

# GEORGE ELIOT

THE ESSAYS  
OF "GEORGE  
ELIOT"

**George Eliot**  
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The Essays of «George Eliot» Complete:*

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# George Eliot

## The Essays of «George Eliot» Complete

### PREFACE

Since the death of George Eliot much public curiosity has been excited by the repeated allusions to, and quotations from, her contributions to periodical literature, and a leading newspaper gives expression to a general wish when it says that “this series of striking essays ought to be collected and reprinted, both because of substantive worth and because of the light they throw on the author’s literary canons and predilections.” In fact, the articles which were published anonymously in *The Westminster Review* have been so pointedly designated by the editor, and the biographical sketch in the “Famous Women” series is so emphatic in its praise of them, and so copious in its extracts from one and the least important one of them, that the publication of all the Review and magazine articles of the renowned novelist, without abridgment or alteration, would seem but an act of fair play to her fame, while at the same time a compliance with a reasonable public demand.

Nor are these first steps in her wonderful intellectual progress

any the less, but are all the more noteworthy, for being first steps. "To ignore this stage," says the author of the valuable little volume to which we have just referred – "to ignore this stage in George Eliot's mental development would be to lose one of the connecting links in her history." Furthermore, "nothing in her fictions excels the style of these papers." Here is all her "epigrammatic felicity," and an irony not surpassed by Heine himself, while her paper on the poet Young is one of her wittiest bits of critical analysis.

Her translation of Status's "Life of Jesus" was published in 1840, and her translation of Feuerbach's "Essence of Christianity" in 1854. Her translation of Spinoza's "Ethics" was finished the same year, but remains unpublished. She was associate editor of *The Westminster Review* from 1851 to 1853. She was about twenty-seven years of age when her first translation appeared, thirty-three when the first of these magazine articles appeared, thirty-eight at the publication of her first story, and fifty-nine when she finished "Theophrastus Such." Two years after she died, at the age of sixty-one. So that George Eliot's literary life covered a period of about thirty-two years.

The introductory chapter on her "Analysis of Motives" first appeared as a magazine article, and appears here at the request of the publishers, after having been carefully revised, indeed almost entirely rewritten by its author.

# **“GEORGE ELIOT’S” ANALYSIS OF MOTIVES**

George Eliot is the greatest of the novelists in the delineation of feeling and the analysis of motives. In “uncovering certain human lots, and seeing how they are woven and interwoven,” some marvellous work has been done by this master in the two arts of rhetoric and fiction.

If you say the telling of a story is her forte, you put her below Wilkie Collins or Mrs. Oliphant; if you say her object is to give a picture of English society, she is surpassed by Bulwer and Trollope; if she be called a satirist of society, Thackeray is her superior; if she intends to illustrate the absurdity of behavior, she is eclipsed by Dickens; but if the analysis of human motives be her forte and art, she stands first, and it is very doubtful whether any artist in fiction is entitled to stand second. She reaches clear in and touches the most secret and the most delicate spring of human action. She has done this so well, so apart from the doing of everything else, and so, in spite of doing some other things indifferently, that she works on a line quite her own, and quite alone, as a creative artist in fiction. Others have done this incidentally and occasionally, as Charlotte Brontë and Walter Scott, but George Eliot does it elaborately, with laborious painstaking, with purpose aforethought. Scott said of

Richardson: "In his survey of the heart he left neither head, bay, nor inlet behind him until he had traced its soundings, and laid it down in his chart with all its minute sinuosities, its depths and its shallows."

This is too much to say of Richardson, but it is not too much to say of George Eliot. She has sounded depths and explored sinuosities of the human heart which were utterly unknown to the author of "Clarissa Harlowe." It is like looking into the translucent brook – you see the wriggling tad, the darting minnow, the leisurely trout, the motionless pike, while in the bays and inlets you see the infusoria and animalculæ as well.

George Eliot belongs to and is the greatest of the school of artists in fiction who write fiction as a means to an end, instead of as an end. And, while she certainly is not a story-teller of the first order, considered simply as a story-teller, her novels are a striking illustration of the power of fiction as a means to an end. They remind us, as few other stories do, of the fact that however inferior the story may be considered simply as a story, it is indispensable to the delineation of character. No other form of composition, no discourse, or essay, or series of independent sketches, however successful, could succeed in bringing out character equal to the novel. Herein is at once the justification of the power of fiction. "He spake a parable," with an "end" in view which could not be so expeditiously attained by any other form of address.

A story of the first-class, with the story as end in itself, and

a story of the first class told as a means to an end, has never been, and it is not likely ever will be, found together. The novel with a purpose is fatal to the novel written simply to excite by a plot, or divert by pictures of scenery, or entertain as a mere panorama of social life. So intense is George Eliot's desire to dissect the human heart and discover its motives, that plot, diction, situations, and even consistency in the vocabulary of the characters, are all made subservient to it. With her it is not so much that the characters do thus and so, but why they do thus and so. Dickens portrays the behavior, George Eliot dissects the motive of the behavior. Here comes the human creature, says Dickens, now let us see how he will behave. Here comes the human creature, says George Eliot, now let us see why he behaves.

"Suppose," she says, "suppose we turn from outside estimates of a man, to wonder with keener interest what is the report of his own consciousness about his doings, with what hindrances he is carrying on his daily labors, and with what spirit he wrestles against universal pressure, which may one day be too heavy for him and bring his heart to a final pause." The outside estimate is the work of Dickens and Thackeray, the inside estimate is the work of George Eliot.

Observe in the opening pages of the great novel of "Middlemarch" how soon we pass from the outside dress to the inside reasons for it, from the costume to the motives which control it and color it. It was "only to close observers that Celia's



dress differed from her sister's," and had "a shade of coquetry in its arrangements." Dorothea's "plain dressing was due to mixed conditions, in most of which her sister shared." They were both influenced by "the pride of being ladies," of belonging to a stock not exactly aristocratic, but unquestionably "good." The very quotation of the word good is significant and suggestive. There were "no parcel-tying forefathers" in the Brooke pedigree. A Puritan forefather, "who served under Cromwell, but afterward conformed and managed to come out of all political troubles as the proprietor of a respectable family estate," had a hand in Dorothea's "plain" wardrobe. "She could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life involving eternal consequences with a keen interest in gimp and artificial protrusions of drapery," but Celia "had that common-sense which is able to accept momentous doctrines without any eccentric agitation." Both were examples of "reversion." Then, as an instance of heredity working itself out in character "in Mr. Brooke, the hereditary strain of Puritan energy was clearly in abeyance, but in his niece Dorothea it glowed alike through faults and virtues."

Could anything be more natural than for a woman with this passion for, and skill in, "unravelling certain human lots," to lay herself out upon the human lot of woman, with all her "passionate patience of genius?" One would say this was inevitable. And, for a delineation of what that lot of woman really is, as made for her, there is nothing in all literature equal to what we find in "Middlemarch," "Romola," "Daniel Deronda,"

and "Janet's Repentance." "She was a woman, and could not make her own lot." Never before, indeed, was so much got out of the word "lot." Never was that little word so hard worked, or well worked. "We women," says Gwendolen Harleth, "must stay where we grow, or where the gardeners like to transplant us. We are brought up like the flowers, to look as pretty as we can, and be dull without complaining. That is my notion about the plants, and that is the reason why some of them have got poisonous." To appreciate the work that George Eliot has done you must read her with the determination of finding out the reason why Gwendolen Harleth "became poisonous," and Dorothea, with all her brains and "plans," a failure; why "the many Theresas find for themselves no epic life, only a life of mistakes, the offspring of a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of opportunity." You must search these marvellous studies in motives for the key to the blunders of "the blundering lives" of woman which "some have felt are due to the inconvenient indefiniteness with which the Supreme power has fashioned the natures of women." But as there is not "one level of feminine incompetence as strict as the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of woman cannot be treated with scientific certitude." It is treated with a dissective delineation in the women of George Eliot unequalled in the pages of fiction.

And then woman's lot, as respects her "social promotion" in matrimony, so much sought, and so necessary for her to seek, even in spite of her conscience, and at the expense of

her happiness – the unravelling of that lot would also come very natural to this expert unraveller. And never have we had the causes of woman's "blunders" in match-making, and man's blunders in love-making, told with such analytic acumen, or with such pathetic and sarcastic eloquence. It is not far from the question of woman's social lot to the question of questions of human life, the question which has so tremendous an influence upon the fortunes of mankind and womankind, the question which it is so easy for one party to "pop" and so difficult for the other party to answer intelligently or sagaciously.

Why does the young man fall in love with the young woman who is most unfit for him of all the young women of his acquaintance, and why does the young woman accept the young man, or the old man, who is better adapted to making her life unendurable than any other man of her circle of acquaintances? Why does the stalwart Adam Bede fall in love with Hetty Sorrel, "who had nothing more than her beauty to recommend her?" The delineator of his motives "respects him none the less." She thinks that "the deep love he had for that sweet, rounded, dark-eyed Hetty, of whose inward self he was really very ignorant, came out of the very strength of his nature, and not out of any inconsistent weakness. Is it any weakness, pray, to be wrought upon by exquisite music? To feel its wondrous harmonies searching the subtlest windings of your soul, the delicate fibres of life which no memory can penetrate, and binding together your whole being, past and present, in one unspeakable vibration? If not, then

neither is it a weakness to be so wrought upon by the exquisite curves of a woman's cheek, and neck, and arms; by the liquid depth of her beseeching eyes, or the sweet girlish pout of her lips. For the beauty of a lovely woman is like music – what can one say more?" And so "the noblest nature is often blinded to the character of the woman's soul that beauty clothes." Hence "the tragedy of human life is likely to continue for a long time to come, in spite of mental philosophers who are ready with the best receipts for avoiding all mistakes of the kind."

How simple the motive of the Rev. Edward Casaubon in popping the question to Dorothea Brooke, how complex her motives in answering the question! He wanted an amanuensis to "love, honor, and obey" him. She wanted a husband who would be "a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew if you wished it." The matrimonial motives are worked to draw out the character of Dorothea, and nowhere does the method of George Eliot show to greater advantage than in probing the motives of this fine, strong, conscientious, blundering young woman, whose voice "was like the voice of a soul that once lived in an Æolian harp." She had a theoretic cast of mind. She was "enamored of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing what seemed to her to have those aspects." The awful divine had those aspects, and she embraced him. "Certainly such elements in the character of a marriageable girl tended to interfere with her lot, and hinder it from being decided, according to custom, by good looks, vanity, and merely canine affection." That's a George

Eliot stroke. If the reader does not see from that what she is driving at he may as well abandon all hope of ever appreciating her great forte and art. Dorothea's goodness and sincerity did not save her from the worst blunder that a woman can make, while her conscientiousness only made it inevitable. "With all her eagerness to know the truths of life she retained very childlike ideas about marriage." A little of the goose as well as the child in her conscientious simplicity, perhaps. She "felt sure she would have accepted the judicious Hooker if she had been born in time to save him from that wretched mistake he made in matrimony, or John Milton, when his blindness had come on, or any other great man whose odd habits it would be glorious piety to endure."

True to life, our author furnishes the "great man," and the "odd habits," and the miserable years of "glorious" endurance. "Dorothea looked deep into the ungauged reservoir of Mr. Casaubon's mind, seeing reflected there every quality she herself brought." They exchanged experiences – he his desire to have an amanuensis, and she hers, to be one. He told her in the billy-cooing of their courtship that "his notes made a formidable range of volumes, but the crowning task would be to condense these voluminous, still accumulating results, and bring them, like the earlier vintage of Hippocratic books, to fit a little shelf." Dorothea was altogether captivated by the wide embrace of this conception. Here was something beyond the shallows of ladies' school literature. Here was a modern Augustine who united the glories of doctor and saint. Dorothea said to herself: "His feeling,

his experience, what a lake compared to my little pool!" The little pool runs into the great reservoir.

Will you take this reservoir to be your husband, and will you promise to be unto him a fetcher of slippers, a dotter of I's and crosser of T's and a copier and condenser of manuscripts; until death doth you part? I will.

They spend their honeymoon in Rome, and on page 211 of Vol. I. we find poor Dorothea "alone in her apartments, sobbing bitterly, with such an abandonment to this relief of an oppressed heart as a woman habitually controlled by pride will sometimes allow herself when she feels securely alone." What was she crying about? "She thought her feeling of desolation was the fault of her own spiritual poverty." A characteristic George Eliot probe. Why does not Dorothea give the real reason for her desolateness? Because she does not know what the real reason is – conscience makes blunderers of us all. "How was it that in the weeks since their marriage Dorothea had not distinctly observed, but felt, with a stifling depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had dreamed of finding in her husband's mind were replaced by anterooms and winding passages which seemed to lead no whither? I suppose it was because in courtship everything is regarded as provisional and preliminary, and the smallest sample of virtue or accomplishment is taken to guarantee delightful stores which the broad leisure of marriage will reveal. But, the door-sill of marriage once crossed, expectation is concentrated on the

present. Having once embarked on your marital voyage, you may become aware that you make no way, and that the sea is not within sight – that in fact you are exploring an inclosed basin.” So the ungauged reservoir turns out to be an inclosed basin, but Dorothea was prevented by her social lot, and perverse goodness, and puritanical “reversion,” from foreseeing that. She might have been saved from her gloomy marital voyage “if she could have fed her affection with those childlike caresses which are the bent of every sweet woman who has begun by showering kisses on the hard pate of her bald doll, creating a happy soul within that woodenness from the wealth of her own love.” Then, perhaps, Ladislaw would have been her first husband instead of her second, as he certainly was her first and only love. Such are the chances and mischances in the lottery of matrimony.

Equally admirable is the diagnosis of Gwendolen Harleth’s motives in “drifting toward the tremendous decision,” and finally landing in it. “We became poor, and I was tempted.” Marriage came to her as it comes to many, as a temptation, and like the deadening drug or the maddening bowl, to keep off the demon of remorse or the cloud of sorrow, like the forgery or the robbery to save from want. “The brilliant position she had longed for, the imagined freedom she would create for herself in marriage” – these “had come to her hunger like food, with the taint of sacrilege upon it,” which she “snatched with terror.” Grandcourt “fulfilled his side of the bargain by giving her the rank and luxuries she coveted.” Matrimony as a bargain never had and

never will have but one result. "She had a root of conscience in her, and the process of purgatory had begun for her on earth." Without the root of conscience it would have been purgatory all the same. So much for resorting to marriage for deliverance from poverty or old maidhood. Better be an old maid than an old fool. But how are we to be guaranteed against "one of those convulsive motiveless actions by which wretched men and women leap from a temporary sorrow into a lifelong misery?" Rosamond Lydgate says, "Marriage stays with us like a murder." Yes, if she could only have found that out before instead of after her own marriage!

