GEORGE ELIOT

GEORGE ELIOT'S LIFE, AS RELATED IN HER LETTERS AND JOURNALS. VOL. 1 (OF 3)

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Eliot G.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

With the materials in my hands I have endeavored to form an *autobiography* (if the term may be permitted) of George Eliot. The life has been allowed to write itself in extracts from her letters and journals. Free from the obtrusion of any mind but her own, this method serves, I think, better than any other open to me, to show the development of her intellect and character.

In dealing with the correspondence I have been influenced by the desire to make known the woman, as well as the author, through the presentation of her daily life.

On the intellectual side there remains little to be learned by those who already know George Eliot's books. In the twenty volumes which she wrote and published in her lifetime will be found her best and ripest thoughts. The letters now published throw light on another side of her nature – not less important, but hitherto unknown to the public – the side of the affections.

The intimate life was the core of the root from which sprung the fairest flowers of her inspiration. Fame came to her late in life, and, when it presented itself, was so weighted with the sense of responsibility that it was in truth a rose with many thorns, for George Eliot had the temperament that shrinks from the position of a public character. The belief in the wide, and I may add in the beneficent, effect of her writing was no doubt the highest happiness, the reward of the artist which she greatly cherished: but the joys of the hearthside, the delight in the love of her friends, were the supreme pleasures in her life.

By arranging all the letters and journals so as to form one connected whole, keeping the order of their dates, and with the least possible interruption of comment, I have endeavored to combine a narrative of day-to-day life, with the play of light and shade which only letters, written in various moods, can give, and without which no portrait can be a good likeness. I do not know that the particular method in which I have treated the letters has ever been adopted before. Each letter has been pruned of everything that seemed to me irrelevant to my purpose – of everything that I thought my wife would have wished to be omitted. Every sentence that remains adds, in my judgment, something (however small it may be) to the means of forming a conclusion about her character. I ought perhaps to say a word of apology for what may appear to be undue detail of travelling experiences; but I hope that to many readers these will be interesting, as reflected through George Eliot's mind. The remarks on works of art are only meant to be records of impressions. She would have deprecated for herself the attitude of an art critic.

Excepting a slight introductory sketch of the girlhood, up to the time when letters became available, and a few words here and there to elucidate the correspondence, I have confined myself to the work of selection and arrangement.

I have refrained almost entirely from quoting remembered sayings by George Eliot, because it is difficult to be certain of complete accuracy, and everything depends upon accuracy. Recollections of conversation are seldom to be implicitly trusted in the absence of notes made at the time. The value of spoken words depends, too, so much upon the *tone*, and on the circumstances which gave rise to their utterance, that they often mislead as much as they enlighten, when, in the process of repetition, they have taken color from another mind. "All interpretations depend upon the interpreter," and I have judged it best to let George Eliot be her own interpreter, as far as possible.

I owe thanks to Mr. Isaac Evans, the brother of my wife, for much of the information in regard to her child-life; and the whole book is a long record of debts due to other friends for letters. It is not, therefore, necessary for me to recapitulate the list of names in this place. My thanks to all are heartfelt. But there is a very special acknowledgment due to Miss Sara Hennell, to Mrs. Bray, and to the late Mr. Charles Bray of Coventry, not only for the letters which they placed at my disposal, but also for much information given to me in the most friendly spirit. The very important part of the life from 1842 to 1854 could not possibly have been written without their contribution.

To Mr. Charles Lewes, also, I am indebted for some valuable letters and extracts from the journals of his father, besides the letters addressed to himself. He also obtained for me an important letter written by George Eliot to Mr. R. H. Hutton; and throughout the preparation of the book I have had the advantage of his sympathetic interest, and his concurrence in the publication of all the materials.

Special thanks are likewise due to Messrs. Wm. Blackwood & Sons for having placed at my disposal George Eliot's long correspondence with the firm. The letters (especially those addressed to her friend the late Mr. John Blackwood) throw a light, that could not otherwise have been obtained, on the most interesting part of her literary career.

To the legal representatives of the late Charles Dickens, of the late Lord Lytton, and of Mrs. Carlyle; to Mr. J. A. Froude, and to Mr. Archer Gurney, I owe thanks for leave to print letters written by them.

For all the defects that there may be in the plan of these volumes I alone am responsible. The lines were determined and the work was substantially put into shape before I submitted the manuscript to any one. While passing the winter in the south of France I had the good fortune at Cannes to find, in Lord Acton, not only an enthusiastic admirer of George Eliot, but also a friend always most kindly ready to assist me with valuable counsel and with cordial, generous sympathy. He was the first reader of the manuscript, and whatever accuracy may have been arrived at, particularly in the names of foreign books, foreign persons, and foreign places, is in great part due to his friendly, careful help. But of course he has no responsibility whatever for any of my sins of omission or commission.

By the kind permission of Sir Frederic Burton, I have been enabled to reproduce as a frontispiece M. Rajon's etching of the beautiful drawing, executed in 1864, now in the National Portrait Gallery, South Kensington.

The view of the old house at Rosehill is from a drawing by Mrs. Bray. It is connected with some of George Eliot's happiest experiences, and with the period of her most rapid intellectual development.

For permission to use the sketch of the drawing-room at the Priory I am indebted to the Messrs. Harpers, of New York.

In conclusion, it is in no conventional spirit, but from my heart, that I bespeak the indulgence of readers for my share of this work. Of its shortcomings no one can be so convinced as I am myself.

J. W. C.

Camden Hill, *December, 1884*.

INTRODUCTORY SKETCH OF CHILDHOOD

"*Nov. 22, 1819.*– Mary Ann Evans was born at Arbury Farm,[1] at five o'clock this morning."

This is an entry, in Mr. Robert Evans's handwriting, on the page of an old diary that now lies before me, and records, with characteristic precision, the birth of his youngest child, afterwards known to the world as George Eliot. Let us pause for a moment to pay its due homage to the precision, because it was in all probability to this most noteworthy quality of her father's nature that the future author was indebted for one of the principal elements of her own after-success – the enormous faculty for taking pains. The baby was born on St. Cecilia's day, and Mr. Evans, being a good churchman, takes her, on the 29th November, to be baptized in the church at Chilvers Coton – the parish in which Arbury Farm lies – a church destined to impress itself strongly on the child's imagination, and to be known by many people in many lands afterwards as Shepperton Church. The father was a remarkable man, and many of the leading traits in his character are to be found in Adam Bede and in Caleb Garth – although, of course, neither of these is a portrait. He was born in 1773, at Ellaston, in Staffordshire, son of a George Evans, who carried on the business of builder and carpenter there: the Evans family having come originally from Northop, in Flintshire. Robert was brought up to the business; but about 1799, or a little before, he held a farm of Mr. Francis Newdigate at Kirk Hallam, in Derbyshire, and became his agent. On Sir Roger Newdigate's death the Arbury estate came to Mr. Francis Newdigate for his life, and Mr. Evans accompanied him into Warwickshire, in 1806, in the capacity of agent. In 1801 he had married Harriott Poynton, by whom he had two children – Robert, born 1802, at Ellaston, and Frances Lucy, born 1805, at Kirk Hallam. His first wife died in 1809; and on 8th February, 1813, he married Christiana Pearson, by whom he had three children – Christiana, born 1814; Isaac, born 1816, and Mary Ann, born 1819. Shortly after the last child's birth, Robert, the son, became the agent, under his father, for the Kirk Hallam property, and lived there with his sister Frances, who afterwards married a Mr. Houghton. In March, 1820, when the baby girl was only four months old, the Evans family removed to Griff, a charming red-brick, ivy-covered house on the Arbury estate – "the warm little nest where her affections were fledged" – and there George Eliot spent the first twenty-one years of her life.

Let us remember what the England was upon which this observant child opened her eyes.

The date of her birth was removed from the beginning of the French Revolution by just the same period of time as separates a child, born this year, 1884, from the beginning of the Crimean War. To a man of forty-six to-day, the latter event seems but of yesterday. It took place at a very impressionable period of his life, and the remembrance of every detail is perfectly vivid. Mr. Evans was forty-six when his youngest child was born. He was a youth of sixteen when the Revolution began, and that mighty event, with all its consequences, had left an indelible impression on him, and the convictions and conclusions it had fostered in his mind permeated through to his children, and entered as an indestructible element into the susceptible soul of his youngest daughter. There are bits in the paper "Looking Backward," in "Theophrastus Such," which are true autobiography.

"In my earliest remembrance of my father his hair was already gray, for I was his youngest child, and it seemed to me that advanced age was appropriate to a father, as, indeed, in all respects I considered him a parent so much to my honor that the mention of my relationship to him was likely to secure me regard among those to whom I was otherwise a stranger – his stories from his life including so many names of distant persons that my imagination placed no limit to his acquaintanceship… Nor can I be sorry, though myself given to meditative if not active innovation, that my father was a Tory who had not exactly a dislike to innovators and dissenters, but a slight opinion of them as persons of ill-founded self-confidence… And I often smile at my consciousness that certain Conservative

[1] The farm is also known as the South Farm, Arbury.

prepossessions have mingled themselves for me with the influences of our Midland scenery, from the tops of the elms down to the buttercups and the little wayside vetches. Naturally enough. That part of my father's prime to which he oftenest referred had fallen on the days when the great wave of political enthusiasm and belief in a speedy regeneration of all things had ebbed, and the supposed millennial initiative of France was turning into a Napoleonic empire… To my father's mind the noisy teachers of revolutionary doctrine were, to speak mildly, a variable mixture of the fool and the scoundrel; the welfare of the nation lay in a strong government which could maintain order; and I was accustomed to hear him utter the word 'government' in a tone that charged it with awe, and made it part of my effective religion, in contrast with the word 'rebel,' which seemed to carry the stamp of evil in its syllables, and, lit by the fact that Satan was the first rebel, made an argument dispensing with more detailed inquiry."

This early association of ideas must always be borne in mind, as it is the key to a great deal in the mental attitude of the future thinker and writer. It is the foundation of the latent Conservative bias.

The year 1819 is memorable as a culminating period of bad times and political discontent in England. The nation was suffering acutely from the reaction after the excitement of the last Napoleonic war. George IV. did not come to the throne till January, 1820, so that George Eliot was born in the reign of George III. The trial of Queen Caroline was the topic of absorbing public interest. Waterloo was not yet an affair of five years old. Byron had four years, and Goethe had thirteen years, still to live. The last of Miss Austen's novels had been published only eighteen months, and the first of the Waverley series only six years before. Thackeray and Dickens were boys at school, and George Sand, as a girl of fifteen, was leaving her loved freedom on the banks of the Indre for the Convent des Anglaises at Paris. That "Greater Britain" (Canada and Australia), which to-day forms so large a reading public, was then scarcely more than a geographical expression, with less than half a million of inhabitants, all told, where at present there are eight millions; and in the United States, where more copies of George Eliot's books are now sold than in any other quarter of the world, the population then numbered less than ten millions where to-day it is fifty-five millions. Including Great Britain, these English-speaking races have increased from thirty millions in 1820 to one hundred millions in 1884; and with the corresponding increase in education we can form some conception how a popular English writer's fame has widened its circle.

There was a remoteness about a detached country-house, in the England of those days, difficult for us to conceive now, with our railways, penny-post, and telegraphs; nor is the Warwickshire country about Griff an exhilarating surrounding. There are neither hills nor vales, no rivers, lakes, or sea – nothing but a monotonous succession of green fields and hedgerows, with some fine trees. The only water to be seen is the "brown canal." The effect of such a landscape on an ordinary observer is not inspiring, but "effective magic is transcendent nature;" and with her transcendent nature George Eliot has transfigured these scenes, dear to Midland souls, into many an idyllic picture, known to those who know her books. In her childhood the great event of the day was the passing of the coach before the gate of Griff House, which lies at a bend of the high-road between Coventry and Nuneaton, and within a couple of miles of the mining village of Bedworth, "where the land began to be blackened with coal-pits, the rattle of hand-looms to be heard in hamlets and villages. Here were powerful men walking queerly, with knees bent outward from squatting in the mine, going home to throw themselves down in their blackened flannel and sleep through the daylight, then rise and spend much of their high wages at the alehouse with their fellows of the Benefit Club; here the pale, eager faces of hand-loom weavers, men and women, haggard from sitting up late at night to finish the week's work, hardly begun till the Wednesday. Everywhere the cottages and the small children were dirty, for the languid mothers gave their strength to the loom; pious Dissenting women, perhaps, who took life patiently, and thought that salvation depended chiefly on predestination, and not at all on cleanliness. The gables of Dissenting chapels now made a visible sign of religion, and of a meeting-place to counterbalance the alehouse, even in the hamlets… Here was a population not convinced that old England was as

good as possible; here were multitudinous men and women aware that their religion was not exactly the religion of their rulers, who might therefore be better than they were, and who, if better, might alter many things which now made the world perhaps more painful than it need be, and certainly more sinful. Yet there were the gray steeples too, and the churchyards, with their grassy mounds and venerable headstones, sleeping in the sunlight; there were broad fields and homesteads, and fine old woods covering a rising ground, or stretching far by the roadside, allowing only peeps at the park and mansion which they shut in from the working-day world. In these midland districts the traveller passed rapidly from one phase of English life to another; after looking down on a village dingy with coal-dust, noisy with the shaking of looms, he might skirt a parish all of fields, high hedges, and deep-rutted lanes; after the coach had rattled over the pavement of a manufacturing town, the scene of riots and trades-union meetings, it would take him in another ten minutes into a rural region, where the neighborhood of the town was only felt in the advantages of a near market for corn, cheese, and hay, and where men with a considerable banking account were accustomed to say that 'they never meddled with politics themselves.'"[2]

We can imagine the excitement of a little four-year-old girl and her seven-year-old brother waiting, on bright frosty mornings, to hear the far-off ringing beat of the horses' feet upon the hard ground, and then to see the gallant appearance of the four grays, with coachman and guard in scarlet, outside passengers muffled up in furs, and baskets of game and other packages hanging behind the boot, as his majesty's mail swung cheerily round on its way from Birmingham to Stamford. Two coaches passed the door daily – one from Birmingham at 10 o'clock in the morning, the other from Stamford at 3 o'clock in the afternoon. These were the chief connecting links between the household at Griff and the outside world. Otherwise life went on with that monotonous regularity which distinguishes the country from the town. And it is to these circumstances of her early life that a great part of the quality of George Eliot's writing is due, and that she holds the place she has attained in English literature. Her roots were down in the pre-railroad, pre-telegraphic period – the days of fine old leisure – but the fruit was formed during an era of extraordinary activity in scientific and mechanical discovery. Her genius was the outcome of these conditions. It would not have existed in the same form deprived of either influence. Her father was busy both with his own farm-work and increasing agency business. He was already remarked in Warwickshire for his knowledge and judgment in all matters relating to land, and for his general trustworthiness and high character, so that he was constantly selected as arbitrator and valuer. He had a wonderful eye, especially for valuing woods, and could calculate with almost absolute precision the quantity of available timber in a standing tree. In addition to his merits as a man of business, he had the good fortune to possess the warm friendship and consistent support of Colonel Newdigate of Astley Castle, son of Mr. Francis Newdigate of Arbury, and it was mainly through the colonel's introduction and influence that Mr. Evans became agent also to Lord Aylesford, Lord Lifford, Mr. Bromley Davenport, and several others.

