THE THEOLOGY

OF

MODERN FICTION

BEING THE TWENTY-SIXTH FERNLEY LECTURE

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BY

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THE THEOLOGY OF MODERN FICTION

INTRODUCTORY

In the early centuries religious teaching was formulated in Church councils, and dispensed amongst the half-taught races of Christendom, without scowl of protest from the docile patient. It is a far cry thence to the present hour, when a large section of the public picks up its religious ideas outside the Church. The daily press coins the commercial and political creeds of our fellow countrymen, and the successful novel-writer coins the religious creeds of equally large numbers. It may be a question how long the currency will wear; but for the time being a dozen story-writers, whom it would be easy to name, have influenced multitudes of people to an extent that may well be the despair of an equal number of trained divines or famous preachers.

Can any theology come out of fiction, and of fiction which is in no sense ecclesiastical in its bias? Is it not enough to make our dead novelists turn in their graves, to propose enrolling them into an assembly of divines who shall define for us articles of faith, and settle in any way

the great questions of God, character, and human destiny? We are sure, at least, of the scorn of some living writers who idealise the gin, blasphemy, and heathenism of the slums, and dress up for our admiration the puppets of an obscene and rollicking Bohemia. To such scorn we may reply that no sane student of the science of religion would think of going to the marionette show to discover the materials of an intuitional theology, any more than a student of medicine would think of going to the pits of eviscerated mummies in the sands of Egypt to qualify for his profession by grounding himself in physiology. The kaleidoscopic trick of the impressionist does not concern us. The mere society novel, which chronicles hunts, balls, dinners, drawing-rooms, is likewise irrelevant, for it deals with the fitful surface of things. One might as well try to hammer filigree out of quicksilver as find suggestions even of an elementary theology in such cursive, capricious, intangible material. And as to the tainted novel, the book which is the mere peep-show into gutters and iridescent cesspools, that will go the way of other peep-shows in a few brief years. The books, however, which with due care and comprehensiveness portray human character and its issues will live, and in proportion to their truth to fact must surely illustrate some of those great principles of religious faith which are bound up with the constitution of man and the history to which he contributes.

The novel is sometimes a mere fashion plate devoted to the description of costumes soon out of date, a stage for the display of those skin-deep manners and customs peculiar to separate castes of society, a feat in sea or

landscape painting to which human interests are subordinate, a readable glossary which stores up for after generations the quaintness and piquancy of expiring dialects. Now and again it is written to boom the latest cult of a cluster of drawing-room butterflies playing at Eastern mysticism, or to further a new criticism destined to be speedily ranked with other exaggerated judgments and overweening expectations. The historical romance comes round in its appointed period to revive the spirit of a bygone century, and cast the glamour of fascination over a half-forgotten ritual. In much-thumbed volumes of the circulating library we may sometimes feel the pulse of a faint, easy-going, middle-class theology; and in volumes which persist after the ups and downs of a decade we may see marks of pathetic reverence for a lost experience, or trace the tracks of a stormy battling to keep, amidst many distractions, priceless fragments of the threatened faith. A book may utter what is partisan rather than catholic in the temper of its writer, and betray a direct ecclesiastical aim, to which plot and dialogue are subsidiary. In such case the production becomes disguised testimony, and its worth will be proportioned to the candour, intelligence, impartiality we can verify in its author. As a rule, stories which are ostensibly religious in their aim, whilst providing harmless and helpful entertainment for the mind in certain stages of its development, do not sensibly direct or determine the deeper channels of religious thought. A writer may chance to be without fixed religious belief, and the theology which pervades his chapters will be identical with an inevitable theology in his own subconsciousness, which he cannot cast out or

ignore. In some respects, especially when days of questioning and controversy are upon us, literature of this type may be of a higher religious value than that which is conceived with the direct object of pointing a pious moral or advocating some formulated scheme of belief and Church government. This theology in solution, which is diffused through all the higher literature of fiction, has evidential force about it of no mean order, inasmuch as it shows that man is religious in spite of himself, and that even in the writer who has repudiated dogma there is an irreducible minimum of theology, out of which some of the cardinal articles of the Christian faith may be built up in new forms. And the books which mirror human life veraciously, the private negations of the writers notwithstanding, must always be more or less religious and furnish some of the rudiments of the faith; because they bring before us the normal principles which work in human society from generation to generation, whatever the mystery veiling the origin of those principles. Such a witness to the innate and indestructible faiths of the human heart is without price, since the witness is more or less hostile and grudging, and concedes no more than can be helped to the inchoate Christianity which cleaves everywhere to the conscience and history of man.

Not a little of our recent fiction teems with painful and repulsive illustrations of the doctrine of human depravity. The basest instincts of the blood are assumed to contain the clew to all the complexities of character. Writers who crowd their canvases with the tragedies of greed, drink, sex, revenge can more than make good the flagging emphasis the Christian teacher puts upon the

grim facts involved in the Fall. It would be possible to name favourite authors who have scarcely delineated a noble and heroic character in the many volumes they have given to the world, and who seem to be always preaching on the text, "There is none that doeth good, no, not one," with a monotony that would wreck the pulpit. Indeed, they might be writing in the interests of extreme premillenarians; for not only do they paint human nature as entirely tainted and depraved, but they recognise no redeeming agencies in the existing scheme of things, and leave us to infer that if the world is ever to be lifted out of its rottenness it must be by some new and strange advent of superhuman force. The only remedy offered by these fond delineators of the impure is that we must reconcile ourselves to the sty, and by some process of metaphysical idealism believe that it is a palace of enchantment, its odours frankincense and myrrh, its garbage golden apples from the gardens of the Hesperides. It is perhaps sufficiently obvious that such writers magnify the symptoms whilst they belittle the antidotes, and that these morbid and, in some cases, wicked exaggerations are a passing phase of the pessimism of the decade.

In novels dealing with the solid verities of character it is impossible to avoid what bears a close resemblance to that Bible system of dual classification which starts with Cain and Abel, persists through the writings of Moses and the prophets, and reappears in the last pages of the Apocalypse. Indeed, Oriental as well as European stories recognise an elect and a reprobate section of mankind. We may sometimes feel that the labels are affixed by a rule of contraries. The elect types are often moulded to

suit the caprices of the writers, and the villains or reprobates are so painted as to represent his personal antipathies; but the lines of luminous demarcation are there, and most even of the subordinate actors in the scenes of both ancient and modern fiction fit into these well-defined types. It would be possible to schedule upon this plan many familiar characters of our popular writers, including even lay figures sketched in with a few swift lines. Certain groups are intended to engage our love, and other groups to provoke our wrath and scorn. It is impossible to escape the demand made by this law of ethical polarity. It is only the Judge and King of Christian reverence who cannot be permitted to separate all nations "as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats." The sagacious novelist, of course, is allowed to deal out blessings and curses with a freedom and an incisiveness commonly stigmatised as narrow and acrimonious when presented as one of the conceptions of Christian theology. The literature of fiction has its Ebal and its Gerizim, its city of Zion and its fated Babylon, its Mount of Olives and its valley of Megiddon. All writers who bring real men and women before us, and paint the scenes of life with any show of verisimilitude, have their codes of reward and punishment. The ever-active instincts of human society, together with the governing powers of nature, be they personal or impersonal, mete out blessings and curses with the utmost rigour and freedom, in the literature at least which is not the literature of artists' models and conscienceless automatons. It is something more than a complimentary tribute to the moral sense of the reader that truth, fidelity, disinterestedness, either by

some innate property of the mind itself or by the providential forces which order the world, receive their due reward; whilst the latter end of treachery, corruption, and crime thrusts itself as irresistibly upon the apprehension of all the great masters of fiction as upon that of the psalmist when he "went into the house of God."

CHAPTER I

GEORGE ELIOT

PERHAPS few students adequately realise the singular service that much of George Eliot's work may be made to render to the truth. Nature meant her for a great theologian, as well as a superb interpreter of human life and character; but the Coventry Socinians, the task of translating Strauss, and the sinister influence of George Henry Lewes turned her into a nominal agnostic not altogether content with her rôle. Essentially constructive in genius, we can almost hear the sigh of pain surging in her breast when she feels compelled for the moment to be destructive. She seems never to have entirely lost the Christian sympathies of her early life, and in some attenuated sense is an illustration of the doctrine of final perseverance. The saddest and most depressing of her books have in them a lingering aroma of religion, indeed more than an aroma; for they illustrate many principles which are precise parallels and analogies to some of the fundamental principles of the faith whose historic credibility she had thought well to repudiate. In her own soul there was a subtle residuum of theology nothing could volatilise or destroy. And she was ever seeing some of the elements of this rudimentary theology verified in those manifold phases of life she studied with an almost infallible scrutiny.

And this is the more significant when we consider two things. In entering upon unmarried companionship with George Henry Lewes she defied the acknowledged canons of Christian ethics, and brought herself into painful conflict with two sections of society: the section which is often secretly lawless whilst paying outward homage to domestic proprieties; and the section which reveres alike the form and the substance of family purity, and will never tolerate the removal of a single safeguard from the home. It is true, she came to live in a charming Alsatia of poets, painters, biologists, musicians; but in spite of the compensations found in this brilliant circle, she would scarcely have been human if she had not sometimes been tempted to spite the faith which had ostracised her. In this irregular life, to which she surrendered herself with all the uncompromising intensity of her nature, she came under the influence of a man who was her moral and intellectual inferior, and she was half-hypnotised into his cold and barren negations. We gather from one of her letters a hint of the atmosphere which surrounded her: "Mr. Lewes is not fond of reading the Bible himself, but sees no harm in my reading it." The freezing effect of such grudging toleration from the person installed as the director of her soul and her go-between with the publishers was inevitable. The nascent theology we may still find in books written under this depressing atmosphere must surely have about it a genuineness and a persistent vitality demanding respectful study. Working through all her plots is a stern, intelligent, unforgetting principle of retribution, which brings even the secret things of darkness into judgment.

Clerical Portraits

To glance through George Eliot's gallery of clerical portraits, and to compare the various figures presented for our study, affords an instructive hint of her standpoint. The attitudes of thought into which she puts her subjects, and the play of expression with which she invests them, speak not a little concerning the artist's own likes and dislikes. She has no overweening fondness for parsons who either magnify their office or burn with zeal for special dogmas. She is in evident accord with Felix Holt, the Radical, when she makes him say, "If I want to believe in Jesus Christ, I must shut my eyes, lest I see a parson." No wonder that critics who think a cleric the final term of Christianity should speak of *Middlemarch* as the dreariest and least religious of her books; for she there delineates four parsons, not one of whom a devout and intelligent man would care to make his spiritual guide and counsellor. She also impeaches the artificial system, so prolific of mere professionalism, under which lads just entering upon their teens are designated to the Church. The shrewd, high-souled Mary Garth justly deprecates the idea of Fred Vincy, a slightly fast young man without convictions, taking orders and entering the Church for a career. "What right have such men to represent Christianity," she asks of the Rev. Mr. Farebrother, "as if it were an institution for getting up idiots genteelly?" The Rev. Hugh Cadwallader is a tolerant, laughing, well-nurtured squire, brimming over with *bonhomie*, who puts on his surplice when Sunday comes round, for whom angling is a more fascinating interest than the cure of souls, a man

pleasant to shake hands with, but not strikingly apostolic. The first husband of Dorothea, the Rev. Edward Casaubon, is a heartless, overbearing, self-opinionated, self-adoring pedant, carrying a cold nature under the burden of his mechanical proprieties, and as much absorbed in his key to all the mythologies as the Rev. Hugh Cadwallader in his trout-fishing. The Rev. Mr. Tyke, the Evangelical chaplain at the local hospital, suffers from narrow views and the patronage of a canting Evangelical scoundrel. The portrait-painter does not like him or any of his kind, either in the pulpit or out of it, nor does she mean to like him. "A good deal of his doctrine," says Lydgate, "is a sort of pinching hard to make people uncomfortably aware of him." "I have been looking into a volume of his sermons," replies Dorothea, who has in her gift the living for which he is a competitor; "such sermons would be of no use in Lowick—I mean about imputed righteousness and the prophecies in the Apocalypse. I have always been thinking of the different ways in which Christianity is taught, and whenever I find one way that makes it a wider blessing than any other, I cling to that as true—I mean that which takes in the most good of all kinds, and brings in the most people as sharers in it." In this setting forth of rival claims to the vacant living, Mr. Farebrother, of course, carries the day. Mr. Farebrother is a man on whom creeds sit lightly; before the days of his preferment given to evening whist with a view to the loose silver he needs; in other respects neighbourly, altruistic to the point of sharp sacrifice and the sagacious and genial providence of one division of the story. That is the use to which George Eliot generally puts the

clergyman who has no special message. Mr. Farebrother makes the confession: "I used often to wish that I had been something else than a clergyman; but perhaps it will be as well to try and make as good a clergyman out of myself as I can." A religious teacher who accepts his position with such helpless resignation has little in common with one of old on whom "necessity was laid to preach the gospel." Mr. Farebrother assumes that Fred Vincy's shrinking from orders must surely be some difficulty "about doctrines—about the Articles"; but is assured by the indolent, pleasure-loving youth in reply: "No; I suppose the Articles are right. I am not prepared with any arguments to disprove them, and much better, cleverer fellows than I am go in for them entirely." The Rev. Adolphus Irwin, the clergyman of *Adam Bede*, painted in the first period of her literary activity, is twin-brother to the Rev. Mr. Farebrother in the last. He also is marked by a fine, generous, practical temper, warm interest in the temporal concerns of his parishioners, charity, tolerance, manifold excellences, but at the same time has only a faint and indeterminate sense of his responsibilities as a religious teacher. He is a good specimen of the moderatism which throve in the Anglican Church half a century ago. The fusty little old Independent preacher, Rufus Lyon, hot against State Churches, bristling with little pedantries so innocent that they have scarcely power to irritate or provoke, broadening out his Calvinistic theology to make room for the salvation of the frail, short-lived little Frenchwoman he befriended in her forsakenness and married, is in some respects the finest type of clerical character George Eliot has delineated. He com-

mands much more of our veneration than the fox-hunting rector, John Lingon, who can swear a round oath upon fitting occasion, is gifted with a broad and genial humour and a love for port wine, and who, crusted Tory though he is, can swing round glibly in obedience to his family instincts and support the Radical candidature of his nephew. The branch of Bible study which specially interests the Rev. John Lingon is the tithe question. One is made to feel again and again that the obscure preacher at the meeting-house is the better man and the more capable spiritual guide. In delicacy of moral sense, in his pure and lovely unworldliness, in his inflexible fidelity and adherence to right, he far outshines any of the surpliced Laodiceans who walk through George Eliot's narratives.

