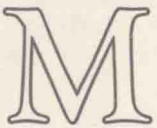
A GEORGE ELIOT MISCELLANY

A Supplement to her Novels

Edited with Commentary and Notes by

F. B. PINION



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Preface

To realize George Eliot's objectives and achievements in *Scenes of Clerical Life* and her seven novels, a reader needs to have access to her other writings. These are not readily available, and it is primarily for this reason that this miscellany has been prepared. It comprises key passages from her pre-novel essays and reviews, two stories in prose, writings relative to some of her major publications, four poems, and some evaluations of her contemporary English world. The order has the advantage of being almost entirely chronological from start to finish.

The selections from George Eliot's pre-novel prose afford an invaluable, if not indispensable, introduction to her fiction. The two stories form a contrast: one, unusually light and entertaining; the other dark, inventive, and prophetic, a forerunner in its ultimate theme of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. This minor masterpiece, 'The Lifted Veil', emphasizes by its bleak negations the positive virtues which motivate George Eliot's more familiar fiction. Many readers will have admired the poetry in some of the anonymous chapter epigraphs in her last three novels. They were composed by George Eliot, and exemplify her range to a remarkable degree, above all the union of deep feeling, human understanding or empathy, and originality of poetic expression which characterizes her best work. George Eliot's poetry is undeservedly ignored. 'Stradivarius' would not discredit any poet; it has a bearing on the romantically artistic young Ladislaw in *Middlemarch*. Similarly the biographical significance of the 'Brother and Sister' sonnets holds a special interest for readers of the more fictional childhood experiences in *The Mill on the Floss*.

Apart from its relevance to *Felix Holt*, the 'Address to Working Men', like the two essays included from *Impressions of Theophrastus Such*, has a strikingly undiminished cogency in the present era. Their broader implications are inherent in George Eliot's work generally; the fundamental articles of her belief did not change from *Scenes of Clerical life* to *Daniel Deronda*.

This selection, therefore, may be regarded as a supplement, or

even an adult introduction, to her works. The commentaries are supplied in order to establish relationships, and, with the same end in view, quotations are introduced from George Eliot's other writings, including her letters. Some items, among them a story in verse, are included solely for their intrinsic merits.

Grateful acknowledgments are made to Yale University Library, Yale University Press, and Gordon S. Haight for permission to produce the manuscript text of 'How I Came to Write Fiction' and 'History of "Adam Bede" ' from *The George Eliot Letters*; also to Angus Hulton for his assistance with some of the classical references.

The following abbreviations are used:

AB	*Adam Bede*	MF	*The Mill on the Floss*
DD	*Daniel Deronda*	R	*Romola*
FH	*Felix Holt*	SCL	*Scenes of Clerical Life*
M	*Middlemarch*	SM	*Silas Marner*

WR *The Westminster Review*

Dates in the form 27.x.60 enable the reader to find passages in either J. W. Cross, *George Eliot's Life* or Gordon S. Haight (ed.), *The George Eliot Letters* (Yale University Press).

Introduction

Mary Ann Evans (1819–80) chose to live with George Henry Lewes in 1854, and their unofficial marriage proved to be unusually happy and successful, each encouraging the other to the highest authorial endeavour. Lewes, whose versatility as a writer had already been shown, was to enhance his reputation as an editor and biographer, and make important contributions to natural sciences and psychology. Unfortunately, although he and his legal wife had separated by mutual consent, he could not obtain a divorce, having condoned adultery by registering the first of her three illegitimate children as his. 'Marian' Evans, condemned by a Grundyan society for her union with Lewes, adopted 'George Eliot' as her *nom de plume* in 1857, after the publication of her first story, choosing 'George' after her devoted husband, and 'Eliot' because she thought it 'a good mouth-filling, easily pronounced word'.

Years before her birth, her father Robert Evans had become the estate manager for Francis Parker, first at Wootton Hall in Staffordshire, then at West Hallam in Derbyshire. His competence and conscientiousness made him indispensable, so much so that in 1806, when his master succeeded Sir Roger Newdigate at Arbury Hall near Nuneaton, he was given responsbility for the whole estate, his diverse duties including farm maintenance, forestry, roads, the mining of coal, and its transportation by tramroad and canal. After only a few months at South Farm, her birthplace, Mary Evans lived twenty-one years at Griff House, a large farmstead by the Coventry road. She was her father's youngest and favourite child, and he often took her on his rounds in his gig; she observed much and forgot little. After her mother's death and her sister's marriage, she was virtually in charge at Griff House. She had been given the best education that was available for girls, first at Nuneaton, then at Coventry; already proficient in French, she was tutored in German and Italian on leaving school. Highly musical, and a great reader, she was very religious, a fervent Evangelical during her late adolescence, with a

pronounced Calvinistic bias at one period.