His position cannot be better summed up than in the words of his daughter, writing to Mr. Bray on 30th September, 1859, in regard to some one who had written of her, after the appearance of "Adam Bede," as a "self-educated farmer's daughter."

"My father did not raise himself from being an artisan to be a farmer; he raised himself from being an artisan to be a man whose extensive knowledge in very varied practical departments made his services valued through several counties. He had large knowledge of building, of mines, of plantations, of various branches of valuation and measurement – of all that is essential to the management of large estates. He was held by those competent to judge as *unique* among land-agents for his manifold knowledge and experience, which enabled him to save the special fees usually paid by landowners for special opinions on the different questions incident to the proprietorship of land.

[2] "Felix Holt" – Introduction.

So far as I am personally concerned I should not write a stroke to prevent any one, in the zeal of antithetic eloquence, from calling me a tinker's daughter; but if my father is to be mentioned at all – if he is to be identified with an imaginary character – my piety towards his memory calls on me to point out to those who are supposed to speak with information what he really achieved in life."

Mr. Evans was also, like Adam Bede, noteworthy for his extraordinary physical strength and determination of character. There is a story told of him, that one day when he was travelling on the top of a coach, down in Kent, a decent woman sitting next him complained that a great hulking sailor on her other side was making himself offensive. Mr. Evans changed places with the woman, and, taking the sailor by the collar, forced him down under the seat, and held him there with an iron hand for the remainder of the stage: and at Griff it is still remembered that the master, happening to pass one day while a couple of laborers were waiting for a third to help to move the high, heavy ladder used for thatching ricks, braced himself up to a great effort, and carried the ladder alone and unaided from one rick to the other, to the wide-eyed wonder and admiration of his men. With all this strength, however, both of body and of character, he seems to have combined a certain self-distrust, owing, perhaps, to his early imperfect education, which resulted in a general submissiveness in his domestic relations, more or less portrayed in the character of Mr. Garth.

His second wife was a woman with an unusual amount of natural force; a shrewd, practical person, with a considerable dash of the Mrs. Poyser vein in her. Hers was an affectionate, warm-hearted nature, and her children, on whom she cast "the benediction of her gaze," were thoroughly attached to her. She came of a race of yeomen, and her social position was, therefore, rather better than her husband's at the time of their marriage. Her family are, no doubt, prototypes of the Dodsons in the "Mill on the Floss." There were three other sisters married, and all living in the neighborhood of Griff – Mrs. Everard, Mrs. Johnson, and Mrs. Garner – and probably Mr. Evans heard a good deal about "the traditions in the Pearson family." Mrs. Evans was a very active, hard-working woman, but shortly after her last child's birth she became ailing in health, and consequently her eldest girl, Christiana, was sent to school, at a very early age, to Miss Lathom's, at Attleboro, a village a mile or two from Griff, while the two younger children spent some part of their time every day at the cottage of a Mrs. Moore, who kept a dame's school close to Griff gates. The little girl very early became possessed with the idea that she was going to be a personage in the world; and Mr. Charles Lewes has told me an anecdote which George Eliot related of herself as characteristic of this period of her childhood. When she was only four years old she recollected playing on the piano, of which she did not know one note, in order to impress the servant with a proper notion of her acquirements and generally distinguished position. This was the time when the love for her brother grew into the child's affections. She used always to be at his heels, insisting on doing everything he did. She was not, in these baby-days, in the least precocious in learning. In fact, her half-sister, Mrs. Houghton, who was some fourteen years her senior, told me that the child learned to read with some difficulty; but Mr. Isaac Evans says that this was not from any slowness in apprehension, but because she liked playing so much better. Mere sharpness, however, was not a characteristic of her mind. Hers was a large, slow-growing nature; and I think it is, at any rate, certain that there was nothing of the infant phenomenon about her. In her moral development she showed, from the earliest years, the trait that was most marked in her all through life, namely, the absolute need of some one person who should be all in all to her, and to whom she should be all in all. Very jealous in her affections, and easily moved to smiles or tears, she was of a nature capable of the keenest enjoyment and the keenest suffering, knowing "all the wealth and all the woe" of a pre-eminently exclusive disposition. She was affectionate, proud, and sensitive in the highest degree.

The sort of happiness that belongs to this budding-time of life, from the age of three to five, is apt to impress itself very strongly on the memory; and it is this period which is referred to in the Brother and Sister Sonnet, "But were another childhood's world my share, I would be born a little sister there." When her brother was eight years old he was sent to school at Coventry, and, her mother

continuing in very delicate health, the little Mary Ann, now five years of age, went to join her sister at Miss Lathom's school, at Attleboro, where they continued as boarders for three or four years, coming, occasionally, home to Griff on Saturdays. During one of our walks at Witley, in 1880, my wife mentioned to me that what chiefly remained in her recollection about this very early school-life was the difficulty of getting near enough the fire in winter to become thoroughly warmed, owing to the circle of girls forming round too narrow a fireplace. This suffering from cold was the beginning of a low general state of health; also at this time she began to be subject to fears at night – "the susceptibility to terror" – which she has described as haunting Gwendolen Harleth in her childhood. The other girls in the school, who were all, naturally, very much older, made a great pet of the child, and used to call her "little mamma," and she was not unhappy except at nights; but she told me that this liability to have "all her soul become a quivering fear," which remained with her afterwards, had been one of the supremely important influences dominating at times her future life. Mr. Isaac Evans's chief recollection of this period is the delight of the little sister at his home-coming for holidays, and her anxiety to know all that he had been doing and learning. The eldest child, who went by the name of Chrissey, was the chief favorite of the aunts, as she was always neat and tidy, and used to spend a great deal of her time with them, while the other two were inseparable playfellows at home. The boy was his mother's pet and the girl her father's. They had everything to make children happy at Griff – a delightful old-fashioned garden, a pond and the canal to fish in, and the farm-offices close to the house, "the long cow-shed, where generations of the milky mothers have stood patiently, the broad-shouldered barns, where the old-fashioned flail once made resonant music," and where butter-making and cheese-making were carried on with great vigor by Mrs. Evans.

Any one, about this time, who happened to look through the window on the left-hand side of the door of Griff House would have seen a pretty picture in the dining-room on Saturday evenings after tea. The powerful, middle-aged man with the strongly marked features sits in his deep, leather-covered arm-chair, at the right-hand corner of the ruddy fireplace, with the head of "the little wench" between his knees. The child turns over the book with pictures that she wishes her father to explain to her – or that perhaps she prefers explaining to him. Her rebellious hair is all over her eyes, much vexing the pale, energetic mother who sits on the opposite side of the fire, cumbered with much service, letting no instant of time escape the inevitable click of the knitting-needles, accompanied by epigrammatic speech. The elder girl, prim and tidy, with her work before her, is by her mother's side; and the brother, between the two groups, keeps assuring himself by perpetual search that none of his favorite means of amusement are escaping from his pockets. The father is already very proud of the astonishing and growing intelligence of his little girl. From a very early age he has been in the habit of taking her with him in his drives about the neighborhood, "standing between her father's knees as he drove leisurely," so that she has drunk in knowledge of the country and of country folk at all her pores. An old-fashioned child, already living in a world of her own imagination, impressible to her finger-tips, and willing to give her views on any subject.

The first book that George Eliot read, so far as I have been able to ascertain, was a little volume published in 1822, entitled "The Linnet's Life," which she gave to me in the last year of her life, at Witley. It bears the following inscription, written some time before she gave it to me:

"This little book is the first present I ever remember having received from my father. Let any one who thinks of me with some tenderness after I am dead take care of this book for my sake. It made me very happy when I held it in my little hands, and read it over and over again; and thought the pictures beautiful, especially the one where the linnet is feeding her young."

It must, I think, have been very shortly after she received this present that an old friend of the family, who was in the habit of coming as a visitor to Griff from time to time, used occasionally to bring a book in his hand for the little girl. I very well remember her expressing to me deep gratitude for this early ministration to her childish delights; and Mr. Burne Jones has been kind enough to tell me of a conversation with George Eliot about children's books, when she also referred to this

old gentleman's kindness. They were agreeing in disparagement of some of the books that the rising generation take their pleasure in, and she recalled the dearth of child-literature in her own home, and her passionate delight and total absorption in Æsop's Fables (given to her by the aforesaid old gentleman), the possession of which had opened new worlds to her imagination. Mr. Burne Jones particularly remembers how she laughed till the tears ran down her face in recalling her infantine enjoyment of the humor in the fable of Mercury and the Statue-seller. Having so few books at this time, she read them again and again, until she knew them by heart. One of them was a Joe Miller jest-book, with the stories from which she used greatly to astonish the family circle. But the beginning of her serious reading-days did not come till later. Meantime her talent for observation gained a glorious new field for employment in her first journey from home, which took place in 1826. Her father and mother took her with them on a little trip into Derbyshire and Staffordshire, where she saw Mr. Evans's relations, and they came back through Lichfield, sleeping at the Swan.[3] They were away only a week, from the 18th to the 24th of May; but "what time is little" to an imaginative, observant child of seven on her first journey? About this time a deeply felt crisis occurred in her life, as her brother had a pony given to him, to which he became passionately attached. He developed an absorbing interest in riding, and cared less and less to play with his sister. The next important event happened in her eighth or ninth year, when she was sent to Miss Wallington's school at Nuneaton with her sister. This was a much larger school than Miss Lathom's, there being some thirty girls, boarders. The principal governess was Miss Lewis, who became then, and remained for many years after, Mary Ann Evans's most intimate friend and principal correspondent, and I am indebted to the letters addressed to her from 1836 to 1842 for most of the information concerning that period. Books now became a passion with the child; she read everything she could lay hands on, greatly troubling the soul of her mother by the consumption of candles as well as of eyesight in her bedroom. From a subsequent letter it will be seen that she was "early supplied with works of fiction by those who kindly sought to gratify her appetite for reading."

It must have been about this time that the episode occurred in relation to "Waverley" which is mentioned by Miss Simcox in her article in the June, 1881, number of the *Nineteenth Century Review*. It was quite new to me, and, as it is very interesting, I give it in Miss Simcox's own words: "Somewhere about 1827 a friendly neighbor lent 'Waverley' to an elder sister of little Mary Ann Evans. It was returned before the child had read to the end, and, in her distress at the loss of the fascinating volume, she began to write out the story as far as she had read it for herself, beginning naturally where the story begins with Waverley's adventures at Tully Veolan, and continuing until the surprised elders were moved to get her the book again." Miss Simcox has pointed out the reference to this in the motto of the 57th chapter of "Middlemarch:"

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

[3] See vol. ii. p. 96.

In lines that thwart like portly spiders ran,
They wrote the tale, from Tully Veolan."

Miss Simcox also mentions that "Elia divided her childish allegiance with Scott, and she remembered feasting with singular pleasure upon an extract in some stray almanac from the essay in commemoration of 'Captain Jackson and his slender ration of Single Gloucester.' This is an extreme example of the general rule that a wise child's taste in literature is sounder than adults generally venture to believe."

We know, too, from the "Mill on the Floss" that the "History of the Devil," by Daniel Defoe, was a favorite. The book is still religiously preserved at Griff, with its pictures just as Maggie looked at them. "The Pilgrim's Progress," also, and "Rasselas" had a large share of her affections.

At Miss Wallington's the growing girl soon distinguished herself by an easy mastery of the usual school-learning of her years, and there, too, the religious side of her nature was developed to a remarkable degree. Miss Lewis was an ardent Evangelical Churchwoman, and exerted a strong influence on her young pupil, whom she found very sympathetically inclined. But Mary Ann Evans did not associate freely with her schoolfellows, and her friendship with Miss Lewis was the only intimacy she indulged in.

On coming home for their holidays the sister and brother began, about this time, the habit of acting charades together before the Griff household and the aunts, who were greatly impressed with the cleverness of the performance; and the girl was now recognized in the family circle as no ordinary child.

Another epoch presently succeeded, on her removal to Miss Franklin's school at Coventry, in her thirteenth year. She was probably then very much what she has described her own Maggie at the age of thirteen:

"A creature full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her; with a blind, unconscious yearning for something that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it. No wonder, when there is this contrast between the outward and the inward, that painful collisions come of it."

In *Our Times* of June, 1881, there is a paper by a lady whose mother was at school with Mary Ann Evans, which gives some interesting particulars of the Miss Franklins.

"They were daughters of a Baptist minister who had preached for many years in Coventry, and who inhabited, during his pastorate, a house in the chapel-yard almost exactly resembling that of Rufus Lyon in 'Felix Holt.' For this venerable gentleman Miss Evans, as a schoolgirl, had a great admiration, and I, who can remember him well, can trace in Rufus Lyon himself many slight resemblances, such as the 'little legs,' and the habit of walking up and down when composing. Miss Rebecca Franklin was a lady of considerable intellectual power, and remarkable for her elegance in writing and conversation, as well as for her beautiful calligraphy. In her classes for English Composition Mary Ann Evans was, from her first entering the school, far in advance of the rest; and while the themes of the other children were read, criticised, and corrected in class, hers were reserved for the private perusal and enjoyment of the teacher, who rarely found anything to correct. Her enthusiasm for music was already very strongly marked, and her music-master, a much-tried man, suffering from the irritability incident to his profession, reckoned on his hour with her as a refreshment to his wearied nerves, and soon had to confess that he had no more to teach her. In connection with this proficiency in music, my mother recalls her sensitiveness at that time as being painfully extreme. When there were visitors, Miss Evans, as the best performer in the school, was sometimes summoned to the parlor to play for their amusement, and though suffering agonies from shyness and reluctance, she obeyed with all readiness, but, on being released, my mother has often known her to rush to her room and throw herself on the floor in an agony of tears. Her schoolfellows

loved her as much as they could venture to love one whom they felt to be so immeasurably superior to themselves, and she had playful nicknames for most of them. My mother, who was delicate, and to whom she was very kind, was dubbed by her 'Miss Equanimity.' A source of great interest to the girls, and of envy to those who lived farther from home, was the weekly cart which brought Miss Evans new-laid eggs and other delightful produce of her father's farm."

In talking about these early days, my wife impressed on my mind the debt she felt that she owed to the Miss Franklins for their excellent instruction, and she had also the very highest respect for their moral qualities. With her chameleon-like nature she soon adopted their religious views with intense eagerness and conviction, although she never formally joined the Baptists or any other communion than the Church of England. She at once, however, took a foremost place in the school, and became a leader of prayer-meetings among the girls. In addition to a sound English education the Miss Franklins managed to procure for their pupils excellent masters for French, German, and music; so that, looking to the lights of those times, the means of obtaining knowledge were very much above the average for girls. Her teachers, on their side, were very proud of their exceptionally gifted scholar; and years afterwards, when Miss Evans came with her father to live in Coventry, they introduced her to one of their friends, not only as a marvel of mental power, but also as a person "sure to get something up very soon in the way of clothing-club or other charitable undertaking."