But "what greater thing," exclaims our novelist, "is there for two human souls than to feel that they are joined for life, to strengthen each other in all labor, to minister to each other in all pain, to be one with each other in silent, unspeakable memories at the last parting?"

While a large proportion of her work in the analysis of motives is confined to woman, she has done nothing more skilful or memorable than the "unravelling" of Bulstrode's mental processes by which he "explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with his beliefs." If there were no Dorothea in "Middlemarch" the character of Bulstrode would give that novel a place by itself among the masterpieces of fiction. The Bulstrode wound was never probed in fiction with more scientific precision. The pious villain finally finds himself so near discovery that he becomes conscientious. "His



equivocation now turns venomously upon him with the full-grown fang of a discovered lie.” The past came back to make the present unendurable. “The terror of being judged sharpens the memory.” Once more “he saw himself the banker’s clerk, as clever in figures as he was fluent in speech, and fond of theological definition. He had striking experience in conviction and sense of pardon; spoke in prayer-meeting and on religious platforms. That was the time he would have chosen now to awake in and find the rest of dream. He remembered his first moments of shrinking. They were private and were filled with arguments – some of these taking the form of prayer.”

Private prayer – but “is private prayer necessarily candid? Does it necessarily go to the roots of action? Private prayer is inaudible speech, and speech is representative. Who can represent himself just as he is, even in his own reflections?”

Bulstrode’s course up to the time of his being suspected “had, he thought, been sanctioned by remarkable providences, appearing to point the way for him to be the agent in making the best use of a large property.” Providence would have him use for the glory of God the money he had stolen. “Could it be for God’s service that this fortune should go to” its rightful owners, when its rightful owners were “a young woman and her husband who were given up to the lightest pursuits, and might scatter it abroad in triviality – people who seemed to lie outside the path of remarkable providences?”

Bulstrode felt at times “that his action was unrighteous, but

how could he go back? He had mental exercises calling himself naught, laid hold on redemption and went on in his course of instrumentality.” He was “carrying on two distinct lives” – a religious one and a wicked one. “His religious activity could not be incompatible with his wicked business as soon as he had argued himself into not feeling it incompatible.”

“The spiritual kind of rescue was a genuine need with him. There may be coarse hypocrites, who consciously affect beliefs and emotions for the sake of gulling the world, but Bulstrode was not one of them. He was simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs, and who had gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs.”

And now Providence seemed to be taking sides against him. “A threatening Providence – in other words, a public exposure – urged him to a kind of propitiation which was not a doctrinal transaction. The divine tribunal had changed its aspect to him. Self-prostration was no longer enough. He must bring restitution in his hand. By what sacrifice could he stay the rod? He believed that if he did something right God would stay the rod, and save him from the consequences of his wrong-doing.” His religion was “the religion of personal fear,” which “remains nearly at the level of the savage.” The exposure comes, and the explosion. Society shudders with hypocritical horror, especially in the presence of poor Mrs. Bulstrode, who “should have some hint given her, that if she knew the truth she would have less complacency in her

bonnet.” Society when it is very candid, and very conscientious, and very scrupulous, cannot “allow a wife to remain ignorant long that the town holds a bad opinion of her husband.” The photograph of the Middlemarch gossips sitting upon the case of Mrs. Bulstrode is taken accurately. Equally accurate, and far more impressive, is the narrative of circumstantial evidence gathering against the innocent Lydgate and the guilty Bulstrode – circumstances that will sometimes weave into one tableau of public odium the purest and the blackest characters. From this tableau you may turn to that one in “Adam Bede,” and see how circumstances are made to crush the weak woman and clear the wicked man. And then you can go to “Romola,” or indeed to almost any of these novels, and see how wrong-doing may come of an indulged infirmity of purpose, that unconscious weakness and conscious wickedness may bring about the same disastrous results, and that repentance has no more effect in averting or altering the consequences in one case than the other. Tito’s ruin comes of a feeble, Felix Holt’s victory of an unconquerable, will. Nothing is more characteristic of George Eliot than her tracking of Tito through all the motives and counter motives from which he acted. “Because he tried to slip away from everything that was unpleasant, and cared for nothing so much as his own safety, he came at last to commit such deeds as make a man infamous.” So poor Romola tells her son, as a warning, and adds: “If you make it the rule of your life to escape from what is disagreeable, calamity may come just the same, and it would be calamity falling on a

base mind, which is the one form of sorrow that has no balm in it.”

Out of this passion for the analysis of motives comes the strong character, slightly gnarled and knotted by natural circumstances, as trees that are twisted and misshapen by storms and floods – or characters gnarled by some interior force working in conjunction with or in opposition to outward circumstances. She draws no monstrosities, or monsters, thus avoiding on the one side romance and on the other burlesque. She keeps to life – the life that fails from “the meanness of opportunity,” or is “dispersed among hindrances” or “wrestles” unavailingly “with universal pressure.”

Why had Mr. Gilfil in those late years of his beneficent life “more of the knots and ruggedness of poor human nature than there lay any clear hint of it in the open-eyed, loving” young Maynard? Because “it is with men as with trees: if you lop off their finest branches into which they were pouring their young life-juice, the wounds will be healed over with some rough boss, some odd excrescence, and what might have been a grand tree, expanding into liberal shade, is but a whimsical, misshapen trunk. Many an irritating fault, many an unlovely oddity, has come of a hard sorrow which has crushed and maimed the nature just when it was expanding into plenteous beauty; and the trivial, erring life, which we visit with our harsh blame, may be but as the unsteady motion of a man whose best limb is withered. The dear old Vicar had been sketched out by nature as a noble tree. The

heart of him was sound, the grain was of the finest, and in the gray-haired man, with his slipshod talk and caustic tongue, 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.”

Her style is influenced by her purpose – may be said, indeed, to be created by it. The excellences and the blemishes of the diction come of the end sought to be attained by it. Its subtleties and obscurities were equally inevitable. Analytical thinking takes on an analytical phraseology. It is a striking instance of a mental habit creating a vocabulary. The method of thought produces the form of rhetoric. Some of the sentences are mental landscapes. The meaning seems to be in motion on the page. It is elusive from its very subtlety. It is more our analyst than her character of Rufus Lyon, who “would fain find language subtle enough to follow the utmost intricacies of the soul’s pathways.” Mrs. Transome’s “lancet-edged epigrams” are dull in comparison with her own. She uses them with startling success in dissecting motive and analyzing feeling. They deserve as great renown as “Nélaton’s probe.”

For example: “Examine your words well, and you will find that even when you have no motive to be false, it is a very hard thing to say the exact truth, especially about your own feelings – much harder than to say something fine about them which is not the exact truth.” That ought to make such a revelation of the religious diary-keeper to himself as to make him ashamed of

himself. And this will fit in here: "Our consciences are not of the same pattern, an inner deliverance of fixed laws – they are the voice of sensibilities as various as our memories;" and this: "Every strong feeling makes to itself a conscience of its own – has its own piety."

Who can say that the joints of his armor are not open to this thrust? "The lapse of time during which a given event has not happened is in the logic of habit, constantly alleged as a reason why the event should never happen, even when the lapse of time is precisely the added condition which makes the event imminent. A man will tell you that he worked in a mine for forty years unhurt by an accident as a reason why he should apprehend no danger, though the roof is beginning to sink." Silas Marner lost his money through his "sense of security," which "more frequently springs from habit than conviction." He went unrobbed for fifteen years, which supplied the only needed condition for his being robbed now. A compensation for stupidity: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar that lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity." Who does not at once recognize "that mixture of pushing forward and being pushed forward" as "the brief history of most human beings?" Who has not seen "advancement hindered by impetuous candor?" or "private grudges christened by the name of public zeal?" or "a church

built with an exuberance of faith and a deficiency of funds?" or a man "who would march determinedly along the road he thought best, but who was easily convinced which was best?" or a preacher "whose oratory was like a Belgian railway horn, which shows praiseworthy intentions inadequately fulfilled?"

There is something chemical about such an analysis as this of Rosamond: "Every nerve and muscle was adjusted to the consciousness that she was being looked at. She was by nature an actress of parts that entered into her physique. She even acted her own character, and so well that she did not know it to be precisely her own!" Nor is the exactness of this any less cruel: "We may handle extreme opinions with impunity, while our furniture and our dinner-giving link us to the established order." Why not own that "the emptiness of all things is never so striking to us as when we fail in them?" Is it not better to avoid "following great reformers beyond the threshold of their own homes?" Does not "our moral sense learn the manners of good society?"

The lancet works impartially, because the hand that holds it is the hand of a conscientious artist. She will endure the severest test you can apply to an artist in fiction. She does not betray any religious bias in her novels, which is all the more remarkable now that we find it in these essays. Nor is it at all remarkable that this bias is so very easily discovered in the novels by those who have found it in her essays! Whatever opinions she may have expressed in her critical reviews, she is not the Evangelical, or the Puritan, or the Jew, or the Methodist, or the Dissenting Minister, or the

Churchman, any more than she is the Radical, the Liberal, or the Tory, who talks in the pages of her fiction.

Every side has its say, every prejudice its voice, and every prejudice and side and vagary even has the philosophical reason given for it, and the charitable explanation applied to it. She analyzes the religious motives without obtrusive criticism or acrid cynicism or nauseous cant – whether of the orthodox or heretical form.

The art of fiction has nothing more elevated, or more touching, or fairer to every variety of religious experience, than the delineation of the motives that actuated Dinah Morris the Methodist preacher, Deronda the Jew, Dorothea the Puritan, Adam and Seth Bede, and Janet Dempster.

Who can object to this? “Religious ideas have the fate of melodies, which, once set afloat in the world, are taken up by all sorts of instruments, some of them woefully coarse, feeble, or out of tune, until people are in danger of crying out that the melody itself is detestable.” Is it not one of the “mixed results of revivals” that “some gain a religious vocabulary rather than a religious experience?” Is there a descendant of the Puritans who will not relish the fair play of this? “They might give the name of piety to much that was only Puritanic egoism; they might call many things sin that were not sin, but they had at least the feeling that sin was to be avoided and resisted, and color-blindness, which may mistake drab for scarlet, is better than total blindness, which sees no distinction of color at all.” Is not Adam Bede justified



in saying that “to hear some preachers you’d think a man must be doing nothing all his life but shutting his eyes and looking at what’s going on in the inside of him,” or that “the doctrines are like finding names for your feelings so that you can talk of them when you’ve never known them?” Read all she has said before you object to anything she has said. Then see whether you will find fault with her for delineating the motives of those with whom “great illusions” are mistaken for “great faith;” of those “whose celestial intimacies do not improve their domestic manners,” however “holy” they may claim to be; of those who “contrive to conciliate the consciousness of filthy rags with the best damask;” of those “whose imitative piety and native worldliness is equally sincere;” of those who “think the invisible powers will be soothed by a bland parenthesis here and there, coming from a man of property” – parenthetical recognition of the Almighty! May not “religious scruples be like spilled needles, making one afraid of treading or sitting down, or even eating?”

But if this is a great mind fascinated with the insoluble enigma of human motives, it is a mind profoundly in sympathy with those who are puzzling hopelessly over the riddle or are struggling hopelessly in its toils. She is “on a level and in the press with them as they struggle their way along the stony road through the crowd of unloving fellow-men.” She says “the only true knowledge of our fellows is that which enables us to feel with them, which gives us a finer ear for the heart-pulses that are beating under the mere clothes of circumstance and opinion.” No artist in fiction

ever had a finer ear or a more human sympathy for the straggler who “pushes manfully on” and “falls at last,” leaving “the crowd to close over the space he has left.” Her extraordinary skill in disclosing “the peculiar combination of outward with inward facts which constitute a man’s critical actions,” only makes her the more charitable in judging them. “Until we know what this combination has been, or will be, it will be better not to think ourselves wise about” the character that results. “There is a terrible coercion in our deeds which may first turn the honest man into a deceiver, and then reconcile him to the change. And for this reason the second wrong presents itself to him in the guise of the only practicable right.” There is nothing of the spirit of “served him right,” or “just what she deserved,” or “they ought to have known better,” in George Eliot. That is not in her line. The opposite of that is exactly in her line. This is characteristic of her: “In this world there are so many of these common, coarse people, who have no picturesque or sentimental wretchedness! And it is so needful we should remember their existence, else we may happen to leave them quite out of our religion and philosophy, and frame lofty theories which only fit a world of extremes.” She does not leave them out. Her books are full of them, and of a Christly charity and plea for them. Who can ever forget little Tiny, “hidden and uncared for as the pulse of anguish in the breast of the bird that has fluttered down to its nest with the long-sought food, and has found the nest torn and empty?” There is nothing in fiction to surpass in pathos the picture of

the death of Mrs. Amos Barton. George Eliot's fellow-feeling comes of the habit she ascribes to Daniel Deronda, "the habit of thinking herself imaginatively into the experience of others." That is the reason why her novels come home so pitilessly to those who have had a deep experience of human life. These are the men and women whom she fascinates and alienates. I know strong men and brave women who are afraid of her books, and say so. It is because of her realness, her unrelenting fidelity to human nature and human life. It is because the analysis is so delicate, subtle, and far-in. Hence the atmosphere of sadness that pervades her pages. It was unavoidable. To see only the behavior, as Dickens did, amuses us; to study only the motive at the root of the behavior, as George Eliot does, saddens us. The humor of Mrs. Poyser and the wit of Mrs. Transome only deepen the pathos by relieving it. There is hardly a sarcasm in these books but has its pensive undertone.

It is all in the key of "Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon," and that would be an appropriate key for a requiem over the grave of George Eliot.

All her writings are now before the world, and are accessible to all. They have taken their place, and will keep their place, high among the writings of those of our age who have made that age illustrious in the history of the English tongue.

# THE ESSAYS OF “GEORGE ELIOT.”

## I. CARLYLE’S LIFE OF STERLING

As soon as the closing of the Great Exhibition afforded a reasonable hope that there would once more be a reading public, “The Life of Sterling” appeared. A new work by Carlyle must always be among the literary births eagerly chronicled by the journals and greeted by the public. In a book of such parentage we care less about the subject than about its treatment, just as we think the “Portrait of a Lord” worth studying if it come from the pencil of a Vandyck. The life of John Sterling, however, has intrinsic interest, even if it be viewed simply as the struggle of a restless aspiring soul, yearning to leave a distinct impress of itself on the spiritual development of humanity, with that fell disease which, with a refinement of torture, heightens the susceptibility and activity of the faculties, while it undermines their creative force. Sterling, moreover, was a man thoroughly in earnest, to whom poetry and philosophy were not merely another form of paper currency or a ladder to fame, but an end in themselves – one of those finer spirits with whom, amid the jar and hubbub of our daily life,

“The melodies abide  
Of the everlasting chime.”