From the historian's standpoint the picture of Savonarola is the most imposing of her studies, and the picture is worked out with careful judgment and generous sympathy. In some respects the portrait may be allowed to stand for her conception of organised Christianity, embodying both its strength and what she was in the habit of regarding as its weakness. It is, perhaps, more than a coincidence that she should explain the supernatural assumptions of Savonarola by the same set of considerations that Renan applies in interpreting the miracles of Jesus Christ—they were forced upon him by the enthusiasm of an ignorant and fanatical crowd. Savonarola appears in her pages as a providential reformer, entirely noble in the ethical part of his work, wise, clear-seeing, irresistibly authoritative as a spiritual guide. But in seeking to direct the State with the imperativeness he employs in directing the conscience of Romola when she is flying in a nun's disguise from the

presence of her wily and treacherous husband, he stumbles and fails. His vocation as a teacher, inspired perhaps within certain limits, is complicated by the fact that he credits himself with an equally clear vocation as a theocratic politician, a prophet of the future, and a foreappointed miracle-worker when the time for showing forth God's will to Florence shall have come. His message would have been purer, more persuasive, richer in regenerative force if disencumbered of these elements. This supernatural lumber was a weight he should have laid aside in running his course of testimony and reform. And these disturbing elements in his career had their roots in the temptations incident to his sway over the crowds who flocked to his preaching. "In Savonarola's preaching there were strains that appealed to the very finest susceptibilities of men's nature, and there were elements that gratified low egoism, tickled gossiping curiosity, and fascinated timorous superstition. His need of personal predominance, his labyrinthine allegorical interpretation of the Scriptures, his enigmatic visions, and his false certitude about the divine intentions, never ceased in his own large soul to be ennobled by that fervid piety, that passionate sense of the infinite, that active sympathy, that clear-sighted demand for the subjection of selfish interests to the general good which he had in common with the greatest of mankind. But for the mass of his audience, all the pregnancy of his preaching lay in his strong assertion of supernatural claims, in his denunciatory visions, in the false certitude which gave his sermons the interest of a political bulletin; and having once held that audience in his mastery, it was necessary to his nature—

it was necessary for their welfare—that he should keep the mastery. The effect was inevitable. No man ever struggled to retain power over a mixed multitude without suffering vitiation; his standard must be their lowest needs, and not his own best insight." The tragedy of this great soul, after he has been banished by order of the Pope from the pulpit of the Duomo, and the crowds, growing suspicious of their hero, begin to demand the long-delayed signs and wonders, is pitiful. "His faith wavered, but not his speech: it is the lot of every man who has to speak for the satisfaction of the crowd, that he must often speak in virtue of yesterday's faith, hoping it will come back to-morrow." It may be that the great novelist herself, although free from any temptation to pose as prophet or miracle-worker, inasmuch as she disavowed the supernatural, may have had some such experience in setting forth the more spiritual side of her message, and have drawn upon the mere memory of bygone inspirations. In the lurid scene of Savonarola's last hours, a scene which seems to blend the sadness of disillusionment and despair with not a few of the noble elements of martyrdom, we are made to feel the searching force of the apostle's word: "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail."

The girl gospeller of the village green at Hayslope is the finest teacher of essential Christianity George Eliot has painted. In Dinah Morris the holy, believing, compassionate spirit of early Methodism has been more perfectly presented to the world than in the pages of our best ecclesiastical historians. Dinah Morris, too, could come down from the Mount of Transfiguration and boil a

kettle and tidy up a kitchen with the best. If the modern preacher can achieve such results, he need hanker after no more valid orders; he may be content to be in the line of Dinah Morris, for there the apostolic continuity is more significantly maintained than in the line of the Lingons, the Farebrothers, the Irwins, the Cadwalladers, the Tykes. The great Savonarola himself is less directly in the line and lineage of those who were gathered together in the upper room. Simple, unpretending soul that she is, Dinah is content to be meekly led, and worldly power even for religious ends is outside the range of her desires. She represents the essence of inspired and unflagging trustfulness, combined with the holiest pity for souls. Her eye is single, and her whole body full of light. She never "speaks in virtue of yesterday's faith, hoping it may come back to-morrow." Neither on the wheelwright's cart under the village maple, nor in the cell of Stoniton gaol as she exhorts and prays through the long night-watches, does a single word miss its gracious mark. There is a sublime unerringness, a star-like constancy, about this unaffected preacher of a gospel which saves; and her secret is told in the apostle's words, that "love," unlike prophecy, "never faileth."

In trying to formulate some portion of George Eliot's unconfessed theology, we must not be unmindful of her own many-sided warning when speaking of Dorothea's view of Mr. Casaubon. "Her faith supplied all that his words seemed to leave unsaid; what believer sees a disturbing omission or infelicity? The text, whether of prophet or of poet, expands for whatever we can put into it."

Trustworthiness of the Moral Instincts

George Eliot had a bitter, soul-scathing experience of those perplexities and negations which tend to disintegrate religious faith and relax the motives which minister life and virility to the character. And yet, at every stage in her literary activity, an unfaltering persuasion of the sagacity and competence of those moral intimations which take their rise in the conscience asserts itself. She does not set herself to explore the genesis of these moral instincts, but accepts the facts. The more nearly questions of elementary duty are touched, the more certain is the inward light that waits to guide us. Conduct never lacks an authoritative law to mould it. Poor Maggie Tulliver, who has been taken a boating trip by Stephen Guest, and who, through scarcely any fault of her own, finds herself in a compromising position in a distant seaport, and is being passionately implored by the fickle young plutocrat to marry into the place that by every code of truth and honour belongs to her cousin, exclaims: "There are memories and affections and longings after perfect goodness that have such a strong hold upon me, they would never quit me for long; they would come back and be pain to me—repentance." "I could not live in peace if I put the shadow of wilful sin between myself and God. I have caused sorrow already I know—I feel it—but I have never deliberately consented to it; I have never said, They shall suffer that I may be happy." "I can't believe in a good for you that I feel—that we both feel—is a wrong towards others. We can't choose happiness either for ourselves or another; we can't tell where

that will lie. We can only choose whether we will indulge ourselves in the present moment, or whether we will renounce that, for the sake of obeying the divine voice within us—for the sake of being true to all the motives that sanctify our lives. I know that this belief is hard; it has slipped away from me again and again; but I have felt if I let it go for ever I should have no light through the darkness of this life." Even when the power of judgment seems to be outwearied, and to fail under Stephen Guest's argument and persistent entreaty, conscience rises up again like an immortal and unsleeping monitor, and makes its voice heard. "I can't argue any longer—I don't know what is wise; but my heart will not let me do it. I see—I feel their trouble now: it is as if it were branded on my mind." . . . "I cannot take a good for myself that has been wrung out of their misery. It is not the force that ought to rule us, this that we feel for each other; it would rend me away from all that my past life has made dear and holy to me."

An equally clear assertion of the reliability of our moral instincts is put into the lips of a simple and kindly character sketched in *Silas Marner*. The poor epileptic weaver, it will be remembered, left the place in which he had been brought up, and lived a forlorn and embittered life amongst strangers who scarcely knew his name, because he had been unjustly suspected of theft, and the ordeal by lot, used in the meeting-house of which he was a member, had gone against him and brought him in guilty. When the shadows had passed from his life in the village of his sojourn, and new sunshine had come into his lot, he one day decided to visit the place from which, years ago,

he had fled, and see if his reputation had been cleared by subsequent events. The meeting-house had been pulled down, its old attendants had vanished, and the place had been revolutionised by industrial changes. His quest was vain. Upon reaching his adopted home again, on the evening of his pilgrimage, he says to Mrs. Dolly Winthrop: "I shall never know whether they got at the truth of the robbery, nor whether Mr. Paston could have given any light about the drawing of the lots. It's dark to me, Mrs. Winthrop, that is; I doubt it'll be dark to the last." "Well, yes, Master Marner," said Dolly, who sat with a placid, listening face, now bordered by gray hairs; "I doubt it may. It's the will o' Them above, as a many things should be dark to us; but there's some things as I never feel in the dark about, and they are mostly what comes in the day's work."

This doctrine of instinctive duty George Eliot for the most part puts into the lips of her female characters; but she lets Felix Holt, the Radical, declare himself in the same sense, with his bold, burly masculinity of phrase. "The only failure a man ought to fear is failure in cleaving to the purpose which he sees to be best. As to just the amount of result he may see from his particular work—that's a tremendous uncertainty: the universe has not been arranged for the gratification of his feelings. As long as a man sees and believes in some great good, he'll prefer working towards that in the way he's best fit for, come what may. I put effects at their minimum; but I'd rather have the minimum effect, if it's of the sort I care for, than the maximum of effect I don't care for."

When Romola has had her sad, soul-stunning

experience of deceit and ingratitude at home, her rising faith in Savonarola is checked by apparent signs of fanaticism in the prophet reformer himself, as well as by his collusion with intrigue and ignorant religious frenzy. The loss of this second faith threatens to make her life an unmitigable enigma, and begets moral paralysis and despair. At this juncture Romola finds new confidence, courage, satisfaction in obeying the guidance of her ever prompt instincts of humanity. "Calmness would not come even on the altar steps; it would not come from looking at the serene picture where the saint, writing in the rocky solitude, was being visited by faces with celestial peace in them. Romola was in the hard press of human difficulties, and that rocky solitude was too far off. She rose from her knees that she might hasten to her sick people in the courtyard, and by some immediate beneficent action revive that sense of worth in life which at this moment was unfed by any wider faith." Romola passes through a later crisis of yet more acute distress. Savonarola, in the furtherance of his ideas, has passively consented to the death upon the scaffold of her godfather, Bernardo del Nero. With the fading of all human love out of her life, duty seems to have lost its sanction and its significance. Again she leaves Florence, and finds herself just above a small fishing village on the brink of the blue Mediterranean. "The clear waves seemed to invite her; she wished she could lie down to sleep on them and pass from sleep into death. But Romola could not directly seek death; the fulness of young life in her forbade that. She could only wish that death would come." Unable to take upon herself the responsibility of acting wrongly or

recklessly, she purchases a disused fishing-boat, hoists the sail in the fading twilight, folds cowl and kerchief under her head, and lies down to sleep, hoping the sleep may be death. "She was alone now; she had freed herself from all claims, she had freed herself even from that burden of choice which presses with heavier and heavier weight when claims have lost their guiding hold." Wind and tide drift her into a little creek, where in the morning light she opens her eyes. Her ear is caught by the cry of a forlorn, untended babe, orphaned by a decimating plague. She feeds it with bits of ripe fig plucked from the neglected trees. In the ministries which await her in the suffering hamlet, upon which she dawns like an angel of deliverance direct from the sky, she recovers her lost faith, and is built up for the new life of awaiting duty on her return to Florence. The wounds of treachery and the hurts of disappointed confidence are healed, and a fresh morning horizon opened before her by the compassionate service she has rendered to sick and dying in the plague-swept hamlet. The lesson is not far below the surface: our deepest and most tormenting scepticisms are bred in the realm of our ambitions and human idolatries, and the shadows flee away when we are directed into noble spheres of self-forgetting altruism.

In *Middlemarch*, Dorothea speaks to the same effect: "By desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are a part of the divine power against evil, widening the skirts of light, and making the darkness narrower." . . . "It is my life. I have found it out and cannot part with it. I have always been finding out my religion since I

was a little girl." Could we have a better commentary than that on the Master's words?—"He that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

If these quotations do not misrepresent her, whatever the defects of her creed, George Eliot must have been in some sense a believer in that inner light which, if it does not reveal the mysteries of heaven, at least makes known the duties of earth. And it must be remembered that through much of the time in which she was asserting so plainly the trustworthiness of our moral instincts, she was moving amongst not a few evolutionists, one of them by her own fireside, who were accustomed to derive man's moral sense from sea slime. The Father of lights Himself may have been shrouded from her view, but in the gift of ethical wisdom coming down from His presence she saw the note of a genuine guidance in practical affairs that could not hopelessly baffle or betray the dutiful soul.