This year, 1832, was not only memorable for the change to a new and superior school, but it was also much more memorable to George Eliot for the riot which she saw at Nuneaton, on the occasion of the election for North Warwickshire, after the passing of the great Reform Bill, and which subsequently furnished her with the incidents for the riot in "Felix Holt." It was an event to lay hold on the imagination of an impressionable girl of thirteen, and it is thus described in the local newspaper of 29th December, 1832:

"On Friday, the 21st December, at Nuneaton, from the commencement of the poll till nearly half-past two, the Hemingites[4] occupied the poll; the numerous plumpers for Sir Eardley Wilmot and the adherents of Mr. Dugdale being constantly interrupted in their endeavors to go to the hustings to give an honest and conscientious vote. The magistrates were consequently applied to, and from the representations they received from all parties, they were at length induced to call in aid a military force. A detachment of the Scots Greys accordingly arrived; but it appearing that that gallant body was not sufficiently strong to put down the turbulent spirit of the mob, a reinforcement was considered by the constituted authorities as absolutely necessary. The tumult increasing, as the detachment of the Scots Greys were called in, the Riot Act was read from the windows of the Newdigate Arms; and we regret to add that both W. P. Inge, Esq., and Colonel Newdigate, in the discharge of their magisterial duties, received personal injuries.

"On Saturday the mob presented an appalling appearance, and but for the forbearance of the soldiery numerous lives would have fallen a sacrifice. Several of the officers of the Scots Greys were materially hurt in their attempt to quell the riotous proceedings of the mob. During the day the sub-sheriffs at the different booths received several letters from the friends of Mr. Dugdale, stating that they were outside of the town, and anxious to vote for that gentleman, but were deterred from entering it from fear of personal violence. Two or three unlucky individuals, drawn from the files of the military on their approach to the poll, were cruelly beaten, and stripped literally naked. We regret to add that one life has been sacrificed during the contest, and that several misguided individuals have been seriously injured."

The term ending Christmas, 1835, was the last spent at Miss Franklin's. In the first letter of George Eliot's that I have been able to discover, dated 6th January, 1836, and addressed to Miss Lewis, who was at that time governess in the family of the Rev. L. Harper, Burton Latimer, Northamptonshire, she speaks of her mother having suffered a great increase of pain, and adds —

[4] A Mr. Heming was the Radical candidate.

"We dare not hope that there will be a permanent improvement. Our anxieties on my mother's account, though so great, have been since Thursday almost lost sight of in the more sudden, and consequently more severe, trial which we have been called on to endure in the alarming illness of my dear father. For four days we had no cessation of our anxiety; but I am thankful to say that he is now considered out of danger, though very much reduced by frequent bleeding and very powerful medicines."

In the summer of this year – 1836 – the mother died, after a long, painful illness, in which she was nursed with great devotion by her daughters. It was their first acquaintance with death; and to a highly wrought, sensitive girl of sixteen such a loss seems an unendurable calamity. "To the old, sorrow is sorrow; to the young, it is despair." Many references will be found in the subsequent correspondence to what she suffered at this time, all summed up in the old popular phrase, "We can have but one mother." In the following spring Christiana was married to Mr. Edward Clarke, a surgeon practising at Meriden, in Warwickshire. One of Mr. Isaac Evans's most vivid recollections is that on the day of the marriage, after the bride's departure, he and his younger sister had "a good cry" together over the break-up of the old home-life, which of course could never be the same with the mother and the elder sister wanting.

Twenty-three years later we shall find George Eliot writing, on the death of this sister, that she "had a very special feeling for her – stronger than any third person would think likely." The relation between the sisters was somewhat like that described as existing between Dorothea and Celia in "Middlemarch" – no intellectual affinity, but a strong family affection. In fact, my wife told me, that although Celia was not in any sense a portrait of her sister, she "had Chrissey continually in mind" in delineating Celia's character. But we must be careful not to found too much on such *suggestions* of character in George Eliot's books; and this must particularly be borne in mind in the "Mill on the Floss." No doubt the early part of Maggie's portraiture is the best autobiographical representation we can have of George Eliot's own feelings in her childhood, and many of the incidents in the book are based on real experiences of family life, but so mixed with fictitious elements and situations that it would be absolutely misleading to trust to it as a true history. For instance, all that happened in real life between the brother and sister was, I believe, that as they grew up their characters, pursuits, and tastes diverged more and more widely. He took to his father's business, at which he worked steadily, and which absorbed most of his time and attention. He was also devoted to hunting, liked the ordinary pleasures of a young man in his circumstances, and was quite satisfied with the circle of acquaintance in which he moved. After leaving school at Coventry he went to a private tutor's at Birmingham, where he imbibed strong High-Church views. His sister had come back from the Miss Franklins' with ultra-Evangelical tendencies, and their differences of opinion used to lead to a good deal of animated argument. Miss Evans, as she now was, could not rest satisfied with a mere profession of faith without trying to shape her own life – and, it may be added, the lives around her – in accordance with her convictions. The pursuit of pleasure was a snare; dress was vanity; society was a danger.

"From what you know of her, you will not be surprised that she threw some exaggeration and wilfulness, some pride and impetuosity, even into her self-renunciation: her own life was still a drama for her, in which she demanded of herself that her part should be played with intensity. And so it came to pass that she often lost the spirit of humility by being excessive in the outward act; she often strove after too high a flight, and came down with her poor little half-fledged wings dabbled in the mud… That is the path we all like when we set out on our abandonment of egoism – the path of martyrdom and endurance, where the palm-branches grow, rather than the steep highway of tolerance, just allowance, and self-blame, where there are no leafy honors to be gathered and worn."[5]

After Christiana's marriage the entire charge of the Griff establishment devolved on Mary Ann, who became a most exemplary housewife, learned thoroughly everything that had to be done, and,

[5] "Mill on the Floss," chap. iii. book iv.

with her innate desire for perfection, was never satisfied unless her department was administered in the very best manner that circumstances permitted. She spent a great deal of time in visiting the poor, organizing clothing-clubs, and other works of active charity. But over and above this, as will be seen from the following letters, she was always prosecuting an active intellectual life of her own. Mr. Brezzi, a well-known master of modern languages at Coventry, used to come over to Griff regularly to give her lessons in Italian and German. Mr. M'Ewen, also from Coventry, continued her lessons in music, and she got through a large amount of miscellaneous reading by herself. In the evening she was always in the habit of playing to her father, who was very fond of music. But it requires no great effort of imagination to conceive that this life, though full of interests of its own, and the source from whence the future novelist drew the most powerful and the most touching of her creations, was, as a matter of fact, very monotonous, very difficult, very discouraging. It could scarcely be otherwise to a young girl with a full, passionate nature and hungry intellect, shut up in a farmhouse in the remote country. For there was no sympathetic human soul near with whom to exchange ideas on the intellectual and spiritual problems that were beginning to agitate her mind. "You may try, but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl."[6] This is a point of view that must be distinctly recognized by any one attempting to follow the development of George Eliot's character, and it will always be corrected by the other point of view which she has made so prominent in all her own writing – the soothing, strengthening, sacred influences of the home life, the home loves, the home duties. Circumstances in later life separated her from her kindred, but among her last letters it will be seen that she wrote to her brother in May, 1880, that "our long silence has never broken the affection for you that began when we were little ones"[7] – and she expresses her satisfaction in the growing prosperity of himself and all his family. It was a real gratification to her to hear from some Coventry friends that her nephew, the Rev. Frederic Evans, the present rector of Bedworth, was well spoken of as a preacher in the old familiar places, and in our last summer at Witley we often spoke of a visit to Warwickshire, that she might renew the sweet memories of her child-days. No doubt, the very monotony of her life at Griff, and the narrow field it presented for observation of society, added immeasurably to the intensity of a naturally keen mental vision, concentrating into a focus what might perhaps have become dissipated in more liberal surroundings. And though the field of observation was narrow in one sense, it included very various grades of society. Such fine places as Arbury, and Packington, the seat of Lord Aylesford, where she was being constantly driven by her father, affected the imagination and accentuated the social differences – differences which had a profound significance for such a sensitive and such an intellectually commanding character, and which left their mark on it.

"No one who has not a strong natural prompting and susceptibility towards such things [the signs and luxuries of ladyhood] and has, at the same time, suffered from the presence of opposite conditions, can understand how powerfully those minor accidents of rank which please the fastidious sense can preoccupy the imagination."[8]

The tone of her mind will be seen from the letters written during the following years, and I remember once, after we were married, when I was urging her to write her autobiography, she said, half sighing, half smiling, "The only thing I should care much to dwell on would be the absolute despair I suffered from of ever being able to achieve anything. No one could ever have felt greater despair, and a knowledge of this might be a help to some other struggler" – adding, with a smile, "but, on the other hand, it might only lead to an increase of bad writing."

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[6] "Daniel Deronda."

[7] See vol. iii.

[8] "Felix Holt," chap. xxxviii. p. 399.

SUMMARY

NOVEMBER 22, 1819, TO END OF 1837

Birth at Arbury Farm – Baptism – Character of father – His first marriage and children – Second marriage and children – Removal to Griff – Events at time of birth – Character of country about Griff – Coach communication – Father's position – Anecdotes of father – Character of mother – Mother's family and delicacy – Dame's school – Companionship with brother – Miss Lathom's school at Attleboro – Suffers from fear – Father's pet – Drives with him – First books read – First journey to Staffordshire – Miss Wallington's school at Nuneaton – Miss Lewis, governess – Books read – Religious impressions – Charade acting – Miss Franklin's school at Coventry – Riot at Nuneaton – First letter to Miss Lewis – Mother's illness – Mother's death – Sister Christiana married to Mr. Clarke – Relations with brother – Housekeeper at Griff – Life and studies there.

CHAPTER I

In the foregoing introductory sketch I have endeavored to present the influences to which George Eliot was subjected in her youth, and the environment in which she grew up; I am now able to begin the fulfilment of the promise on the titlepage, that the life will be related in her own letters; or, rather, in extracts from her own letters, for no single letter is printed entire from the beginning to the end. I have not succeeded in obtaining any between 6th January, 1836, and 18th August, 1838; but from the latter date the correspondence becomes regular, and I have arranged it as a continuous narrative, with the names of the persons to whom the letters are addressed in the margin. The slight thread of narrative or explanation which I have written to elucidate the letters, where necessary, will hereafter occupy an inside margin, so that the reader will see at a glance what is narrative and what is correspondence, and will be troubled as little as possible with marks of quotation or changes of type.

The following opening letter of the series to Miss Lewis describes a first visit to London with her brother:

Letter to Miss Lewis, 18th Aug. 1838

Let me tell you, though, that I was not at all delighted with the stir of the great Babel, and the less so, probably, owing to the circumstances attending my visit thither. Isaac and I went alone (that seems rather Irish), and stayed only a week, every day of which we worked hard at seeing sights. I think Greenwich Hospital interested me more than anything else.

Mr. Isaac Evans himself tells me that what he remembers chiefly impressed her was the first hearing the great bell of St. Paul's. It affected her deeply. At that time she was so much under the influence of religious and ascetic ideas that she would not go to any of the theatres with her brother, but spent all her evenings alone, reading. A characteristic reminiscence is that the chief thing she wanted to buy was Josephus's "History of the Jews;" and at the same bookshop her brother got her this he bought for himself a pair of hunting sketches. In the same letter, alluding to the marriage of one of her friends, she says:

Letter to Miss Lewis, 18th Aug. 1838

For my part, when I hear of the marrying and giving in marriage that is constantly being transacted, I can only sigh for those who are multiplying earthly ties which, though powerful enough to detach their hearts and thoughts from heaven, are so brittle as to be liable to be snapped asunder at every breeze. You will think that I need nothing but a tub for my habitation to make me a perfect female Diogenes; and I plead guilty to occasional misanthropical thoughts, but not to the indulgence of them. Still, I must believe that those are happiest who are not fermenting themselves by engaging in projects for earthly bliss, who are considering this life merely a pilgrimage, a scene calling for diligence and watchfulness, not for repose and amusement. I do not deny that there may be many who can partake with a high degree of zest of all the lawful enjoyments the world can offer, and yet live in near communion with their God – who can warmly love the creature, and yet be careful that the Creator maintains his supremacy in their hearts; but I confess that, in my short experience and narrow sphere of action, I have never been able to attain to this. I find, as Dr. Johnson said respecting

his wine, total abstinence much easier than moderation. I do not wonder you are pleased with Pascal;[9] his thoughts may be returned to the palate again and again with increasing rather than diminished relish. I have highly enjoyed Hannah More's letters; the contemplation of so blessed a character as hers is very salutary. "That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises," is a valuable admonition. I was once told that there was nothing out of myself to prevent my becoming as eminently holy as St. Paul; and though I think that is too sweeping an assertion, yet it is very certain we are generally too low in our aims, more anxious for safety than sanctity, for place than purity, forgetting that each involves the other, and that, as Doddridge tells us, to rest satisfied with any attainments in religion is a fearful proof that we are ignorant of the very first principles of it. O that we could live only for eternity! that we could realize its nearness! I know you do not love quotations, so I will not give you one; but if you do not distinctly remember it, do turn to the passage in Young's "Infidel Reclaimed," beginning, "O vain, vain, vain all else eternity," and do love the lines for my sake.

I really feel for you, sacrificing, as you are, your own tastes and comforts for the pleasure of others, and that in a manner the most trying to rebellious flesh and blood; for I verily believe that in most cases it requires more of a martyr's spirit to endure, with patience and cheerfulness, daily crossings and interruptions of our petty desires and pursuits, and to rejoice in them if they can be made to conduce to God's glory and our own sanctification, than even to lay down our lives for the truth.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 6th Nov. 1838

I can hardly repress a sort of indignation towards second causes. That your time and energies should be expended in ministering to the petty interests of those far beneath you in all that is really elevating is about as *bienséant* as that I should set fire to a goodly volume to light a match by! I have had a very unsettled life lately – Michaelmas, with its onerous duties and anxieties, much company (for us) and little reading, so that I am ill prepared for corresponding with profit or pleasure. I am generally in the same predicament with books as a glutton with his feast, hurrying through one course that I may be in time for the next, and so not relishing or digesting either; not a very elegant illustration, but the best my organs of ideality and comparison will furnish just now.

I have just begun the "Life of Wilberforce," and I am expecting a rich treat from it. There is a similarity, if I may compare myself with such a man, between his temptations, or rather *besetments*, and my own, that makes his experience very interesting to me. O that I might be made as useful in my lowly and obscure station as he was in the exalted one assigned to him! I feel myself to be a mere cumberer of the ground. May the Lord give me such an insight into what is truly good that I may not rest contented with making Christianity a mere addendum to my pursuits, or with tacking it as a fringe to my garments! May I seek to be sanctified wholly! My nineteenth birthday will soon be here (the 22d) – an awakening signal. My mind has been much clogged lately by languor of body, to which I am prone to give way, and for the removal of which I shall feel thankful.

We have had an oratorio at Coventry lately, Braham, Phillips, Mrs. Knyvett, and Mrs. Shaw – the last, I think, I shall attend. I am not fitted to decide on the question of the propriety or lawfulness of such exhibitions of talent and so forth, because I have no soul for music. "Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth." I am a tasteless person, but it would not cost me any regrets if the only music heard in our land were that of strict worship, nor can I think a pleasure that involves the devotion of all the time and powers of an immortal being to the acquirement of an expertness in so useless (at least in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred) an accomplishment, can be quite pure or elevating in its tendency.