But his intellect was active and rapid, rather than powerful, and in all his writings we feel the want of a stronger electric current to give that vigor of conception and felicity of expression, by which we distinguish the undefinable something called genius; while his moral nature, though refined and elevated, seems to have been subordinate to his intellectual tendencies and social qualities, and to have had itself little determining influence on his life. His career was less exceptional than his character: a youth marked by delicate health and studious tastes, a short-lived and not very successful share in the management of the *Athenæum*, a fever of sympathy with Spanish patriots, arrested before it reached a dangerous crisis by an early love affair ending in marriage, a fifteen months' residence in the West Indies, eight months of curate's duty at Herstmonceux, relinquished on the ground of failing health, and through his remaining years a succession of migrations to the South in search of a friendly climate, with the occasional publication of an “article,” a tale, or a poem in *Blackwood* or elsewhere – this, on the prosaic background of an easy competence, was what made up the outer tissue of Sterling's existence. The impression of his intellectual power on his personal friends seems to have been produced chiefly by the eloquence and brilliancy of his conversation; but the mere reader of his works and letters would augur from them neither the wit nor the *curiosa felicitas* of epithet and imagery,

which would rank him with the men whose sayings are thought worthy of perpetuation in books of table-talk and “ana.” The public, then, since it is content to do without biographies of much more remarkable men, cannot be supposed to have felt any pressing demand even for a single life of Sterling; still less, it might be thought, when so distinguished a writer as Archdeacon Hare had furnished this, could there be any need for another. But, in opposition to the majority of Mr. Carlyle’s critics, we agree with him that the first life is properly the justification of the second. Even among the readers personally unacquainted with Sterling, those who sympathized with his ultimate alienation from the Church, rather than with his transient conformity, were likely to be dissatisfied with the entirely apologetic tone of Hare’s life, which, indeed, is confessedly an incomplete presentation of Sterling’s mental course after his opinions diverged from those of his clerical biographer; while those attached friends (and Sterling possessed the happy magic that secures many such) who knew him best during this latter part of his career, would naturally be pained to have it represented, though only by implication, as a sort of deepening declension ending in a virtual retraction. Of such friends Carlyle was the most eminent, and perhaps the most highly valued, and, as co-trustee with Archdeacon Hare of Sterling’s literary character and writings, he felt a kind of responsibility that no mistaken idea of his departed friend should remain before the world without correction. Evidently, however, his “Life of Sterling” was not so much the conscientious

discharge of a trust as a labor of love, and to this is owing its strong charm. Carlyle here shows us his “sunny side.” We no longer see him breathing out threatenings and slaughter as in the Latter-Day Pamphlets, but moving among the charities and amenities of life, loving and beloved – a Teufelsdröckh still, but humanized by a Blumine worthy of him. We have often wished that genius would incline itself more frequently to the task of the biographer – that when some great or good personage dies, instead of the dreary three or five volumed compilations of letter, and diary, and detail, little to the purpose, which two thirds of the reading public have not the chance, nor the other third the inclination, to read, we could have a real “Life,” setting forth briefly and vividly the man’s inward and outward struggles, aims, and achievements, so as to make clear the meaning which his experience has for his fellows. A few such lives (chiefly, indeed, autobiographies) the world possesses, and they have, perhaps, been more influential on the formation of character than any other kind of reading. But the conditions required for the perfection of life writing – personal intimacy, a loving and poetic nature which sees the beauty and the depth of familiar things, and the artistic power which seizes characteristic points and renders them with lifelike effect – are seldom found in combination. “The Life of Sterling” is an instance of this rare conjunction. Its comparatively tame scenes and incidents gather picturesqueness and interest under the rich lights of Carlyle’s mind. We are told neither too little nor too much; the facts noted,

the letters selected, are all such as serve to give the liveliest conception of what Sterling was and what he did; and though the book speaks much of other persons, this collateral matter is all a kind of scene-painting, and is accessory to the main purpose. The portrait of Coleridge, for example, is precisely adapted to bring before us the intellectual region in which Sterling lived for some time before entering the Church. Almost every review has extracted this admirable description, in which genial veneration and compassion struggle with irresistible satire; but the emphasis of quotation cannot be too often given to the following pregnant paragraph:

“The truth is, I now see Coleridge’s talk and speculation was the emblem of himself. In it, as in him, a ray of heavenly inspiration struggled, in a tragically ineffectual degree, with the weakness of flesh and blood. He says once, he ‘had skirted the howling deserts of infidelity.’ This was evident enough; but he had not had the courage, in defiance of pain and terror, to press resolutely across said deserts to the new firm lands of faith beyond; he preferred to create logical *fata-morganas* for himself on this hither side, and laboriously solace himself with these.”

The above mentioned step of Sterling – his entering the Church – is the point on which Carlyle is most decidedly at issue with Archdeacon Hare. The latter holds that had Sterling’s health permitted him to remain in the Church, he would have escaped those aberrations from orthodoxy, which, in the



clerical view, are to be regarded as the failure and shipwreck of his career, apparently thinking, like that friend of Arnold's who recommended a curacy as the best means of clearing up Trinitarian difficulties, that "orders" are a sort of spiritual backboard, which, by dint of obliging a man to look as if he were strait, end by making him so. According to Carlyle, on the contrary, the real "aberration" of Sterling was his choice of the clerical profession, which was simply a mistake as to his true vocation:

"Sterling," he says, "was not intrinsically, nor had ever been in the highest or chief degree, a devotional mind. Of course all excellence in man, and worship as the supreme excellence, was part of the inheritance of this gifted man; but if called to define him, I should say artist, not saint, was the real bent of his being."

Again:

"No man of Sterling's veracity, had he clearly consulted his own heart, or had his own heart been capable of clearly responding, and not been bewildered by transient fantasies and theosophic moonshine, could have undertaken this function. His heart would have answered, 'No, thou canst not. What is incredible to thee, thou shalt not, at thy soul's peril, attempt to believe! Elsewhither for a refuge, or die here. Go to perdition if thou must, but not with a lie in thy mouth; by the eternal Maker, no!'"

From the period when Carlyle's own acquaintance with

Sterling commenced, the Life has a double interest, from the glimpses it gives us of the writer, as well as of his hero. We are made present at their first introduction to each other; we get a lively idea of their colloquies and walks together, and in this easy way, without any heavy disquisition or narrative, we obtain a clear insight into Sterling's character and mental progress. Above all, we are gladdened with a perception of the affinity that exists between noble souls, in spite of diversity in ideas – in what Carlyle calls “the logical outcome” of the faculties. This “Life of Sterling” is a touching monument of the capability human nature possesses of the highest love, the love of the good and beautiful in character, which is, after all, the essence of piety. The style of the work, too, is for the most part at once pure and rich; there are passages of deep pathos which come upon the reader like a strain of solemn music, and others which show that aptness of epithet, that masterly power of close delineation, in which, perhaps, no writer has excelled Carlyle.

We have said that we think this second “Life of Sterling” justified by the first; but were it not so, the book would justify itself.

## II. WOMAN IN FRANCE: MADAME DE SABLÉ.<sup>1</sup>

In 1847, a certain Count Leopold Ferri died at Padua, leaving a library entirely composed of works written by women, in various languages, and this library amounted to nearly 32,000 volumes. We will not hazard any conjecture as to the proportion of these volumes which a severe judge, like the priest in *Don Quixote*, would deliver to the flames, but for our own part, most of these we should care to rescue would be the works of French women. With a few remarkable exceptions, our own feminine literature is made up of books which could have been better written by men – books which have the same relation to literature is general, as academic prize poems have to poetry: when not a feeble imitation, they are usually an absurd exaggeration of the masculine style, like the swaggering gait of a bad actress in male attire. Few English women have written so much like a woman as Richardson's *Lady G.* Now we think it an immense mistake to maintain that there is no sex in literature. Science has no sex: the mere knowing and reasoning faculties, if they act correctly, must go through the same process, and arrive at the same result. But in art and literature, which imply the action of

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<sup>1</sup> 1. "Madame de Sablé. Etudes sur les Femmes illustres et la Société du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle." Par M. Victor Cousin. Paris: Didier. 2. "Portraits de Femmes." Par C. A. Sainte-Beuve. Paris: Didier. 3. "Les Femmes de la Revolutions." Par J. Michelet.

the entire being, in which every fibre of the nature is engaged, in which every peculiar modification of the individual makes itself felt, woman has something specific to contribute. Under every imaginable social condition, she will necessarily have a class of sensations and emotions – the maternal ones – which must remain unknown to man; and the fact of her comparative physical weakness, which, however it may have been exaggerated by a vicious civilization, can never be cancelled, introduces a distinctively feminine condition into the wondrous chemistry of the affections and sentiments, which inevitably gives rise to distinctive forms and combinations. A certain amount of psychological difference between man and woman necessarily arises out of the difference of sex, and instead of being destined to vanish before a complete development of woman's intellectual and moral nature, will be a permanent source of variety and beauty as long as the tender light and dewy freshness of morning affect us differently from the strength and brilliancy of the midday sun. And those delightful women of France, who from the beginning of the seventeenth to the close of the eighteenth century, formed some of the brightest threads in the web of political and literary history, wrote under circumstances which left the feminine character of their minds uncramped by timidity, and unstrained by mistaken effort. They were not trying to make a career for themselves; they thought little, in many cases not at all, of the public; they wrote letters to their lovers and friends, memoirs of their every-day lives, romances in which

they gave portraits of their familiar acquaintances, and described the tragedy or comedy which was going on before their eyes. Always refined and graceful, often witty, sometimes judicious, they wrote what they saw, thought, and felt in their habitual language, without proposing any model to themselves, without any intention to prove that women could write as well as men, without affecting manly views or suppressing womanly ones. One may say, at least with regard to the women of the seventeenth century, that their writings were but a charming accident of their more charming lives, like the petals which the wind shakes from the rose in its bloom. And it is but a twin fact with this, that in France alone woman has had a vital influence on the development of literature; in France alone the mind of woman has passed like an electric current through the language, making crisp and definite what is elsewhere heavy and blurred; in France alone, if the writings of women were swept away, a serious gap would be made in the national history.

Patriotic gallantry may perhaps contend that English women could, if they had liked, have written as well as their neighbors; but we will leave the consideration of that question to the reviewers of the literature that might have been. In the literature that actually is, we must turn to France for the highest examples of womanly achievement in almost every department. We confess ourselves unacquainted with the productions of those awful women of Italy, who held professorial chairs, and were great in civil and canon law; we have made no researches

into the catacombs of female literature, but we think we may safely conclude that they would yield no rivals to that which is still unburied; and here, we suppose, the question of pre-eminence can only lie between England and France. And to this day, Madame de Sévigné remains the single instance of a woman who is supreme in a class of literature which has engaged the ambition of men; Madame Dacier still reigns the queen of blue stockings, though women have long studied Greek without shame; <sup>2</sup> Madame de Staël's name still rises first to the lips when we are asked to mention a woman of great intellectual power; Madame Roland is still the unrivalled type of the sagacious and sternly heroic, yet lovable woman; George Sand is the unapproached artist who, to Jean Jacques' eloquence and deep sense of external nature, unites the clear delineation of character and the tragic depth of passion. These great names, which mark different epochs, soar like tall pines amidst a forest of less conspicuous, but not less fascinating, female writers; and beneath these, again, are spread, like a thicket of hawthorns, eglantines, and honey-suckles, the women who are known rather by what they stimulated men to write, than by what they wrote themselves – the women whose tact, wit, and personal radiance created the atmosphere of the *Salon*, where literature, philosophy, and science, emancipated from the

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<sup>2</sup> Queen Christina, when Mme. Dacier (then Mlle. Le Fèvre) sent her a copy of her edition of "Callimachus," wrote in reply: "Mais vous, de qui on m'assure que vous êtes une belle et agréable fille, n'avez vous pas honte d'être si savante?"

trammels of pedantry and technicality, entered on a brighter stage of existence.

What were the causes of this earlier development and more abundant manifestation of womanly intellect in France? The primary one, perhaps, lies in the physiological characteristics of the Gallic race – the small brain and vivacious temperament which permit the fragile system of woman to sustain the superlative activity requisite for intellectual creativeness; while, on the other hand, the larger brain and slower temperament of the English and Germans are, in the womanly organization, generally dreamy and passive. The type of humanity in the latter may be grander, but it requires a larger sum of conditions to produce a perfect specimen. Throughout the animal world, the higher the organization, the more frequent is the departure from the normal form; we do not often see imperfectly developed or ill-made insects, but we rarely see a perfectly developed, well-made man. And thus the *physique* of a woman may suffice as the substratum for a superior Gallic mind, but is too thin a soil for a superior Teutonic one. Our theory is borne out by the fact that among our own country-women those who distinguish themselves by literary production more frequently approach the Gallic than the Teutonic type; they are intense and rapid rather than comprehensive. The woman of large capacity can seldom rise beyond the absorption of ideas; her physical conditions refuse to support the energy required for spontaneous activity; the voltaic-pile is not strong enough to produce crystallizations;

phantasms of great ideas float through her mind, but she has not the spell which will arrest them, and give them fixity. This, more than unfavorable external circumstances, is, we think, the reason why woman has not yet contributed any new form to art, any discovery in science, any deep-searching inquiry in philosophy. The necessary physiological conditions are not present in her. That under more favorable circumstances in the future, these conditions may prove compatible with the feminine organization, it would be rash to deny. For the present, we are only concerned with our theory so far as it presents a physiological basis for the intellectual effectiveness of French women.