Responsibility and the Day of Grace

George Eliot preaches in no dubious accents a doctrine of moral responsibility. The characters upon whom she brings punishment have their clearly defined day of grace, and are no puppet victims of either Fate or Heredity. It is alien to her art to tell a story of tragic shame and then describe it as the history of a pure woman. She was too scientific in her methods not to take account of the mighty mysteries of ancestry which in recent years have been studied to the neglect of other equally mighty factors, and too broad in her survey not to bring into

her reckoning the situations which arise from those far-reaching laws of reciprocal influence which bind the units of society into a common organism. Lydgate is the mouthpiece of an apology for those "whose fathers and mothers had overeaten themselves," and Harold Transome is unaware of "the weighty, resistless destiny laid upon us by the acts of other men as well as our own." She sees these things, and yet almost ostentatiously surrounds her erring and transgressing men and women with the opportunities of becoming better. In *Adam Bede*, the impulsive young squire who brings ruin upon Hetty Sorrell has a warning word from the shrewd, companionable vicar concerning the hazard and impropriety of his attentions to the farmer's niece; and the scene in which Dinah, on the last night of her stay at the Hall Farm, after sitting in the casement of her bedroom window thinking lovingly of Hetty and praying for her welfare, enters her room to speak with her and frightens her to tears by the promise "to come to her if she is ever in sorrow," is one of the classic pictures of our literature. Godfrey Cass defers the confession of his first secret, ill-starred marriage with a laudanum-drinking slut. In spite of repeated impulses and opportunities to act otherwise, he shrinks again and again from acknowledging his own child, who is growing up into womanhood within a stone's throw of his own door, never breathing hint of his past till it was too late. The chance of taking a right course had come to him almost entreatingly again and again, and the uncheered old age that lay before him like a long stretch of moonless marshland was the fruit of repeated refusals to be candid and humble himself, and

put himself right at an earlier stage of the history. The day of grace with George Eliot is not a day in which there is the promise that sin and its effects shall be entirely undone, but it is a possibility of amendment and amelioration. In *Middlemarch*, the book which is commonly accounted of all her productions the most sterile of moral and spiritual ideas, Bulstrode, a fraudulent professor of evangelical piety, and a party to the death by alcohol of the wastrel who knows his past secrets, is privileged with frequent opportunities of pulling himself up before passing into the final shadows, where the writer leaves him. He is brought to book by Lydgate, by Caleb Garth, by his own stepson, Ladislaw, and has to deliberately refuse the confession which would have been good for his guilty and diseased soul. Her philosophy of the formation of character is perhaps well set forth in what she says of Lydgate, the young doctor, who represents the drift of modern science. "He was at a starting-point which makes many a man's career a fine subject for betting, if there were any gentlemen given to that amusement who could appreciate the complicated probabilities of an arduous purpose, with all the possible thwartings and furtherings of circumstance, all the niceties of inward balance by which a man swims and makes his purpose or else is carried headlong. The risk would remain even with close knowledge of Lydgate's character; for character, too, is a process and an unfolding. The man was still in the making, and there were both faults and virtues capable of shrinking or expanding."

Gwendolen, whom George Eliot describes in her correspondence as "one of those who are saved though as

by fire," has timely warnings which, if heeded, would have turned her from that career of folly, selfishness, and ambition which cankered her youth and must have left her a sad and chastened woman to the end of her days. One cannot pity her as one pities a wounded bird. When she is introduced to us at a Continental gaming-table, flushed with the pride and rapture of her winnings, Daniel Deronda appears upon the scene, a silent and watchful monitor against the peril and degradation to which she is surrendering herself. By her encounter with Lydia Glasher, attended by two beautiful children, at the Whispering Stones, she is warned against the frightful marriage, for the pitfall into which she had prepared herself by the reckless and selfish temper of the gaming-table. Lydia Glasher has every moral right to become Grandcourt's wife. Gwendolen could not have been more impressively warned by one sent from the dead. She rushes again to the Continent to renew her old excitement at the roulette table, whither Grandcourt slowly follows. After her betrothal and before the marriage is irrevocably consummated, the warning eye of Deronda is silently fixed upon her again. The bridal bells have not long been hushed when the words of Mrs. Glasher's letter keep repeating themselves and hang upon her consciousness with the weight of a prophetic woe: "I am the grave in which your chance of happiness is buried as well as mine. You had your warning. You have chosen to injure me and my children. He would have married me at last if you had not broken your word. The willing wrong you have done me will be your curse."

But this idea of the day of grace irretrievably

neglected is perhaps wrought out with more careful reiteration and intensity in *Romola* than in any of George Eliot's writings,—a book respecting which one can well believe her statement that when she began writing it she was a young woman and when she finished it an old. It seems as though this gifted analyst of the supreme problems of character had brought in the day of grace with its repeated offers of moral and social salvation again and again, to teach that the ideas of choice, responsibility, self-elected doom cannot be eliminated from the catastrophes overtaking one like Tito,—who might be assumed to have a large admixture of intrigue in his very blood, and in whom the maximum of physical sensibility is combined with the minimum of moral. The denouement of the history is not calamity only, but judgment.

Tito, who has been snatched as a child from rags, penury, cruel ill-treatment, is brought up as the adopted son of Baldassarre. More than a father's fondness is lavished upon him, and he is trained to share a life of luxury, refinement, scholarship. In the course of time the boat in which the young man and his benefactor are travelling together in genial comradeship is attacked by Levantine pirates. The young man succeeds in swimming ashore, and at last reaches Florence, carrying with him rings and jewels, the sale of which suffices to launch him upon a prosperous and influential career; whilst the old man is carried away as a slave to Corinth, to be deported at length to Antioch. Tito should have made it his first duty to seek out his foster-father, and ransom him from the toils and sufferings of a position doubly cruel at his time of life. Some sense of the base selfishness of the

career upon which he is entering seems to haunt him from the outset. It is not long before he has to play the part of a dissembler and cover up, as far as may be, the traces of his past. The first rebuke which comes to him in his smooth-faced insincerity is from the blunt painter Piero, who, finding him in a barber's shop where familiars foregathered, makes free to say: "Young man, I am painting a picture of Sinon deceiving old Priam, and I should be glad of your face for my Sinon, if you'd give me a sitting." Tito Melema looked with a pale astonishment in his face as at a sudden accusation. When the barber, with the fussy conciliation characteristic of his class, seeks to check the rudeness of the painter's comment on Tito's face, the painter replies: "A perfect traitor should have a face which vice can write no marks on, lips that will lie with a dimpled smile, cheeks that will rise from a murder and not look haggard. I say not this young man is a traitor: I mean, he has a face that would make him the more perfect traitor if he had the heart of one. . . . Ask Domenico there if the lapidaries can always tell a gem by the sight alone." "Tito stood transfixed, with his long dark eyes resting on the man who had addressed him so equivocally." The shrewd, plain-speaking painter is invested with the prevision of a Hebrew prophet, and in some vague fashion or other is made to warn against the duplicity which was nestling in the heart of the supple youth, and making ready to hatch itself into a life of private treachery and public crime.

It is not long before a chance word from the lips of his future father-in-law reminds him of his baseness, and recalls him for a moment to the urgent duty he is trying

to forget. Tito, at the request of the blind scholar Bardo, is producing from a small case the gems he has resolved to sell for his own uses; but at a sign from Romola, who fears her father may be tempted to spend upon his collecting hobby a sum he can ill afford, withdraws his hand from the case, and declares that the gems are in the keeping of Cennini, who prices them at five hundred ducats. "Ah, then they are fine intagli," said Bardo. "Five hundred ducats! Ah, more than a man's ransom." "Tito gave a slight, almost imperceptible start, and opened his long dark eyes with questioning surprise at Bardo's blind face, as if his words—a mere phrase of common parlance at a time when men were often being ransomed from slavery or imprisonment—had some special meaning for him."

Tito is looking out from a window above the barber's shop upon a civic spectacle, when the eye of a Dominican friar, who is just passing up the steps to the Duomo, is turned upon him with a significant meaning. The young Greek's interest and enquiry are aroused. From the same crowd there looks up to him within a few minutes the face of the peasant girl Tessa, which fact naturally provokes the comment and the question of the garrulous barber. The one face is an appeal to his better and the other to his baser nature. Tito descends into the street hoping he may meet the blue eyes which had glanced recognition from under the contadina's hood. "But the passing wish about pretty Tessa was almost immediately eclipsed by the recurrent recollection of the friar, whose face had some irrecoverable association for him. Why should a sickly fanatic, worn with fasting, have looked at him in particular? and where in all his travels could he

remember encountering that face before? Folly! Such vague memories hang about the mind like cobwebs, with tickling importunity; best to sweep them away at a dash, and Tito had pleasanter occupations for his thoughts."

Five hundred gold florins having been realised by the sale of Tito's gems, the goldsmith who has negotiated the transaction counsels Tito to put the money out at usury, rather than spend it upon the follies and dissipations so common in the city. "The moment when he first had this sum in his possession was the crisis of the first serious struggle his facile, good-humoured nature had known. An importunate thought, of which he had till now refused to see more than the shadow as it dogged his footsteps, at last rushed upon him and grasped him; he was obliged to pause and decide whether he would surrender and obey, or whether he would give the refusal that must carry irrevocable consequences." As the goldsmith closed the door and departed, Tito gives himself up to serious reflection. He pictures in imagination a grayhaired old man on some hot, unfriendly shore doing the bitter work of a slave in the scorching sun, cherishing there the hope that the child on whom he had lavished such kindness would find him out and ransom him with the price of the moneys raised by the sale of the gems and manuscripts. Tito says to himself, that if he were sure his benefactor were alive he would go at once, and at any cost seek to secure his rescue. Not many hours after this colloquy with his better nature, the friar he had seen entering the Duomo puts into his hands a direct message from Baldassarre himself. All excuse for base and ungrateful inaction is taken away. He has to choose his course with the

clearest knowledge of the facts before him, and his sin becomes a sin against light. "A new crisis had arisen, and he was beginning to feel that everything might be disclosed through this monk if he were to remain in Florence." "His talent for concealment was being fast developed into something less than neutral." He prepares to spin fresh sophistries by which to excuse himself from this urgent and righteous duty. "Having once begun to explain away Baldassarre's claim, Tito's thought showed itself as active as a virulent acid, eating its rapid way through all the tissues of sentiment. His mind was destitute of that dread which has been erroneously decried as if it were nothing higher than a man's animal care for his own skin: that awe of the divine Nemesis which was felt by religious pagans, and though it took a more positive form under Christianity, is still felt by the mass of mankind as a vague fear at anything which is called wrongdoing."

The Frate who has carried Baldassarre's message to Tito turns out to be the brother of Romola, and with his dying breath he tells his sister of a thrice-recurring dream he has had about her marriage, and the woes to which it will give rise. As a sign of the warning, she receives the crucifix upon which his dying eyes have been riveted. Romola tells the dream to Tito, her lover, who brushes it aside as the distempered fancy of a sick monk, and arranges for the painting of a cabinet to be adorned with his own portrait and that of his future bride, as Bacchus and Ariadne. In the cabinet are to be hidden away the crucifix and the omens of which it was to be the reminder. He visits Piero to engage his services in carrying out this

conceit of the cabinet, and sees there a portrait of himself with the expression of fear stamped upon the features. "The sight starts a cold stream through his veins, as if he were thrown into sympathy with his imaged self." "You are beginning to look like it already. He's seeing a ghost, that fine young man. I shall finish it some day when I have settled what sort of ghost is most terrible—whether it should look solid, like a dead man come to life or half transparent, like a mist."

On the day of the public betrothal Tessa, with whom Tito has entered into a mock marriage, celebrated by a surpliced charlatan at a street corner, crosses his pathway, and lugubrious masking, representing Time followed by troops of the sheeted dead, comes into sight just as they are about to enter the church. Such things seem to give ominous colour to the Frate's warning dream.

Again a new chapter of opportunity opens, and the chance of self-retrieval the young Greek had refused to seek by a journey for the ransom of his benefactor is brought to his very hand. Baldassarre appears as a captive in Florence itself, brought there in the wake of the French soldiery. In a panic caused by the rush of the mob he makes good his escape, and at once thinks of finding sanctuary in the church. As he rushes up the steps he chances to stumble, and to save himself catches at an arm which is close by. The arm proves to be that of Tito, who, turning his head, sees the face of his adoptive father almost touching his own. "The two men looked at each other, silent as death; Baldassarre, with dark fierceness and a tightening grip of the soiled, worn hands on the velvet-clad arm. Tito, with cheeks and lips all

bloodless, fascinated with terror. It seemed a long while to them—it was but a moment." The chance of reconciliation, partly recovered honour, sincerity, virtue, which has so strangely come unsought, is missed. The painter happens to be at hand watching the encounter, and with a short laugh exclaims: "Ha! ha! I know what a ghost should be like now."

"This is another escaped prisoner," said a bystander. "Who is he?"

"Some madman surely," said Tito.

"He hardly knew how the words had come to his lips; there are moments when our passions speak and decide for us, and we seem to stand by and wonder. They carry in them an inspiration of crime, that in one instant does the work of long premeditation. The two men had not taken their eyes off each other, and it seemed to Tito when he had spoken, that some magical poison had darted from Baldassarre's eyes, and that he felt it rushing through his veins."

"As Tito walked away he felt as if a serpent had begun to coil round his limbs. Baldassarre living, and in Florence, was a living revenge, which would no more rest than a winding serpent would rest until it had crushed its prey."

