testimony. The town seems to have had its orgin early in the Saxon period, and during the Heptarchy, being a border town and subject in consequence to

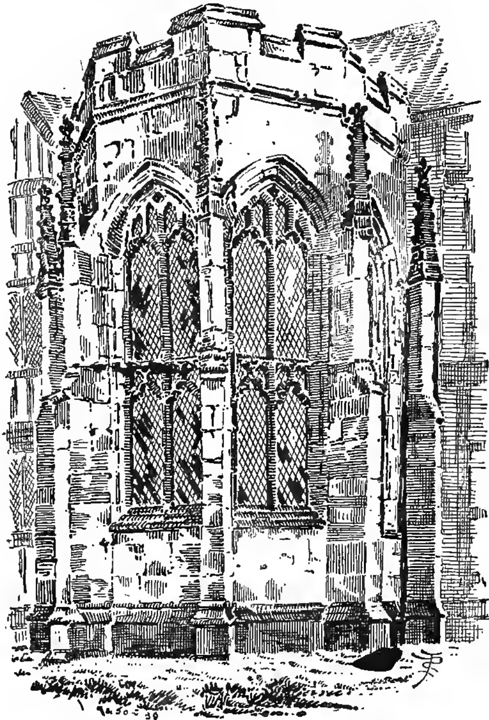


OLD HALL, GAINSBOROUGH.

frequent assaults, it sometimes formed part of the kingdom of Northumbria, but was oftener comprehended within that of Mercia. Among its sweetest memories during the Heptarchy are that here for some time in his youth Alfred the Great dwelt with Ethelred, and that here he fell in love with and married Ethelred's daughter Elswitha. From the incursions of the Danes, which began some time before this, Gainsborough suffered from time to time, and early in the eleventh century Sweyne, whose very name was a terror, brought his vessels up the Trent, landed his forces, and Northumbria and the whole of Lindsey submitted to him. Leaving his vessels in command of Canute, Sweyne set off southward on an expedition, plundering and harrying the country as he went; but returning to Gainsborough he was in the following year assassinated among his own followers. The spot where he was murdered is variously assigned as the site of the Old Hall, the Pillared House—an old building in the town—and a field a little behind it. In the dispute between Charles and his Parliament Gainsborough was again a fierce battleground for the contending parties.

One building in the town transcends all others in historic and antiquarian interest. It is the Old Hall, or Manor House, which is lovingly described in the story. "It was the Normans who began to build that fine old hall, which is like the town, telling of the thoughts and hands of widely-sundered generations; but it is all so old that we look with loving pardon at its inconsistencies, and are well content that they who built the stone oriel, and they who built the Gothic façade and towers of finest small brickwork with the trefoil ornament, and the windows and battlements defined with stone, did not sacrilegiously pull down the ancient half-timbered body, with its oak-roofed banqueting-hall." The hall, situated near the river,

is an extensive pile of buildings covering, with its court-yard, half an acre of ground, and occupying three sides of a quadrangle. A portion of the front and part of the west angle are said to have been built in the time of Stephen; the remainder of the west wing being added in the time of Henry VII.; and the east wing being of a still later date.



ORIEL WINDOW IN GAINSBOROUGH OLD HALL.

Built at three different periods, it has an odd mixture of styles—curious, quaint, and striking features that one would like to examine and linger over. The towers, turrets, and

battlements of its wings, and the oak-timbered framing, the fine oriel window and the gables and projections of the central portion, are all so many features to be dwelt upon with loving reverence for the men who planned and carried them out; and which in the aggregate stand a symbol in brick, timber, and mortar of the past life of the town. But should the visitor seek to inspect the interior he may be sharply reminded that it is private property.

Without permission of any one, however, one may enter the large banqueting-hall with George Eliot on the occasion of the St. Oggs bazaar—for it was in this very hall that it was held—and inspect, not only its quaint grandeur, but see Maggie Tulliver at her stall, and witness the effect produced upon the gathering by her "simple noble beauty, clad in a white muslin of some soft flowing kind. We perhaps never detect how much of our social demeanour is made up of artificial airs until we see a person who is at once beautiful and simple: without the beauty we are apt to call the simplicity awkwardness. The Miss Guests were much too well-bred to have any of the grimaces and affected tones that belong to pretentious vulgarity; but their stall being next to the one where Maggie sat, it seemed newly obvious to-day that Miss Guest held her chin too high, and that Miss Laura spoke and moved continually with a view to effect. All well-dressed St. Oggs and neighbourhood were there, and it would have been worth while to come even from a distance to see the fine old hall, with its open roof and carved oaken rafters, and great oaken folding-doors, and light shed down from a height on the many-coloured show beneath; a very quaint place, with broad faded stripes painted on the walls, and here and there a show of heraldic animals of a bristly, long-snouted character, the cherished emblems of a noble family once the seigneurs of this now civic