A secondary cause was probably the laxity of opinion and practice with regard to the marriage-tie. Heaven forbid that we should enter on a defence of French morals, most of all in relation to marriage! But it is undeniable that unions formed in the maturity of thought and feeling, and grounded only on inherent fitness and mutual attraction, tended to bring women into more intelligent sympathy with men, and to heighten and complicate their share in the political drama. The quiescence and security of the conjugal relation are doubtless favorable to the manifestation of the highest qualities by persons who have already attained a high standard of culture, but rarely foster a passion sufficient to rouse all the faculties to aid in winning or retaining its beloved object – to convert indolence into activity, indifference into ardent partisanship, dulness into perspicuity. Gallantry and intrigue are sorry enough things in themselves,



but they certainly serve better to arouse the dormant faculties of woman than embroidery and domestic drudgery, especially when, as in the high society of France in the seventeenth century, they are refined by the influence of Spanish chivalry, and controlled by the spirit of Italian causticity. The dreamy and fantastic girl was awakened to reality by the experience of wifehood and maternity, and became capable of loving, not a mere phantom of her own imagination, but a living man, struggling with the hatreds and rivalries of the political arena; she espoused his quarrels, she made herself, her fortune, and her influence, the stepping-stones of his ambition; and the languid beauty, who had formerly seemed ready to “die of a rose,” was seen to become the heroine of an insurrection. The vivid interest in affairs which was thus excited in woman must obviously have tended to quicken her intellect, and give it a practical application; and the very sorrows – the heart-pangs and regrets which are inseparable from a life of passion – deepened her nature by the questioning of self and destiny which they occasioned, and by the energy demanded to surmount them and live on. No wise person, we imagine, wishes to restore the social condition of France in the seventeenth century, or considers the ideal programme of woman’s life to be a *marriage de convenance* at fifteen, a career of gallantry from twenty to eight-and-thirty, and penitence and piety for the rest of her days. Nevertheless, that social condition has its good results, as much as the madly superstitious Crusades had theirs.

But the most indisputable source of feminine culture and development in France was the influence of the *salons*, which, as all the world knows, were *réunions* of both sexes, where conversation ran along the whole gamut of subjects, from the frothiest *vers de société* to the philosophy of Descartes. Richelieu had set the fashion of uniting a taste for letters with the habits of polite society and the pursuits of ambition; and in the first quarter of the seventeenth century there were already several hôtels in Paris, varying in social position from the closest proximity of the Court to the debatable ground of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, which served as a rendezvous for different circles of people, bent on entertaining themselves either by showing talent or admiring it. The most celebrated of these rendezvous was the Hôtel de Rambouillet, which was at the culmination of its glory in 1630, and did not become quite extinct until 1648, when the troubles of the Fronde commencing, its *habitués* were dispersed or absorbed by political interests. The presiding genius of this *salon*, the Marquise de Rambouillet, was the very model of the woman who can act as an amalgam to the most incongruous elements; beautiful, but not preoccupied by coquetry, or passion; an enthusiastic admirer of talent, but with no pretensions to talent on her own part; exquisitely refined in language and manners, but warm and generous withal; not given to entertain her guests with her own compositions, or to paralyze them by her universal knowledge. She had once *meant* to learn Latin, but had been prevented by an illness; perhaps she was all the better acquainted

with Italian and Spanish productions, which, in default of a national literature, were then the intellectual pabulum of all cultivated persons in France who are unable to read the classics. In her mild, agreeable presence was accomplished that blending of the high-toned chivalry of Spain with the caustic wit and refined irony of Italy, which issued in the creation of a new standard of taste – the combination of the utmost exaltation in sentiment with the utmost simplicity of language. Women are peculiarly fitted to further such a combination – first, from their greater tendency to mingle affection and imagination with passion, and thus subtilize it into sentiment; and next, from that dread of what overtaxes their intellectual energies, either by difficulty, or monotony, which gives them an instinctive fondness for lightness of treatment and airiness of expression, thus making them cut short all prolixity and reject all heaviness. When these womanly characteristics were brought into conversational contact with the materials furnished by such minds as those of Richelieu, Corneille, the Great Condé, Balzac, and Bossuet, it is no wonder that the result was something piquant and charming. Those famous *habitués* of the Hôtel de Rambouillet did not, apparently, first lay themselves out to entertain the ladies with grimacing “small-talk,” and then take each other by the sword-knot to discuss matters of real interest in a corner; they rather sought to present their best ideas in the guise most acceptable to intelligent and accomplished women. And the conversation was not of literature only: war, politics, religion, the lightest details

of daily news – everything was admissible, if only it were treated with refinement and intelligence. The Hôtel de Rambouillet was no mere literary *réunion*; it included *hommes d'affaires* and soldiers as well as authors, and in such a circle women would not become *bas bleus* or dreamy moralizers, ignorant of the world and of human nature, but intelligent observers of character and events. It is easy to understand, however, that with the herd of imitators who, in Paris and the provinces, aped the style of this famous *salon*, simplicity degenerated into affectation, and nobility of sentiment was replaced by an inflated effort to outstrip nature, so that the *genre précieux* drew down the satire, which reached its climax in the *Précieuses Ridicules* and *Les Femmes Savantes*, the former of which appeared in 1660, and the latter in 1673. But Madelon and Caltros are the lineal descendants of Mademoiselle Scudery and her satellites, quite as much as of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. The society which assembled every Saturday in her *salon* was exclusively literary, and although occasionally visited by a few persons of high birth, bourgeois in its tone, and enamored of madrigals, sonnets, stanzas, and *bouts rimés*. The affectation that decks trivial things in fine language belongs essentially to a class which sees another above it, and is uneasy in the sense of its inferiority; and this affectation is precisely the opposite of the original *genre précieux*.

Another centre from which feminine influence radiated into the national literature was the Palais du Luxembourg, where Mademoiselle d'Orleans, in disgrace at court on account of

her share in the Fronde, held a little court of her own, and for want of anything else to employ her active spirit busied herself with literature. One fine morning it occurred to this princess to ask all the persons who frequented her court, among whom were Madame de Sévigné, Madame de la Fayette, and La Rochefoucauld, to write their own portraits, and she at once set the example. It was understood that defects and virtues were to be spoken of with like candor. The idea was carried out; those who were not clever or bold enough to write for themselves employing the pen of a friend.

“Such,” says M. Cousin, “was the pastime of Mademoiselle and her friends during the years 1657 and 1658: from this pastime proceeded a complete literature. In 1659 Ségrais revised these portraits, added a considerable number in prose and even in verse, and published the whole in a handsome quarto volume, admirably printed, and now become very rare, under the title, ‘Divers Portraits.’ Only thirty copies were printed, not for sale, but to be given as presents by Mademoiselle. The work had a prodigious success. That which had made the fortune of Mademoiselle de Scudéry’s romances – the pleasure of seeing one’s portrait a little flattered, curiosity to see that of others, the passion which the middle class always have had and will have for knowing what goes on in the aristocratic world (at that time not very easy of access), the names of the illustrious persons who were here for the first time described physically and morally with the utmost detail, great ladies transformed all at once into writers, and

unconsciously inventing a new manner of writing, of which no book gave the slightest idea, and which was the ordinary manner of speaking of the aristocracy; this undefinable mixture of the natural, the easy, and at the same time of the agreeable, and supremely distinguished – all this charmed the court and the town, and very early in the year 1659 permission was asked of Mademoiselle to give a new edition of the privileged book for the use of the public in general.”

The fashion thus set, portraits multiplied throughout France, until in 1688 La Bruyère adopted the form in his “Characters,” and ennobled it by divesting it of personality. We shall presently see that a still greater work than La Bruyère’s also owed its suggestion to a woman, whose salon was hardly a less fascinating resort than the Hôtel de Rambouillet itself.

In proportion as the literature of a country is enriched and culture becomes more generally diffused, personal influence is less effective in the formation of taste and in the furtherance of social advancement. It is no longer the coterie which acts on literature, but literature which acts on the coterie; the circle represented by the word *public* is ever widening, and ambition, poising itself in order to hit a more distant mark, neglects the successes of the salon. What was once lavished prodigally in conversation is reserved for the volume or the “article,” and the effort is not to betray originality rather than to communicate it. As the old coach-roads have sunk into disuse through the creation of railways, so journalism tends more and more to divert information from the channel of conversation into the channel of

the Press; no one is satisfied with a more circumscribed audience than that very indeterminate abstraction "the public," and men find a vent for their opinions not in talk, but in "copy." We read the *Athenæum* askance at the tea-table, and take notes from the *Philosophical Journal* at a soirée; we invite our friends that we may thrust a book into their hands, and presuppose an exclusive desire in the "ladies" to discuss their own matters, "that we may crackle the *Times*" at our ease. In fact, the evident tendency of things to contract personal communication within the narrowest limits makes us tremble lest some further development of the electric telegraph should reduce us to a society of mutes, or to a sort of insects communicating by ingenious antenna of our own invention. Things were far from having reached this pass in the last century; but even then literature and society had outgrown the nursing of coteries, and although many *salons* of that period were worthy successors of the Hôtel de Rambouillet, they were simply a recreation, not an influence. Envious evenings, no doubt, were passed in them; and if we could be carried back to any of them at will, we should hardly know whether to choose the Wednesday dinner at Madame Geoffrin's, with d'Alembert, Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse, Grimm, and the rest, or the graver society which, thirty years later, gathered round Condorcet and his lovely young wife. The *salon* retained its attractions, but its power was gone: the stream of life had become too broad and deep for such small rills to affect it.

A fair comparison between the French women of the

seventeenth century and those of the eighteenth would, perhaps, have a balanced result, though it is common to be a partisan on this subject. The former have more exaltation, perhaps more nobility of sentiment, and less consciousness in their intellectual activity – less of the *femme auteur*, which was Rousseau's horror in Madame d'Épinay; but the latter have a richer fund of ideas – not more ingenuity, but the materials of an additional century for their ingenuity to work upon. The women of the seventeenth century, when love was on the wane, took to devotion, at first mildly and by halves, as English women take to caps, and finally without compromise; with the women of the eighteenth century, Bossuet and Massillon had given way to Voltaire and Rousseau; and when youth and beauty failed, then they were thrown on their own moral strength.

M. Cousin is especially enamored of the women of the seventeenth century, and relieves himself from his labors in philosophy by making researches into the original documents which throw light upon their lives. Last year he gave us some results of these researches in a volume on the youth of the Duchess de Longueville; and he has just followed it up with a second volume, in which he further illustrates her career by tracing it in connection with that of her friend, Madame de Sablé. The materials to which he has had recourse for this purpose are chiefly two celebrated collections of manuscript: that of Conrart, the first secretary to the French Academy, one of those universally curious people who seem made for the annoyance of



contemporaries and the benefit of posterity; and that of Valant, who was at once the physician, the secretary, and general steward of Madame de Sablé, and who, with or without her permission, possessed himself of the letters addressed to her by her numerous correspondents during the latter part of her life, and of various papers having some personal or literary interest attached to them. From these stores M. Cousin has selected many documents previously unedited; and though he often leaves us something to desire in the arrangement of his materials, this volume of his on Madame de Sablé is very acceptable to us, for she interests us quite enough to carry us through more than three hundred pages of rather scattered narrative, and through an appendix of correspondence in small type. M. Cousin justly appreciates her character as “un heureux mélange de raison, d’esprit, d’agrément, et de bonté;” and perhaps there are few better specimens of the woman who is extreme in nothing but sympathetic in all things; who affects us by no special quality, but by her entire being; whose nature has no *tons criards*, but is like those textures which, from their harmonious blending of all colors, give repose to the eye, and do not weary us though we see them every day. Madame de Sablé is also a striking example of the one order of influence which woman has exercised over literature in France; and on this ground, as well as intrinsically, she is worth studying. If the reader agrees with us he will perhaps be inclined, as we are, to dwell a little on the chief points in her life and character.

Madeline de Souvré, daughter of the Marquis of Courtenvaux,

a nobleman distinguished enough to be chosen as governor of Louis XIII., was born in 1599, on the threshold of that seventeenth century, the brilliant genius of which is mildly reflected in her mind and history. Thus, when in 1635 her more celebrated friend, Mademoiselle de Bourbon, afterward the Duchess de Longueville, made her appearance at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, Madame de Sablé had nearly crossed that tableland of maturity which precedes a woman's descent toward old age. She had been married in 1614, to Philippe Emanuel de Laval-Montmorency, Seigneur de Bois-Dauphin, and Marquis de Sablé, of whom nothing further is known than that he died in 1640, leaving her the richer by four children, but with a fortune considerably embarrassed. With beauty and high rank added to the mental attractions of which we have abundant evidence, we may well believe that Madame de Sablé's youth was brilliant. For her beauty, we have the testimony of sober Madame de Motteville, who also speaks of her as having "*beaucoup de lumière et de sincérité*;" and in the following passage very graphically indicates one phase of Madame de Sablé's character:

"The Marquise de Sablé was one of those whose beauty made the most noise when the Queen came into France. But if she was amiable, she was still more desirous of appearing so; this lady's self-love rendered her too sensitive to the regard which men exhibited toward her. There yet existed in France some remains of the politeness which Catherine de Medici had introduced from Italy, and the new dramas, with all the other works in prose and verse, which came

from Madrid, were thought to have such great delicacy, that she (Madame de Sablé) had conceived a high idea of the gallantry which the Spaniards had learned from the Moors.

“She was persuaded that men can, without crime, have tender sentiments for women – that the desire of pleasing them led men to the greatest and finest actions – roused their intelligence, and inspired them with liberality, and all sorts of virtues; but, on the other hand, women, who were the ornament of the world, and made to be served and adored, ought not to admit anything from them but their respectful attentions. As this lady supported her views with much talent and great beauty, she had given them authority in her time, and the number and consideration of those who continued to associate with her have caused to subsist in our day what the Spaniards call *finezas*.”