[9] Given to her as a school prize when she was fourteen.

The above remarks on oratorio are the more surprising because, two years later, when Miss Evans went to the Birmingham festival, in September, 1840, previous to her brother's marriage, she was affected to an extraordinary degree, so much so that Mrs. Isaac Evans – then Miss Rawlins – told me that the attention of people sitting near was attracted by her hysterical sobbing. And in all her later life music was one of the chiefest delights to her, and especially oratorio.

"Not that her enjoyment of music was of the kind that indicates a great specific talent; it was rather that her sensibility to the supreme excitement of music was only one form of that passionate sensibility which belonged to her whole nature, and made her faults and virtues all merge in each other – made her affections sometimes an impatient demand, but also prevented her vanity from taking the form of mere feminine coquetry and device, and gave it the poetry of ambition."[10]

The next two letters, dated from Griff – February 6th and March 5th, 1839 – are addressed to Mrs. Samuel Evans, a Methodist preacher, the wife of a younger brother of Mr. Robert Evans. They are the more interesting from the fact, which will appear later, that an anecdote related by this aunt during her visit to Griff in 1839 was the germ of "Adam Bede." To what extent this Elizabeth Evans resembled the ideal character of Dinah Morris will also be seen in its place in the history of "Adam Bede."

Letter to Mrs. Samuel Evans, 6th Feb. 1839

I am so unwilling to believe that you can forget a promise, or to entertain fears respecting your health, that I persuade myself I must have mistaken the terms of the agreement between us, and that I ought to have sent you a letter before I considered myself entitled to one from Wirksworth. However this may be, I feel so anxious to hear of your well-being in every way, that I can no longer rest satisfied without using my only means of obtaining tidings of you. My dear father is not at home to-night, or I should probably have a message of remembrance to give you from him, in addition to the good news that he is as well as he has been for the last two years, and even, I think, better, except that he feels more fatigue after exertion of mind or body than formerly. If you are able to fill a sheet, I am sure both uncle and you would in doing so be complying with the precept, "Lift up the hands that hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees." I need not tell you that this is a dry and thirsty land, and I shall be as grateful to you for a draught from your fresh spring as the traveller in the Eastern desert is to the unknown hand that digs a well for him. "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel," seems to be my character, instead of that regular progress from strength to strength that marks, even in this world of mistakes, the people that shall, in the heavenly Zion, stand before God. I shall not only suffer, but be delighted to receive, the word of exhortation, and I beg you not to withhold it. If I did not know how little you need human help, I should regret that my ignorance and want of deep feeling in spiritual things prevent me from suggesting profitable or refreshing thoughts; but I dare say I took care to tell you that my desire for correspondence with you was quite one of self-interest.

I am thankful to tell you that my dear friends here are all well. I have a faint hope that the pleasure and profit I have felt in your society may be repeated in the summer: there is no place I would rather visit than Wirksworth, or the inhabitants of which have a stronger hold on my affections.

In the next letter the touch about Mrs. Fletcher's life is characteristic.

[10] "Mill on the Floss," chap. v. book vi.

Letter to Mrs. Samuel Evans, 5th Mch. 1839

My dear father is just now so plunged in business, and that of a fatiguing kind, that I should put your confidence in my love and gratitude to an unreasonably severe trial if I waited until he had leisure to unite with me in filling a sheet. You were very kind to remember my wish to see "Mrs. Fletcher's Life: " I only desire such a spiritual digestion as has enabled *you* to derive so much benefit from its perusal. I am truly glad to hear that you are less embarrassed with respect to your congregation, etc., than you were when we saw you. I must protest against your making apologies for speaking of yourself, for nothing that relates to you can be uninteresting to me.

The unprofitableness you lament in yourself, during your visit to us, had its true cause, not in your lukewarmness, but in the little improvement I sought to derive from your society, and in my lack of humility and Christian simplicity, that makes me willing to obtain credit for greater knowledge and deeper feeling than I really possess. Instead of putting my light under a bushel, I am in danger of ostentatiously displaying a false one. You have much too high an opinion, my dear aunt, of my spiritual condition, and of my personal and circumstantial advantages. My soul seems for weeks together completely benumbed, and when I am aroused from this torpid state, the intervals of activity are comparatively short. I am ever finding excuses for this in the deprivation of outward excitement and the small scope I have for the application of my principles, instead of feeling self-abasement under the consciousness that I abuse precious hours of retirement, which would be eagerly employed in spiritual exercises by many a devoted servant of God who is struggling with worldly cares and occupations. I feel that my besetting sin is the one of all others most destroying, as it is the fruitful parent of them all – ambition, a desire insatiable for the esteem of my fellow-creatures. This seems the centre whence all my actions proceed. But you will perhaps remember, my dear aunt, that I do not attach much value to a disclosure of religious feelings, owing probably to the dominant corruption I have just been speaking of, which "turns the milk of my good purpose all to curd."

On 16th March, 1839, in a letter to Miss Lewis, there is a reference to good spirits, which is of the rarest occurrence all through the correspondence:

Letter to Miss Lewis, 16th Mch. 1839

I am this morning hardly myself, owing to the insuppressible rising of my animal spirits on a deliverance from sick headache;

and then the letter continues as to the expediency of reading works of fiction, in answer to a question Miss Lewis had asked:

I put out of the question all persons of perceptions so quick, memories so eclectic and retentive, and minds so comprehensive that nothing less than omnivorous reading, as Southey calls it, can satisfy their intellectual man; for (if I may parody the words of Scripture without profaneness) they will gather to themselves all facts, and heap unto themselves all ideas. For such persons we cannot legislate. Again, I would put out of the question standard works, whose contents are matter of constant reference, and the names of whose heroes and heroines briefly, and therefore conveniently, describe characters and ideas – such are "Don Quixote," Butler's "Hudibras," "Robinson Crusoe," "Gil Blas," Byron's Poetical Romances, Southey's ditto, etc. Such, too, are Walter Scott's novels and poems. Such allusions as "He is a perfect Dominie Sampson," "He is as industrious in finding out antiquities, and about as successful, as Jonathan Oldbuck," are likely to become so common in books and conversation that, *always providing* our leisure is not circumscribed by duty within narrow bounds, we should, I think, qualify ourselves to understand them. Shakespeare has a higher claim than this on our attention;

but we have need of as nice a power of distillation as the bee, to suck nothing but honey from his pages. However, as in life we must be exposed to malign influences from intercourse with others, if we would reap the advantages designed for us by making us social beings, so in books. Having cleared our way of what would otherwise have encumbered us, I would ask why is one engaged in the instruction of youth to read, as a purely conscientious and self-denying performance of duty, works whose value to others is allowed to be doubtful? I can only imagine two shadows of reasons. Either that she may be able experimentally to decide on their desirableness for her pupils, or else that there is a certain power exerted by them on the mind that would render her a more efficient "tutress" by their perusal. I would not depreciate the disinterestedness of those who will make trial of the effect on themselves of a cup suspected poisonous, that they may deter another from risking life; but it appears to me a work of supererogation, since there are enough witnesses to its baneful effect on themselves already to put an end to all strife in the matter. The Scriptural declaration, "As face answereth to face in a glass, so the heart of man to man," will exonerate me from the charge of uncharitableness, or too high an estimation of myself, if I venture to believe that the same causes which exist in my own breast to render novels and romances pernicious have their counterpart in that of every fellow-creature. I am, I confess, not an impartial member of a jury in this case; for I owe the culprits a grudge for injuries inflicted on myself. When I was quite a little child I could not be satisfied with the things around me; I was constantly living in a world of my own creation, and was quite contented to have no companions, that I might be left to my own musings, and imagine scenes in which I was chief actress. Conceive what a character novels would give to these Utopias. I was early supplied with them by those who kindly sought to gratify my appetite for reading, and of course I made use of the materials they supplied for building my castles in the air. But it may be said – "No one ever dreamed of recommending children to read them: all this does not apply to persons come to years of discretion, whose judgments are in some degree matured." I answer that men and women are but children of a larger growth: they are still imitative beings. We cannot (at least those who ever read to any purpose at all) – we cannot, I say, help being modified by the ideas that pass through our minds. We hardly wish to lay claim to such elasticity as retains no impress. We are active beings too. We are each one of the *dramatis personæ* in some play on the stage of life; hence our actions have their share in the effects of our reading. As to the discipline our minds receive from the perusal of fictions, I can conceive none that is beneficial but may be attained by that of history. It is the merit of fictions to come within the orbit of probability: if unnatural they would no longer please. If it be said the mind must have relaxation, "Truth is strange – stranger than fiction." When a person has exhausted the wonders of truth there is no other resort than fiction: till then, I cannot imagine how the adventures of some phantom conjured up by fancy can be more entertaining than the transactions of real specimens of human nature, from which we may safely draw inferences. I dare say Mr. James's "Huguenot" would be recommended as giving an idea of the times of which he writes; but as well may one be recommended to look at landscapes for an idea of English scenery. The real secret of the relaxation talked of is one that would not generally be avowed; but an appetite that wants seasoning of a certain kind cannot be indicative of health. Religious novels are more hateful to me than merely worldly ones: they are a sort of centaur or mermaid, and, like other monsters that we do not know how to class, should be destroyed for the public good as soon as born. The weapons of the Christian warfare were never sharpened at the forge of romance. Domestic fictions, as they come more within the range of imitation, seem more dangerous. For my part, I am ready to sit down and weep at the impossibility of my understanding or barely knowing a fraction of the sum of objects that present themselves for our contemplation in books and in life. Have I, then, any time to spend on things that never existed?

Letter to Miss Lewis, 20th May, 1839

You allude to the religious, or rather irreligious, contentions that form so prominent a feature in the aspect of public affairs – a subject, you will perhaps be surprised to hear me say, full of interest to me, and on which I am unable to shape an opinion for the satisfaction of my mind. I think no one feels more difficulty in coming to a decision on controverted matters than myself. I do not mean that I have not preferences; but, however congruous a theory may be with my notions, I cannot find that comfortable repose that others appear to possess after having made their election of a class of sentiments. The other day Montaigne's motto came to my mind (it is mentioned by Pascal) as an appropriate one for me – "Que sais-je?" – beneath a pair of balances, though, by-the-bye, it is an ambiguous one, and may be taken in a sense that I desire to reprobate, as well as in a Scriptural one, to which I do not refer. I use it in a limited sense as a representation of my oscillating judgment. On no subject do I veer to all points of the compass more frequently than on the nature of the visible Church. I am powerfully attracted in a certain direction, but, when I am about to settle there, counter-assertions shake me from my position. I cannot enter into details, but when we are together I will tell you all my difficulties – that is, if you will be kind enough to listen. I have been reading the new prize essay on "Schism," by Professor Hoppus, and Milner's "Church History," since I last wrote to you: the former ably expresses the tenets of those who deny that any form of Church government is so clearly dictated in Scripture as to possess a divine right, and, consequently, to be binding on Christians; the latter, you know, exhibits the views of a moderate Evangelical Episcopalian on the inferences to be drawn from ecclesiastical remains. He equally repudiates the loud assertion of a *jus divinum*, to the exclusion of all separatists from the visible Church, though he calmly maintains the superiority of the evidence in favor of Episcopacy, of a moderate kind both in power and extent of diocese, as well as the benefit of a national establishment. I have been skimming the "Portrait of an English Churchman," by the Rev. W. Gresley: this contains an outline of the system of those who exclaim of the Anglican Church as the Jews did of their sacred building (that they do it in as reprehensible a spirit I will not be the judge), "the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord" is exclusively theirs; while the authors of the Oxford Tracts go a step further, and evince by their compliments to Rome, as a dear though erring sister, and their attempts to give a Romish color to our ordinance, with a very confused and unscriptural statement of the great doctrine of justification, a disposition rather to fraternize with the members of a Church carrying on her brow the prophetical epithets applied by St. John to the scarlet beast, the mystery of iniquity, than with pious Nonconformists. It is true they disclaim all this, and that their opinions are seconded by the extensive learning, the laborious zeal, and the deep devotion of those who propagate them; but a reference to facts will convince us that such has generally been the character of heretical teachers. Satan is too crafty to commit his cause into the hands of those who have nothing to recommend them to approbation. According to their dogmas, the Scotch Church and the foreign Protestant Churches, as well as the non-Episcopalians of our own land, are wanting in the essentials of existence as part of the Church.

In the next letter there is the first allusion to authorship, but, from the wording of the sentence, the poem referred to has evidently not been a first attempt.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 17th July, 1839

I send you some doggerel lines, the crude fruit of a lonely walk last evening when the words of one of our martyrs occurred to me. You must be acquainted with the idiosyncrasy of my authorship, which is, that my effusions, once committed to paper, are like the laws of the Medes and Persians, that alter not.

"Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle."

– 2 Peter i. 14.

"As o'er the fields by evening's light I stray
I hear a still, small whisper – Come away;
Thou must to this bright, lovely world soon say
Farewell!

"The mandate I'd obey, my lamp prepare,
Gird up my garments, give my soul to pray'r,
And say to earth, and all that breathe earth's air,
Farewell!

"Thou sun, to whose parental beam I owe
All that has gladden'd me while here below,
Moon, stars, and covenant-confirming bow,
Farewell!

"Ye verdant meads, fair blossoms, stately trees,
Sweet song of birds and soothing hum of bees,
Refreshing odors wafted on the breeze,
Farewell!

"Ye patient servants of creation's Lord,
Whose mighty strength is govern'd by his word,
Who raiment, food, and help in toil afford,
Farewell!

"Books that have been to me as chests of gold,
Which, miserlike, I secretly have told,
And for them love, health, friendship, peace have sold,
Farewell!

"Blest volume! whose clear truth-writ page once known,
Fades not before heaven's sunshine or hell's moan,
To thee I say not, of earth's gifts alone,
Farewell!

"There shall my new-born senses find new joy,
New sounds, new sights, my eyes and ears employ,
Nor fear that word that here brings sad alloy,
Farewell!"

I had a dim recollection that my wife had told me that this poem had been printed somewhere. After a long search I found it in the *Christian Observer* for

January, 1840. The version there published has the two following additional verses, and is signed M. A. E.:

"Ye feebler, freer tribes that people air,
Ye gaudy insects, making buds your lair,
Ye that in water shine and frolic there,
Farewell!

"Dear kindred, whom the Lord to me has given,
Must the strong tie that binds us now be riven?
No! say I – only till we meet in heaven,
Farewell!"

The editor of the *Christian Observer* has added this note: "We do not often add a note to a poem: but if St. John found no temple in the New Jerusalem, neither will there be any need of a Bible; for we shall not then see through a glass darkly – through the veil of sacraments or the written Word – but face to face. The Bible is God's gift, but not for heaven's use. Still, on the very verge of heaven we may cling to it, after we have bid farewell to everything earthly: and this, perhaps, is what M. A. E. means."