hall. A grand arch cut in the upper wall at one end, surmounted an oaken orchestra, with an open room behind it where hot-house plants and stalls for refreshments were disposed: an agreeable resort for gentlemen disposed to loiter and yet to exchange the occasional crush below for a more commodious point of view. In fact the perfect fitness of this ancient building for an admirable modern purpose that made charity truly elegant, and led through vanity up to the supply of a deficit, was so striking that hardly a person entered the room without exchanging the remark more than once. Near the great arch over the orchestra was the stone oriel with painted glass, which was one of the venerable inconsistencies of the old hall."

This grand old manor-house, with the banqueting-hall just described, has had as chequered a history as the town itself. It was for generations the residence of the Burgh and Hick man families, successively lords of the manor of Gainsborough, and then for a short time of Lord Abingdon; royal personages were on several occasions welcomed within its walls as guests; but from these high uses as the residence of noble families where was dispensed princely hospitality to royal guests, it came in the middle of the last century to be used for workshops and private dwelling-houses, whilst the fine banqueting-hall was leased and transformed into a theatre. When, however, the lease expired and the Hickman-Bacon family again got possession, a considerable work of restoration took place, the fabric being rebuilt in parts, and other changes being made. A large sum of money has also been spent upon it within a few years past, but it is not with any feeling of satisfaction that one learns that the banqueting-hall is now used as a corn exchange and auction mart.

In the course of this chequered history—in the descent

from a noble mansion to an auction-room—the hall has suffered much. The oaken orchestra—where Philip Wakem sat with admiring eyes fixed upon Maggie at her stall, and at last had his jealousy excited by the little by-play between her and Mr. Stephen Guest—with the arch over it, and the heraldic emblems spoken of by George Eliot, have long ceased to exist, and the walls no longer show painted stripes. Yet in many of its essential features it is just the same—the open roof and carved oaken rafters, the oriel window (but without the stained glass), and other quaintnesses and inconsistencies are still to be seen; but the light shed from above now streams in on both sides, the high windows having been lengthened nearly to the floor. Reference has been made to the importance of the port at Gainsborough. That is largely a thing of the past. During the railway epoch the trade of the port has declined. Comparatively few vessels now seek its wharves, and the industrial life of the town no longer radiates from the river. The town itself, however, has continued to grow.

In an earlier chapter the identity of the childhood of Mary Ann Evans and her brother Isaac, and the loving relations between sister and brother with the childhood and relations of Maggie and Tom Tulliver, were pointed out. Maggie's fishing expeditions with her brother, the cutting off her hair when in a temper, driving the nails into the head of her wooden doll, and many other childish incidents mentioned in "The Mill on the Floss" were actual occurrences in Mary Ann Evans' childhood. When she quarrelled with her brother she would often retreat to an attic in the old house at Griff, and there fret out her ill-humour. Here too she would pore over Defoe's "History of the Devil"—Maggie startles Mr. Riley by her acquaintance with the character of that personage—and any other book that she could lay her hands upon. Her adventure with the gypsies

was also an actual occurrence. Lucy Deane, represented as Maggie's cousin, was in character really a sketch of her own sister; and Mrs. Deane, Mrs. Glegg, and Mrs. Pullet were sketches of her mother's sisters. The contrast between Maggie and Lucy is worth quoting. "It was like the contrast between a rough, dark, overgrown puppy and a white kitten. Lucy put up the neatest little rose-bud mouth to be kissed: everything about her was neat—her little round neck, with the row of coral beads; her straight nose, not at all snubby; her little clear eyebrows, rather darker than her curls, to match her hazel eyes, which looked up with shy pleasure at Maggie, taller by the head, though scarcely a year older." Then as she got older Maggie's spiritual struggles are depicted, and these are but a faithful reflex of what took place in Mary Ann Evans' mind, even to the reading of "Thomas-a-Kempis," and her temporary renunciation of what she regarded as the vanities of life.