"Tito was experiencing that inexorable law of human souls, that we prepare ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil which gradually determines character."

"There was still one resource open to Tito. He might have turned back, sought Baldassarre again, confessed everything to him—to Romola—to all the world. But

he never thought of that. The repentance which cuts off all moorings to evil demands something more than selfish fear. He had no sense that there was strength and safety in truth."

Knowing the vengeance which threatened, the subtle dissembler buys a coat of chain armour. Romola discovers that he is wearing it, and, in spite of Tito's renewed attempt to hide the true cause of his fear, her conversation leads up to the subject of this escaped prisoner, in whom she had begun to feel some kind of interest. "The horrible sense that he must live in continual dread of what Baldassarre had said or done pressed upon him like a cold weight." Again the face of this forsaken and disowned foster-father thrusts itself upon Tito as he is haranguing a crowd of Florentines. Till this direct and deliberate disownment, Baldassarre was prepared to take Tito back to his heart. "He had made every excuse for him. Perhaps Tito had thought that his father was dead. Somehow the mystery would explain itself."

New discoveries of the sordidness and duplicity of her husband await Romola. He sells old Bardo's library after his death, and appropriates the money it realised. With a Nathan-like touch of truth, she comes very near to his secret when she says: "Have you robbed some one else who is *not* dead? Is that the reason you wear the armour?"

On one of Tito's secret visits to Tessa he finds that Baldassarre is sleeping in an outhouse adjoining her cottage, and the possibility of retrieving the base ingratitude of which he had been guilty on the steps of the Duomo presents itself to his active mind. No harm could be done, for the interview would at least be secret and

fraught with no open consequences should the interview prove futile. But a secret confession and repentance which would make life pleasant again and bury all the ignoble secrets of the past failed, as was fitting. With the dagger of which he has possessed himself, Baldassarre springs on his visitor, seeking the vengeance which is the one object for which he has now to live. The chain armour is a momentary defence, and the dagger breaks in the hand which clutches it. Such wrong could not be appeased by secret recognition of a forgotten and outraged tie.

Before the stroke of final vengeance falls, Baldassarre finds entrance to a banquet in the Rucellai gardens at which Tito is present, and, after hovering for a time in the obscurity of the foliage, like a tiger approaching its quarry by narrowing circles, he steals into the company, with the purpose of publicly denouncing the ingrate and covering him with contempt. The young Greek is in the act of playing upon the lute and entertaining the guests with song. "Tito, who had never yet been guilty of murderous cruelty, but who at that moment to save himself would have been capable of treading the breath out of a smiling child," asserts that the old man was years ago a servant of his father's family, dismissed for theft. Baldassarre's memory has so flickered and failed that he is unable to prove his position as a scholar by a classical test to which he is subjected. He is therefore put under restraint and hurried away for a madman. "Tito's heart was palpitating, and the wine tasted no better to him that night than if it had been blood."

As the day draws near when he shall have filled up the measure of his iniquity, Tito enters into a conspiracy

against Savonarola. Romola pleads with him like his good angel, an embodiment of the spirit of mercy and forgiveness. "You changed towards me the night you first wore that chain armour. You had some secret from me. It was about that old man, and I saw him again yesterday. Tito, if you would once tell me everything—let it be what it may—I would not mind pain, that there might be no wall between us. Is it not possible that we could begin a new life? . . . We shall always be divided unless misery come and join us." Romola has captivated the gratitude and affection of Baldassarre by sympathy and merciful ministration to his sufferings, and we are made to feel that if Tito had confessed his past and become true, she might have turned aside the vengeance that was dogging his steps, and helped him to repair the shame and the misery of the past. Almost to the point of monotonous iteration, George Eliot shows that this man, whose race and history were so much against him, and who was beset by many snares and temptations, had his day of grace and opportunity. A voice warning against evil spoke to this degenerate representative of the Greek race no less than to Socrates. In George Eliot's pages those who go into the pit of perdition go with their eyes open and after due admonition. This despised and rejected foster-father betokens a chance of improvement and redemption that was persistently hovering about Tito's pathway.

The Doctrine of Retribution

In each of her fuller stories, George Eliot has given us fiery pictures of the processes whereby the solemn

and inviolable law of retribution works itself out, which will never pass from the memory of the Anglo-Saxon race.

No one can read the story of the sin and punishment of Arthur Donnithorne and Hetty Sorrel without a wholesome sense of both terror and tears. A not altogether antiquated picture, alas! that of the two youthful transgressors in *Adam Bede*,—the young squire, exuberant with blended egotism and *bonhomie*, thoughtless, impulsive, self-indulgent, on terms of habitual goodwill with his own personality, ever mollifying himself with the flattering idea that out of the ample revenues fortune was making ready for him he could more than atone for any peccadillo into which he might fall; and a village maiden, fair as a midsummer dream, void of intelligence and strong moral conviction, with her mincing languorous vanities and a fateful passion for jewels and dress. One almost feels that the vengeance which alights upon this poor, dull-witted, superficial girl is too cruel, as she wearily follows her rich lover to Windsor, only to find that he has already left with his regiment for Ireland; then retracing her sad, leaden steps, gives birth amongst strangers to her hapless babe; in her distraction abandons it, and is then drawn back to the spot where she is arrested by the cry in her conscience,—the conscience that seems to dawn in this case with motherhood—the cry that nothing can still, which pursues her into the prison cell. Perhaps the remorse signified by this unhushable wail impresses the imagination more profoundly even than the trial, the sentence, the reprieve in very sight of the gallows, ignominious exile instead of the scaffold, followed by untimely death when home and liberty are once more in view.

But the young squire also is made to taste the bitterness of his own misdoings. His sin brings with it the sinister sequence inseparable from all such acts. He who has prided himself on his candour loses every shred of self-respect in the deceptions to which he thinks himself driven. "The native impulse to give truth in return for truth, to meet trust with frank confession, must be suppressed, and duty was become a question of tactics. His deed was reacting upon him—was already governing him tyrannously, and forcing him into a course that jarred with his habitual feelings." He tries to lull his conscience with active physical movement, which sometimes works as a counter-irritant, and after his fight with Adam seems to be reassured for the moment by the deference of the man-servant who waits upon him. "In the hunting and shooting seasons, regret, self-reproach, and mortified pride weigh lighter on country gentlemen than in late spring and summer. Arthur felt that he should be more of a man on horseback. Even the presence of Pym waiting on him with the usual deference was a reassurance to him after the scenes of yesterday." To quote George Eliot's words again: "Arthur would gladly have persuaded himself that he had done no harm! And if no one had told him the contrary, he could have persuaded himself so much the better. Nemesis can seldom forge a sword for herself out of our consciences—out of the suffering we feel in the suffering we may have caused; there is rarely metal enough there to make an effective weapon. But when some rude person gives rough names to our actions, she is apt to take part against us." In that fine epigram

the truth is admitted that other forces besides those of a man's own conscience are enlisted for the punishment of misdoing, or true self-knowledge can never come to us. And so Arthur Donnithorne found it. In the very hour when he returns to take possession of his estates and show himself benefactor to tenants, friends, and early comrades, he finds his name linked with that of the poor, misguided child who is condemned to the scaffold for infanticide. Adam Bede and Arthur Donnithorne are introduced to us again seated once more in a place associated with both the seduction of Hetty Sorrel and the humiliating fight with Adam some months before. From the waste-paper basket Hetty's little pink handkerchief peeps. Adam said tremulously, "How did she seem when you left her, sir?"

"Don't ask me, Adam; I feel sometimes as if I should go mad with thinking of her looks and what she said to me, and then that I could not get a full pardon—that I could not save her from that wretched state of being transported—that I could do nothing better for her all those years; and she may die under it, and never know comfort any more."

The young squire seems to be not without a sense of equity, and by exile on military service, from which he at last returns stricken with fever, makes some poor show of halving fates with Hetty.

In the final interview with Adam, Arthur Donnithorne says: "I could never do anything for her, Adam,—she lived long enough for all the suffering,—and I'd thought so of the time when I might do something for her. But you told me the truth when you said to me once, 'There's a sort of wrong that can never be made up for.'"

The scenes brought before us in the last pages of this book seem to illustrate the balanced mercy and judgment of which the psalmist testified, "Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions." Some of the later stories seem to forget the forgiveness, and paint vengeance only with a concentrated power that appals.

In the *Mill on the Floss* the working of retributive law is more or less veiled and complicated by the influences which enter into the characters, and which determine the movements of the chief actors. This powerful story, perhaps, marks a departure from the early method of the writer, and, consciously or unconsciously, shows traces of that new doctrine of heredity which was just becoming dominant in the world of science and literature. The *Mill on the Floss* is half a tragedy of fate and half a study of character and its issues. It shows how the rancour and wrongheadedness of a misguided father may be visited on his children. Tom Tulliver proves himself a true son of his obtuse, pugnacious, and implacable sire, when he says in his boyhood to his little sister Maggie, "I never do forget things." At a later stage he feels himself the responsible legatee of his father's grudges, and a narrow and ignorant loyalty to what he conceives to be family duty betrays him into the mistakes of his prejudiced but not altogether ignoble life. It is with no unready mind that he obeys his broken-down father, and solemnly writes in the family Bible his promise never to forgive Wakem the lawyer, who seems to have brought ruin upon the family. Either through the channel of blood, or by the less

mysterious process of imitative infection, the testy and nagging clannishness of the Dodson aunts has written its mark upon the temperament of Tom Tulliver. The wreck of these two young lives in the flood which sweeps down Dolcote Mill, the landmark of the family wrongs, must be looked upon in the light of a family rather than a personal retribution, and illustrates the idea that, "members one of another," we are compelled to share in some degree the consequences of each other's shortcomings. In the crash of the old homestead and the rush of the timbers through the thunderous flood, we see the revenge which inevitably overtakes the sin of revenge. A gleam of light comes into the last dark scene, for the wreck and the swirling torrent of flood-water which avenge the family frailty and the family pride unite in tender confidence and affection the brother and sister who have been so hopelessly incompatible in life. "In their death they were not divided."

We see this same principle of moral government in *Silas Marner* working to produce contrasted effects. An unconfessed providence, which deals in the long-run with every man according to his deserts, brings the queer, reserved, ill-shapen weaver from under the cloud of misjudgment which has been darkening his life from youth upwards into honour, love, and sunshine, "setting the solitary in families"; whilst it brings into fierce, unrelenting light the crime of Dunstan Cass, the gambling profligate, who stumbled one snowy night into his death as he was carrying off a bag of guineas he had purloined from the poor weaver's cottage, and forces Godfrey Cass in the end to confess the secret sin of his youth. As the

fruit of the sin, he is at the same time doomed to carry a sense of restless pain and unsatisfied love in his heart down to the grave. Through weakness and vicious passion, played upon by the cunning of his dissolute brother, Godfrey Cass had been inveigled into marriage with a poor, laudanum-drinking young woman of a neighbouring village who lived in idleness and squalor. "If Godfrey could have felt himself simply a victim, the iron bit that destiny had put into his mouth would have chafed him less intolerably. If the curses he muttered half aloud when he was alone had had no other object than Dunstan's diabolical cunning, he might have shrunk less from the consequences of avowal. But he had something else to curse—his own vicious folly, which now seemed as mad and unaccountable to him as almost all our follies and vices do when their first promptings have passed away." A child born of this miserable marriage could not be recognised without risk to Godfrey's expectations as the eldest son of the house. All the time his heart was set upon marrying Nancy Lammeter, a comely heiress of the neighbourhood, the pink of housekeeping taste and neatness, high and unswerving in principle, and somewhat unromantic in temperament. Whilst Godfrey Cass, during an evening party at his father's house, was carrying on a tacit courtship with Nancy Lammeter, the poor, forlorn, draggled wife sets out in the snow, babe folded to her breast, with the design of presenting herself in the midst of these brilliant festivities and claiming the open recognition that was her due. As she nears the cottage of Silas Marner the crave for her accustomed opiate masters her; she swallows an excessive draught with

which she has provided herself, and dies in a snow-wreath a few feet from the weaver's door. Attracted by the fire-light from the door left ajar by Silas, who has gone upon some short errand, the babe creeps to the hearth, where she is found on his return.

The perplexed man sets out to find the village doctor, carrying the infant in his arms, and, as the doctor is one of the festive gathering, it happens that Godfrey must pass through the ordeal of seeing his own child brought upon the scene. "Godfrey felt a great throb; there was one terror in his mind at that moment; it was that the woman might not be dead. That was an evil terror—an ugly inmate to have found a nestling-place in Godfrey's kindly disposition; but no disposition is a security from evil wishes to a man whose happiness hangs on duplicity." The lonely and embittered weaver claims the right of caring for the foundling, and in due time Godfrey, the father of this waif of the snow, marries the young lady upon whom his heart had long been set. He yearns for the presence of children at his hearth, but the only child born in his house dies not long after birth. With mingled feelings Godfrey watches his own daughter grow up into womanhood in the cottage of the weaver, and is again and again prompted and pressed by his own conscience, and the suppressed instincts of fatherhood within him, to make the late acknowledgment and take her under his own care. Godfrey tried a compromise, suggesting that they should adopt Eppie; but his wife did not take to that idea. After the lapse of many years, draining operations are being carried out upon the estate, and one of the ponds near Marner's cottage falls to a lower level than had been

known before. The receding of the water brings into view the skeleton of Dunstan, the profligate brother, clutching the stolen bag of Marner's guineas. The sad and humiliating story of the sped years must needs be told at last. "O Godfrey, if we had taken her from the first, if you'd taken to her as you ought, she'd have loved me for a mother, and you'd have been happier with me. I could better have bore my little baby dying, and our life might have been more like what we used to think it ud be."