In the following letter we already see the tendency to draw illustrations from science:

Letter to Miss Lewis, 4th Sept. 1839

I have lately led so unsettled a life, and have been so desultory in my employments, that my mind, never of the most highly organized genus, is more than usually chaotic, or, rather, it is like a stratum of conglomerated fragments, that shows here a jaw and rib of some ponderous quadruped, there a delicate alto-relievo of some fern-like plant, tiny shells and mysterious nondescripts incrusted and united with some unvaried and uninteresting but useful stone. My mind presents just such an assemblage of disjointed specimens of history, ancient and modern; scraps of poetry picked up from Shakespeare, Cowper, Wordsworth, and Milton; newspaper topics; morsels of Addison and Bacon, Latin verbs, geometry, entomology, and chemistry; reviews and metaphysics – all arrested and petrified and smothered by the fast-thickening every-day accession of actual events, relative anxieties, and household cares and vexations. How deplorably and unaccountably evanescent are our frames of mind, as various as the forms and hues of the summer clouds! A single word is sometimes enough to give an entirely new mould to our thoughts – at least, I find myself so constituted; and therefore to me it is pre-eminently important to be anchored within the veil, so that outward things may be unable to send me adrift. Write to me as soon as you can. Remember Michaelmas is coming, and I shall be engaged in matters so nauseating to me that it will be a charity to console me; to reprove and advise me no less.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 22d Nov. 1839

I have emerged from the slough of domestic troubles, or, rather, to speak quite clearly, "malheurs de cuisine," and am beginning to take a deep breath in my own element, though with a mortifying consciousness that my faculties have become superlatively obtuse during my banishment from it. I have been so self-indulgent as to possess myself of Wordsworth at full length, and I

thoroughly like much of the contents of the first three volumes, which I fancy are only the low vestibule of the three remaining ones. I never before met with so many of my own feelings expressed just as I could like them. The distress of the lower classes in our neighborhood is daily increasing, from the scarcity of employment for weavers, and I seem sadly to have handcuffed myself by unnecessary expenditure. To-day is my 20th birthday.

> This allusion to Wordsworth is interesting, as it entirely expresses the feeling she had to him up to the day of her death. One of the very last books we read together at Cheyne Walk was Mr. Frederick Myers's "Wordsworth" in the "English Men of Letters," which she heartily enjoyed.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 23d Mch. 1840

I have just received my second lesson in German.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 2d May, 1840, Friday evening

I know you will be glad to think of me as thoroughly employed, as, indeed, I am to an extent that makes me fear I shall not be able to accomplish everything well. I have engaged, if possible, to complete the chart,[11] the plan of which I sketched out last year, by November next, and I am encouraged to believe that it will answer my purpose to print it. The profits arising from its sale, if any, will go partly to Attleboro Church, and partly to a favorite object of my own. Mrs. Newdigate is very anxious that I should do this, and she permits me to visit her library when I please, in search of any books that may assist me. Will you ask Mr. Craig what he considers the best authority for the date of the apostolical writings? I should like to carry the chart down to the Reformation, if my time and resources will enable me to do so. We are going to have a clothing-club, the arrangement and starting of which are left to me. I am ashamed to run the risk of troubling you, but I should be very grateful if you could send me an abstract of the rules by which yours is regulated.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 21st May, 1840

Our house is now, and will be for the next two months, miserably noisy and disorderly with the musical operations of masons, carpenters, and painters. You know how abhorrent all this is to my tastes and feelings, taking all the spice out of my favorite little epithet, "this working-day world: " I can no longer use it figuratively. How impressive must the gradual rise of Solomon's Temple have been! each prepared mass of virgin marble laid in reverential silence. I fancy Heber has compared it to the growth of a palm. Your nice miniature chart, which I shall carefully treasure up, has quite satisfied me that Dr. Pearson, at least, has not realized my conceptions, though it has left me still dubious as to my own power of doing so. I will just (if you can bear to hear more of the matter) give you an idea of the plan, which may have partly faded from your memory. The series of perpendicular columns will successively contain the Roman emperors, with their dates, the political and religious state of the Jews, the bishops, remarkable men, and events in the several churches, a column being devoted to each of the chief ones, the aspect of heathenism and Judaism towards Christianity, the chronology of the apostolical and patristical writings, schisms, and heresies, General Councils, eras of corruption (under which head the remarks would be general), and I thought possibly an application of the apocalyptic prophecies, which would merely require a few figures and not take up room. I

[11] Of ecclesiastical history.

think there must be a break in the chart after the establishment of Christianity as the religion of the empire, and I have come to a determination not to carry it beyond the first acknowledgment of the supremacy of the Pope by Phocas, in 606, when Mohammedanism became a besom of destruction in the hand of the Lord, and completely altered the aspect of ecclesiastical history. So much for this, at present, airy project, about which I hope never to tease you more. Mr. Harper[12] lent me a little time ago a work by the Rev. W. Gresley, begging me to read it, as he thought it was calculated to make me a proselyte to the opinions it advocates. I had skimmed the book before ("Portrait of an English Churchman"), but I read it attentively a second time, and was pleased with the spirit of piety that breathes throughout. His last work is one in a similar style ("The English Citizen"), which I have cursorily read; and, as they are both likely to be seen by you, I want to know your opinion of them. Mine is this: that they are sure to have a powerful influence on the minds of small readers and shallow thinkers, as, from the simplicity and clearness with which the author, by his *beau-idéal* characters, enunciates his sentiments, they furnish a magazine of easily wielded weapons for *morning-calling* and *evening-party* controversialists, as well as that really honest minds will be inclined to think they have found a resting-place amid the footballing of religious parties. But it appears to me that there is unfairness in arbitrarily selecting a train of circumstances and a set of characters as a development of a class of opinions. In this way we might make atheism appear wonderfully calculated to promote social happiness. I remember, as I dare say you do, a very amiable atheist depicted by Bulwer in "Devereux;" and for some time after the perusal of that book, which I read seven or eight years ago,[13] I was considerably shaken by the impression that religion was not a requisite to moral excellence.

Have you not alternating seasons of mental stagnation and activity? just such as the political economists say there must be in a nation's pecuniary condition – all one's precious specie, Time, going out to procure a stock of commodities, while one's own manufactures are too paltry to be worth vending. I am just in that condition – partly, I think, owing to my not having met with any steel to sharpen my edge against for the last three weeks. I am going to read a volume of the Oxford Tracts and the "Lyra Apostolica;" the former I almost shrink from the labor of conning, but the other I confess I am attracted towards by some highly poetical extracts that I have picked up in various quarters. I have just bought Mr. Keble's "Christian Year," a volume of sweet poetry that perhaps you know. The fields of poesy look more lovely than ever, now I have hedged myself in the geometrical regions of fact, where I can do nothing but draw parallels and measure differences in a double sense.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 26th May, 1840

[14] I will only hint that there seems a probability of my being an unoccupied damsel, of my being severed from all the ties that have hitherto given my existence the semblance of a usefulness beyond that of making up the requisite quantum of animal matter in the universe. A second important intimation respecting my worthy self is one that, I confess, I impart without one sigh, though perhaps you will think my callousness discreditable. It is that Seeley & Burnside have just published a Chart of Ecclesiastical History, doubtless giving to my airy vision a local habitation and a name. I console all my little regrets by thinking that what is thus evidenced to be a desideratum has been executed much better than if left to my slow fingers and slower head. I fear I am laboriously doing nothing, for I am beguiled by the fascination that the study of languages has for my capricious mind. I could e'en give myself up to making discoveries in the world of words.

[12] The Squire of Coton.

[13] When she would be thirteen years old.

[14] Written probably in view of her brother's marriage.

Letter to Miss Lewis, in London, Whit-Wednesday, June, 1840

May I trouble you to procure for me an Italian book recommended by Mr. Brezzi – Silvio Pellico's "Le mie Prigioni;" if not, "Storia d'Italia"? If they are cheap, I should like both.

I shall have, I hope, a little trip with my father next week into Derbyshire, and this "lark" will probably be beneficial to me; so do not imagine I am inviting you to come and hear moaning, when you need all attainable relaxation.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 23d June, 1840

Your letter greeted me last night on my arrival from Staffordshire. The prospectus of Mr. Henslow's work is as marvellous to my ignorant conceptions as the prophecies of the wonders of the steam-engine would have been to some British worthy in the days of Caractacus. I can only gape as he would probably have done. I hope Mr. H. has not imitated certain show-keepers, who give so exaggerated a representation of their giantess, on the outside, that the spectators have disappointment for their cash within.

If I do not see you, how shall I send your "Don Quixote," which I hope soon to finish? I have been sadly interrupted by other books that have taken its scanty allowance of time, or I should have made better haste with it. Will you try to get me Spenser's "Faery Queen"? the cheapest edition, with a glossary, which is quite indispensable, together with a clear and correct type. I have had some treats on my little excursion, not the least of which was the gazing on some – albeit the smallest – of the "everlasting hills," and on those noblest children of the earth, fine, healthy trees, as independent in their beauty as virtue; set them where you will, they adorn, and need not adornment. Father indulged me with a sight of Ashborne Church, the finest mere parish church in the kingdom – in the *interior*; of Alton Gardens, where I saw actually what I have often seen mentally – the bread-fruit tree, the fan-palm, and the papyrus; and last, of Lichfield Cathedral, where, besides the exquisite architectural beauties, both external and internal, I saw Chantrey's famous monument of the Sleeping Children. There is a tasteless monument to the learned and brilliant female pedant of Lichfield, Miss Seward, with a poor epitaph by Sir Walter Scott. In the town we saw a large monument erected to Johnson's memory, showing his Titanic body, in a sitting posture, on the summit of a pedestal which is ornamented with bas-reliefs of three passages in his life: his penance in Uttoxeter Market, his chairing on the shoulders of his schoolmates, and his listening to the preaching of Sacheverel. The statue is opposite to the house in which Johnson was born – altogether inferior to that in St. Paul's, which shook me almost as much as a real glance from the literary monarch. I am ashamed to send you so many ill-clothed nothings. My excuse shall be a state of head that calls for four leeches before I can attack Mrs. Somerville's "Connection of the Physical Sciences."

Letter to Miss Lewis, July, Monday morning, 1840

I write with a very tremulous hand, as you will perceive; both this, and many other defects in my letter, are attributable to a very mighty cause – no other than the boiling of currant jelly! I have had much of this kind of occupation lately, and I grieve to say I have not gone through it so cheerfully as the character of a Christian who professes to do *all*, even the most trifling, duty, as the Lord demands. My mind is consequently run all wild, and bears nothing but *dog-roses*. I am truly obliged to you for getting me Spenser. How shall I send to you "Don Quixote," which I have quite finished?

Letter to Miss Lewis, 8th July, 1840

I believe it is decided that father and I should leave Griff and take up our residence somewhere in the neighborhood of Coventry, if we can obtain a suitable house, and this is at present a matter of anxiety. So you see I am likely still to have a home where I can independently welcome you. I am really so plunged in an abyss of books, preserves, and sundry *important trivialities*, that I must send you this bare proof that I have not cast the remembrance of you to a dusty corner of my heart. Ever believe that "my heart is as thy heart," that you may rely on me as a second self, and that I shall, with my usual selfishness, lose no opportunity of gratifying my duplicate.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 12th Aug. 1840

The Epistle to the Colossians is pre-eminently rich in the coloring with which it portrays the divine fulness contained in the Saviour, contrasted with the beggarly elements that a spirit of self-righteousness would, in some way, mingle with the light of life, the filthy rags it would tack round the "fine raiment" of his righteousness. I have been reading it in connection with a train of thought suggested by the reading of "Ancient Christianity and the Oxford Tracts," by Isaac Taylor, one of the most eloquent, acute, and pious of writers. Five numbers only have yet appeared. Have you seen them? If not, I should like to send you an abstract of his argument. I have gulped it (pardon my coarseness) in a most reptile-like fashion. I must *chew* it thoroughly to facilitate its assimilation with my mental frame. When your pupils can relish Church history, I venture to recommend the chart lately published by Seeley & Burnside – far superior in conception to mine – as being more compendious, yet answering the purpose of presenting epochs as nuclei round which less important events instinctively cluster.

> Mrs. John Cash of Coventry, who was then Miss Mary Sibree, daughter of a Nonconformist minister there, and whose acquaintance Miss Evans made a year or two later in Coventry, writes in regard to this book of Isaac Taylor's: "In her first conversations with my father and mother, they were much interested in learning in what high estimation she held the writings of Isaac Taylor. My father *thought* she was a little disappointed on hearing that he was a Dissenter. She particularly enjoyed his 'Saturday Evening,' and spoke in years after to me of his 'Physical Theory of Another Life,' as exciting thought and leading speculation further than he would have desired. When his 'Ancient Christianity' was published in numbers, Miss Evans took it in, and kindly forwarded the numbers to us. From the impression made on my own mind by unfavorable facts about 'The Fathers,' and from her own subsequent references to this work, I am inclined to think it had its influence in unsettling her views of Christianity."

Letter to Miss Lewis, 17th Sept. 1840

I have thought of you as *the* one who has ever shown herself so capable of consideration for my weakness and sympathy in my warm and easily fastened affections. My imagination is an enemy that must be cast down ere I can enjoy peace or exhibit uniformity of character. I know not which of its caprices I have most to dread – that which incites it to spread sackcloth "above, below, around," or that which makes it "cheat my eye with blear illusion, and beget strange dreams" of excellence and beauty in beings and things of only working-day price. The beautiful heavens that we have lately enjoyed awaken in me an indescribable sensation of exultation in existence, and aspiration after all

that is suited to engage an immaterial nature. I have not read very many of Mr. B.'s poems, nor any with much attention. I simply declare my determination not to feed on the broth of literature when I can get strong soup – such, for instance, as Shelley's "Cloud," the five or six stanzas of which contain more poetic metal than is beat out in all Mr. B.'s pages. You must know I have had bestowed on me the very pretty cognomen of Clematis, which, in the floral language, means "mental beauty." I cannot find in my heart to refuse it, though, like many other appellations, it has rather the appearance of a satire than a compliment. *Addio!* I will send your floral name in my next, when I have received my dictionary. My hand and mind are wearied with writing four pages of German and a letter of business.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 1st Oct. 1840

My dear Veronica – which, being interpreted, is "fidelity in friendship" – Last week I was absent from home from Wednesday to Saturday, in quest of the "coy maiden," Pleasure – at least, nominally so, the real motive being rather to gratify another's feeling.[15] I heard the "Messiah" on Thursday morning at Birmingham, and some beautiful selections from other oratories of Handel and Haydn on Friday. With a stupid, drowsy sensation, produced by standing sentinel over damson cheese and a warm stove, I cannot do better than ask you to read, if accessible, Wordsworth's short poem on the "Power of Sound," with which I have just been delighted. I have made an alteration in my plans with Mr. Brezzi, and shall henceforward take Italian and German alternately, so that I shall not be liable to the consciousness of having imperative employment for every interstice of time. There seems a greater affinity between German and my mind than Italian, though less new to me, possesses.

I am reading Schiller's "Maria Stuart," and Tasso.

I was pleased with a little poem I learned a week or two ago in German; and, as I want you to like it, I have just put the idea it contains into English doggerel, which quite fails to represent the beautiful simplicity and nature of the original, but yet, I hope, will give you sufficiently its sense to screen the odiousness of the translation. *Eccola*:

QUESTION AND ANSWER

"'Where blooms, O my father, a thornless rose?'
'That can I not tell thee, my child;
Not one on the bosom of earth e'er grows
But wounds whom its charms have beguiled.'

"'Would I'd a rose on my bosom to lie,
But I shrink from the piercing thorn:
I long, but I dare not its point defy;
I long, and I gaze forlorn.'