Here is the grand element of the original *femme précieuse*, and it appears farther, in a detail also reported by Madame de Motteville, that Madame de Sablé had a passionate admirer in the accomplished Duc de Montmorency, and apparently reciprocated his regard; but discovering (at what period of their attachment is unknown) that he was raising a lover’s eyes toward the queen, she broke with him at once. “I have heard her say,” tells Madame de Motteville, “that her pride was such with regard to the Duc de Montmorency, that at the first demonstrations which he gave of his change, she refused to see him any more, being unable to receive with satisfaction attentions which she had to share with the greatest princess in the world.” There is

no evidence except the untrustworthy assertion of Tallement de Réaux, that Madame de Sablé had any other *liaison* than this; and the probability of the negative is increased by the ardor of her friendships. The strongest of these was formed early in life with Mademoiselle Dona d'Attichy, afterward Comtesse de Maure; it survived the effervescence of youth, and the closest intimacy of middle age, and was only terminated by the death of the latter in 1663. A little incident in this friendship is so characteristic in the transcendentalism which was then carried into all the affections, that it is worth relating at length. Mademoiselle d'Attichy, in her grief and indignation at Richelieu's treatment of her relative, quitted Paris, and was about to join her friend at Sablé, when she suddenly discovered that Madame de Sablé, in a letter to Madame de Rambouillet, had said that her greatest happiness would be to pass her life with Julie de Rambouillet, afterward Madame de Montausier. To Anne d'Attichy this appears nothing less than the crime of *lèse-amitié*. No explanations will appease her: she refuses to accept the assurance that the offensive expression was used simply out of unreflecting conformity to the style of the Hôtel de Rambouillet – that it was mere “*galimatias*.” She gives up her journey, and writes a letter, which is the only one Madame de Sablé chose to preserve, when, in her period of devotion, she sacrificed the records of her youth. Here it is:

“I have seen this letter in which you tell me there is so much *galimatias*, and I assure you that I have not found any at all. On the contrary, I find everything very plainly

expressed, and among others, one which is too explicit for my satisfaction – namely, what you have said to Madame de Rambouillet, that if you tried to imagine a perfectly happy life for yourself, it would be to pass it all alone with Mademoiselle de Rambouillet. You know whether any one can be more persuaded than I am of her merit; but I confess to you that that has not prevented me from being surprised that you could entertain a thought which did so great an injury to our friendship. As to believing that you said this to one, and wrote it to the other, simply for the sake of paying them an agreeable compliment, I have too high an esteem for your courage to be able to imagine that complaisance would cause you thus to betray the sentiments of your heart, especially on a subject in which, as they were unfavorable to me, I think you would have the more reason for concealing them, the affection which I have for you being so well known to every one, and especially to Mademoiselle de Rambouillet, so that I doubt whether she will not have been more sensible of the wrong you have done me, than of the advantage you have given her. The circumstance of this letter falling into my hands has forcibly reminded me of these lines of Bertaut:

“Malheureuse est l’ignorance

Et plus malheureux le savoir.”

“Having through this lost a confidence which alone rendered life supportable to me, it is impossible for me to take the journey so much thought of. For would there be any propriety in travelling sixty miles in this season, in order to burden you with a person so little suited to you, that after

years of a passion without parallel, you cannot help thinking that the greatest pleasure of your life would be to pass it without her? I return, then, into my solitude, to examine the defects which cause me so much unhappiness, and unless I can correct them, I should have less joy than confusion in seeing you.”

It speaks strongly for the charm of Madame de Sablé’s nature that she was able to retain so susceptible a friend as Mademoiselle d’Attichy in spite of numerous other friendships, some of which, especially that with Madame de Longueville, were far from lukewarm – in spite too of a tendency in herself to distrust the affection of others toward her, and to wait for advances rather than to make them. We find many traces of this tendency in the affectionate remonstrances addressed to her by Madame de Longueville, now for shutting herself up from her friends, now for doubting that her letters are acceptable. Here is a little passage from one of these remonstrances which indicates a trait of Madame de Sablé, and is in itself a bit of excellent sense, worthy the consideration of lovers and friends in general: “I am very much afraid that if I leave to you the care of letting me know when I can see you, I shall be a long time without having that pleasure, and that nothing will incline you to procure it me, for I have always observed a certain lukewarmness in your friendship after our *explanations*, from which I have never seen you thoroughly recover; and that is why I dread explanations, for however good they may be in themselves, since they serve to

reconcile people, it must always be admitted, to their shame, that they are at least the effect of a bad cause, and that if they remove it for a time they *sometimes leave a certain facility in getting angry again*, which, without diminishing friendship, renders its intercourse less agreeable. It seems to me that I find all this in your behavior to me; so I am not wrong in sending to know if you wish to have me to-day.” It is clear that Madame de Sablé was far from having what Sainte-Beuve calls the one fault of Madame Necker – absolute perfection. A certain exquisiteness in her physical and moral nature was, as we shall see, the source of more than one weakness, but the perception of these weaknesses, which is indicated in Madame de Longueville’s letters, heightens our idea of the attractive qualities which notwithstanding drew from her, at the sober age of forty, such expressions as these: “I assure you that you are the person in all the world whom it would be most agreeable to me to see, and there is no one whose intercourse is a ground of truer satisfaction to me. It is admirable that at all times, and amidst all changes, the taste for your society remains in me; and, *if one ought to thank God for the joys which do not tend to salvation*, I should thank him with all my heart for having preserved that to me at a time in which he has taken away from me all others.”

Since we have entered on the chapter of Madame de Sablé’s weaknesses, this is the place to mention what was the subject of endless raillery from her friends – her elaborate precaution about her health, and her dread of infection, even from diseases

the least communicable. Perhaps this anxiety was founded as much on æsthetic as on physical grounds, on disgust at the details of illness as much as on dread of suffering: with a cold in the head or a bilious complaint, the exquisite *précieuse* must have been considerably less conscious of being “the ornament of the world,” and “made to be adored.” Even her friendship, strong as it was, was not strong enough to overcome her horror of contagion; for when Mademoiselle de Bourbon, recently become Madame de Longueville, was attacked by small-pox, Madame de Sablé for some time had not courage to visit her, or even to see Mademoiselle de Rambouillet, who was assiduous in her attendance on the patient. A little correspondence *à propos* of these circumstances so well exhibits the graceful badinage in which the great ladies of that day were adepts, that we are attempted to quote one short letter.

### **“Mlle. de Rambouillet to the Marquise de Sablé.”**

“Mlle, de Chalais (*dame de compagnie* to the Marquise) will please to read this letter to Mme. la Marquise, *out of* a draught.

“Madame, I do not think it possible to begin my treaty with you too early, for I am convinced that between the first proposition made to me that I should see you, and the conclusion, you will have so many reflections to make, so many physicians to consult, and so many fears to surmount,



that I shall have full leisure to air myself. The conditions which I offer to fulfil for this purpose are, not to visit you until I have been three days absent from the Hôtel de Condé (where Mme. de Longueville was ill), to choose a frosty day, not to approach you within four paces, not to sit down on more than one seat. You may also have a great fire in your room, burn juniper in the four corners, surround yourself with imperial vinegar, with rue and wormwood. If you can feel yourself safe under these conditions, without my cutting off my hair, I swear to you to execute them religiously; and if you want examples to fortify you, I can tell you that the Queen consented to see M. Chaudebonne, when he had come directly from Mme. de Bourbon's room, and that Mme. d'Aiguillon, who has good taste in such matters, and is free from reproach on these points, has just sent me word that if I did not go to see her she would come to me."

Madame de Sablé betrays in her reply that she winces under this raillery, and thus provokes a rather severe though polite rejoinder, which, added to the fact that Madame de Longueville is convalescent, rouses her courage to the pitch of paying the formidable visit. Mademoiselle de Rambouillet, made aware through their mutual friend Voiture, that her sarcasm has cut rather too deep, winds up the matter by writing that very difficult production a perfectly conciliatory yet dignified apology. Peculiarities like this always deepen with age, and accordingly, fifteen years later, we find Madame D'Orleans in her "Princesse de Paphlagonia" – a romance in which she

describes her court, with the little quarrels and other affairs that agitated it – giving the following amusing picture, or rather caricature, of the extent to which Madame de Sablé carried her pathological mania, which seems to have been shared by her friend the Countess de Maure (Mademoiselle d’Attichy). In the romance, these two ladies appear under the names of Princesse Parthénie and the Reine de Mionie.

“There was not an hour in the day in which they did not confer together on the means of avoiding death, and on the art of rendering themselves immortal. Their conferences did not take place like those of other people; the fear of breathing an air which was too cold or too warm, the dread lest the wind should be too dry or too moist – in short, the imagination that the weather might not be as temperate as they thought necessary for the preservation of their health, caused them to write letters from one room to the other. It would be extremely fortunate if these notes could be found, and formed into a collection. I am convinced that they would contain rules for the regimen of life, precautions even as to the proper time for applying remedies, and also remedies which Hippocrates and Galen, with all their science, never heard of. Such a collection would be very useful to the public, and would be highly profitable to the faculties of Paris and Montpellier. If these letters were discovered, great advantages of all kinds might be derived from them, for they were princesses who had nothing mortal about them but the *knowledge* that they were mortal. In their writings might be learned all politeness in style, and the most delicate

manner of speaking on all subjects. There is nothing with which they were not acquainted; they knew the affairs of all the States in the world, through the share they had in all the intrigues of its private members, either in matters of gallantry, as in other things, on which their advice was necessary; either to adjust embroilments and quarrels, or to excite them, for the sake of the advantages which their friends could derive from them; – in a word, they were persons through whose hands the secrets of the whole world had to pass. The Princess Parthénie (Mme. de Sablé) had a palate as delicate as her mind; nothing could equal the magnificence of the entertainments she gave; all the dishes were exquisite, and her cleanliness was beyond all that could be imagined. It was in their time that writing came into use; previously nothing was written but marriage contracts, and letters were never heard of; thus it is to them that we owe a practice so convenient in intercourse.”

Still later in 1669, when the most uncompromising of the Port Royalists seemed to tax Madame de Sablé with lukewarmness that she did not join them at Port-Royal-des-Champs, we find her writing to the stern M. de Sévigny: “En vérité, je crois que je ne pourrais mieux faire que de tout quitter et de m’en aller là. Mais que deviendroient ces frayeurs de n’avoir pas de médecines à choisir, ni de chirurgien pour me saigner?”

Mademoiselle, as we have seen, hints at the love of delicate eating, which many of Madame de Sablé’s friends numbered among her foibles, especially after her religious career had

commenced. She had a genius in *friandise*, and knew how to gratify the palate without offending the highest sense of refinement. Her sympathetic nature showed itself in this as in other things; she was always sending *bonnes bouches* to her friends, and trying to communicate to them her science and taste in the affairs of the table. Madame de Longueville, who had not the luxurious tendencies of her friend, writes: “Je vous demande au nom de Dieu, que vous ne me prépariez aucun ragoût. Surtout ne me donnez point de festin. Au nom de Dieu, qu’il n’y ait rien que ce qu’on peut manger, car vous savez que c’est inutile pour moi; de plus j’en ai scrupule.” But other friends had more appreciation of her niceties. Voiture thanks her for her melons, and assures her that they are better than those of yesterday; Madame de Choisy hopes that her ridicule of Jansenism will not provoke Madame de Sablé to refuse her the receipt for salad; and La Rochefoucauld writes: “You cannot do me a greater charity than to permit the bearer of this letter to enter into the mysteries of your marmalade and your genuine preserves, and I humbly entreat you to do everything you can in his favor. If I could hope for two dishes of those preserves, which I did not deserve to eat before, I should be indebted to you all my life.” For our own part, being as far as possible from fraternizing with those spiritual people who convert a deficiency into a principle, and pique themselves on an obtuse palate as a point of superiority, we are not inclined to number Madame de Sablé’s *friandise* among her defects. M. Cousin, too, is apologetic on this point. He says:

“It was only the excess of a delicacy which can be really understood, and a sort of fidelity to the character of *précieuse*. As the *précieuse* did nothing according to common usage, she could not dine like another. We have cited a passage from Mme. de Motteville, where Mme. de Sablé is represented in her first youth at the Hôtel de Rambouillet, maintaining that woman is born to be an ornament to the world, and to receive the adoration of men. The woman worthy of the name ought always to appear above material wants, and retain, even in the most vulgar details of life, something distinguished and purified. Eating is a very necessary operation, but one which is not agreeable to the eye. Mme. de Sablé insisted on its being conducted with a peculiar cleanliness. According to her it was not every woman who could with impunity be at table in the presence of a lover; the first distortion of the face, she said, would be enough to spoil all. Gross meals made for the body merely ought to be abandoned to *bourgeoises*, and the refined woman should appear to take a little nourishment merely to sustain her, and even to divert her, as one takes refreshments and ices. Wealth did not suffice for this: a particular talent was required. Mme. de Sablé was a mistress in this art. She had transported the aristocratic spirit, and the *genre précieux*, good breeding and good taste, even into cookery. Her dinners, without any opulence, were celebrated and sought after.”

It is quite in accordance with all this that Madame de Sablé should delight in fine scents, and we find that she did; for

being threatened, in her Port Royal days, when she was at an advanced age, with the loss of smell, and writing for sympathy and information to Mère Agnès, who had lost that sense early in life, she receives this admonition from the stern saint: “You would gain by this loss, my very dear sister, if you made use of it as a satisfaction to God, for having had too much pleasure in delicious scents.” Scarron describes her as

“La non pareille Bois-Dauphine,  
*Entre dames perle très fine,”*

and the superlative delicacy implied by this epithet seems to have belonged equally to her personal habits, her affections, and her intellect.

Madame de Sablé’s life, for anything we know, flowed on evenly enough until 1640, when the death of her husband threw upon her the care of an embarrassed fortune. She found a friend in René de Longueil, Seigneur de Maisons, of whom we are content to know no more than that he helped Madame de Sablé to arrange her affairs, though only by means of alienating from her family the estate of Sablé, that his house was her refuge during the blockade of Paris in 1649, and that she was not unmindful of her obligations to him, when, subsequently, her credit could be serviceable to him at court. In the midst of these pecuniary troubles came a more terrible trial – the loss of her favorite son, the brave and handsome Guy de Laval, who, after a brilliant career in the campaigns of Condé, was killed at the siege of Dunkirk, in 1646, when scarcely four-

and-twenty. The fine qualities of this young man had endeared him to the whole army, and especially to Condé, had won him the hand of the Chancellor Séguire's daughter, and had thus opened to him the prospect of the highest honors. His loss seems to have been the most real sorrow of Madame de Sablé's life. Soon after followed the commotions of the Fronde, which put a stop to social intercourse, and threw the closest friends into opposite ranks. According to Lenet, who relies on the authority of Gourville, Madame de Sablé was under strong obligations to the court, being in the receipt of a pension of 2000 crowns; at all events, she adhered throughout to the Queen and Mazarin, but being as far as possible from a fierce partisan, and given both by disposition and judgment to hear both sides of the question, she acted as a conciliator, and retained her friends of both parties. The Countess de Maure, whose husband was the most obstinate of *frondeurs*, remained throughout her most cherished friend, and she kept up a constant correspondence with the lovely and intrepid heroine of the Fronde, Madame de Longueville. Her activity was directed to the extinction of animosities, by bringing about marriages between the Montagues and Capulets of the Fronde – between the Prince de Condé, or his brother, and the niece of Mazarin, or between the three nieces of Mazarin and the sons of three noblemen who were distinguished leaders of the Fronde. Though her projects were not realized, her conciliatory position enabled her to preserve all her friendships intact, and when the political tempest was

over, she could assemble around her in her residence, in the Place Royal, the same society as before. Madame de Sablé was now approaching her twelfth *lustrum*, and though the charms of her mind and character made her more sought after than most younger women, it is not surprising that, sharing as she did in the religious ideas of her time, the concerns of “salvation” seemed to become pressing. A religious retirement, which did not exclude the reception of literary friends or the care for personal comforts, made the most becoming frame for age and diminished fortune. Jansenism was then to ordinary Catholicism what Puseyism is to ordinary Church of Englandism in these days – it was a *récherché* form of piety unshared by the vulgar; and one sees at once that it must have special attractions for the *précieuse*. Madame de Sablé, then, probably about 1655 or ’56, determined to retire to Port Royal, not because she was already devout, but because she hoped to become so; as, however, she wished to retain the pleasure of intercourse with friends who were still worldly, she built for herself a set of apartments at once distinct from the monastery and attached to it. Here, with a comfortable establishment, consisting of her secretary, Dr. Valant, Mademoiselle de Chalais, formerly her *dame de compagnie*, and now become her friend; an excellent cook; a few other servants, and for a considerable time a carriage and coachman; with her best friends within a moderate distance, she could, as M. Cousin says, be out of the noise of the world without altogether forsaking it, preserve her dearest friendships, and have



before her eyes edifying examples – “vaquer enfin à son aise aux soins de son salut et à ceux de sa santé.”