When Robert Evans retired in 1841, he and Mary Ann (as she preferred to be known at the time) moved to Foleshill near Coventry. In poorer parts of the city she was appalled by the poverty of families engaged in the ribbon industry; she had witnessed it in the Griff–Nuneaton area, but never on such a scale. She continued to receive instruction in German and Italian, had lessons also in Greek and Latin, and read widely, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* and the more modern books on astronomy and geology giving her much food for thought. Wordsworth was her favourite poet. At Rosehill, the home of Charles Bray, a ribbon manufacturer and free-thinker, she met some of his more distinguished visitors. Mrs Bray's brother Charles Hennell had independently reached conclusions similar to those of the German historical critics, undermining all that is miraculous and supernatural in the Gospels. His *An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity* had reached its second edition when Mary Ann bought her copy and inscribed her name on 2 January 1842. Her refusal to attend church with her father led almost to their separation, but mediation prevailed, and Miss Evans began to perceive the truth of what was to become one of her cardinal principles in fiction, that human relationships, active sympathy, and co-operation are more instrumental in creating progress than any form of sectarian discrimination or dogma. When Elizabeth Brabant, who had begun the translation of Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu*, became engaged to Charles Hennell, Miss Evans was persuaded to continued this massive task; the work was published anonymously in 1846. In 1847 she admired Hennell's work more than ever before, and found inspiration in the pantheism of Wordsworth and Spinoza. She read contemporary novels, and was particularly enthusiastic about George Sand's; when Emerson met her at the Brays', and asked what had led her to think most deeply, she answered 'Rousseau's *Confessions*'.

After her father's death, and a period at Geneva, where she resumed her translation of Spinoza's *Tractatus-Theologico-Politicus*, she met John Chapman at Rosehill. Subsequently he bought *The Westminster Review*; being most unbusinesslike himself, he engaged Marian (as she now signed herself) to assist him. When the first number in its new series appeared in January 1852, she had become responsible, without remuneration, for most of the editorial work. She met eminent writers and intellectuals, British and foreign; among them Herbert Spencer, with whom she fell in love. He regarded her as 'the most admirable woman, mentally' he had ever met; they had many philosophical discussions, but it

was a relief to him when she became friendly with George Henry Lewes. By this time, she had begun her translation of Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity*, a work which, unlike the Strauss, appealed to her throughout. In its apotheosis of human love she found a warm expression of the new religion which she felt mankind needed for its amelioration and happiness. The translation appeared in July 1854, soon after she and Lewes had left for Weimar, where she helped him to prepare his biography of Goethe.

On their return Marian accepted Chapman's invitation to take charge of the Belles Lettres section of *The Westminster* at a salary of £50 per annum. She read assiduously, and became a writer in earnest, producing for this and other journals a series of reviews and essays which demonstrated high critical sagacity and literary talent. Both Lewes and Spencer had urged her to turn to fiction. This she was persuaded to do, after thinking of the story which became the first in *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Lewes recommended it to his publisher John Blackwood, and with its appearance in *Blackwood's Magazine* at the beginning of 1857 George Eliot's career began.

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i A LITTLE FABLE WITH A GREAT MORAL

(Appearing in February 1847, this is the fourth of a series of original articles 'from the Notebook of an Eccentric' which Mary Ann Evans, after contributing anonymous reviews, wrote for *The Herald and Observer*, a Coventry weekly newspaper acquired by Charles Bray in June 1846 for the promotion of ideas on reform.)