"'Not so, O my child – round the stem again
Thy resolute fingers entwine;
Forego not the joy for its sister, pain —
Let the rose, the sweet rose, be thine.'"

Would not a parcel reach you by railway?

[15] Visit to Miss Rawlins, her brother's *fiancée*.

This is the first allusion to the new means of locomotion, which would, no doubt, be attracting much interest in the Griff household, as valuation was a large part of Mr. Evans's business. Long years after, George Eliot wrote:

"Our midland plains have never lost their familiar expression and conservative spirit for me; yet at every other mile, since I first looked on them, some sign of world-wide change, some new direction of human labor, has wrought itself into what one may call the speech of the landscape… There comes a crowd of burly navvies with pickaxes and barrows, and while hardly a wrinkle is made in the fading mother's face, or a new curve of health in the blooming girl's, the hills are cut through, or the breaches between them spanned, we choose our level, and the white steam-pennon flies along it."

Letter to Miss Lewis, 27th Oct. 1840

My only reason for writing is to obtain a timely promise that you will spend your holidays chiefly with me, that we may once more meet among scenes which, now I am called on to leave them, I find to have *grown in* to my affections. Carlyle says that to the artisans of Glasgow the world is not one of blue skies and a green carpet, but a world of copperas-fumes, low cellars, hard wages, "striking," and whiskey; and if the recollection of this picture did not remind me that gratitude should be my reservoir of feeling, that into which all that comes from above or around should be received as a source of fertilization for my soul, I should give a lachrymose parody of the said description, and tell you all-seriously what I now tell you playfully, that mine is too often a world such as Wilkie can so well paint, a walled-in world furnished with all the details which he remembers so accurately, and the least interesting part whereof is often what I suppose must be designated the intelligent; but I deny that it has even a comparative claim to the appellation, for give me a three-legged stool, and it will call up associations – moral, poetical, mathematical – if I do but ask it, while some human beings have the odious power of contaminating the very images that are enshrined as our soul's arcana. Their baleful touch has the same effect as would a uniformity in the rays of light – it turns all objects to pale lead-color. O how luxuriously joyous to have the wind of heaven blow on one after being *stived* in a human atmosphere – to feel one's heart leap up after the pressure that Shakespeare so admirably describes: "When a man's wit is not seconded by the forward chick understanding, it strikes a man as dead as a large reckoning in a small room." But it is time I check this Byronic invective, and, in doing so, I am reminded of Corinne's, or rather Oswald's, reproof – "La vie est un *combat* pas un *hymne*." We should aim to be like a plant in the chamber of sickness – dispensing purifying air even in a region that turns all pale its verdure, and cramps its instinctive propensity to expand. Society is a wide nursery of plants, where the hundreds decompose to nourish the future ten, after giving collateral benefits to their contemporaries destined for a fairer garden. An awful thought! one so heavy that if our souls could once sustain its whole weight, or, rather, if its whole weight were once to drop on them, they would break and burst their tenements. How long will this continue? The cry of the martyrs heard by St. John finds an echo in every heart that, like Solomon's, groans under "the outrage and oppression with which earth is filled." Events are now so momentous, and the elements of society in so chemically critical a state, that a drop seems enough to change its whole form.

I am reading Harris's "Great Teacher," and am *innig bewegt*, as a German would say, by its stirring eloquence, which leaves you no time or strength for a cold estimate of the writer's strict merits. I wish I could read some extracts to you. Isaac Taylor's work is not yet complete. When it is so, I hope to reperuse it. Since I wrote to you I have had Aimé Martin's work, "L'Education des Mères," lent to me, and I have found it to be the real Greece whence "Woman's Mission" has only imported to us a few marbles – but! Martin is a *soi-disant* rational Christian, if I mistake him not. I send you an epitaph which he mentions on a tomb in Paris – that of a mother: "Dors en paix, O ma mère, ton fils t'obeira toujours." I am reading eclectically Mrs. Hemans's poems, and venture to

recommend to your perusal, if unknown to you, one of the longest ones – "The Forest Sanctuary." I can give it my pet adjective – exquisite.

I have adopted as my motto, "*Certum pete finem*" – seek a sure end.[16]

Letter to Miss Lewis, 5th Dec. 1840

Come when you would best like to do so: if my heart beat at all at the time, it will be with a more rapid motion than the general, from the joy of seeing you. I cannot promise you more than calmness when that flush is past, for I am aweary, aweary – longing for rest, which seems to fly from my very anticipations. But this wrought-up sensitiveness which makes me shrink from all contact is, I know, not for communication or sympathy, and is, from that very character, a kind of trial best suited for me. Whatever tends to render us ill-contented with ourselves, and more earnest aspirants after perfect truth and goodness, is gold, though it come to us all molten and burning, and we know not our treasure until we have had long smarting.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 21st Dec. 1840

It is impossible, to me at least, to be poetical in cold weather. I understand the Icelanders have much national poetry, but I guess it was written in the neighborhood of the boiling springs. I will promise to be as cheerful and as Christmas-like as my rickety body and chameleon-like spirits will allow. I am about to commence the making of mince-pies, with all the interesting sensations characterizing young enterprise or effort.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 27th Jan. 1841

Happily, the moody, melancholy temperament has some counterbalancing advantages to those of the sanguine: it *does* sometimes meet with results more favorable than it expected, and by its knack of imagining the pessimus, cheats the world of its power to disappoint. The very worm-like originator of this coil of sentiment is the fact that you write more cheerfully of yourself than I had been thinking of you, and that, *ergo*, I am pleased.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 11th Feb. 1841

On Monday and Tuesday my father and I were occupied with the sale of furniture at our new house: it is probable that we shall migrate thither in a month. I shall be incessantly hurried until after our departure, but at present I have to be grateful for a smooth passage through contemplated difficulties. Sewing is my staple article of commerce with the hard trader, Time. Now the wind has veered to the south I hope to do much more, and that with greater zest than I have done for many months – I mean, of all kinds.

I have been reading the three volumes of the "Life and Times of Louis the Fourteenth," and am as eagerly waiting for the fourth and last as any voracious novel-reader for Bulwer's last. I am afraid I am getting quite martial in my spirit, and, in the warmth of my sympathy for Turenne and Condé, losing my hatred of war. Such a conflict between *individual* and *moral* influence is no novelty. But certainly war, though the heaviest scourge with which the divine wrath against sin is manifested in Time, has been a necessary vent for impurities and a channel for tempestuous passions that must have otherwise made the whole earth, like the land of the devoted Canaanites, to vomit forth the

[16] By a curious coincidence, when she became Mrs. Cross, this actually was her motto.

inhabitants thereof. Awful as such a sentiment appears, it seems to me that in the present condition of man (and I do not mean this in the sense that Cowper does), such a purgation of the body politic is probably essential to its health. A foreign war would soon put an end to our national humors, that are growing to so alarming a head.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 8th Mch. 1841

What do you think of the progress of architecture as a subject for poetry?

I am just about to set out on a purchasing expedition to Coventry: you may therefore conceive that I am full of little plans and anxieties, and will understand why I should be brief. I hope by the close of next week that we and our effects shall be deposited at Foleshill, and until then and afterwards I shall be fully occupied, so that I am sure you will not expect to hear from me for the next six weeks. One little bit of unreasonableness you must grant me – the request for a letter from yourself within that time.

SUMMARY

AUGUST 18, 1838, TO MARCH 8, 1841

Letters to Miss Lewis – First visit to London – Religious asceticism – Pascal – Hannah More's letters – Young's "Infidel Reclaimed" – Michaelmas visitors – "Life of Wilberforce" – Nineteenth birthday – Oratorio at Coventry – Religious objections to music – Letters to Mrs. Samuel Evans – Religious reflections – Besetting sin ambition – Letters to Miss Lewis – Objections to fiction-reading – Religious contentions on the nature of the visible Church – First poem – Account of books read and studies pursued – Wordsworth – Twentieth birthday – German begun – Plan of Chart of Ecclesiastical History – Religious controversies – Oxford Tracts – "Lyra Apostolica" – "Christian Year" – Chart of Ecclesiastical History forestalled – Italian begun – Trip to Derbyshire and Staffordshire – "Don Quixote" – Spenser's "Faery Queen" – Mrs. Somerville's "Connection of the Physical Sciences" – Dislike of housekeeping work – Removal to Coventry decided – "Ancient Christianity and the Oxford Tracts," by Isaac Taylor, and Mrs. John Cash's impression of its effect – Determination not to feed on the broth of literature – Visit to Birmingham to hear the "Messiah" – Reading Schiller's "Maria Stuart," and Tasso – Translation of German poem – Depression of surroundings at Griff – Reading Harris's "Great Teacher," Aimé Martin's "L'Education des Mères," and Mrs. Hemans's Poems – Selling furniture at new house – Sewing – Reading "Life and Times of Louis XIV." – Removal to Foleshill road, Coventry.

CHAPTER II

New circumstances now created a change almost amounting to a revolution in Miss Evans's life. Mr. Isaac Evans, who had been associated for some time with his father in the land-agency business, married, and it was arranged that he should take over the establishment at Griff. This led to the removal in March, 1841, of Mr. Robert Evans and his daughter to a house on the Foleshill road, in the immediate neighborhood of Coventry. The house is still standing, although considerably altered – a semi-detached house with a good bit of garden round it, and from its upper windows a wide view over the surrounding country, the immediate foreground being unfortunately, however, disfigured by the presence of mills and chimneys. It is town life now instead of country life, and we feel the effects at once in the tone of the subsequent letters. The friendships now formed with Mr. and Mrs. Bray and Miss Sara Hennell particularly, and the being brought within reach of a small circle of cultivated people generally, render this change of residence an exceedingly important factor in George Eliot's development. It chanced that the new house was next door to Mrs. Pears', a sister of Mr. Bray, and as there had been some acquaintance in days gone by between him and the family at Griff, this close neighborhood led to an exchange of visits. The following extracts from letters to Miss Lewis show how the acquaintance ripened, and will give some indications of the first impressions of Coventry life:

Letter to Miss Lewis, Saturday evening, April, 1841

Last evening I mentioned you to my neighbor (Mrs. Pears), who is growing into the more precious character of a friend. I have seriously to be thankful for far better health than I have possessed, I think, for years, and I am imperatively called on to trade diligently with this same talent. I am likely to be more and more busy, if I succeed in a project that is just now occupying my thoughts and feelings. I seem to be tried in a contrary mode to that in which most of my dearest friends are being tutored – tried in the most dangerous way – by prosperity. Solomon says, "In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider." It seems to me that a transposition, *vice versâ*, of the admonitions would be equally salutary and just. Truly, as the prophet of Selwyn has told us, "Heaven is formidable in its favors." Not that a wise and grateful reception of blessings obliges us to stretch our faces to the length of one of Cromwell's Barebones; nor to shun that joyous, bird-like enjoyment of things (which, though perishable as to their actual existence, will be embalmed to eternity in the precious spices of gratitude) that is distinct from levity and voluptuousness. I am really crowded with engagements just now, and I have added one to the number of my correspondents.

Letter to Miss Lewis, April, 1841

The whole of last week was devoted to a bride's-maid's[17] duties, and each day of this has been partially occupied in paying or receiving visits. I have a calm in sea and sky that I doubt not will ere long be interrupted. This is not our rest, if we are among those for whom there remaineth one, and to pass through life without tribulation (or, as Jeremy Taylor beautifully says, with only such a measure

[17] Brother's marriage.

of it as may be compared to an artificial discord in music, which nurses the ear for the returning harmony) would leave us destitute of one of the marks that invariably accompany salvation, and of that fellowship in the sufferings of the Redeemer which can alone work in us a resemblance to one of the most prominent parts of his divinely perfect character, and enable us to obey the injunction, "In patience possess your souls." I have often observed how, in secular things, active occupation in procuring the necessaries of life renders the character indifferent to trials not affecting that one object. There is an analogous influence produced in the Christian by a vigorous pursuit of duty, a determination to work while it is day.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 28th April, 1841

One of the penalties women must pay for modern deference to their intellect is, I suppose, that they must give reasons for their conduct, after the fashion of men. The days are past for pleading a woman's reason. The truth is, that the hinderances to my writing have been like the little waves of the brooks that look so lovely just now – they have arisen one after another close to my side, but when I have looked back I have found the ripples too insignificant to be marked in the distance. My father's longer *séjours* at home than formerly, and multiplied acquaintances and engagements, are really valid excuses for me hitherto, but I do not intend to need them in future; I hope to be a "snapper-up of unconsidered" moments. I have just been interrupted by a visit from a lass of fourteen, who has despoiled me of half an hour, and I am going out to dinner, so that I cannot follow the famous advice, "Hasten slowly." I suppose that you framed your note on the principle that a sharp and sudden sound is the most rousing, but there are *addenda* about yourself that I want to know, though I dare not ask for them. I do not feel settled enough to write more at present. How is it that Erasmus could write volumes on volumes and multifarious letters besides, while I, whose labors hold about the same relation to his as an ant-hill to a pyramid or a drop of dew to the ocean, seem too busy to write a few? A most posing query!

Letter to Miss Lewis, Thursday morning, June, 1841

I have of late felt a depression that has disordered the vision of my mind's eye and made me *alive* to what is certainly a fact (though my imagination when I am in health is an adept at concealing it), that I am *alone* in the world. I do not mean to be so sinful as to say that I have not friends *most* undeservedly kind and tender, and disposed to form a far too favorable estimate of me, but I mean that I have no one who enters into my pleasures or my griefs, no one with whom I can pour out my soul, no one with the same yearnings, the same temptations, the same delights as myself. I merely mention this as the impression that obtrudes itself when my body tramples on its keeper – (a metaphor borrowed from a menagerie of wild beasts, if it should happen to puzzle you!) – mysterious "connection exquisite of distant worlds" that we present! A few drops of steel will perhaps make me laugh at the simple objects that, in gloom and mist, I conjure into stalking apparitions.

Letter to Miss Lewis, at Margate, 31st July, 1841

I am beginning to be interlaced with multiplying ties of duty and affection, that, while they render my new home happier, forbid me to leave it on a pleasure-seeking expedition. I think, indeed, that both my heart and limbs would leap to behold the great and wide sea – that old ocean on which man can leave no trace.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 3d Sept. 1841

I have been revelling in Nichol's "Architecture of the Heavens and Phenomena of the Solar System," and have been in imagination winging my flight from system to system, from universe to universe, trying to conceive myself in such a position and with such a visual faculty as would enable me to enjoy what Young enumerates among the novelties of the "Stranger" man when he bursts the shell to

> "Behold an infinite of floating worlds
> Divide the crystal waves of ether pure
> In endless voyage without port."