We have hitherto looked only at one phase of Madame de Sablé's character and influence – that of the *précieuse*. But she was much more than this: she was the valuable, trusted friend of noble women and distinguished men; she was the animating spirit of a society, whence issued a new form of French literature; she was the woman of large capacity and large heart, whom Pascal sought to please, to whom Arnauld submitted the Discourse prefixed to his “Logic,” and to whom La Rochefoucauld writes: “Vous savez que je ne crois que vous êtes sur de certains chapitres, et surtout sur les replis du cœur.” The papers preserved by her secretary, Valant, show that she maintained an extensive correspondence with persons of various rank and character; that her pen was untiring in the interest of others; that men made her the depositary of their thoughts, women of their sorrows; that her friends were as impatient, when she secluded herself, as if they had been rival lovers and she a youthful beauty. It is into her ear that Madame de Longueville pours her troubles and difficulties, and that Madame de la Fayette communicates her little alarms, lest young Count de St. Paul should have detected her intimacy with La Rochefoucauld.<sup>3</sup> The few of Madame de Sablé's letters which survive show that she excelled in that epistolary style

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<sup>3</sup> The letter to which we allude has this charming little touch: “Je hais comme la mort que les gens de son âge puissent croire que j'ai des galanteries. Il semble qu'on leur paraît cent ans des qu'on est plus vieille qu'eux, et ils sont tout propre à s'étonner qu'il y ait encore question des gens.”

which was the specialty of the Hôtel de Rambouillet: one to Madame de Montausier, in favor of M. Périer, the brother-in-law of Pascal, is a happy mixture of good taste and good sense; but among them all we prefer quoting one to the Duchess de la Tremouille. It is light and pretty, and made out of almost nothing, like soap, bubbles.

“Je croix qu’il n’y a que moi qui face si bien tout le contraire de ce que je veux faire, car il est vrai qu’il n’y a personne que j’honore plus que vous, et j’ai si bien fait qu’il est quasi impossible que vous le puissiez croire. Ce n’estoit pas assez pour vous persuader que je suis indigne de vos bonnes grâces et de votre souvenir que d’avoir manqué fort longtemps à vous écrire; il falloit encore retarder quinze jours à me donner l’honneur de répondre à votre lettre. En vérité, Madame, cela me fait parôître si coupable, que vers tout autre que vous j’aimeroix mieux l’être en effet que d’entreprendre une chose si difficile qu’est celle de me justifier. Mais je me sens si innocente dans mon âme, et j’ai tant d’estime, de respect et d’affection pour vous, qu’il me semble que vous devez le connôître à cent lieues de distance d’ici, encore que je ne vous dise pas un mot. C’est ce que me donne le courage de vous écrire à cette heure, mais non pas ce qui m’en a empêché si longtemps. J’ai commencé, a faillir par force, ayant eu beaucoup de maux, et depuis je l’ai faite par honte, et je vous avoue que si je n’avois à cette heure la confiance que vous m’avez donnée en me rassurant, et celle que je tire de mes propres sentimens pour vous, je n’oserois jamais entreprendre de vous faire souvenir de moi;

mais je m'assure que vous oublierez tout, sur la protestation que je vous fais de ne me laisser plus endurcir en mes fautes et de demeurer inviolablement, Madame, votre, etc."

Was not the woman, who could unite the ease and grace indicated by this letter, with an intellect that men thought worth consulting on matters of reasoning and philosophy, with warm affections, untiring activity for others, no ambition as an authoress, and an insight into *confitures* and *ragoûts*, a rare combination? No wonder that her *salon* at Port Royal was the favorite resort of such women as Madame de la Fayette, Madame de Montausier, Madame de Longueville, and Madame de Hautefort; and of such men as Pascal, La Rochefoucauld, Nicole, and Domat. The collections of Valant contain papers which show what were the habitual subjects of conversation in this salon. Theology, of course, was a chief topic; but physics and metaphysics had their turn, and still more frequently morals, taken in their widest sense. There were "Conferences on Calvinism," of which an abstract is preserved. When Rohault invented his glass tubes to serve for the barometrical experiments in which Pascal had roused a strong interest, the Marquis de Sourdis entertained the society with a paper entitled "Why Water Mounts in a Glass Tube." Cartesianism was an exciting topic here, as well as everywhere else in France; it had its partisans and opponents, and papers were read containing "Thoughts on the Opinions of M. Descartes." These lofty matters were varied by discussions on love and friendship, on the drama, and on most

of the things in heaven and earth which the philosophy of that day dreamt of. Morals – generalizations on human affections, sentiments, and conduct – seem to have been the favorite theme; and the aim was to reduce these generalizations to their briefest form of expression, to give them the epigrammatic turn which made them portable in the memory. This was the specialty of Madame de Sablé's circle, and was, probably, due to her own tendency. As the Hôtel de Rambouillet was the nursery of graceful letter-writing, and the Luxembourg of "portraits" and "characters," so Madame de Sablé's *salon* fostered that taste for the sententious style, to which we owe, probably, some of the best *Pensées* of Pascal, and certainly, the "Maxims" of La Rochefoucauld. Madame de Sablé herself wrote maxims, which were circulated among her friends; and, after her death, were published by the Abbé d'Ailly. They have the excellent sense and nobility of feeling which we should expect in everything of hers; but they have no stamp of genius or individual character: they are, to the "Maxims" of La Rochefoucauld, what the vase moulded in dull, heavy clay is to the vase which the action of fire has made light, brittle, and transparent. She also wrote a treatise on Education, which is much praised by La Rochefoucauld and M. d'Andilly; but which seems no longer to be found: probably it was not much more elaborate than her so-called "Treatise on Friendship," which is but a short string of maxims. Madame de Sablé's forte was evidently not to write herself, but to stimulate others to write; to show that sympathy and appreciation which

are as genial and encouraging as the morning sunbeams. She seconded a man's wit with understanding – one of the best offices which womanly intellect has rendered to the advancement of culture; and the absence of originality made her all the more receptive toward the originality of others.

The manuscripts of Pascal show that many of the *Pensées*, which are commonly supposed to be raw materials for a great work on religion, were remodelled again and again, in order to bring them to the highest degree of terseness and finish, which would hardly have been the case if they had only been part of a quarry for a greater production. Thoughts, which are merely collected as materials, as stones out of which a building is to be erected, are not cut into facets, and polished like amethysts or emeralds. Since Pascal was from the first in the habit of visiting Madame de Sablé, at Port Royal, with his sister, Madame Périer (who was one of Madame de Sablé's dearest friends), we may well suppose that he would throw some of his jewels among the large and small coin of maxims, which were a sort of subscription money there. Many of them have an epigrammatical piquancy, which was just the thing to charm a circle of vivacious and intelligent women: they seem to come from a La Rochefoucauld who has been dipped over again in philosophy and wit, and received a new layer. But whether or not Madame de Sablé's influence served to enrich the *Pensées* of Pascal, it is clear that but for her influence the "Maxims" of La Rochefoucauld would never have existed. Just as in some circles the effort is, who shall

make the best puns (*horibile dictu!*), or the best charades, in the *salon* of Port Royal the amusement was to fabricate maxims. La Rochefoucauld said, “L’envie de faire des maximes se gagne comme la rhume.” So far from claiming for himself the initiation of this form of writing, he accuses Jacques Esprit, another *habitué* of Madame de Sablé’s *salon*, of having excited in him the taste for maxims, in order to trouble his repose. The said Esprit was an academician, and had been a frequenter of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. He had already published “Maxims in Verse,” and he subsequently produced a book called “La Fausseté des Vertus Humaines,” which seems to consist of Rochefoucauldism become flat with an infusion of sour Calvinism. Nevertheless, La Rochefoucauld seems to have prized him, to have appealed to his judgment, and to have concocted maxims with him, which he afterward begs him to submit to Madame Sablé. He sends a little batch of maxims to her himself, and asks for an equivalent in the shape of good eatables: “Voilà tout ce que j’ai de maximes; mais comme je ne donne rien pour rien, je vous demande un potage aux carottes, un ragoût de mouton,” etc. The taste and the talent enhanced each other; until, at last, La Rochefoucauld began to be conscious of his pre-eminence in the circle of maxim-mongers, and thought of a wider audience. Thus grew up the famous “Maxims,” about which little need be said. Every at once is now convinced, or professes to be convinced, that, as to form, they are perfect, and that as to matter, they are at once undeniably true and miserably false; true as applied to that condition of human nature

in which the selfish instincts are still dominant, false if taken as a representation of all the elements and possibilities of human nature. We think La Rochefoucauld himself wavered as to their universality, and that this wavering is indicated in the qualified form of some of the maxims; it occasionally struck him that the shadow of virtue must have a substance, but he had never grasped that substance – it had never been present to his consciousness.

It is curious to see La Rochefoucauld's nervous anxiety about presenting himself before the public as an author; far from rushing into print, he stole into it, and felt his way by asking private opinions. Through Madame de Sablé he sent manuscript copies to various persons of taste and talent, both men and women, and many of the written opinions which he received in reply are still in existence. The women generally find the maxims distasteful, but the men write approvingly. These men, however, are for the most part ecclesiastics, who decry human nature that they may exalt divine grace. The coincidence between Augustinianism or Calvinism, with its doctrine of human corruption, and the hard cynicism of the maxims, presents itself in quite a piquant form in some of the laudatory opinions on La Rochefoucauld. One writer says: "On ne pourroit faire une instruction plus propre à un catechumène pour convertir à Dieu son esprit et sa volonté.. Quand il n'y auroit que cet escrit au monde et l'Evangile je voudrois etre chretien. L'un m'apprendroit à connoistre mes misères, et l'autre à implorer mon libérateur." Madame de Maintenon tends word

to La Rochefoucauld, after the publication of his work, that the “Book of Job” and the “Maxims” are her only reading.

That Madame de Sablé herself had a tolerably just idea of La Rochefoucauld’s character, as well as of his maxims, may be gathered not only from the fact that her own maxims are as full of the confidence in human goodness which La Rochefoucauld wants, as they are empty of the style which he possesses, but also from a letter in which she replies to the criticisms of Madame de Schomberg. “The author,” she says, “derived the maxim on indolence from his own disposition, for never was there so great an indolence as his, and I think that his heart, inert as it is, owes this defect as much to his idleness as his will. It has never permitted him to do the least action for others; and I think that, amid all his great desires and great hopes, he is sometimes indolent even on his own behalf.” Still she must have felt a hearty interest in the “Maxims,” as in some degree her foster-child, and she must also have had considerable affection for the author, who was lovable enough to those who observed the rule of Helvetius, and expected nothing from him. She not only assisted him, as we have seen, in getting criticisms, and carrying out the improvements suggested by them, but when the book was actually published she prepared a notice of it for the only journal then existing – the *Journal des Savants*. This notice was originally a brief statement of the nature of the work, and the opinions which had been formed for and against it, with a moderate eulogy, in conclusion, on its good sense, wit, and insight into



human nature. But when she submitted it to La Rochefoucauld he objected to the paragraph which stated the adverse opinion, and requested her to alter it. She, however, was either unable or unwilling to modify her notice, and returned it with the following note:

“Je vous envoie ce que j’ai pu tirer de ma teste pour mettre dans le *Journal des Savants*. J’y ai mis cet endroit qui vous est le plus sensible, afin que cela vous fasse surmonter la mauvaise honte qui vous fit mettre la préface sans y rien retrancher, et je n’ai pas craint de le mettre, parce que je suis assurée que vous ne le ferez pas imprimer, quand même le reste vous plairait. Je vous assure aussi que je vous serai plus obligée, si vous en usez comme d’une chose qui servit à vous pour le corriger ou pour le jeter au feu. Nous autres grands auteurs, nous sommes trop riches pour craindre de rien perdre de nos productions. Mandez-moi ce qu’il vous semble de ce dictum.”

La Rochefoucauld availed himself of this permission, and “edited” the notice, touching up the style, and leaving out the blame. In this revised form it appeared in the *Journal des Savants*. In some points, we see, the youth of journalism was not without promise of its future.

While Madame de Sablé was thus playing the literary confidante to La Rochefoucauld, and was the soul of a society whose chief interest was the *belles-lettres*, she was equally active in graver matters. She was in constant intercourse or correspondence with the devout women of Port Royal, and of

the neighboring convent of the Carmelites, many of whom had once been the ornaments of the court; and there is a proof that she was conscious of being highly valued by them in the fact that when the Princess Marie-Madeline, of the Carmelites, was dangerously ill, not being able or not daring to visit her, she sent her youthful portrait to be hung up in the sick-room, and received from the same Mère Agnès, whose grave admonition we have quoted above, a charming note, describing the pleasure which the picture had given in the infirmary of "Notre bonne Mère." She was interesting herself deeply in the translation of the New Testament, which was the work of Sacy, Arnauld, Nicole, Le Maître, and the Duc de Luynes conjointly, Sacy having the principal share. We have mentioned that Arnauld asked her opinion on the "Discourse" prefixed to his "Logic," and we may conclude from this that he had found her judgment valuable in many other cases. Moreover, the persecution of the Port Royalists had commenced, and she was uniting with Madame de Longueville in aiding and protecting her pious friends. Moderate in her Jansenism, as in everything else, she held that the famous formulary denouncing the Augustinian doctrine, and declaring it to have been originated by Jansenius, should be signed without reserve, and, as usual, she had faith in conciliatory measures; but her moderation was no excuse for inaction. She was at one time herself threatened with the necessity of abandoning her residence at Port Royal, and had thought of retiring to a religious house at Auteuil, a village near Paris. She did, in

fact, pass some summers there, and she sometimes took refuge with her brother, the Commandeur de Souvré, with Madame de Montausier, or Madame de Longueville. The last was much bolder in her partisanship than her friend, and her superior wealth and position enabled her to give the Port Royalists more efficient aid. Arnauld and Nicole resided five years in her house; it was under her protection that the translation of the New Testament was carried on and completed, and it was chiefly through her efforts that, in 1669, the persecution was brought to an end. Madame de Sablé co-operated with all her talent and interest in the same direction; but here, as elsewhere, her influence was chiefly valuable in what she stimulated others to do, rather than in what she did herself. It was by her that Madame de Longueville was first won to the cause of Port Royal; and we find this ardent brave woman constantly seeking the advice and sympathy of her more timid and self-indulgent, but sincere and judicious friend.