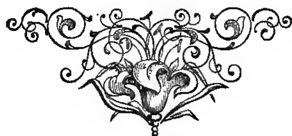
Bob Jakem, with his big thumb, which he could only conclude had been given him for his own personal profit, is a sketch from life. Maggie remonstrates with him on the use to which he puts it, and he replies, "I'll leave off that trick wi' my big thumb, if you don't think well on me for it, Miss: but it 'ud be a pity, it would. I couldn't find another trick so good—an' what 'ud be the use o' having a big thumb? It might as well ha' been narrow." Bob was a Warwickshire man, and a friend of Mary Ann and Isaac Evans in their childhood. His devotion to Maggie is typical of his real sentiments towards Mary Ann Evans, for "the days of chivalry are not gone, notwithstanding Burke's grand dirge over them; they live still in that far-off worship paid by many a youth and man to the woman of whom he never dreams that he shall touch so much as her little finger or the hem of her robe. Bob, with the pack on his back, had as respectful an adoration for this dark-eyed

maiden as if he had been a knight in armour calling aloud on her name as he pricked on to the fight." Bob proves his devotion later on when Maggie, returning to St. Oggs after her escapade on the river with Stephen Guest, finds that people shrug their shoulders and look askance at her. Bob sees she is in trouble and asks her permission to put a question. His inquiry is, "Do you owe anybody a grudge?" "No; not any one," said Maggie, looking up at him inquiringly. "Why?" Bob's reply is characteristic. "O lors! Miss, I wish you did —and 'ud tell me—I'd leather him till I couldn't see—I would —an' the Justice might do what he liked to me arter." The utmost that Bob, longing for some service, can do is to leave his dog 'Mumps' with Maggie with the recommendation: "He's rare company—Mumps is—he knows everything and makes no bother about it. If I tell him, he'll lie before you and watch you—as still—just as he watches my pack. You'd better let me leave him a bit; he'll get fond on you. Lors, it's a fine thing to have a dumb brute fond on you; it'll stick to you and make no jaw."

The Eagre or Bore is a phenomenon well known in the past of Gainsborough, and is still occasionally witnessed—though not to its former extent—when the alarm cry, "'Ware the Aigre!" is passed from vessel to vessel, man to man, and bank to bank. At spring tides the water rises on the surface of the river to a height of six to eight feet, and rolls on from the mouth of the river to above Gainsborough bridge—a grand spectacle, but dangerous. Low in situation and quite close to the river, Gainsborough has often been flooded. The Trent in its 200 miles' course brings down a mighty mass of water, the drainage of Staffordshire and Derbyshire chiefly, and in case of heavy rains or sudden thaws after snow destructive floods occur, the liability to which is increased by the

phenomenon just referred to. An extraordinary and destructive flood occurred in Gainsborough in 1770, and again in 1795, 1809, and 1812. It is a great flood that is responsible for the final catastrophe in "The Mill on the Floss," and the pheno menon of the Eagre is several times referred to.

It is curiously illustrative of George Eliot's wide intellectual sympathies that just about the time she was finishing "The Mill on the Floss," she should be wishing for time to pursue a study that is not associated in the popular mind with romance writing. In a letter to a friend she says :—"Whereabouts are you in algebra? It would be very pleasant to study it with you if I could possibly find time to rub up my knowledge. It is now a good while since I looked into algebra, but I was very fond of it in old days." In another letter some years later she says :—"I could enjoy everything from arithmetic to anti-quarianism, if I had large spaces of life before me."



CHAPTER XII.

"SILAS MARNER."

IMMEDIATELY after the manuscript of "The Mill on the Floss" was placed in the publisher's hands, George Eliot went on a tour to Italy with Mr. Lewes, where she remained some months. On her return, writing to a friend, she announced that when in Florence she had been fired with the idea of writing an historical romance—"Scene, Florence; period, the close of the fifteenth century, which was marked by Savanarola's career and martyrdom." This was the germ of "Romola," the most stately and majestic of all her novels.

But before it appeared she wrote "Silas Marner," which has not inappropriately been designated her most perfect story. Respecting this she says, in a letter to her publisher, Mr. Blackwood:—"I have felt all through as if the story would have lent itself best to metrical rather than to prose fiction, especially in all that relates to the psychology of Silas, except that under that treatment there could not be an equal play of humour. It came to me first of all quite suddenly, as a sort of legendary tale suggested by my recollection of having once, in early childhood, seen a linen-weaver with a bag on his back; but as my mind dwelt on the subject I became inclined to a more realistic treatment." "Silas Marner," published in 1861,

was a great success. Its scene is in the Midlands. A short story, and only the history of a poor linen weaver, nothing that George Eliot has written exhibits her great powers more. The conception and execution are alike perfect. Had she done nothing else, Silas Marner would have ensured her a place among the Immortals. It is a picture of English rural life at the beginning of the present century, and short though it is, it contains quite a little gallery of characters—living human beings who can never die out of English literature. The central idea of the book is as beautiful as anything that ever emanated from poet's brain. A simple-minded, uneducated, and too-trustful weaver, with his faith destroyed by an act of treachery, isolating himself for almost a lifetime from all communication with his fellow men, is brought back to a healthier state and to human sympathy, by a little child. "In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the City of Destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's."