"Hospitable infinity!" Nichol beautifully says. How should I love to have a thorough-going student with me, that we might read together! We might each alternately employ the voice and the fingers, and thus achieve just twice as much as a poor solitary. I am more impressed than ever with a truth beautifully expressed in "Woman's Mission" – "Learning is only so far valuable as it serves to enlarge and enlighten the bounds of conscience." This I believe it eminently does when pursued humbly and piously, and from a belief that it is a solemn duty to cultivate every faculty of our nature so far as primary obligations allow. There is an exhortation of St. Paul's that I should love to take as my motto: "Finally, my brethren, whatsoever things are honest" (you know the continuation) – "if there be *any* virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things." I have had to lament lately that mine is not a *hard-working* mind – it requires frequent rest. I am violently in love with the Italian fashion of repeating an adjective or adverb, and even noun, to give force to expression: there is so much more fire in it than in our circumlocutory phrases, our dull "verys" and "exceedinglys" and "extremelys." I strongly recommend Hallam to you. I shall read it again if I live. When a sort of haziness comes over the mind, making one feel weary of articulated or written signs of ideas, does not the notion of a less laborious mode of communication, of a perception approaching more nearly to intuition, seem attractive? Nathless, I love words: they are the quoits, the bows, the staves that furnish the gymnasium of the mind. Without them, in our present condition, our intellectual strength would have no implements. I have been rather humbled in thinking that if I were thrown on an uncivilized island, and had to form a literature for its inhabitants from my own mental stock, how very fragmentary would be the information with which I could furnish them! It would be a good mode of testing one's knowledge to set one's self the task of writing sketches of all subjects that have entered into one's studies entirely from the chronicles of memory. The prevalence of misery and want in this boasted nation of prosperity and glory is appalling, and really seems to call us away from mental luxury. O to be doing some little towards the regeneration of this groaning, travailing creation! I am supine and stupid – overfed with favors – while the haggard looks and piercing glance of want and conscious hopelessness are to be seen in the streets.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 1st Oct. 1841

Is not this a true autumn day? Just the still melancholy that I love – that makes life and nature harmonize. The birds are consulting about their migrations, the trees are putting on the hectic or the pallid hues of decay, and begin to strew the ground, that one's very footsteps may not disturb the repose of earth and air, while they give us a scent that is a perfect anodyne to the restless spirit. Delicious autumn! My very soul is wedded to it, and if I were a bird I would fly about the earth seeking the successive autumns.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 2d Nov. 1841

I am going, I hope, to-day to effect a breach in the thick wall of indifference behind which the denizens of Coventry seem inclined to intrench themselves; but I fear I shall fail.

This probably refers to the first visit paid by Miss Evans to Mr. and Mrs. Bray at their house. They had met in the previous May at Mrs. Pears'; but although they were at once mutually attracted, the acquaintance does not seem to have been immediately prosecuted further. Now, however, any time lost in the beginning was quickly made up, and it is astonishing how rapidly the most intimate relations were formed. Mr. Bray was a ribbon-manufacturer, well-to-do at that time, and had a charming house, Rosehill, with a beautiful lawn and garden, in the outskirts of Coventry. Only a part of his time was occupied with his business, and he had much leisure and opportunity, of which he availed himself, for liberal self-education and culture. His was a robust, self-reliant mind. Already, in 1839, he had published a work on the "Education of the Feelings," viewed from the phrenological standpoint; and in this year, 1841, appeared his most important book, "The Philosophy of Necessity." He always remained a sincere and complete believer in the science of phrenology. He had married Miss Caroline Hennell, sister of the Mr. Charles Hennell who published, in 1838, "An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity" – a remarkable book, which was translated into German, Strauss contributing a preface to the translation. It will be seen from subsequent letters how greatly Miss Evans was interested in this book – how much she admired it; and the reading of it, combined with the association with her new friends – with the philosophical speculations of Mr. Bray, and with Mrs. Bray's sympathy in her brother's critical and sceptical standpoint – no doubt hastened the change in her attitude towards the dogmas of the old religion. In the Analytical Catalogue of Mr. Chapman's publications, issued in 1852, there is an analysis of Hennell's "Inquiry," done by Miss Evans, which may be inserted here, as giving her idea of the book eleven years later.

"The first edition of this work appeared in 1838, when the present strong current of public opinion in favor of free religious discussion had not yet set in; and it probably helped to generate the tone of thought exhibited in more recent works of the same class, to which circumstances have given a wider fame – works which, like the above, in considering questions of Biblical criticism and the philosophy of Christianity, combine high refinement, purity of aim, and candor, with the utmost freedom of investigation, and with a popularity of style which wins them the attention not only of the learned but of the practical.

"The author opens his inquiry with an historical sketch, extending from the Babylonish Captivity to the end of the first century, the design of which is to show how, abstracting the idea of the miraculous, or any speciality of divine influence, the gradual development of certain elements in Jewish character, and the train of events in Jewish history, contributed to form a suitable *nidus* for the production of a character and career like that of Jesus, and how the devoted enthusiasm generated by such a career in his immediate disciples, rendering it easier for them to modify their ideas of the Messiah than to renounce their belief in their Master's Messiahship – the accession of Gentile converts and the destruction of the last remnant of theocracy, necessitating a wider interpretation of Messianic hopes – the junction of Christian ideas with Alexandrian Platonism, and the decrepitude of polytheism, combined to associate the name of Jesus, his Messiahship, his death and his resurrection, with a great moral and religious revolution. This historical sketch, which is under the disadvantage of presenting, synthetically, ideas based on a subsequent analysis, is intended to meet the difficulty so

often urged, and which might be held to nullify the value of a critical investigation, that Christianity is a fact for which, if the supposition of a miraculous origin be rejected, no adequate and probable causes can be assigned, and that thus, however defective may be the evidence of the New-Testament history, its acceptance is the least difficult alternative.

"In the writer's view, the characteristics of the Essene sect, as traced by Josephus and Philo, justify the supposition that Jesus was educated in their school of philosophy; but with the elevated belief and purity of life which belonged to this sect he united the ardent patriotic ideas which had previously animated Judas of Galilee, who resisted the Roman authority on the ground that God was the only ruler and lord of the Jews. The profound consciousness of genius, a religious fervor which made the idea of the divine ever present to him, patriotic zeal, and a spirit of moral reform, together with a participation in the enthusiastic belief of his countrymen that the long-predicted exaltation of Israel was at hand, combined to produce in the mind of Jesus the gradual conviction that he was himself the Messiah, with whose reign that exaltation would commence. He began, as John the Baptist had already done, to announce 'the kingdom of heaven,' a phrase which, to the Jewish mind, represented the national glorification of Israel; and by his preaching, and the influence of his powerful personality, he won multitudes in Galilee to a participation in his belief that he was the expected Son of David. His public entrance into Jerusalem in the guise which tradition associated with the Messiah, when he sanctioned the homage of the multitude, was probably the climax of his confidence that a great demonstration of divine power, in concurrence with popular enthusiasm, would seat him triumphantly on the throne of David. No such result appearing, his views of the divine dispensation with respect to himself began to change, and he felt the presentiment that he must enter on his Messianic reign through the gates of suffering and death. Viewing Jesus as a pretender not only to spiritual but to political power, as one who really expected the subversion of the existing government to make way for his own kingship (though he probably relied on divine rather than on human means), he must necessarily have appeared in a dangerous light to those of his countrymen who were in authority, and who were anxious at any price to preserve public tranquillity in the presence of the Roman power, ready to visit with heavy vengeance any breach of order, and to deprive them of the last remnants of their independence; and hence the motives for his arrest and execution. To account for the belief of the disciples in the resurrection of their Master – a belief which appears to have been sincere – the author thinks it necessary to suppose a certain nucleus of fact, and this he finds in the disappearance of the body of Jesus, a point attested by all the four evangelists. The secret of this disappearance probably lay with Joseph of Arimathæa and Nicodemus, who were anxious to avoid implicating themselves with that fermentation of regretful enthusiasm to which a resort of the disciples to the grave might give rise. Animated by a belief in the resurrection, which, being more harmless in the eyes of the authorities than that in a living Messiah, they were permitted to preach with little molestation; the zeal of the disciples won many converts; a new impulse was given to their cause by the accession of Paul, who became the chief missionary of the new faith, as construed by himself, to the Gentiles; and the concurrence of the causes indicated above, modifying the early creed of the apostles, and blending it with trains of thought already prevalent, bore along Christianity in its conquest over the minds of men until it became the dominant religion of the Roman world.

"Having sought to show, in this preliminary sketch, that a belief in miracles is not entailed on us by the fact of the early growth of Christianity, the author enters on the inquiry whether the claims of the evangelical writers on our credence are such as to sustain the miraculous part of their narratives. The answer is in the negative. He discusses, first, the date and credibility of each Gospel, and concludes that while Matthew has many marvellous stories, incongruous in themselves, and not only unsupported but contradicted by the other evangelists, he nevertheless presents the most comprehensible account of the career of Jesus; that in Mark, evidently more remote in time and circumstances, both from his events and from Jewish modes of thought, the idea conveyed of Jesus is much vaguer and less explicable; that in Luke there is a still further modification of his character,

which has acquired a tinge of asceticism; while in John the style of his teaching is wholly changed, and instead of the graphic parable and the pithy apothegm, he utters long, mystical discourses in the style of the first epistle bearing the name of the same evangelist. Mr. Hennell, however, adheres to the conclusion that the substance of this Gospel came from the apostle John at an advanced age, when both the events of his early manhood and the scenes of his native land lay in the far distance. The writer then enters on a special examination of the Resurrection and Ascension, and the other miracles in the Gospels and the Acts, and inquires how far they are sustained by the apostolic Epistles. He examines the prophecies of the Old Testament supposed to have been fulfilled in Jesus, and also the predictions of Jesus himself concerning his death and resurrection; and, finally, he considers the character, views, and doctrine of Christ. According to him, an impartial study of the conduct and sayings of Jesus, as exhibited in the Gospels, produces the conviction that he was an enthusiast and a revolutionist, no less than a reformer and a moral and religious teacher. Passages are adduced from the Old Testament, and from the apocryphal and rabbinical writings, to show that there is scarcely anything absolutely original in the teaching of Jesus; but, in the opinion of the author, he manifests a freedom and individuality in the use of his materials, and a general superiority of tone and selection, which, united with the devotion of his life to what he held the highest purpose, mark him to be of an order of minds occurring but at rare intervals in the history of our race.

"Shortly after the appearance of this work it was translated into German through the instrumentality of Dr. Strauss, who, in the preface he prefixed to it, says: 'Not sufficiently acquainted with German to read continuously a learned work in that language, the labors of our theologians were only accessible to him' (the author of the 'Inquiry') 'so far as they were written in Latin, or translated into English, or treated of in English writings or periodicals: especially he is unacquainted with what the Germans have effected in the criticism of the gospels since Schleiermacher's work on Luke, and even the earlier commentators he knows but imperfectly. Only so much the more remarkable is it, however, that both in the principles and in the main results of his investigation, he is on the very track which has been entered on among us in recent years… That at certain periods, certain modes of thought lie as it were in the atmosphere, … and come to light in the most remote places without perceptible media of communication, is shown, not only by the contents, but by the spirit, of Mr. Hennell's work. No further traces of the ridicule and scorn which characterize his countrymen of the deistical school; the subject is treated in the earnest and dignified tone of the truth-seeker, not with the rancor of a passionate polemic; we nowhere find him deriving religion from priestcraft, but from the tendencies and wants of human nature… These elevated views, which the learned German of our day appropriates as the fruit of the religious and scientific advancement of his nation, this Englishman, to whom most of the means at our command were wanting, has been able to educe entirely from himself… An Englishman, a merchant, a man of the world, he possesses, both by nature and by training, the practical insight, the sure tact, which lays hold on realities. The solution of problems over which the German flutters with many circuits of learned formulæ, our English author often succeeds in seizing at one spring… To the learned he often presents things under a surprisingly new aspect; to the unlearned, invariably under that which is the most comprehensible and attractive.'"

The reading of Mr. Hennell's book no doubt marks an epoch in George Eliot's development; but probably there had been a good deal of half-unconscious preparation beforehand (as indicated by Mrs. Cash's remarks on Isaac Taylor's work, in the last chapter), which was greatly stimulated now by the contact with new minds. The following extract from a letter to Miss Lewis, dated 13th November, 1841, accurately fixes the date of the first acknowledgment by herself that her opinions were undergoing so momentous a change.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 13th Nov. 1841

My whole soul has been engrossed in the most interesting of all inquiries for the last few days, and to what result my thoughts may lead, I know not – possibly to one that will startle you; but my only desire is to know the truth, my only fear to cling to error. I venture to say our love will not decompose under the influence of separation, unless you excommunicate me for differing from you in opinion. Think – is there any *conceivable* alteration in me that would prevent your coming to me at Christmas? I long to have a friend such as you are, I think I may say, alone to me, to unburden every thought and difficulty – for I am still a solitary, though near a city. But we have the universe to talk with, infinity in which to stretch the gaze of hope, and an all-bountiful, all-wise Creator in whom to confide – he who has given us the untold delights of which our reason, our emotion, our sensations, are the ever-springing sources.

Letter to Miss Lewis, 8th Dec. 1841

What a pity that while mathematics are indubitable, immutable, and no one doubts the properties of a triangle or a circle, doctrines infinitely important to man are buried in a charnel-heap of bones over which nothing is heard but the barks and growls of contention! "Unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united."

It was impossible for such a nature as Miss Evans's, in the enthusiasm of this first great change, to rest satisfied in compliance with the old forms, and she was so uneasy in an equivocal position that she determined to give up going to church. This was an unforgivable offence in the eyes of her father, who was a Churchman of the old school, and nearly led to a family rupture. He went so far as to put into an agent's hands the lease of the house in the Foleshill road, with the intention of going to live with his married daughter. Upon this, Miss Evans made up her mind to go into lodgings at Leamington, and to try to support herself by teaching. The first letter to Mrs. Bray refers to this incident:

Letter to Mrs. Bray, Jan. 1842

My guardian angel, Mrs. Pears, has just sent for me to hear your kind note, which has done my aching limbs a little good. I shall be most thankful for the opportunity of going to Leamington, and Mrs. Pears is willing to go too. There is but *one* woe, that of leaving my dear father – all else, doleful lodgings, scanty meals, and *gazing-stockism*, are quite indifferent to me. Therefore do not fear for me when I am once settled in my home – wherever it may be – and freed from wretched suspense.

Letter to Mrs. Pears, Friday evening, Feb. 1842

Far from being weary of your dear little Henry, his matin visits are as cheering to me as those of any little bird

"that comes in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bids good-morrow."

We have not, perhaps, been so systematic as a regular tutor and pupil would have been, but we crave indulgence for some laxity. I was really touched that you should think of *me* while among friends more closely linked with you in every way. I was beginning to get used to the conviction that, ivy-like as I am by nature, I must (as we see ivy do sometimes) shoot out into an isolated tree. Never again imagine that you need ask forgiveness for speaking or writing to me on subjects to me more interesting than aught else; on the contrary, believe that I really enjoy conversation of this nature: blank silence and cold reserve are the only bitters I care for in my intercourse with you. I can rejoice in all the joys of humanity; in all that serves to elevate and purify feeling and action; nor will I quarrel with the million who, I am persuaded, are with me in intention, though our dialects differ. Of course, I must desire the ultimate downfall of error, for no error is innocuous; but this assuredly will occur without my proselytizing aid, and the best proof of a real love of the truth – that freshest stamp of divinity – is a calm confidence in its intrinsic power to secure its own high destiny, that of universal empire. Do not fear that I will become a stagnant pool by a self-sufficient determination only to listen to my own echo; to read the yea, yea, on my own side, and be most comfortably deaf to the nay, nay. Would that all rejected *practically* this maxim! To *fear* the examination of any proposition appears to me an intellectual and a moral palsy that will ever hinder the firm grasping of any substance whatever. For my part, I wish to be among the ranks of that glorious crusade that is seeking to set Truth's Holy Sepulchre free from a usurped domination. We shall then see her resurrection! Meanwhile, although I cannot rank among my principles of action a fear of vengeance eternal, gratitude for predestined salvation, or a revelation of future glories as a reward, I fully participate in the belief that the only heaven here, or hereafter, is to be found in conformity with the will of the Supreme; a continual aiming at the attainment of the perfect ideal, the true *logos* that dwells in the bosom of the one Father. I hardly know whether I am ranting after the fashion of one of the Primitive Methodist prophetesses, with a cart for her rostrum, I am writing so fast. Good-bye, and blessings on you, as they will infallibly be on the children of peace and virtue.