"I'm a worse man than you thought I was, Nancy. Can you forgive me ever?"

"The wrong to me is but little, Godfrey—you've made it up to me—you've been good to me for fifteen years. It's another you did the wrong to, and I doubt it can never be all made up to her."

It is impossible to detach the heart of Eppie from her foster-father. When she marries, she still lives in the old weaver's cottage, and Godfrey's home is without children to the end. "I wished," said he, "to pass for childless once; I shall pass for childless now against my wish."

The doom of Tito portrayed with such a terrific inspiration of fearfulness in one of the closing chapters of *Romola*, is another tribute to this stern law which operates in all climes and generations, and illustrates the great novelist's conviction that when a man is cunning, avaricious, so void of moral sense as to be incapable of that form of self-punishment known as remorse, other agencies of vengeance will come into play than those which lie within the immediate circle of his own temperament and self-acting sensibilities. This cunning young Greek, whose life has been one long web of selfish finesse and

intrigue, and who, with an adroitness or a good fortune little less than amazing, has escaped the blows aimed against him, is overthrown and destroyed at last. Baldassarre, the wronged and neglected foster-father, may seem to represent the madness of the vendetta rather than the sobriety of righteousness; but that is simply the exaggeration and incongruity assumed by the passion for justice in a disorganised brain. Other forces, moreover, conspire to bring about the penalty which he who had been the victim of long ingratitude and desertion was too helpless to inflict. Baldassarre sees in Genoa one of his own rings upon the finger of a passer by. That becomes the clew through which he traces Tito. He sells a sapphire and buys a dagger, which snaps in his hand when he is face to face with the thankless young worldling. But that does not turn him aside from his purpose. Not only is it by Romola's hand that this old man, who is an impersonation of the spirit of just revenge, is nursed in his sickness, and by her gifts of food that he is brought back to life, but as the unseen providence of judgment, which seems to be Baldassarre's ally in spite of his repeated failures, would have it, Tito's own money buys the second dagger which replaces that which had snapped. "I have nothing but my knife," he exclaims to Romola. "It is sharp; but there is a moment after the thrust when men see the face of death, —and it shall be *my* face that he will see." The old man, accustomed through his whole life to luxury, is content to beg his food so that his strength may be nurtured for the last act of vengeance. After Baldassarre's months of waiting and failure, Tito, to escape the wrath of the mob whom he has betrayed, plunges into the Arno. He has swum past

the last bridge, is beginning to feel faint and exhausted, and is flung up by the strong stream on a rush-grown patch of shore. Baldassarre, who has been searching for broken food there, sees this figure, recognises Tito, presses his knuckles into the throat of his half-dead victim, watches the quiver in the glazing eye, and knows that he is recognised. An hour or two afterwards a pair of dead bodies are found, half covered by the rushes, the fingers of the one still clutching the garment of the other.

Two or three scenes of overwhelming power in *Felix Holt, the Radical*, remind us how sharp and unerringly aimed are the pains which alight at last in the present life upon the secret transgressions of bygone years. "Some sins are open beforehand, going before unto judgment," is the thought in the mind of the writer, however much or little faith she may have in the complementary half of the statement: "and they that are otherwise cannot be hid." More than thirty years back from the time of the story, the proud and queenly Mrs. Transome had been faithless to her weak, dandering, insignificant husband, afflicted to the point of childishness. Her guilty friendship with the family lawyer, Jermyn, was followed by the birth of a son, known throughout the story as Harold Transome. Upon reaching manhood, this son goes to reside in the East, where he enjoys for some years a prosperous career as a banker. His elder brother, the heir to the estate, dies, and Harold Transome, the pride and the hope of his mother's sad heart, comes back to take possession of the patrimony. His examination of the accounts brings to light frauds and felonies which have been practised by the family lawyer,

who has been expecting immunity from exposure and punishment because of the shameful secret between himself and Mrs. Transome. Harold, of course, disappoints the long, sad hopes of his mother's heart, and by frigidity, haughty reserve, and wilfulness brings bitterness into her life. At last this handsome, middle-aged man, upon whom his mother has been building her hopes for years, resolves, in disregard of her wishes, to bring Jermyn to bay and invoke the law for his just punishment. The scene in which the lawyer asks this proud, stately, inflexible woman to secure his safety from prosecution by announcing to Harold Transome the shameful secret of his birth flashes into the conscience in hot letters of fire the grim, fierce ironies of a retributive providence. "You could save me if you would," said Jermyn. "It is not to be supposed that Harold would go on against me if he—if he knew the whole truth."

"I will never tell," said Mrs. Transome, starting up, her whole frame thrilled with a passion that seemed almost to make her young again. "You reckon up your sacrifices for me; you have kept a good account of them, and it is needful; they are some of them what no one else could guess or find out. But you made your sacrifices when they seemed pleasant to you, when you told me they were your happiness, when you told me that it was I who stooped and I who bestowed favours."

"Mrs. Transome," said Jermyn, white to the lips, "it is needless to say more. I withdraw any words that have offended you."

"You can't withdraw them. Can a man apologise for being a dastard? And I have caused you to strain your

conscience, have I? It is I who have sullied your purity? I would not lose the misery of being a woman now I see what can be the baseness of a man. One must be a man —first to tell a woman that her love has made her your debtor, and then ask her to pay you by breaking the last poor threads between her and her son."

To protect himself against the rage of Harold Transome, Jermyn himself declares the incriminating fact in a thronged room of the White Hart hotel, where the two men were just closing with each other in conflict.

"Let me go," said Harold fiercely, "or I'll be the death of you."

"Do," said Jermyn, in a grating voice. "I am your father." As Harold turned from the pale face of his antagonist, he happened to see his own face reflected in a mirror, and beheld the hated fatherhood reasserted there. Harold returned to Transome Court, went straight to his mother's room, tapped at the door and entered. The discovery he had made was legibly written upon his face as he entered.

"Mother, tell me the truth, that I may know how to act."

He paused a moment and then said, "Who is my father?"

She was mute; her lips only trembled. Harold stood silent for a moment as if waiting; then he spoke again.

"He has said it—said it before others—that he is my father."

He looked still at his mother. She seemed as if age were striking her with a sudden wand—as if her trembling face were getting haggard before him. She was mute. But her eyes had not fallen; they looked up in helpless misery at her son.

Her son turned away his eyes from her and withdrew.

In *Middlemarch*, the punishment of sin is made a process of personal psychology and social reaction, and those uncommon forces which environ human life, and at times co-operate in vindicating the broken law of truth and righteousness, are kept in the background. In a word, wickedness defeats and punishes itself. The deathbed scene of the profligate and malicious old miser, Peter Featherstone, is an example. He has been scheming for years how he can best mortify and disappoint his relatives in the disposal of his property, but dies in chagrin at finding that Mary Garth, who is ministering in his sick-room, can be neither bribed nor coerced into burning one of his wills, which act, when death was in view, formed a part of his spiteful scheme. He whimpered in his weakness, glared like a hyæna at the high-souled, honest girl, threw his stick at her in a convulsion of rage, and, thus defeated, baffled, mortified, sank down into the rigour of death. Bulstrode's misdoings when unearthed leave him forlorn, unpitied, standing in family relationships that, like his own religion, are a mere form, and from which all tenderness and joy have passed. "There is a forsaking which still sits at the same board and lies on the same couch with the forsaken soul, withering it the more by unloving proximity." "Bulstrode, who knew that his wife had been out and had come in again, saying that she was not well, had spent the time in an agitation equal to hers. He had looked forward to her learning the truth from others, and had acquiesced in that probability as something easier to him than any confession. But now that he imagined the moment of her knowledge

had come, he awaited the result in anguish. He felt himself perishing slowly in unpitied misery. Perhaps he should never see his wife's face with affection in it again. And if he turned to God, there seemed to be no answer but the pressure of retribution." "The pitiable lot is that of the man who knows that he is stoned, not for professing the right, but for not being the man he professed to be." "This was the consciousness that Bulstrode was withering under when he made his preparation for departing from Middlemarch, and going to end his stricken life in that sad refuge, the indifference of new faces. The duteous constancy of his wife had delivered him from one dread, but it could not hinder her presence from being still a tribunal, before which he shrank from confession and desired advocacy. Some time, perhaps when he was dying, he would tell her all. Perhaps; but concealment had been the habit of his life, and the impulse to confession had no power against the dread of a deeper humiliation."

The last presentation of this doctrine of retributive justice, so closely identified with our faith in moral government, to be found in the pages of *Daniel Deronda*, is perhaps the most solemn and impressive of all. Whatever the mental conflicts and dubitations through which George Eliot passed, the doctrine was the pole-star in her conception of ethics. The pale, flexuous-figured, sylph-like girl, Gwendolen, has been betrayed by her selfish ambition, tempered, perhaps, with some little consideration for her mother's straitened circumstances, into marriage with Grandcourt; and it is a part of her punishment to see the ghastly doom which overtakes her husband,

whilst her soul is consumed with hate and she is feeling that she would not stir a finger to save him. His white, agonised face as it comes up above the waters is to haunt her for long days to come. Grandcourt is an English Tito without conscience, kindness, or morals, and with the good-humour and suppleness of the Greek replaced by the grossness and the heavy grandeur to which the more fleshly temperament of his race so easily lends itself. Grandcourt, who, like his Greek counterpart, has neither moral sense nor generosity enough to punish himself, nor even the quick imagination which at last brings an ever-haunting fear into the life of the Greek adventurer, is fittingly drowned with every accompaniment of tragic agony in the Bay of Genoa. Before sinking for the last time he sees the fair young wife, whose life for the past twelve months he had cankered by veiled torture and tyranny, sitting rigidly in the stern of the boat whence he had fallen, either unable or unwilling to fling the rope in answer to his cry. The preacher of the pulpit would be sneered at if he invoked the forces of inanimate Nature for the punishment of the man past feeling, but the preacher of the classical novel is allowed a wider liberty. Again and again George Eliot makes the fall of the Tower of Siloam sagaciously retributive, although she takes care to put the right kind of victims under the Tower before it begins to rock and topple. Be it observed, that George Eliot does not invoke the forces of inanimate Nature and the chances which are ever present in the outward frame of things, as a mere mechanism for killing off the figures that have served their purpose in the story and have nothing more to do. As at the death of

Tito in the presence of Baldassarre, and at the death of Grandcourt in the presence of Gwendolen, she never fails to bring upon the scene those who have been maddened by past wrong, and whose wrongs seem to be in part avenged by these appalling forces of Nature.

George Eliot's treatment of character and its issues is invested with all the solemnity of a religion. In this respect she stands head and shoulders above not a few recent writers, whose books vibrate with the erotic antics of base music halls and dancing saloons. Whatever her private philosophy may have been, the elements of a very orthodox theology pervade her interpretation of life. We search in vain for the ethical anarchy, the pandemoniac topsy-turvydom which is the staple of many of the plots in recent fiction. It is easy to single out from each other the interacting factors which enter into her schemes of retribution. The conscience of the transgressor himself plays its appropriate part, unless he has passed into irremediable moral obduracy. Where the moral sense can scarcely be said to exist in the full meaning of the word, she recognises the operation of an instinctive fear which does the rudimentary work of a moral sense. George Eliot had no scruple at preaching the terrors of the law. Most truly does she say that "the guardianship of fear over the soul may become needless; but only when all outward law has become needless—only when duty and love have united in one stream and made a common force." Retribution arises again from the constituent forces of that social order of which man forms a part. There is a corporate conscience ever seeking to express itself more or less successfully through

what we call public opinion, and that stings the offender in the most sensitive parts of his personality, especially when it acts through those from whom the offender had expected love and praise and esteem. And then man is punished from time to time by agencies that seem to lie out of the direct pathway of causation. Impersonal Nature, obscure as are many of her motives and workings, not infrequently takes part against the offender, and shows herself at heart an ally of righteousness. In all the unfoldings of human history George Eliot sees a specific ethical teleology—when the subject, at least, is studied in the concrete. The knowledge we have of George Eliot, through other channels than those of her writings, unhappily forbids us to credit her with dogmatic faith in a personal God; but the retributive providences she admits into her stories are clear-eyed, deep-searching, inexorable. No series of mere accidents could bring to light the sins of bygone years as depicted in *Silas Marner*, or revive in Mrs. Transome's life with an awful force of circumstance the sin of more than a generation back, or unpick the meshes of Bulstrode's far-away dishonour and deceit. The gathering up of all these tangled threads after years of oblivion implies an overwatching providence of judgment in human life.

It may, of course, be said that this is one of the conventions of the craft, and George Eliot is only following the example of all dramatists and story-writers. Moreover, she has the ethical instincts of her readers to satisfy, who expect the reward of virtue and punishment of vice. Of course, there is truth in all this, but at the same time it does not invalidate her essential theology. There is

a theology in life which will always assert itself when life is accurately presented, and in the art of accurate presentation this gifted woman is perhaps without a rival. A fiction-writer is supposed to describe types of character and representative actions, and to mass together in impressive pictures the great facts of human history; and there is less excuse for the delineation of the abnormal in a work of imagination than in the matter-of-fact chronicle of events. George Eliot meant her work to fulfil a serious purpose, and to furnish a true exposition of human life, and it could not have done either of these things if the retributive element had been dropped out of her plots.