CHAPTER XIII.

"MIDDLEMARCH."

AFTER another trip to Italy, George Eliot resumed the writing of "Romola," in respect to which she told Mr. Cross, her second husband, that the writing of it had "ploughed into her more than any of her other books." She said "I began it a young woman—I finished it an old woman." "Felix Holt" was next given to the public. It, too, is a Midland story, as has been pointed out in a previous article. "The Spanish Gipsy," a new departure for the authoress, was published in 1868; "Middlemarch" began to appear at the end of 1871, and was finished at the end of 1873. Of this novel she says in her journal: "No former book of mine has been received with more enthusiasm—not even 'Adam Bede.'" It indeed produced a sensation.

"Middlemarch," as all admit, is a great work. It is not beholden to any plot—for there is little of that—for its sustained interest; but to its character sketches—numerous, varied, belonging to every class—a complete microcosm—each individual standing out a well-defined and living personality; the diverse elements woven together with remarkable ingenuity, and the telling of the story displaying all the authoress's finest powers at their very best—her psychological insight, her

humour, her pathos, her nobility of tone and of teaching, and her poetic feeling. In Dorothea Brooke we have sketched some of the more prominent traits of George Eliot herself. Maggie Tulliver is a portrait; Miss Brooke is Maggie Tulliver under a different environment—Maggie in her spiritual aspirations and her inconsistencies. The truthfulness of George Eliot's art is perhaps its very highest quality. She has not in the whole list of her books presented us anywhere with angels or demons; but with men and women as they actually are. No man or woman so transcendently good as to be without faults and inconsistencies; no character so utterly bad as to be without redeeming features. Maggie and Dorothea are cast upon noble lines, but being of flesh and blood are not perfect. In their case as in others the actual life falls far short of the ideal, for many Saint Theresas "have been born who found for themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity; perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet, and sank unwept into oblivion." The likeness between Maggie Tulliver and Dorothea Brooke extends even to physical beauty. Cousin Lucy says to Maggie: "I can't think what witchery it is in you, Maggie, that makes you look best in shabby clothes; though you really must have a new dress now. But do you know last night I was trying to fancy you in a handsome fashionable dress, and do what I would that old limp merino would come back as the only right thing for you. I wonder if Marie Antoinette looked all the grander when her gown was darned at the elbows." And in "Middlemarch" we have this description of Dorothea: "Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely

formed that she could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters; and her profile as well as her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible—or from one of our elder poets—in a paragraph of to-day's newspaper. She was usually spoken of as being clever, but with the addition that her sister Celia had more common sense." A little further on and we have statements that seem to be literally auto-biographic, and for "Dorothea" we might substitute "George Eliot." "Dorothea knew many passages of Pascal's *Pensées* and of Jeremy Taylor by heart; and to her the destinies of mankind, seen by the light of Christianity, made the solicitudes of feminine fashion appear an occupation for Bedlam. She could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life, involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in guimp and artificial protrusions of drapery." In sketching Celia Brooke, George Eliot had her own sister Christiana before her eyes, though she stated that the one was not by any means a portrait of the other. The relations, however, between the two sisters, are probably a pretty faithful reflex of the relations between Mary Ann and Christiana Evans. Caleb Garth is in many respects George Eliot's own father. He is Adam Bede in his conscientiousness, uprightness of character, love of and belief in honest work; but Adam under different conditions, and with Mrs. Garth as his wife instead of Dinah Morris. Again, Mrs. Garth is George Eliot's mother—a reflex and development of Mrs. Hackit. The keen sharp-tongued Mrs. Cadwallader is an educated Mrs. Poyser; and the journalist Ladislaw is George Eliot's husband, Mr. Lewes. The character of Casaubon is a psychological masterpiece.

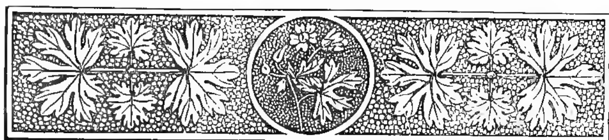
Visiting Oxford just about the time when the last book of "Middlemarch" was being completed, George Eliot tells the story in a letter of how two ladies went up to her. One said. "How could you let Dorothea marry that Casaubon?" The other, "Oh, I understand her doing that; but why did you let her marry the other fellow, whom I cannot bear?" Another story told about Mr. Casaubon is that a lady once condoled with George Eliot on having a husband such as that gentleman was represented as being. Her reply was that there was nothing in common between Casaubon and Mr. Lewes. "Where, then, did you get such a character?" asked her friend. The reply was rather startling. George Eliot put her hand on her own heart and said "There."