In 1669, when Madame de Sablé had at length rest from these anxieties, she was at the good old age of seventy, but she lived nine years longer – years, we may suppose, chiefly dedicated to her spiritual concerns. This gradual, calm decay allayed the fear of death, which had tormented her more vigorous days; and she died with tranquillity and trust. It is a beautiful trait of these last moments that she desired not to be buried with her family, or even at Port Royal, among her saintly and noble companions – but in the cemetery of her parish, like one of the people, without pomp or ceremony.

It is worth while to notice, that with Madame de Sablé, as with some other remarkable French women, the part of her life which is richest in interest and results is that which is looked forward to by most of her sex with melancholy as the period of decline. When between fifty and sixty, she had philosophers, wits, beauties, and saints clustering around her; and one naturally cares to know what was the elixir which gave her this enduring and general attraction. We think it was, in a great degree, that well-balanced development of mental powers which gave her a comprehension of varied intellectual processes, and a tolerance for varied forms of character, which is still rarer in women than in men. Here was one point of distinction between her and Madame de Longueville; and an amusing passage, which Sainte-Beuve has disinterred from the writings of the Abbé St. Pierre, so well serves to indicate, by contrast, what we regard as the great charm of Madame de Sablé's mind, that we shall not be wandering from our subject in quoting it.

"I one day asked M. Nicole what was the character of Mme. de Longueville's intellect; he told me it was very subtle and delicate in the penetration of character; but very small, very feeble, and that her comprehension was extremely narrow in matters of science and reasoning, and on all speculations that did not concern matters of sentiment. For example, he added, I one day said to her that I could wager and demonstrate that there were in Paris at least two inhabitants who had the same number of hairs, although I could not point out who these two men were.

She told me I could never be sure of it until I had counted the hairs of these two men. Here is my demonstration, I said: I take it for granted that the head which is most amply supplied with hairs has not more than 200,000, and the head which is least so has but one hair. Now, if you suppose that 200,000 heads have each a different number of hairs, it necessarily follows that they have each one of the numbers of hairs which form the series from one to 200,000; for if it were supposed that there were two among these 200,000 who had the same number of hairs, I should have gained my wager. Supposing, then, that these 200,000 inhabitants have all a different number of hairs, if I add a single inhabitant who has hairs, and who has not more than 200,000, it necessarily follows that this number of hairs, whatever it may be, will be contained in the series from one to 200,000, and consequently will be equal to the number of hairs on one of the previous 200,000 inhabitants. Now as, instead of one inhabitant more than 200,000, there are nearly 800,000 inhabitants in Paris, you see clearly that there must be many heads which have an equal number of hairs, though I have not counted them. Still Mme. de Longueville could never comprehend that this equality of hairs could be demonstrated, and always maintained that the only way of proving it was to count them."

Surely, the meet ardent admirer of feminine shallowness must have felt some irritation when he found himself arrested by this dead wall of stupidity, and have turned with relief to the larger intelligence of Madame de Sablé, who was not the less

graceful, delicate, and feminine because she could follow a train of reasoning, or interest herself in a question of science. In this combination consisted her pre-eminent charm: she was not a genius, not a heroine, but a woman whom men could more than love – whom they could make their friend, confidante, and counsellor; the sharer, not of their joys and sorrows only, but of their ideas and aims.

Such was Madame de Sablé, 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 among 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 for the harvest of human happiness.

### III. EVANGELICAL TEACHING: DR. CUMMING. <sup>4</sup>

Given, a man with moderate intellect, a moral standard not higher than the average, some rhetorical affluence and great glibness of speech, what is the career in which, without the aid of birth or money, he may most easily attain power and reputation in English society? Where is that Goshen of mediocrity in which a smattering of science and learning will pass for profound instruction, where platitudes will be accepted as wisdom, bigoted narrowness as holy zeal, unctuous egoism as God-given piety? Let such a man become an evangelical preacher; he will then find it possible to reconcile small ability with great ambition, superficial knowledge with the prestige of erudition, a middling morale with a high reputation for sanctity. Let him shun practical extremes and be ultra only in what is purely theoretic; let him

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<sup>4</sup> 1. "The Church before the Flood." By the Rev. John Cumming, D.D. 2. "Occasional Discourses." By the Rev. John Cumming, D.D. In two vols. 3. "Signs of the Times; or, Present, Past, and Future." By the Rev. John Cumming, D.D. 4. "The Finger of God." By the Rev. John Cumming, D.D. 5. "Is Christianity from God? or, a Manual of Christian Evidence, for Scripture-Readers, City Missionaries, Sunday-School Teachers, etc." By the Rev. John Cumming, D.D. 6. "Apocalyptic Sketches; or, Lectures on the Book of Revelation." First Series. By the Rev. John Cumming, D.D. 7. "Apocalyptic Sketches." Second Series. By the Rev. John Cumming, D.D. 8. "Prophetic Studies; or, Lectures on the Book of Daniel." By the Rev. John Cumming, D.D.



be stringent on predestination, but latitudinarian on fasting; unflinching in insisting on the Eternity of punishment, but diffident of curtailing the substantial comforts of Time; ardent and imaginative on the pro-millennial advent of Christ, but cold and cautious toward every other infringement of the *status quo*. Let him fish for souls not with the bait of inconvenient singularity, but with the drag-net of comfortable conformity. Let him be hard and literal in his interpretation only when he wants to hurl texts at the heads of unbelievers and adversaries, but when the letter of the Scriptures presses too closely on the genteel Christianity of the nineteenth century, let him use his spiritualizing alembic and disperse it into impalpable ether. Let him preach less of Christ than of Antichrist; let him be less definite in showing what sin is than in showing who is the Man of Sin, less expansive on the blessedness of faith than on the accursedness of infidelity. Above all, let him set up as an interpreter of prophecy, and rival Moore's Almanack in the prediction of political events, tickling the interest of hearers who are but moderately spiritual by showing how the Holy Spirit has dictated problems and charades for their benefit, and how, if they are ingenious enough to solve these, they may have their Christian graces nourished by learning precisely to whom they may point as the "horn that had eyes," "the lying prophet," and the "unclean spirits." In this way he will draw men to him by the strong cords of their passions, made reason-proof by being baptized with the name of piety. In this way he may gain a

metropolitan pulpit; the avenues to his church will be as crowded as the passages to the opera; he has but to print his prophetic sermons and bind them in lilac and gold, and they will adorn the drawing-room table of all evangelical ladies, who will regard as a sort of pious "light reading" the demonstration that the prophecy of the locusts whose sting is in their tail, is fulfilled in the fact of the Turkish commander's having taken a horse's tail for his standard, and that the French are the very frogs predicted in the Revelations.

Pleasant to the clerical flesh under such circumstances is the arrival of Sunday! Somewhat at a disadvantage during the week, in the presence of working-day interests and lay splendors, on Sunday the preacher becomes the cynosure of a thousand eyes, and predominates at once over the Amphitryon with whom he dines, and the most captious member of his church or vestry. He has an immense advantage over all other public speakers. The platform orator is subject to the criticism of hisses and groans. Counsel for the plaintiff expects the retort of counsel for the defendant. The honorable gentleman on one side of the House is liable to have his facts and figures shown up by his honorable friend on the opposite side. Even the scientific or literary lecturer, if he is dull or incompetent, may see the best part of his audience quietly slip out one by one. But the preacher is completely master of the situation: no one may hiss, no one may depart. Like the writer of imaginary conversations, he may put what imbecilities he pleases into the mouths of his

antagonists, and swell with triumph when he has refuted them. He may riot in gratuitous assertions, confident that no man will contradict him; he may exercise perfect free-will in logic, and invent illustrative experience; he may give an evangelical edition of history with the inconvenient facts omitted: – all this he may do with impunity, certain that those of his hearers who are not sympathizing are not listening. For the Press has no band of critics who go the round of the churches and chapels, and are on the watch for a slip or defect in the preacher, to make a “feature” in their article: the clergy are, practically, the most irresponsible of all talkers. For this reason, at least, it is well that they do not always allow their discourses to be merely fugitive, but are often induced to fix them in that black and white in which they are open to the criticism of any man who has the courage and patience to treat them with thorough freedom of speech and pen.

It is because we think this criticism of clerical teaching desirable for the public good that we devote some pages to Dr. Cumming. He is, as every one knows, a preacher of immense popularity, and of the numerous publications in which he perpetuates his pulpit labors, all circulate widely, and some, according to their title-page, have reached the sixteenth thousand. Now our opinion of these publications is the very opposite of that given by a newspaper eulogist: we do *not* “believe that the repeated issues of Dr. Cumming’s thoughts are having a beneficial effect on society,” but the reverse; and hence, little inclined as we are to dwell on his pages, we think it worth while

to do so, for the sake of pointing out in them what we believe to be profoundly mistaken and pernicious. Of Dr. Cumming personally we know absolutely nothing: our acquaintance with him is confined to a perusal of his works, our judgment of him is founded solely on the manner in which he has written himself down on his pages. We know neither how he looks nor how he lives. We are ignorant whether, like St. Paul, he has a bodily presence that is weak and contemptible, or whether his person is as florid and as prone to amplification as his style. For aught we know, he may not only have the gift of prophecy, but may bestow the profits of all his works to feed the poor, and be ready to give his own body to be burned with as much alacrity as he infers the everlasting burning of Roman Catholics and Puseyites. Out of the pulpit he may be a model of justice, truthfulness, and the love that thinketh no evil; but we are obliged to judge of his charity by the spirit we find in his sermons, and shall only be glad to learn that his practice is, in many respects, an amiable *non sequitur* from his teaching.

Dr. Cumming's mind is evidently not of the pietistic order. There is not the slightest leaning toward mysticism in his Christianity – no indication of religious raptures, of delight in God, of spiritual communion with the Father. He is most at home in the forensic view of Justification, and dwells on salvation as a scheme rather than as an experience. He insists on good works as the sign of justifying faith, as labors to be achieved to the glory of God, but he rarely represents them as

the spontaneous, necessary outflow of a soul filled with Divine love. He is at home in the external, the polemical, the historical, the circumstantial, and is only episodically devout and practical. The great majority of his published sermons are occupied with argument or philippic against Romanists and unbelievers, with “vindications” of the Bible, with the political interpretation of prophecy, or the criticism of public events; and the devout aspiration, or the spiritual and practical exhortation, is tacked to them as a sort of fringe in a hurried sentence or two at the end. He revels in the demonstration that the Pope is the Man of Sin; he is copious on the downfall of the Ottoman empire; he appears to glow with satisfaction in turning a story which tends to show how he abashed an “infidel;” it is a favorite exercise with him to form conjectures of the process by which the earth is to be burned up, and to picture Dr. Chalmers and Mr. Wilberforce being caught up to meet Christ in the air, while Romanists, Puseyites, and infidels are given over to gnashing of teeth. But of really spiritual joys and sorrows, of the life and death of Christ as a manifestation of love that constrains the soul, of sympathy with that yearning over the lost and erring which made Jesus weep over Jerusalem, and prompted the sublime prayer, “Father, forgive them,” of the gentler fruits of the Spirit, and the peace of God which passeth understanding – of all this, we find little trace in Dr. Cumming’s discourses.

His style is in perfect correspondence with this habit of mind. Though diffuse, as that of all preachers must be, it has

rapidity of movement, perfect clearness, and some aptness of illustration. He has much of that literary talent which makes a good journalist – the power of beating out an idea over a large space, and of introducing far-fetched *à propos*. His writings have, indeed, no high merit: they have no originality or force of thought, no striking felicity of presentation, no depth of emotion. Throughout nine volumes we have alighted on no passage which impressed us as worth extracting, and placing among the “beauties,” of evangelical writers, such as Robert Hall, Foster the Essayist, or Isaac Taylor. Everywhere there is commonplace cleverness, nowhere a spark of rare thought, of lofty sentiment, or pathetic tenderness. We feel ourselves in company with a voluble retail talker, whose language is exuberant but not exact, and to whom we should never think of referring for precise information or for well-digested thought and experience. His argument continually slides into wholesale assertion and vague declamation, and in his love of ornament he frequently becomes tawdry. For example, he tells us (“Apoc. Sketches,” p. 265) that “Botany weaves around the cross her amaranthine garlands; and Newton comes from his starry home – Linnæus from his flowery resting-place – and Werner and Hutton from their subterranean graves at the voice of Chalmers, to acknowledge that all they learned and elicited in their respective provinces has only served to show more clearly that Jesus of Nazareth is enthroned on the riches of the universe:” – and so prosaic an injunction to his hearers as that they should choose

a residence within an easy distance of church, is magnificently draped by him as an exportation to prefer a house "that basks in the sunshine of the countenance of God." Like all preachers of his class, he is more fertile in imaginative paraphrase than in close exposition, and in this way he gives us some remarkable fragments of what we may call the romance of Scripture, filling up the outline of the record with an elaborate coloring quite undreamed of by more literal minds. The serpent, he informs us, said to Eve, "Can it be so? Surely you are mistaken, that God hath said you shall die, a creature so fair, so lovely, so beautiful. It is impossible. *The laws of nature and physical science tell you that my interpretation is correct*; you shall not die. I can tell you by my own experience as an angel that you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." ("Apoc. Sketches," p. 294.) Again, according to Dr. Cumming, Abel had so clear an idea of the Incarnation and Atonement, that when he offered his sacrifice "he must have said, 'I feel myself a guilty sinner, and that in myself I cannot meet thee alive; I lay on thine altar this victim, and I shed its blood as my testimony that mine should be shed; and I look for forgiveness and undeserved mercy through him who is to bruise the serpent's head, and whose atonement this typifies.'" ("Occas. Disc." vol. i. p. 23.) Indeed, his productions are essentially ephemeral; he is essentially a journalist, who writes sermons instead of leading articles, who, instead of venting diatribes against her Majesty's Ministers, directs his power of invective against Cardinal Wiseman and the

Puseyites; instead of declaiming on public spirit, perorates on the “glory of God.” We fancy he is called, in the more refined evangelical circles, an “intellectual preacher;” by the plainer sort of Christians, a “flowery preacher;” and we are inclined to think that the more spiritually minded class of believers, who look with greater anxiety for the kingdom of God within them than for the visible advent of Christ in 1864, will be likely to find Dr. Cumming’s declamatory flights and historico-prophetical exertions as little better than “clouds o’ could parritch.”