But what is the measure of her contribution to the theology of this subject? Her doctrine cannot carry us far, for she does not seem to have been an assured believer in individual immortality. She shows, at least, whether human souls survive the dissolution of the body or not, the law of retribution is restless, persistent, a part of the permanent order of the cosmos. The processes that vindicate righteousness outlive the fading generations of men.

Does this law of judgment she illustrates so impressively operate only in that little handbreadth of time and space of which we are cognisant? We might as well argue that life exists only upon our own planet, and that the elements with which our chemistry has familiarised us have no place in the constitution of other worlds. We see the trend of this moral law in the scenes George Eliot has painted for us, but the limited size of her canvas prevents us from following out the lines she

suggests. They converge beyond time. Such, at least, will be the conclusion forced upon most minds. "There are yesterdays that can never be revoked."

The Ripening of Character

A marked feature in the writings of George Eliot, and one too which touches somewhat closely the teaching of the Bible, is that man's moral life is in a state of continuous development, tending on the one hand to conditions of irretrievable baseness and corruption, and rising on the other through many steps of discipline into full-orbed goodness and perfection. We are made to see the stages of transition through which her men and women pass.

Some of her personalities deteriorate with the unfolding of the story in which they play their part, and the door of hope is at last closed to them. Early transgressions make way for later and more heinous transgressions; and unless there be a quick and whole-hearted turning round, no term can be put to the process of deterioration. "Our deeds determine us as much as we determine our deeds; and until we know what has been or will be the peculiar combination of outward with inward facts which constitutes a man's critical action, it will be better not to think ourselves wise about his character. There is a terrible coercion in our deeds, which may first turn the honest man into a deceiver, and then reconcile him to the change; for this reason, that the second wrong presents itself to him as the only practicable right. The action which before commission has been seen with that blended

common sense and fresh, untarnished feeling which is the healthy eye of the soul, is looked at afterwards with the lens of apologetic ingenuity. Europe adjusts itself to a *fait accompli*, and so does individual character, until the placid adjustment is disturbed by a convulsive revolution. No man can escape this vitiating effect of an offence against his own sense of right." The cumulative effect of past evil may be such that the life of virtue is completely suppressed, and the deterioration is irretrievable. Of the malicious old miser of the Middlemarch story, she says: "If any one will here contend that there must have been traits of goodness in old Featherstone, I will not presume to deny this; but I must observe that goodness is of a modest nature, easily discouraged, and when much elbowed in early life by unabashed vices is apt to retire into extreme privacy, so that it is more easily believed in by those who construct a selfish old gentleman theoretically, than by those who form the narrower judgments based on his personal acquaintance."

In the school of thought to which George Eliot was supposed to belong, the enigma of suffering has been held fatal to the idea that a benevolent Being rules the universe; but nothing is more beautiful in her writings than the way in which she shows the transfiguring influence of great sorrow upon some of her best characters. For George Eliot the darkness of the enigma is not entirely impenetrable. How devout and instructive her illustrations of the sweet uses of adversity! Even the hard and unimaginative Tom Tulliver, as unattractive a specimen of virtue as Mr. Casaubon, loses his moral and mental narrowness, and is melted into genial love and

sympathy, as his large-souled and much misjudged sister Maggie, forgetful of past harshness, intractability, cruel censoriousness, comes single-handed in a boat at the midnight to rescue him from the peril of the rising flood. It is impossible to overlook the contrast between Maggie Tulliver and Gwendolen:—the one going through wind and blackness and surging waters to the futile rescue of her proud, stiff-necked, alienated brother; the other witnessing the drowning of her husband in the Bay of Naples, and swayed only by a dread lest the cold-blooded, well-mannered tyrant should come back again. Such is the different effect of tribulation and of selfish gaiety upon the character. "Along with the sense of danger and possible rescue for those long-remembered beings at the old home, there was an undefined sense of reconcilement with her brother; what quarrel, what harshness, what unbelief in each other can subsist in the presence of a great calamity, when all the artificial vesture of our life is gone, and we are all one with each other in primitive mortal needs? Vaguely Maggie felt this; in the strong resurgent love towards her brother that swept away all the impressions of hard, cruel offence and misunderstanding, and left only the deep, underlying, unshakable memories of early union."

"It was not till Tom had pushed off, and they were on the wide water,—he face to face with Maggie,—that the full meaning of what had happened rushed upon his mind. They sat mutely gazing upon each other; Maggie with eyes of intense life looking out from a weary, beaten face; Tom with a certain awe and humiliation. At last a mist gathered over the blue-gray eyes, and the lips found a

word they could utter—the old childish 'Magsie.' Maggie could make no answer but a long, deep sob of that mysterious, wondrous happiness that is one with pain."

A new promise of fruitfulness in the wizened, sapless character of Silas Marner begins with the crisis of anguish which follows the theft of his guineas: for the poor motherless child who has strangely crept into his home makes him forget his loss, and weans him from the avarice which has hitherto been his only interest in life. He found through Eppie a new spring of motive, and a larger range of sympathy with his kind. He was able to forget the wrong of his early life, and to dispel the suspicion with which he was eyed in his new surroundings, which seemed so much like an interminable multiplication of the misjudgment of which he had been a victim in the past. Speaking to Eppie, the old weaver says: "At first I'd a sort of feeling come across me now and then, as if you might be changed into the gold again: for sometimes, turn my head which way I would, I seemed to see the gold; and I thought I should be glad if I could feel it, and find it was come back. But that didn't last long. After a bit I should have thought it was a curse come again, if it had drove you from me, for I'd got to feel the need of your voice and the touch of your little fingers."

In *Felix Holt* we see how Esther Lyon, who at first is little better than a frivolous coquette, with all the whims, tricks, airs, weaknesses of her French ancestry, a superior Hetty Sorrel with a taste for Byron, grows in due time and by many an ordeal into thoughtful piety, unselfishness, and heroic strength; whilst Felix, the man of rough manners and straight thinking, is softened and made gentle

by the wrongs which once might have exasperated him into a firebrand.

And Adam Bede is almost made a companion spirit for the divinely gracious and pitiful Dinah by the fire through which he passes in connexion with Hetty's trial and sentence. "Deep, unspeakable suffering may well be called a baptism, a regeneration, the initiation into a new state. The yearning memories, the bitter regret, the agonised sympathy, the struggling appeal to the invisible right, all the intense emotions which had filled the days and nights of the past week, and were compressing themselves like an eager crowd into the hours of this single morning, made Adam look back on all the previous years as if they had been a dim, sleepy existence, and they had only now awakened to full consciousness. Doubtless, a great anguish may do the work of years, and we may come out from that baptism of fire with a soul full of new awe and new pity."

The illustrations might be multiplied. Romola learns sweetness, self-restraint, faith by years of misery that might seem to threaten all faith, and a charity larger than that of her age or even of Savonarola himself. "God's kingdom is something wider than your party—else, let me stand outside it with the beings that I love." By the crosses and mortifications of her first marriage, and the unjust reflection cast upon her through her husband's will, Dorothea acquires finer powers of sympathy, and is able to prove herself the good genius of Lydgate, who has been so disastrously compromised by his relations with Bulstrode. All the elect characters in these lifelike books are in process of growth toward piety and holiness, for they are

not all angels to begin with. We are not invited to look upon groups of motionless statuary. As in the modern device of the kinetescope, the photographic similitudes so revolve before us that we see men and women not only entering into heroic actions which quicken the pulse of the beholder, but working out step by step their salvation into the life of righteousness and transcendent excellence. Many weak and blemished characters leave their frailties behind them in the fires. Even Arthur Donnithorne is allowed space for the repentance that worketh unto life, and from our last glimpses of him we are led to hope that he may not have received the grace of God in vain.

One thing only is needed to make these views of the rise, progress, fruition of character, often through heart-piercing discipline and tragic ordeal, completely Christian, and that is the belief in some after-sphere, where the perfected character can find for itself due range and opportunity. One cannot feel content that the last vocation for which the Adam Bedes, Felix Holts, Caleb Garths, Romolas, Dorotheas, Maggie Tullivers have been perfected by suffering, is to go on doing honest carpentry, laughing at make-believes in pills and politics, building model cottages, watching over the children of faithless husbands, sucked by the vortex of devouring floods into eternal oblivion. The immortality of George Eliot's unfading pages is not enough. The great writer herself must surely have been drawn to the inference which would have made her view that of the Bible: that conscious personal immortality is the inalienable birthright of righteous and pitiful character, and that, as such, the pains and

sorrows employed to refine and perfect character are not wasted upon either the sufferer or those inspired hereafter by his example.

Guilt and the Demand for Mediation

The great writer under discussion recognises with impressive frequency the need of the human heart, overwhelmed with the sense of its own sin, for a wise, holy, pitiful personality on which to lean. And this is so in spite of the open contempt she shows for the warped Evangelicalism of some of her Low Church and Dissenting characters. It was perhaps out of respect for the saintly character of her "Aunt Samuel" that she spared the early Methodist theology in her satire, as well as from the fact that the theology represented by Dinah Bede had to bear the reproach of attaching undue importance to good works. There was a meeting-point between Dinah and Adam Bede, for they were at one in their passion for practical righteousness. Most of George Eliot's favourite characters, such as Adam Bede, Caleb Garth, Dorothea Brooke, are no believers in "the propitiation which is simply a doctrinal transaction," but are working out their salvation by honest and unselfish work. Old miser Featherstone passes a shrewd criticism upon Bulstrode's type of piety when he says: "That's what his religion means; he wants God Almighty to come in" when, that is, "the devil no longer backs him," and he is on the point of "coming down." She does not go the full length of depicting Bulstrode as an antinomian, for she shows him eager to render some kind of reparation to Ladislaw when the final crash is

in view. In making upright, clear-souled people, who are not fervently religious in the conventional sense of the word, foils to the seamy pietists of her stories, she was perhaps representing only the utilitarian enthusiasm of her decade, and might have arranged her lights and shadows differently if writing now, when the current Christianity, whatever its other defects and limitations, has at least become somewhat more practical.

But her criticisms upon Evangelical theology notwithstanding, George Eliot recognises the mystery of sin and the cry of the heart burdened with it for help. She is wonderfully true to human nature, and implies more than she says about the mystery of evil when she paints Arthur Donnithorne caressing his horse. "He loved her the better because she knew nothing of his secrets." The same trait of human nature reappears when Tito finds more happiness in the company of Tessa than of Romola, because she could not read his sin and duplicity so clearly. She was too simple to do that. Bulstrode accepts greedily the continued sympathy and affection of his wife, when the flagitious past is brought into view; but he is afraid to tell her all, lest the last crime should permanently alienate her affections. A time comes when to the normally sensitive at least there is no hiding away for the guilty soul amongst the ignorant, and the burden it bears must be shared or the heart will break. It is in the time of the upcast, ever-accusing sin, rather than in the time of crushing sorrow, that George Eliot brings in the human mediator. This mystery of trouble in the soul must not be carried alone. Dinah goes to the half-petrified, despairing girl in the prison cell; Esther enters

Mrs. Transome's room in the sleepless midnight which follows the acknowledgment to Harold of her early sin, and the fact that it is now bruited abroad in the neighbourhood, saving her by gentleness and sympathy from the last madness of pain; Bulstrode leans in his conscious guilt and forlornness upon his faithful wife, although he dare not tell her the worst; Daniel Deronda goes to Gwendolen when she is affrighted into stupefaction more by the remembrance of her own malignant thoughts against her husband than by the tragedy which has dissolved the hated marriage bond. Ceasing as she had to believe in a doctrine of divine mediation for sin, George Eliot provided the best human substitute for it her imagination could devise. Most of the mediators she sends to those crushed by sin are women, perhaps a concession to the conspicuous position claimed for them by Comtists, with whom George Henry Lewes was more or less identified. It would be unfair to look upon these passages in her writings as furnishing any ground for claiming her as a believer in the doctrine of divine mediation, but they do reaffirm again and again that in no faithful portraiture of sinful human nature can the cry of the human soul be discarded, and that it is only in the answered cry that the human soul can find help, uplifting, salvation. The picture of Dinah interceding with Hetty Sorrel in the prison cell through the night-watches till she is softened, humanised, saved, makes one feel almost as though the fervent compassion of Jesus Christ had come to dwell bodily in this sweet, winsome, believing woman. When the door of the cell had been closed, Dinah saw the poor condemned girl in a heap on a straw pallet, with

her head buried in her knees as though asleep; she paused for a moment, and then spoke to her softly by name, but there was no response, save a faint shiver through Hetty's frame. The name is called a second and a third time; and then the hidden face is uplifted, and at last the despair of the one is clasped close to the all-hoping love of the other's heart. The lingering light of the evening faded as they stood in silence, till at length, when they sat down on the straw pallet together, their faces were no longer distinguishable. But still there was no sense of sin in the transgressor; her incipient repentance consisted in little more than a vague clinging to life and a horror of that gulf of death and darkness which seemed to be gaping before her. But the prayer which follows, in which Dinah bears upon her inmost soul of pity the guilt of her kinswoman, receives its speedy answer in the contrite confession of Hetty. The confession is followed by a second prayer, in which the God of mercy is asked to still the remorseful cry in the conscience. The work of grace is crowned, when, at the bidding of Dinah, Hetty sees Adam, and asks his pardon for the bitter wrong she had done him, and expresses her readiness to forgive her seducer, against whom her soul had been burning with the fiery hatred of hell. Dinah's ministry to this doomed girl is the ideal of high-priestly sympathy, and if one human soul ever redeemed another by standing in its place, the feat was accomplished by this holy and prayerful woman.