In very early times indeed, when no maidens had looking-glasses, except the mermaidens, there lived in a deep valley two beautiful Hamadryads. Now the Hamadryads are a race of nymphs that inhabit the forests. Whenever a little acorn, or a beech nut, or any other seed of a forest tree, begins to sprout, a little Hamadryad is born, and grows up, and lives and dies with the tree. So, you see, the Hamadryads, the daughters of the trees, live far longer than the daughters of men, – some of them even a thousand years; still, they do at last get old, and faded, and shrivelled. Now the two Hamadryads of whom I spoke lived in a forest by the side of a clear lake, and they loved better than anything to go down to the brink of the lake, and look into the mirror of waters; but not for the same reason. Idione loved to look into the lake because she saw herself there; she would sit on the bank, weaving leaves and flowers in her silken hair, and smiling at her own image all the day long, and if the pretty water-lilies or any other plants began to spread themselves on the surface below her, and spoil her mirror, she would tear them up in anger. But Hieria cared not to look at herself in the lake; she only cared about watching the heavens as they were reflected in its bosom – the foamy clouds on the clear blue by day, and the moon and the stars by night. She did not mind that the water-lilies grew below her, for she was always looking farther off, into the deep part of the lake; she only thought the lilies pretty, and loved them. So, in the course of time, these two Hamadryads grew old, and Idione began to be angry with the lake, and to hate it, because it no longer gave back a

pleasant image of herself, and she would carry little stones to the margin, and dash them into the lake for vengeance; but she only tired herself, and did not hurt the lake. And as she was frowning and looking spiteful all the day, the lake only went on giving her an uglier and uglier picture of herself, till at last she ran away from it into the hollow of her tree, and sat there lonely and sad till she died. But Hieria grew old without finding it out, for she never looked for herself in the lake; – only as, in the centuries she had lived, some of the thick forests had been cleared away from the earth, and men had begun to build and to plough, the sky was less often obscured by vapours, so that the lake was more and more beautiful to her, and she loved better and better the water-lilies that grew below her. Until one morning, after she had been watching the stars in the lake, she went home to her tree, and lying down, she fell into a gentle sleep, and dreamed that she had left her mouldering tree, and had been carried up to live in a star, from which she could still look down on her lake that she had loved so long. And while she was dreaming this, men came and cut down her tree, and Hieria died without knowing that she had become old.

* * *

The story has its variants in George Eliot's novels. Hetty Sorrel, self-centred and vain, performs her narcissistic rites in front of a mirror, while Dinah Morris looks out of the window in the next bedroom, and thinks of all the people out there whom she has learned to love and care for (AB.xv). The beauty of the lake for Hieria has its counterpart in the autumnal sunshine which outwardly expresses the mellowing of Adam Bede's humanitarian self as a result of suffering and the awakening of a deeper love than that inspired by Hetty. Transome Court spells tragedy for the proud, withdrawn, self-pitying Mrs Transome, and Esther Lyon rejects its 'silken bondage'; she yearns for a more purposive life, and finds it in Felix Holt's self-dedication to the cause of his fellow-workers. Both women look out on the same scene at night; where one sees no relief (a black boundary of trees and the long line of the river), the other notices the bending movement of the trees, the forever flowing river, and veiled glimmerings of moonlight (FH.xlix–l). Life goes on for Esther, and hope returns, just as when Dorothea, after self-pitying grief, recovers her better self, draws the curtains, and sees the pearly light of dawn, with signs of 'the manifold wakings of men to endurance and labour' (M.lxxx). *Daniel Deronda* illustrates the association of distant

illuminated prospects with such altruistic causes as are to be found in Mordecai's zeal for Zionism (xxxviii) and the hero's yearning to be useful to humanity, July evening scenes serving to contrast the latter with the self-seeking hedonism of Gwendolen Harleth (xi,xvii). Hieria's finding the lake more beautiful as a result of men's labour is an earnest of the value attached by George Eliot to improvements in housing, land-cultivation, industry, and transport for the benefit of the public and the future (AB.i; M.xxiv,xl,lvi).

ii FROM THE REVIEW OF R. W. MACKAY'S *THE PROGRESS OF THE INTELLECT*

(The book was published by John Chapman, and he and the author met Mary Evans at Charles Bray's. She agreed to review the book, and the result was her first contribution to *The Westminster Review*, where it appeared in January 1851.

There are many, and those not the least powerful thinkers and efficient workers amongst us, who are prone to under-rate critical research into ancient modes of life and forms of thought, alleging that what it behoves us chiefly to ascertain is the truth which comes home to men's business and bosoms[1] in these our days, and not by-gone speculations and beliefs which we can never fully comprehend, and with which we can only yet more imperfectly sympathise. Holding, with Auguste Comte, that theological and metaphysical speculation have reached their limit, and that the only hope of extending man's sources of knowledge and happiness is to be found in positive science, and in the universal application of its principles; they urge that the thinkers who are in the van of human progress should devote their energies to the actual rather than to the retrospective.