Such is our general impression from his writings after an attentive perusal. There are some particular characteristics which we shall consider more closely, but in doing so we must be understood as altogether declining any doctrinal discussion. We have no intention to consider the grounds of Dr. Cumming’s dogmatic system, to examine the principles of his prophetic exegesis, or to question his opinion concerning the little horn, the river Euphrates, or the seven vials. We identify ourselves with no one of the bodies whom he regards it as his special mission to attack: we give our adhesion neither to Romanism, Puseyism, nor to that anomalous combination of opinions which he introduces to us under the name of infidelity. It is simply as spectators that we criticise Dr. Cumming’s mode of warfare, and we concern ourselves less with what he holds to be Christian truth than with his manner of enforcing that truth, less with the doctrines he teaches than with the moral spirit and tendencies of his teaching.

One of the most striking characteristics of Dr. Cumming’s



writings is *unscrupulosity of statement*. His motto apparently is, *Christianitatem, quocunque modo, Christianitatem*; and the only system he includes under the term Christianity is Calvinistic Protestantism. Experience has so long shown that the human brain is a congenial nidus for inconsistent beliefs that we do not pause to inquire how Dr. Cumming, who attributes the conversion of the unbelieving to the Divine Spirit, can think it necessary to co-operate with that Spirit by argumentative white lies. Nor do we for a moment impugn the genuineness of his zeal for Christianity, or the sincerity of his conviction that the doctrines he preaches are necessary to salvation; on the contrary, we regard the flagrant unveracity that we find on his pages as an indirect result of that conviction – as a result, namely, of the intellectual and moral distortion of view which is inevitably produced by assigning to dogmas, based on a very complex structure of evidence, the place and authority of first truths. A distinct appreciation of the value of evidence – in other words, the intellectual perception of truth – is more closely allied to truthfulness of statement, or the moral quality of veracity, than is generally admitted. There is not a more pernicious fallacy afloat, in common parlance, than the wide distinction made between intellect and morality. Amiable impulses without intellect, man may have in common with dogs and horses; but morality, which is specifically human, is dependent on the regulation of feeling by intellect. All human beings who can be said to be in any degree moral have their impulses guided, not indeed

always by their own intellect, but by the intellect of human beings who have gone before them, and created traditions and associations which have taken the rank of laws. Now that highest moral habit, the constant preference of truth, both theoretically and practically, pre-eminently demands the co-operation of the intellect with the impulses, as is indicated by the fact that it is only found in anything like completeness in the highest class of minds. In accordance with this we think it is found that, in proportion as religious sects exalt feeling above intellect, and believe themselves to be guided by direct inspiration rather than by a spontaneous exertion of their faculties – that is, in proportion as they are removed from rationalism – their sense of truthfulness is misty and confused. No one can have talked to the more enthusiastic Methodists and listened to their stories of miracles without perceiving that they require no other passport to a statement than that it accords with their wishes and their general conception of God's dealings; nay, they regard as a symptom of sinful scepticism an inquiry into the evidence for a story which they think unquestionably tends to the glory of God, and in retailing such stories, new particulars, further tending to his glory, are “borne in” upon their minds. Now, Dr. Cumming, as we have said, is no enthusiastic pietist: within a certain circle – within the mill of evangelical orthodoxy – his intellect is perpetually at work; but that principle of sophistication which our friends the Methodists derive from the predominance of their pietistic feelings, is involved for him in the doctrine of

verbal inspiration; what is for them a state of emotion submerging the intellect, is with him a formula imprisoning the intellect, depriving it of its proper function – the free search for truth – and making it the mere servant-of-all-work to a foregone conclusion. Minds fettered by this doctrine no longer inquire concerning a proposition whether it is attested by sufficient evidence, but whether it accords with Scripture; they do not search for facts, as such, but for facts that will bear out their doctrine. They become accustomed to reject the more direct evidence in favor of the less direct, and where adverse evidence reaches demonstration they must resort to devices and expedients in order to explain away contradiction. It is easy to see that this mental habit blunts not only the perception of truth, but the sense of truthfulness, and that the man whose faith drives him into fallacies treads close upon the precipice of falsehood.

We have entered into this digression for the sake of mitigating the inference that is likely to be drawn from that characteristic of Dr. Cumming's works to which we have pointed. He is much in the same intellectual condition as that professor of Padua; who, in order to disprove Galileo's discovery of Jupiter's satellites, urged that as there were only seven metals there could not be more than seven planets – a mental condition scarcely compatible with candor. And we may well suppose that if the professor had held the belief in seven planets, and no more, to be a necessary condition of salvation, his mental condition would have been so dazed that even if he had consented to look through Galileo's

telescope, his eyes would have reported in accordance with his inward alarms rather than with the external fact. So long as a belief in propositions is regarded as indispensable to salvation, the pursuit of truth *as such* is not possible, any more than it is possible for a man who is swimming for his life to make meteorological observations on the storm which threatens to overwhelm him. The sense of alarm and haste, the anxiety for personal safety, which Dr. Cumming insists upon as the proper religious attitude, unmans the nature, and allows no thorough, calm thinking no truly noble, disinterested feeling. Hence, we by no means suspect that the unscrupulosity of statement with which we charge Dr. Cumming, extends beyond the sphere of his theological prejudices; we do not doubt that, religion apart, he appreciates and practices veracity.

A grave general accusation must be supported by details, and in adducing those we purposely select the most obvious cases of misrepresentation – such as require no argument to expose them, but can be perceived at a glance. Among Dr. Cumming's numerous books, one of the most notable for unscrupulosity of statement is the "Manual of Christian Evidences," written, as he tells us in his Preface, not to give the deepest solutions of the difficulties in question, but to furnish Scripture Readers, City Missionaries, and Sunday School Teachers, with a "ready reply" to sceptical arguments. This announcement that *readiness* was the chief quality sought for in the solutions here given, modifies our inference from the other qualities which those solutions

present; and it is but fair to presume that when the Christian disputant is not in a hurry Dr. Cumming would recommend replies less ready and more veracious. Here is an example of what in another place <sup>5</sup> he tells his readers is “change in their pocket.. a little ready argument which they can employ, and therewith answer a fool according to his folly.” From the nature of this argumentative small coin, we are inclined to think Dr. Cumming understands answering a fool according to his folly to mean, giving him a foolish answer. We quote from the “Manual of Christian Evidences,” p. 62.

“Some of the gods which the heathen worshipped were among the greatest monsters that ever walked the earth. Mercury was a thief; and because he was an expert thief he was enrolled among the gods. Bacchus was a mere sensualist and drunkard, and therefore he was enrolled among the gods. Venus was a dissipated and abandoned courtesan, and therefore she was enrolled among the goddesses. Mars was a savage, that gloried in battle and in blood, and therefore he was deified and enrolled among the gods.”

Does Dr. Cumming believe the purport of these sentences? If so, this passage is worth handing down as his theory of the Greek myth – as a specimen of the astounding ignorance which was possible in a metropolitan preacher, a. d. 1854. And if he does not believe them.. The inference must then be, that he thinks delicate veracity about the ancient Greeks is not a

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<sup>5</sup> “Lect. on Daniel,” p. 6.

Christian virtue, but only a “splendid sin” of the unregenerate. This inference is rendered the more probable by our finding, a little further on, that he is not more scrupulous about the moderns, if they come under his definition of “Infidels.” But the passage we are about to quote in proof of this has a worse quality than its discrepancy with fact. Who that has a spark of generous feeling, that rejoices in the presence of good in a fellow-being, has not dwelt with pleasure on the thought that Lord Byron’s unhappy career was ennobled and purified toward its close by a high and sympathetic purpose, by honest and energetic efforts for his fellow-men? Who has not read with deep emotion those last pathetic lines, beautiful as the after-glow of sunset, in which love and resignation are mingled with something of a melancholy heroism? Who has not lingered with compassion over the dying scene at Missolonghi – the sufferer’s inability to make his farewell messages of love intelligible, and the last long hours of silent pain? Yet for the sake of furnishing his disciples with a “ready reply,” Dr. Cumming can prevail on himself to inoculate them with a bad-spirited falsity like the following:

“We have one striking exhibition of *an infidel’s brightest thoughts*, in some lines *written in his dying moments* by a man, gifted with great genius, capable of prodigious intellectual prowess, but of worthless principle, and yet more worthless practices – I mean the celebrated Lord Byron. He says:

“Though gay companions o’er the bowl  
Dispel awhile the sense of ill,  
Though pleasure fills the maddening soul,  
The heart —*the heart* is lonely still.

“Ay, but to die, and go, alas!  
Where all have gone and all must go;  
To be the *Nothing* that I was,  
Ere born to life and living woe!

“Count o’er the joys thine hours have seen,  
Count o’er thy days from anguish free,  
And know, whatever thou hast been,  
Tis *something better* not to be.

“Nay, for myself, so dark my fate  
Through every turn of life hath been,  
*Man* and the *world* so much *I hate*,  
I care not when I quit the scene.”

It is difficult to suppose that Dr. Cumming can have been so grossly imposed upon – that he can be so ill-informed as really to believe that these lines were “written” by Lord Byron in his dying moments; but, allowing him the full benefit of that possibility, how shall we explain his introduction of this feebly rabid doggrel as “an infidel’s brightest thoughts?”

In marshalling the evidences of Christianity, Dr. Cumming directs most of his arguments against opinions that are either

totally imaginary, or that belong to the past rather than to the present, while he entirely fails to meet the difficulties actually felt and urged by those who are unable to accept Revelation. There can hardly be a stronger proof of misconception as to the character of free-thinking in the present day, than the recommendation of Leland's "Short and Easy Method with the Deists" – a method which is unquestionably short and easy for preachers disinclined to reconsider their stereotyped modes of thinking and arguing, but which has quite ceased to realize those epithets in the conversion of Deists. Yet Dr. Cumming not only recommends this book, but takes the trouble himself to write a feebleness of its arguments. For example, on the question of the genuineness and authenticity of the New Testament writing's, he says: "If, therefore, at a period long subsequent to the death of Christ, a number of men had appeared in the world, drawn up a book which they christened by the name of the Holy Scripture, and recorded these things which appear in it as facts when they were only the fancies of their own imagination, surely the *Jews* would have instantly reclaimed that no such events transpired, that no such person as Jesus Christ appeared in their capital, and that *their* crucifixion of Him, and their alleged evil treatment of his apostles, were mere fictions." <sup>6</sup> It is scarcely necessary to say that, in such argument as this, Dr. Cumming is beating the air. He is meeting a hypothesis which no one holds, and totally missing the real question. The only type of "infidel" whose existence Dr.

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<sup>6</sup> "Man of Ev." p. 81.



Cumming recognizes is that fossil personage who “calls the Bible a lie and a forgery.” He seems to be ignorant – or he chooses to ignore the fact – that there is a large body of eminently instructed and earnest men who regard the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as a series of historical documents, to be dealt with according to the rules of historical criticism, and that an equally large number of men, who are not historical critics, find the dogmatic scheme built on the letter of the Scriptures opposed to their profoundest moral convictions. Dr. Cumming’s infidel is a man who, because his life is vicious, tries to convince himself that there is no God, and that Christianity is an imposture, but who is all the while secretly conscious that he is opposing the truth, and cannot help “letting out” admissions “that the Bible is the Book of God.” We are favored with the following “Creed of the Infidel:”

“I believe that there is no God, but that matter is God, and God is matter; and that it is no matter whether there is any God or not. I believe also that the world was not made, but that the world made itself, or that it had no beginning, and that it will last forever. I believe that man is a beast; that the soul is the body, and that the body is the soul; and that after death there is neither body nor soul. I believe there is no religion, that *natural religion is the only religion, and all religion unnatural*. I believe not in Moses; I believe in the first philosophers. I believe not in the evangelists; I believe in Chubb, Collins, Toland, Tindal, and Hobbes. I believe in Lord Bolingbroke, and I believe not in St. Paul. I believe not in revelation; *I believe in tradition; I believe in the Talmud;*

*I believe in the Koran; I believe not in the Bible. I believe in Socrates; I believe in Confucius; I believe in Mahomet; I believe not in Christ. And lastly, I believe in all unbelief.*”

The intellectual and moral monster whose creed is this complex web of contradictions, is, moreover, according to Dr. Cumming, a being who unites much simplicity and imbecility with his Satanic hardihood – much tenderness of conscience with his obdurate vice. Hear the “proof:”

“I once met with an acute and enlightened infidel, with whom I reasoned day after day, and for hours together; I submitted to him the internal, the external, and the experimental evidences, but made no impression on his scorn and unbelief. At length I entertained a suspicion that there was something morally, rather than intellectually wrong, and that the bias was not in the intellect, but in the heart; one day therefore I said to him, ‘I must now state my conviction, and you may call me uncharitable, but duty compels me; you are living in some known and gross sin.’ *The man’s countenance became pale; he bowed and left me.*”  
– “Man. of Evidences,” p. 254.

Here we have the remarkable psychological phenomenon of an “acute and enlightened” man who, deliberately purposing to indulge in a favorite sin, and regarding the Gospel with scorn and unbelief, is, nevertheless, so much more scrupulous than the majority of Christians, that he cannot “embrace sin and the Gospel simultaneously;” who is so alarmed at the Gospel in which he does not believe, that he cannot be easy without trying

to crush it; whose acuteness and enlightenment suggest to him, as a means of crushing the Gospel, to argue from day to day with Dr. Cumming; and who is withal so naïve that he is taken by surprise when Dr. Cumming, failing in argument, resorts to accusation, and so tender in conscience that, at the mention of his sin, he turns pale and leaves the spot. If there be any human mind in existence capable of holding Dr. Cumming's "Creed of the Infidel," of at the same time believing in tradition and "believing in all unbelief," it must be the mind of the infidel just described, for whose existence we have Dr. Cumming's *ex officio*

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