It is interesting to find this need for some kind of mediation in the hour of guilt and terror reappear in a more or less pale and indeterminate form in *Daniel*

Deronda, George Eliot's last book. In that sympathetic study of modern Jewish life, one would like to think that this great delineator of character, whose religious views had been so disastrously convulsed, was traversing the path back to faith in the order of historic revelation, and that in the abject dependence of Gwendolen upon the wisdom, strength, and high-mindedness of Deronda, when her soul was prostrate with agony and self-accusation, this skilful interpreter of some of the heart's deepest secrets is recognising the fact that the need for mediation of some kind, in presence of the oppressive and soul-withering consciousness of indwelling wrong, is one of the indestructible instincts of our nature. If her canons of historical criticism forbade George Eliot to accept Jesus Christ as a divine mediator, she put in His place human mediators as much like Him in wisdom, pitifulness, and magnanimity as she could make them.

The sarcasm upon conventional Christianity George Eliot sometimes fits into the lips of her favourite characters, if taken upon due occasion, may serve as a useful tonic to brace us up to sane views of religion and wholesome conceptions of duty. In her most biting epigrams she scarcely ever shows herself hostile to either the faith or the ethic of our great Master. Some theological writers perhaps deserve the sneer she puts into the mouth of Parson Farebrother, concerning "a monograph on the ant as treated by Solomon, showing the harmony of the book of Proverbs with modern research." The preacher who expects undue deference to his teaching may well consider Felix Holt's rough assertion that "truth venders and medicine venders usually recommend swallow-

ing. When a man sees his livelihood in a pill or a proposition, he likes to have orders for the dose, and not curious enquiries." The same candid philosopher levels a true and not unnecessary criticism at a too common type of senile piety when he says, "There are some people who don't care about heaven till they get the gout very bad." The religion of the past twenty years is in some respects perhaps an improvement upon that of our forefathers, yet we still need to be reminded of the Radical's axiom, that "we are saved by making the future present to ourselves." But the noblest saying which came from the lips of Felix Holt was one which George Eliot perhaps meant to some extent as a personal apology, —a saying that might well be put in letters of gold over all our halls of science and clubs of unbelieving socialists, aye! and over not a few Christian pulpits, entered from time to time by men who unsettle rather than build up: "I do not measure my force by the negations that are in me."

Throughout the writings of this gifted woman we may find the material for religious inferences which she had perhaps become too sad or timid or rigidly mathematical to formulate for herself. To see whether her theology in solution can be crystallized into postulates may be one of the processes of legitimate logic. With all her drawbacks of creed and character, the testimony she bears to much that is of the very essence of religion is scarcely less precious than her contribution to literature; and in the latter respect there are some who think that she stands alone amongst the men and women of the past fifty years.

CHAPTER II

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

In the literature of modern fiction, a star of the first magnitude adorns the Western heavens, shedding a pure and solemn light over the continents that lie on either side of the Atlantic wave. Nathaniel Hawthorne, looked at in some aspects, is scarcely less great than George Eliot, although his genius is of an entirely different order, and works upon a plane peculiarly its own. His writing is just as rich in veiled religious teaching, as that already passed under review. We get the theology, however, first-hand from the brain of the author, and not broken up and interfused through the busy dramas of workaday life. This greatest of American prose writers is a vivid chronicler of introspective processes, and does not spend himself in painting action scenes. Steeped through and through in a somewhat sombre moral seriousness, he gives the supreme place to ethical and religious problems, and all other interests are subsidiary. There is no rest for the human spirit, according to his teaching, but in the highest duty and the holiest love. By birth, training, and quiet, persistent sympathy, Hawthorne belonged to the New England school of Unitarians, a school in whose unworldly ideals and noble severity of principle we can trace not a little of the Puritanism and iron of the Pilgrim Fathers.

His profound and half-credulous interest in those enigmas of psychology which are still occupying the attention of scientific students, perhaps justifies the claim of spiritualists to count him as one of their proselytes. His imagination is so eerie and fearsome, that we sometimes doubt its perfect sanity. He is the Wiertz of literature, filling amongst modern writers some such place as that filled by the half-mad Belgian amongst painters,—a Wiertz of faultless style, with reticence and self-control, toned by the searching airs of Massachusetts. Some of his tales idealise the legends, histories, superstitions of the first groups of New England settlers, and as such scarcely fall within the scope of our survey. Other stories, which he labels as moralities, parables, allegories, romances, are not infrequently set in a framework of psychological occultism and semi-scientific marvel. We find ourselves groping along the intricate paths of a sombre borderland, where it is neither light nor dark. But through all his scenes the book of remembrance looms vaguely in view; a sense of judgment is ever in the air,—self-judgment mysteriously forced upon the mind by a hand from the unseen. Some writers make it their chosen vogue to paint the madness of sensual passion. Hawthorne revels in depicting conscience at its fever-height, tumultuous with convulsion, remorse, delirium. The tragedy of a nature made a little lower than God, and flying from its own shame and baseness on the one hand, and fretting, on the other, against the eternal righteousness which grasps it with unrelenting hold, is sometimes embodied in the form of romance which sets aside the probabilities of life; and the essence of truth secretes itself

in incredible incident. For this reason it is not always easy to separate Hawthorne's specific moral and religious teaching from the wanton fantasies of his powerful imagination. His witness to the significance of all thought and of every phase of conduct seems to be half invalidated by the dreaminess of the romance with which it is incorporated. And yet, in delineations where the fancy is eccentric to the point of frenzy and madness, it is possible to see stern, sober, abiding law, ever alert to vindicate itself. The solemn trumpet-note which rang from the crags of Sinai rises high above the voices of mockery, self-incrimination, solemn laughter, of which Hawthorne not infrequently makes his characters the mouthpiece. He has a scheme of retribution which asserts itself with almost monotonous consistency through his plots and ghostly dramas. Its processes are inward; but the wounded conscience is not alone in the revenge it inflicts upon sin. It leagues with itself a relentless memory and the unknown powers of a boundless imagination, and these combined influences imprint upon the very flesh brands and stripes as real as though some machinery of torture had been applied from without. The instruments of judgment all lie ready to hand within the unseen half of man's personality.

A slight sketch in *Twice Told Tales*, called "Fancy's Show Box," illustrates the principles of construction observed in the more elaborate stories of after years. The faculties of the soul are personified, and contribute something to those lurid conceptions which blaze through Hawthorne's writings like so many red beacons warning against inward as well as outward sin. An old gentleman of irreproachable reputation is sitting musefully over his glass of wine.

Three figures enter the room, symbolising respectively Fancy, Memory, Conscience. Memory and Conscience take their places on each side of his chair, whilst Fancy lays down a pile of pictures upon the table opposite, and sets to work to exhibit them after the fashion of an itinerant showman. A scene is put into the box and focused before his vision, in which he appears as breaking the heart of a cottage maiden, or at least treating her with great meanness and treachery. This is followed by a scene in which he aims a blow at the life of a bosom friend, and incurs the stain of indelible bloodguiltiness. Yet another scene rises before his view, in which he commences a lawsuit against three helpless orphans, who are joint legatees with himself under a kinsman's will, and he is only stopped by the fact that he has not a shred of legal argument on his side. At first he looks upon these representations as gratuitous falsehoods; but out of disjointed recollections Memory begins to reconstruct the past, and Conscience, on the other side, stimulates and spiritualises his sense of right and wrong, and completes conviction, till at last it is impossible to evade the acknowledgment that there have been hidden delinquencies of motive and temper corresponding in all respects to these outward facts visualised to the eye. "One single penitential tear would have washed away these pictures." In those whose reputation is apparently without reproach there are inward touches of affinity with the base and the guilty, and that title to heaven which grounds itself on spotless, uniform, lifelong personal righteousness is little better than a pretence. "Penitence must kneel; mercy must come from the footstool of the throne, or the golden gate will never open."

The subtlety of sin, the inwardness of penalty, the close partnership with itself into which the conscience brings the intellectual faculties, so that it may accomplish its appointed tasks of discipline and punishment, and the healing efficacy of a complete and unshrinking confession upon the manifold diseases vexing human nature at its very springs, are not only the obvious lessons of this sketch, but ever-recurring notes of instruction in some stories into which a larger element of actual incident and circumstance is introduced.

Some of these ideas find a pathetic and memorable expression in the narrative of *The Minister's Black Veil*. Conventional codes of dress and deportment sit lightly upon the thin populations of new settlements, especially when those settlements have been founded to assert the independence of the individual; and personal eccentricity naturally shows itself in strange forms. A godly and intelligent clergyman in one of the new American colonies suddenly appeared in his pulpit wearing a double fold of crape over his face, much to the surprise and horror of his congregation. He had resolved to keep it there day and night to the close of his life, as a sign of the reservations with which men hide their faults from each other, as well as of the vain attempt they make to disguise, if that were possible, the worst that is in them from God Himself. No one dared to ask the meaning of this singular badge he had all at once adopted. It looked like either a penance for some scandalous sin or an unwelcome omen of wrath. The lady who was to have become his bride could not persuade him to lift the distressful badge even for once, and bade him an irrevocable farewell. His life was full of gentle-

ness, fidelity, and godly zeal; yet the black veil made him an object of mingled terror and suspicion. When he was on his deathbed, a neighbouring minister, who had come to pray by his side, exhorted him to make his confession, if the veil signified some sin into which he had fallen, and tried to draw aside the crape which had hidden his features for years. The dying minister roused himself from his languor, and with both hands clutched the veil, and kept it in its place. He was buried with the veil unlifted, as a witness that much which eternity will disclose cannot be revealed in this life to those who are nearest to us.

The same strain of self-reproach for a fault, and the same sense of gloom inseparable from the concealment of a fault, dominates the tale of *Roger Malvin's Burial.* Roger Malvin and his young companion, Reuben Bourne, have been wounded in a frontier fight with the Indians, the former more seriously than the latter. They are creeping slowly through the forest, back to the settlement from which they have come, and it seems uncertain whether their strength will hold out. Reuben Bourne is betrothed to the daughter of Roger Malvin, and the older man presses the younger to make good his escape, and bring back help to the rock under which they are resting, and if the help is too late, to give decent burial to his body. After much persuasion on the part of Roger Malvin, and many misgivings on the part of Reuben Bourne, this unheroic course is taken. Roger Malvin's daughter nurses back her lover to life and strength upon his arrival at the settlement, and catches at the idea that her father had died in the forest, and that her lover had watched by him in his last moments, and had then buried him. Reuben Bourne is too weak to

state the whole truth. The marriage takes place, gloom settles upon the life of the husband, and none of his affairs prospers. In the course of years the family moves farther away into the forest. One evening, as they were camping after the day's march, Reuben Bourne, hearing a rustle in the foliage, raises his musket and fires. Instead of a deer he has shot his own son, and it is at the foot of the rock where the unburied skeleton of his father-in-law is crouching. "Then Reuben's heart was smitten, and the tears gushed out like water from a rock. The vow that the wounded youth had made, the blighted man had come to redeem. His sin was expiated—the curse was gone from him; and, in the hour when he had shed blood dearer to him than his own, a prayer, the first for years, went up from the lips of Reuben Bourne."

Some pictures of self-reproach which have come from this graphic pen seem like studies in hypochondria and religious insanity rather than sober presentations of the thought that sin is self-chastised, and that remorse and fated moods of introspection are its appointed penalties. When we remember, however, Hawthorne's view, that the judicial recoil of sin upon the nature of the transgressor is scarcely distinguishable from insanity, we shall see that these sketches, so full of gloom and reeling wildness, are not given to the world as specimens of pathological monstrosity only. The two short stories of *Egotism, or the Bosom Serpent* and *Ethan Brand*, seem to lie on the dividing line between self-chastising transgression and mental disease. Roderick Elliston, in a fit of jealousy which has no other cause than his own miserable egotism, has separated from his wife, and for five years has been

tortured by the belief that a poisoned serpent is gnawing at his vitals. The hallucination is so complete, that he often imitates in his movements and gestures the wriggles of the creature which has selected him for its habitation. Roderick Elliston not only believes himself to be the victim of this terrible misfortune, but he projects his own unhappy states of feeling into the lives of those whom he is accustomed to meet. In a tone of mock sympathy he asks a man who is on bad terms with his own brother, "How is the snake to-day?" The rapacity of a professional statesman suggests the idea that he is an incarnation of extraordinary swallowing powers, and he meets him with the pleasant enquiry, "How is the boa-constrictor to-day?" A man with an unduly rubicund face has swallowed the nest of venomous devils hiding in a distiller's vat, and a clergyman who has plunged into acrimonious theological controversy is tormented by a snake that was hiding at the bottom of the sacramental cup. Every one is assumed to suffer from an inward torture analogous to his own. This moral monomaniac spends much time before a looking-glass peering down his own throat, vainly betakes himself to a quack, who claims at length to have killed the gnawing reptile with alcohol or opiates, and is plunged again and again into the lowest abysses of pain and despair. From this cruel illusion he finds deliverance through the return and forgiveness of his wife;—a parable of the fact that sin punishes itself, that it sees its own shadow everywhere, and that a diseased and distressing self-contemplation, having its birth in egotism, and its fruit in madness, can only be cast out by the forgiving love which comes to meet us with open arms, and by

overmastering faith in the fidelity of those we are most solemnly bound to trust.