The motto to the 57th chapter of Middlemarch is worth quoting, as it carries us back to an incident in George Eliot's childhood.

> "They numbered scarce eight summers when a name
> Rose on their souls, and stirred such motions there
> As thrill the buds and shape their hidden frame
> At penetration of the quickening air:
> His name who told of loyal Evan Dhu,
> Of quaint Bradwardine, and Vich Ian Vor,
> Making the little world their childhood knew
> Large with a land of mountain, lake and scaur,
> And larger yet a wonder, love, belief
> Toward Walter Scott, who living far away
> Sent them this wealth of joy and noble grief.
> The book and they must part, but day by day
> In lines that thwart like portly spiders ran,
> They wrote the tale, from Tully Veolan."

When George Eliot was not more than eight years old a copy of 'Waverley' fell into her hands, and she eagerly perused the story. But the book had to be returned to the lender before she had finished, and child though she was she

set about continuing the story from where Waverley's adventures at Tully Veolan begin, until her elders, astonished at the interest thus evinced, got her the book again. The lines given above commemorate this childish incident and exhibition of developing power. In the same note of apology or excuse for human frailty with which "Middlemarch" begins, it closes. "Certainly those deserving acts of her life (Dorothea's) were not ideally beautiful. They were the mixed result of young and noble impulse struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the aspect of illusion."



CHAPTER XIV.

"DANIEL DERONDA."

"DANIEL Deronda" began to appear in 1875, and was completed in 1876. So far as its scenery is laid in this country, it relates to Surrey and to London. The book opens with a description of Gwendolen, the heroine at a Baden gaming-table. The incident and probably the characters might have been suggested during a visit George Eliot paid to Homburg in 1872. Writing from there she says: "The air, the waters, the plantations here, are all perfect—'only man is vile.' I am not fond of denouncing my fellow-sinners, but gambling being a vice I have no mind to, it stirs my disgust even more than my pity." In another letter referring to the same subject she says: "The saddest thing to be witnessed is the play of a young lady, who is only twenty-six years old, and is completely in the grasp of this money-making demon. It made me cry to see her young fresh face among the hags and brutally-stupid men around her." "Daniel Deronda," tested by popularity, was the least successful of George Eliot's novels. Its issue was a great literary event, and each successive book was eagerly anticipated by the admirers of the authoress; but the impres-

sion it made was distinctly disappointing. Those charms of humour and style which before had attracted were wanting, and many of the characters are lay figures and not breathing men and women. Yet the book contains a great deal of powerful writing, and in the presentation of Gwendolen, Grandcourt, Lush, Sir Hugh Mallinger, Mr. Gascoigne, Rex, Anna and Mrs. Davilow, the old psychological power is displayed; and from anyone else but the authoress of "Middlemarch," "Romola," and "Silas Marner," her last work of fiction would have been accounted an unequivocal triumph. But she had done better work, and there was a little disappointment. The book is chiefly remarkable because it deals with the position of the Jewish people, their treatment by Christians, and the aspirations of the race. Astonishment having been expressed at her choice of subject, George Eliot said: "I wrote about the Jews because I think them a fine old race who have done great things for humanity. I feel the same admiration for them as I do for the Florentines." Through Mordecai, indeed, we get George Eliot's opinions of and aspirations on behalf of Judaism. Bernal Osborne said of "Deronda" that its best parts were the interview between Grandcourt and Lush. Mrs. Stowe expressed great admiration. The Jewish portions were much discussed, and the Jews themselves were highly gratified by George Eliot's opinions of them.

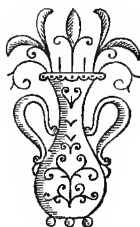
Mr. Lewes, George Eliot's husband, died in November, 1878. "Theophrastus Such" was published in May of the following year. In May, 1880, George Eliot married again, her second husband being Mr. Cross. Her last novel was "Daniel Deronda," and her last work "Theophrastus Such." At a concert she attended in London in December, 1880, she caught cold from which she never rallied. On the morning of the 23rd December the whole country and distant continents

thrilled with the news that George Eliot had died on the night previous at her house in London. She had

> Joined the throng
> Of mighty dead ones,

and in her loss thousands felt they had lost a friend, and more than a friend—a teacher. She was buried by the side of her first husband in Highgate Cemetery, and is for ever numbered among

> Those immortal dead who live again
> In minds made better by their presence.



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