Again about the same date in 1842 she writes to Mrs. Bray:

Letter to Mrs. Bray, Feb. 1842

A heart full of love and gratitude to you for all your kindness in thought and act to me, undeserving. I dare say my manner belies my feelings: but friendship must live by faith and not by sight, and I shall be a great gainer by leaving you to interpret my mystic character without any other key than your own goodness.

The last letter of the series to Miss Lewis also refers to the difficulties of the situation:

Letter to Miss Lewis, 19th Feb. 1842

I dare say you have added, subtracted, and divided suppositions until you think you have a sure product – viz., a good quantum, or, rather, a bad one, of indifference and forgetfulness, as the representation of my conduct towards you. If so, revise your arithmetic, for be it known to you that, having had my propensities, sentiments, and intellect gauged a second time, I am pronounced to possess a large organ of "adhesiveness," a still larger one of "firmness," and as large of "conscientiousness" – hence, if I should turn out a very weathercock and a most pitiful truckler, you will have data for the exercise of faith maugre common-sense, common justice, and the testimony of your eyes and ears.

How do you go on for society, for communion of spirit, the drop of nectar in the cup of mortals? But why do I say the drop? The mind that feels its value will get large draughts from some source, if denied it in the most commonly chosen way.

"'Mid the rich store of nature's gifts to man
Each has his loves, close wedded to his soul
By fine association's golden links.
As the Great Spirit bids creation teem
With conscious being and intelligence,
So man, his miniature resemblance, gives
To matter's every form a speaking soul,
An emanation from his spirit's fount,
The impress true of its peculiar seal.
Here finds he thy best image, sympathy."

Beautiful egoism, to quote one's own. But where is not this same ego? The martyr at the stake seeks its gratification as much as the court sycophant, the difference lying in the comparative dignity and beauty of the two egos. People absurdly talk of self-denial. Why, there is none in virtue, to a being of moral excellence: the greatest torture to such a soul would be to run counter to the dictates of conscience; to wallow in the slough of meanness, deception, revenge, or sensuality. This was Paul's idea in the first chapter of 2d Epistle to Timothy (I think that is the passage).

I have had a weary week. At the beginning more than the usual amount of *cooled* glances, and exhortations to the suppression of self-conceit. The former are so many hailstones that make me wrap more closely around me the mantle of determinate purpose: the latter are needful, and have a tendency to exercise forbearance, that well repays the temporary smart. The heart knoweth its own, whether bitterness or joy: let us, dearest, beware how we, *even with good intentions*, press a finger's weight on the already bruised.

And about the same date she writes to Mrs. Bray:

Letter to Mrs. Bray, end of Feb. 1842

I must relieve my conscience before I go to bed by entering a protest against every word or accent of discontent that I uttered this morning. If I have ever complained of any person or circumstance, I do penance by eating my own words. When my real self has regained its place, I can shake off my troubles "like dewdrops from the lion's mane," and then I feel the baseness of imputing my sorrows to others rather than to my own pitiful weakness. But I do not write for your forgiveness; that I know I have. I only want to satisfy my indignation against myself.

The conclusion of the matter was that Mr. Evans withdrew his house from the agent's hands, and his daughter went to stay at Griff, with Mr. and Mrs. Isaac Evans, whence she writes the following letter to Mrs. Pears:

Letter to Mrs. Pears, Thursday, Mch. 1842

I have just been climbing up some favorite old hills, or rather hillocks, and if I could see you I should find myself in high preparation for one of my thorough chats. Oh, if I could transport myself to your dining-room, where I guess you and Mr. Pears are sitting in anticipation of tea – carrying on no "holy war," but at peace with the world and its opinions, or, if ever you do battle, in the happy

ranks of the majority – I could kiss you into sublime liberality! How are you and your dear husband and children? It seems a week of years instead of days since you said to me your kind good-bye, and as I have tried your magnanimity quite long enough to be assured that you will not let me hear of you without a beseeching letter from me, I snatch half an hour from a too short day for the generous purpose of doubly qualifying myself, first, by pouring out the contents of my gossip-wallet, and then quietly awaiting the news I want to hear of you. I have here, in every way, abundant and unlooked-for blessings – delicacy and consideration from all whom I have seen; and I really begin to recant my old belief about the indifference of all the world towards me, for my acquaintances of this neighborhood seem to seek an opportunity of smiling on me in spite of my heresy. All these things, however, are but the fringe and ribbons of happiness. They are *ad*herent, not *in*herent; and, without any affectation, I feel myself to be acquiring what I must hold to be a precious possession, an independence of what is baptized by the world external good. There are externals (at least, they are such in common thought) that I could ill part with – the deep, blue, glorious heavens, bending as they do over all, presenting the same arch, emblem of a truer omnipresence, wherever we may be chased, and all the sweet, peace-breathing sights and sounds of this lovely earth. These, and the thoughts of the good and great, are an inexhaustible world of delight; and the felt desire to be one in will and design with the great mind that has laid open to us these treasures is the sun that warms and fructifies it. I am more and more impressed with the duty of *finding* happiness. On a retrospection of the past month, I regret nothing so much as my own impetuosity both of feeling and judging. I am not inclined to be sanguine as to my dear father's future determination, and I sometimes have an intensely vivid consciousness, which I only allow to be a fleeting one, of all that is painful and that has been so. I can only learn that my father has commenced his alterations at Packington, but he only appears to be temporarily acquiescing in my brother's advice "not to be in a hurry." I do not intend to remain here longer than three weeks, or, at the very farthest, a month; and, if I am not then recalled, I shall write for definite directions. I must have a *home*, not a visiting-place. I wish you would learn something from my father, and send me word how he seems disposed. I hope you get long walks on these beautiful days. You would love to hear the choristers we have here; they are hymning away incessantly. Can you not drive over and see me? Do come by hook or by crook. Why, Mr. Pears could almost walk hither. I am becoming very hurried, for most welcome tea is in the vicinity, and I must be busy after I have imbibed its inspiration. You will write to me to-morrow, will you not? and pray insist on Mr. Pears writing an appendix. I had a note from Mrs. Bray this morning, and I liked it better than my breakfast. So do give me a little treat on Saturday. Blessings on you and yours, as all forlorn beggars have said from time immemorial to their benefactors; but real feeling, you know, will sometimes slip into a hackneyed guise.

Miss Evans remained for about three weeks at Griff, at the end of which time, through the intervention of her brother, the Brays, and Miss Rebecca Franklin, the father was very glad to receive her again, and she resumed going to church as before.

It will be seen from a subsequent noteworthy letter to Miss Sara Hennell, dated 19th October, 1843, that Miss Evans's views of the best course to be pursued under similar circumstances had already undergone considerable modifications, and in the last year of her life she told me that, although she did not think she had been to blame, few things had occasioned her more regret than this temporary collision with her father, which might, she thought, have been avoided with a little management.

In July of this year (1842) Miss Sara Hennell – the gifted sister of Mrs. Bray – came to Rosehill, and completed the trio destined to exert the most important influence over the life of George Eliot. The individual characters of these three friends, and the relations each bore to their correspondent, will unfold themselves in the letters. It is only necessary here to say that the two ladies – Cara and Sara, as they are always addressed – now became like sisters to Miss Evans, and Mr. Bray her

most intimate male friend, and the letters to them form an almost unbroken chain during all the remainder of George Eliot's life.

To us Miss Sara Hennell is the most important correspondent, for it is to her that Miss Evans mainly turns now for intellectual sympathy; to Mrs. Bray when she is in pain or trouble, and wants affectionate companionship; with Mr. Bray she quarrels, and the humorous side of her nature is brought out. Every good story goes to him, with a certainty that it will be appreciated. With all three it is a beautiful and consistent friendship, running like a thread through the woof of the coming thirty-eight years. For the next twelve years, as will be seen, it is quite the most important thread; and although later it naturally became very much less important, it was never dropped except for a moment, in 1854, owing to a brief misunderstanding of letters, which will appear in its due place.

The following letters to Miss Sara Hennell show what was passing from 30th August, 1842, to April, 1843:

Letter to Miss Sara Hennell, 30th Aug. 1842

How I have delighted in the thought that there are beings who are better than their promises, beyond the regions of waking and sleeping dreams.

Letter to Miss Sara Hennell, Friday, Sept. 1842

I have not yet accounted for my tardiness in writing, which, I assure you, is no representation of my usual habit, and has been occasioned only by a week's indisposition, the foster-parent to the ill-favored offspring of my character and circumstances, gloom and stolidity, and I could not write to you with such companions to my thought. I am anxious that you should not imagine me unhappy even in my most melancholy moods, for I hold all indulgence of sadness that has the slightest tincture of discontent to be a grave delinquency. I think there can be few who more truly feel than I that this is a world of bliss and beauty – that is, that bliss and beauty are the end, the tendency of creation; and evils are the shadows that are the only conditions of light in the picture, and I live in much, much enjoyment.

I am beginning to enjoy the "Eneid," though, I suppose, much in the same way as the uninitiated enjoy wine, compared with the connoisseurs.

Letter to Miss Sara Hennell, 3d Nov. 1842

I have been in high displeasure with myself, have thought my soul only fit for limbo, to keep company with other abortions, and my life the shallowest, muddiest, most unblessing stream. Having got my head above this slough of despond, I feel quite inclined to tell you how much pleasure your letter gave me. You observe in your note that some persons say the unsatisfied longing we feel in ourselves for something better than the greatest perfection to be found on earth is a proof that the true object of our desires lies beyond it. Assuredly, this earth is not the home of the spirit – it will rest only in the bosom of the Infinite. But the non-satisfaction of the affections and intellect being inseparable from the unspeakable advantage of such a mind as that of man in connection with his corporal condition and *terrene* destiny, forms not at present an argument with me for the realization of particular desires.

The next letter refers to Miss Mary Hennell's[18] last illness:

Letter to Miss Sara Hennell, 7th Jan. 1843

I cannot help wishing to tell you, now that you are in trouble and anxiety, how dear you are to me, and how the recollection of you is ever freshening in my mind. You have need of all your cheeriness and energy; and if they do not fail, I think it almost enviable, as far as one's self is concerned (not, of course, when the sufferer is remembered), to have the care of a sick-room, with its twilight and tiptoe stillness and helpful activity. I have always had a peculiarly peaceful feeling in such a scene.

Again, after the death of Miss Mary Hennell, there is a letter to her sister Sara:

Letter to Miss Sara Hennell, April, 1843

We always find that our stock of appreciated good can never be really diminished. When the chief desire of the eyes is taken, we can afford a gaze to hitherto unnoticed possessions; and even when the topmost boughs are lopped, a thousand shoots spring from below with the energy of new life. So it will be with you; but you cannot yet look beyond the present, nor is it desirable that you should. It would not be well for us to overleap one grade of joy or suffering: our life would lose its completeness and beauty.

Rosehill not only afforded a pleasant variety in the Coventry life, as most visitors to the town, of any note, found their way there, but the Brays were also frequently in the habit of making little holiday excursions, in many of which Miss Evans now joined. Thus we find them in May, 1843, all going to Stratford and Malvern, together with Mr. Charles Hennell and Miss Sara Hennell, for a week; and again, in July of that year the same party, accompanied by Miss Brabant, daughter of Dr. Brabant of Devizes, went on a fortnight's tour, visiting Tenby, among other places. This trip is chiefly memorable from the fact that it was indirectly responsible for Miss Evans undertaking the translation of Strauss's "Leben Jesu." For Miss Brabant (to whom the translation had been confided by Mr. Joseph Parkes of Birmingham and a group of friends) became engaged to be married to Mr. Charles Hennell; and shortly after her marriage she handed the work over to Miss Evans.

In the next two letters to Miss Sara Hennell there are allusions to the approaching marriage, which took place in London on 1st November, 1843, the Brays and Miss Evans being present.

Letter to Miss Sara Hennell, 16th Sept. 1843

Many thanks for procuring me the hymns and anthems. I was right glad to play "Ancient of Ages" again, and I shall like still better to sing it with you when we meet. That that is to be so soon, and under circumstances so joyful, are among the *mirabilia* of this changing world. To see and re-see such a cluster of not indifferent persons as the programme for the wedding gives, will be almost too large a *bonne-bouche*.

I saw Robert Owen yesterday, Mr. and Mrs. Bray having kindly asked me to dine with him, and I think if his system prosper it will be in spite of its founder, and not because of his advocacy.

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[18] Miss Mary Hennell was the author of "An Outline of the Various Social Systems founded on the Principle of Co-operation," published in 1841.

The next letter to Mrs. Bray gives a pleasant glimpse of their studies together, and of the little musical society that was in the habit of meeting at Rosehill to play concerted pieces.

Letter to Mrs. Bray, no date, 1843

I only wish you would change houses with the mayor, that I might get to you when I would. I send you the first part of "Wallenstein," with the proposition that we should study that in conjunction with the "Thirty Years' War," as I happen to have a loose copy. We had better omit the "Lager," and begin "Die Piccolomini." You shall have "Joan of Arc," my grand favorite, as a *bonne-bouche* when you have got through "Wallenstein," which will amply repay you for any trouble in translating it, and is not more difficult than your reading ought to be now. I have skimmed Manzoni, who has suffered sadly in being poured out of silver into pewter. The chapter on Philosophy and Theology is worth reading. Miss Brabant sent me my "Hyperion" with a note, the other day. She had put no direction besides Coventry, and the parcel had consequently been sent to some other Miss Evans, and my choice little sentimental treasures, alas! exposed to vulgar gaze. Thank you for the manual, which I have had so long. I trust I did not bestow those scratches on the cover. I have been trying to find a French book that you were not likely to have read, but I do not think I have one, unless it be "Gil Blas," which you are perhaps too virtuous to have read, though how any one can opine it to have a vicious tendency I am at a loss to conjecture. They might as well say that to condemn a person to eat a whole plum-pudding would deprive him of all future relish for plain food. I have had a visitor ever since Saturday, and she will stay till Saturday again. I cannot desire that you should *un*ask Violin and Flute, unless a postponement would be in every way as agreeable to you and them. If you have them, you will give them much more pleasure as Piano than I, so do not think of me in the matter for a moment. Good-bye; and remember to treat your cold as if it were an orphan's cold, or a widow's cold, or any one's cold but your own.

The following is the letter before referred to as containing an important and noteworthy declaration of opinion on the very interesting question of conformity:

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.