There is, undeniably, truth in this view. It is better to discover and apply improved methods of draining our own towns, than to be able to quote Aristophanes in proof that the streets of Athens were in a state of unmacadamized muddiness – better to reason justly on some point of immediate concern, than to know the fallacies of the ancient sophists – better to look with 'awful eye'[2] at the starry heavens, and, under the teaching of Newton and Herschel,[3] feel the immensity, the order, the sublimity of the universe, and of the forces by which it subsists, than to pore over the grotesque symbols, whereby the Assyrian or Egyptian

shadowed forth his own more vague impressions of the same great facts. But it would be a very serious mistake to suppose that the study of the past and the labours of criticism have no important practical bearing on the present. Our civilization, and, yet more, our religion, are an anomalous blending of lifeless barbarisms, which have descended to us like so many petrifactions from distant ages,[4] with living ideas, the offspring of a true process of development. We are in bondage to terms and conceptions which, having had their root in conditions of thought no longer existing, have ceased to possess any vitality, and are for us as spells which have lost their virtue. The endeavour to spread enlightened ideas is perpetually counteracted by these *idola theatri*,[5] which have allied themselves, on the one hand with men's better sentiments, and on the other with institutions in whose defence are arrayed the passions and the interests of dominant classes. Now, though the teaching of positive truth is the grand means of expelling error, the process will be very much quickened if the negative argument serve as its pioneer; if, by a survey of the past, it can be shown how each age and each race has had a faith and a symbolism suited to its need and its stage of development, and that for succeeding ages to dream of retaining the spirit along with the forms of the past, is as futile as the embalming of the dead body in the hope that it may one day be resumed by the living soul.

But apart from this objective utility of critical research, it has certain highly advantageous influences on the mind which pursues it. There is so far justice in the common sarcasms against men of erudition *par excellence*, that they have rarely been distinguished for warmth of moral sympathy, or for fertility and grandeur of conception; but your eminently practical thinker is often beset by a narrowness of another kind. It may be doubted, whether a mind which has no susceptibility to the pleasure of changing its point of view, of mastering a remote form of thought, of perceiving identity of nature under variety of manifestation – a perception which resembles an expansion of one's own being, a pre-existence in the past – can possess the flexibility, the ready sympathy, or the tolerance, which characterizes a truly philosophic culture. Now and then, however, we meet with a nature which combines the faculty for amassing minute erudition with the largeness of view necessary to give it a practical bearing; a high appreciation of the genius of antiquity, with a profound belief in the progressive character of human development – in the eternal freshness of the founts of inspiration, a wonderful intuition of the mental conditions of past ages with an ardent participation in the most advanced ideas and most

hopeful efforts of the present; a nature like some mighty river, which, in its long windings through unfrequented regions, gathers mineral and earthy treasures only more effectually to enrich and fertilize the cultivated valleys and busy cities which form the habitation of man.

Of such a nature . . . we have evidence in the work before us. . . . We believe Mr Mackay's work is unique in its kind. England has been slow to use or to emulate the immense labours of Germany in the departments of mythology and biblical criticism; but when once she does so, the greater solidity and directness of the English mind ensure a superiority of treatment. . . . It is Mr Mackay's faith that divine revelation is not contained exclusively or pre-eminently in the facts and inspirations of any one age or nation, but is co-extensive with the history of human development, and is perpetually unfolding itself to our widened experience and investigation, as firmament upon firmament becomes visible to us in proportion to the power and range of our exploring instruments. The master key to this revelation, is the recognition of the presence of undeviating law in the material and moral world – of that invariability of sequence which is acknowledged to be the basis of physical science, but which is still perversely ignored in our social organization, our ethics and our religion. It is this invariability of sequence which can alone give value to experience and render education in the true sense possible. The divine yea and nay, the seal of prohibition and of sanction, are effectually impressed on human deeds and aspirations, not by means of Greek and Hebrew, but by that inexorable law of consequences, whose evidence is confirmed instead of weakened as the ages advance; and human duty is comprised in the earnest study of this law and patient obedience to its teaching. While this belief sheds a bright beam of promise on the future career of our race, it lights up what once seemed the dreariest region of history with new interest; every past phase of human development is part of that education of the race in which we are sharing; every mistake, every absurdity into which poor human nature has fallen, may be looked on as an experiment of which we may reap the benefit. A correct generalization gives significance to the smallest detail, just as the great inductions of geology demonstrate in every pebble the working of laws by which the earth has become adapted for the habitation of man. In this view, religion and philosophy are not merely conciliated, they are identical; or rather, religion is the crown and consummation of philosophy – the delicate corolla, which can only spread out its petals in all their symmetry and brillance to the sun, when root and branch exhibit

the conditions of a healthy and vigorous life.

* * *

Perhaps the above provides one reason for George Eliot's conclusion that Positivism is 'one-sided' (12.vii.61), for her writings are in accord with the basic principles of 'the religion of humanity' which emanated from the philosophy and doctrines of Auguste Comte (1798–1857). She did not agree with all his teaching, but acknowledged her 'great debt' to him; it was greater (as far as J. W. Cross could remember her acknowledging) than to any other writer. Believing that 'other-worldliness' is a distraction from the real centre of human endeavour, she and Comte held that education and science are fundamental to progress, that religion needs to be at one with scientific truth, and that self-interest should be subordinated to altruism and general welfare. Above all, Comte emphasized the necessity for stimulating humanitarian feeling and moral energy, if social justice is to be achieved and maintained (cf. pp. 170–2).

The width of Mary Evans' outlook is seen not only in terms of evolutionary religion and civilization, but also in her scientific allusions, and in her insistence on the 'undeviating law' of cause-effect (the 'inexorable law of consequences') in human affairs. Any religion that ignores it is inadequate. It may be seen in the rise and fall of nations. George Eliot illustrates it in her novels: in Arthur Donnithorne (AB), Godfrey Cass (SM), Tito Melema (R), Lydgate, Bulstrode (M), and Gwendolen Harleth (DD); also in more successful characters such as Adam Bede, Silas Marner, and Dorothea Brooke. The importance of not breaking violently away from tradition is one of the interrelated themes of *Felix Holt*.

iii FROM 'WOMAN IN FRANCE: MADAME DE SABLÉ'

(Devoted principally to Victor Cousin's *Madame de Sablé: études sur les femmes illustres et la société du XVII^e siècle*, this was the first review Marian Evans contributed to *The Westminster Review* after she had chosen to live with George Henry Lewes; it appeared in October 1854. The happy relationship and intellectual interdependence of these two writers contributed much to the cogency of this article.)

Such was Madame de Sablé,[6] whose name is, perhaps, new to some

of our readers, so far does it lie from the surface of literature and history. We have seen, too, that she was only one amongst a crowd – one in a firmament of feminine stars which, when once the biographical telescope is turned upon them, appear scarcely less remarkable and interesting. Now, if the reader recollects what was the position and average intellectual character of women in the high society of England during the reigns of James the First and the two Charleses – the period through which Madame de Sablé's career extends – we think he will admit our position as to the early superiority of womanly development in France: and this fact, with its causes, has not merely an historical interest, it has an important bearing on the culture of women in the present day. Women become superior in France by being admitted to a common fund of ideas, to common objects of interest with men; and this must ever be the essential condition at once of true womanly culture and of true social well-being. We have no faith in feminine conversazioni, where ladies are eloquent on Apollo and Mars; though we sympathize with the yearning activity of faculties which, deprived of their proper material, waste themselves in weaving fabrics out of cobwebs. Let the whole field of reality be laid open to woman as well as to man, and then that which is peculiar in her mental modification, instead of being, as it is now, a source of discord and repulsion between the sexes, will be found to be a necessary complement to the truth and beauty of life. Then we shall have that marriage of minds which alone can blend all the hues of thought and feeling in one lovely rainbow of promise[6] for the harvest of human happiness.

* * *

With the above, one should consider the typically masculine views expressed by Bardo (R.v) and Mr Brooke (M.vii), and the kind of education which, on the one hand, fails to prepare Maggie Tulliver (MF) and Dorothea Brooke for life and, on the other, adds to Rosamond's superficial attractiveness, yet makes her a handicap in marriage to the exceptionally talented Lydgate (M). Coincidentally, the rainbow image of promise was used by D. H. Lawrence in *The Rainbow*, as a sign of women's coming self-responsibility, at a time when he believed he would do more for their emancipation than the suffragette movement could ever achieve.