Ethan Brand is a morose and half-mad lime-burner, who, whilst waiting night by night before his glowing kiln, sets himself to conceive some phenomenal sin which shall be beyond the forgiveness of God's infinite mercy. The rude and unlettered rustics of the village fancy that he is accustomed to invoke the fiends who make their habitation in the white pulsing flame to aid him with their skill in this appalling problem, and write him down as a madman. At last he leaves his occupation on the hill side, and for eighteen years wanders to and fro in quest of his terrific secret. By the arts of hypnotism he looks into the souls of men and women who submit to his experiments, and finds their passions sevenfold hotter than the fires of the kiln. In his proud desire to know where knowledge is forbidden, he tramples upon all that is sacred in human life. After years of wandering he comes back to the old limekiln, and finds, of course, that his place is filled by another. His terrific laughter rolls through the valley, and he exults in the power and proud possession of evil knowledge. In reply to a question from the man who had succeeded him in his post as lime-burner, he declares that he has found that which he has been wandering hither and thither for years to seek, The Unpardonable Sin; but he laughs disdainfully at the idea that it is here or there. Placing his hand upon his breast, he declares that it is within, and that it is attained when all sense of brotherhood with man and reverence for God is sacrificed to an insatiable and undisciplined desire for knowledge. The lime-burner retires into his hut, and the man who has discovered this

secret, and left the very devils behind him in his progress, is alone by the side of the kiln through the midnight. Lifting his arms aloft, he leaps into the hissing volcano of smouldering stone, and in the morning the outline of his skeleton, inclosing a calcined heart within the ribs, is seen resting on the upper crust of the kiln. The picture is a picture of madness for which even fire has lost its terror, but madness that has its starting-point in moral degeneracy and rebellion. There is a lawlessness of the intellect which is as flagitious as the riot of the coarser passions, and to a soul exulting in its mad mastery of the last secret of wrong the furnace itself may be a sweet refuge.

In the *House of the Seven Gables* the problem of heredity is dealt with. The predisposition to mysterious and fatal disease, the passionate championship of a wrong cause, and the curse cleaving to ill-gotten possessions may be handed on to succeeding generations, just as obviously as ancestral lineaments; and the entail of the curse can be cut off only by the reconciliation of those who have inherited, as disastrous heirlooms, the grudges and grievances of their forefathers.

The book by which Nathaniel Hawthorne is best known, *The Scarlet Letter*, gathers up and elaborates stray suggestions that are scattered through some of the shorter stories. That delineation of guilt, and all the mental purgatories through which it is swept, is a masterpiece no religious teacher can afford to overlook. A bit of New England history is brought before us with a dramatic impressiveness that has rarely, if ever, been rivalled; and the power, the mystery, the deathless judicial zeal which are inseparable attributes of the human conscience, imprint

themselves upon our senses in lines that affright and agonise like fire. The chief characters of the romance are the Rev. Arthur Dimmesdale, a young preacher of mobile sensibility, with a vein of animalism running close under his finer qualities, and always ready to crop suddenly to the surface. He has fallen into sin with Hester Prynne, a young woman who, against her own choice, has been persuaded into marriage with a man much older than herself. The offspring of this guilty love is a child of strange and elfish disposition, known throughout the story by the name of Pearl. Hester has vowed that she will never reveal the name of her companion in sin. Whilst the faithless wife is enduring in the market-place of Salem the ordeal of public exposure and shame, as a punishment for her unchastity, the husband, who for some time past had been travelling amongst the Indians, returns to the settlement.

In the first scene Hester Prynne is being brought out of prison into the market-place to do penance in the pillory, which was one of the standing institutions of the Puritan townships. She holds in her arms the babe which is the proof of her shame, and on her breast, by the stern compulsion of those days, she wears the letter "A" embroidered upon a groundwork of scarlet cloth, announcing the fact that she is an adulteress. Whilst she is being made a spectacle for the gaze of indignant and unsympathising onlookers, it falls to the lot of Arthur Dimmesdale, as one of the ministers of the settlement, to exhort her to clear her soul by making known the paternity of her child, so that father and mother may share the humiliation belonging to both alike, and rise at last out of their abasement to a

better life. At this juncture Roger Chillingworth appears upon the scene, and mixes with the bystanders. He has known nothing of his wife's fall, but she recognises him at once as he enters the crowd, through a disparity in the height of his two shoulders. At night he gains admission into the gaol, administers a sleeping draft to her restless and feverish child, fails to wrest from her the name of her fellow sinner, and extorts the vow that she shall never make known to the people of the settlement the fact that he is her husband. After the term of imprisonment has run out, Hester goes to live with her child in a cottage by the beach, where the two are almost entirely cut off from intercourse with the community. The very children scoff at her badge of shame, and mock her unoffending little one. The discipline of her forlornness, combined with a self-humiliation not inconsistent with dignity and independence, act as purifying forces in her life, and, little by little, she breaks down the harsh prejudice and hostility of her neighbours, and develops a strong, sympathetic, and magnanimous character, which compels silent esteem. The bitterness of death is past, for she has nothing to conceal, and has patiently borne the penalty of her misdoing.

In the meantime the minister goes about his work with this hideous secret eating away his very soul. Imagination, as in the other sketches referred to, comes in to aid and abet the conscience in its work of punishing guilt and bringing to light the hidden things of darkness. The unresting pang which is ever throbbing in the breast of the minister, according to an organic law more fully verified now than then, leaves its tooth-mark in the flesh—the

badge of the opprobrious letter which he ought to be wearing no less than Hester. His life withers away, and he falls into the habit of constantly placing his hand over the spot on his breast where chronic pain is fixing its imprint. Roger Chillingworth, who is installed as physician to the suffering minister, has got some clew to his guilt, and sets himself to play upon his fears, and worm his way, if may be, into the dark secret which is undermining his health, till at last Dimmesdale's life is consumed with sighing, and he stands shuddering on the brink of insanity. The physician plies his victim with medicine, half invites his confidence, tells him of omens which appear upon the graves of those who die with their sins unacknowledged. To tyrannise more completely over the soul of this fallen man he falls into a plan—apparently in the interests of the minister's health—of occupying the same apartments with him, so that he may have him under a cruel scrutiny day and night. The walls of their sitting room happen to be adorned with tapestries representing David, Bathsheba, and the prophet Nathan. One day the physician inquisitor unfastens the neck-band of the minister as he is sleeping, and gets a passing glimpse of the mark that remorse is fast writing there in lines red as fire. Like a wild beast he dissects his way into the very heart of this man who has wronged him, and gloats over its daily tremors and quivering pains. The death of his victim would be too poor and disappointing a revenge to satisfy such cold, calculating vindictiveness. It was this one motive which kept Roger Chillingworth, year after year, in the insignificant Puritan township.

In the course of time the minister is driven by his

unresting remorse to a midnight penance that stops short, however, of a frank, public avowal of his sin. He takes his stand upon the platform where, seven years ago, Hester was pilloried before the hard, pitiless eyes of her neighbours. As the form of Arthur Dimmesdale, veiled by the darkness, looms from this coign of ignominy, an old minister, who has just been returning from attendance at a death-bed, creeps by, lantern in hand, and the young man thinks he will surely be discovered. The lonely woman and her child happen to be passing by, for she has been to the house of death to measure for a funeral robe the body of a man who was passing away at midnight. He bids them mount and take their stand by his side, he holding one hand of little Pearl whilst the mother holds the other. "Wilt thou stand here with mother and me to-morrow noontide?" asks the child, who seems to be always hovering curiously round the secret, and pining for an acknowledgment which will deliver her from the isolation and contempt in which she is being brought up. The minister could only answer that he would stand together with them at the judgment day, and Pearl mocks him for this make-believe penance, and his delay in avowing the relationship that exists. Then the flash of a brilliant meteor all at once lights up the heavens, and, to Dimmesdale's imagination, it looks like the letter "A," proclaiming his scandalous backsliding before the whole universe. As the night begins to pale into morning twilight, the form of Roger Chillingworth is seen hovering near the pillory, like one of the fiends of the judgment day. The minister loathes the very sight of the man; but, prostrated by all the terror of

the night, allows himself to be led back by the physician to his lodgings. The next Sabbath morning, at the close of the service, the sexton returns to the minister a glove which he had dropped on the gibbet, assuming that it was one of the wiles of the devil himself to compromise the reputation of the much revered teacher.

This scene is followed by one in the forest, where Hester has resolved to intercept Arthur Dimmesdale on his return from a visit to an Indian mission settlement, and save him, if possible, from the clutches of the man who is fast hunting him into insanity. She tells him that the physician who haunts his life, and, under the guise of ministering to his physical weakness, has acquired such disastrous mastery over him, is her own husband. He is aghast, and declares that he cannot forgive Hester for suffering this diabolic plot against his peace and well-being to be carried out for years without protest. The poor woman's regret and importunate pity now create a new temptation for them both. After taking counsel together they determine to depart for some foreign shore, where the shame of the past will be unknown and Chillingworth's clutch upon his victim will be relaxed. They will make their home amongst strangers, and find healing for their remorse in a mutual love, that for the moment they scarcely realise is unlawful. Hester flings away the "Scarlet Letter" into the depths of the forest; but when Pearl comes back from her play by the brook, she shuns her mother and repels her call and her caressing affection, till the familiar symbol has been picked up and fastened to her dress again. This scheme of running away from the duty of public confession, and repeating elsewhere the

untrue life of the past, seems to let loose a legion of devils in the soul of the faithless minister. As he comes out of the forest he is strangely impelled to pour a torrent of blasphemies into the ear of one of his godliest deacons, and he scarcely knows how he is kept back from the outrage. He meets a pure maiden who has just been received into Church membership, and who is full of reverence for her spiritual guide, and he can scarcely keep himself from interjecting lewd suggestions into her spotless mind. He is prompted to hiss atheism into the ear of an aged saint, who has been accustomed to treasure every syllable of comfort he has addressed to her. When he passes a group of drunken sailors he has a terrible wish to join himself to their company, and bandy obscene jests with them.

Of this interview in the forest Roger Chillingworth soon had suspicion, if not actual knowledge. Like a haunting shadow, he prepares to follow them in their journey across the sea. Before many days are over, to the horror of the intended fugitives, it is clear that he has arranged for himself a passage in the same vessel by which they have planned to go. At this stage in the history a new governor was to be invested, and Arthur Dimmesdale was appointed to preach the election sermon. He feels bound to fulfil this duty before taking his flight. The sermon is delivered with extraordinary pathos to a crowded meeting-house, and makes an amazing impression upon the hearers. In the crowd outside are Hester and Pearl, listening to the distant cadences of the preacher's voice, and feeling that they belong to another world than that in which the preacher is the centre of attraction. As the procession returns from the church to the market-place,

Arthur Dimmesdale suddenly leaves his place amongst its dignitaries, calls Hester and Pearl to his side, and in defiance of the deprecation of Roger Chillingworth, who feels that his power as torturer will be destroyed by the confession, with pale face and tottering knees mounts the place where Hester had once stood alone. Tearing away the ministerial band from his breast, he exhibits the burning symbol, the sharper and more terrible counterpart of that worn by Hester, written there. Roger Chillingworth feels that in this act the victim, whose awful wound he has been gleefully fretting for years, has escaped him. The sin proves itself a sin unto death, and in the act of making his confession, his soul attains a long waited for and merciful release.

The persons and the groups of persons in this thrilling romance represent influences providentially appointed to stimulate the laggard conscience to the ever present task from which it shrinks—Brocken shadows, may we not call them, of the common conscience of the race? The moral sense of the community, accustomed to show itself at that primitive period in rude, coarse protests and manifestoes against sexual laxity and all other deadly sins, was essentially right at its core, and put its wall of fire for a defence around the sanctities of the family. Its severities were a just reminder of the divine wrath, which has declared itself against sin; and weak and wavering consciences, like that of the backsliding minister, need to be stung and stimulated by the common conscience, so that unreality may be cast aside, and the salvation of the soul wrought out with fear and trembling. And then Hester stands before him, or flits to and

fro with her child, a mute appeal to his sense of honour, and an object lesson of the milder stripes laid upon those to whom concealment is no longer a necessity, and who bear the just reproaches of their transgressions. She carries alone the shame of the past, and at heart suffers less than the man, who is leading a life that is to a great degree false. The very distance he was compelled to observe in his public encounters with her did constant violence to his own sense of truth. And the part played by Pearl is not without its significance in the moral scheme of the story. By her strange reserve and mocking laughter, by the semi-prophetic discernments peculiar to childish innocence, she puts a barrier of ice between herself and the minister, whose instincts of fatherhood are immolated at the base dictates of falsehood and expediency. This strange child seems scarcely human till Arthur Dimmesdale, by his last confession, has made himself of the same circle as Hester and herself. Her kiss on the scaffold is the minister's absolution, and the birth of a new life in her own soul. The voice of this elfish child was a voice appealing to his conscience, and helping his final redemption. In the cold, studious, persistent malice of Roger Chillingworth, the minister recognised a terrible instrument needed in the process of subduing his pride and bringing himself back to spiritual hope, and with his last breath thanks God for the stupendous pressure put upon him by this old man, who, however much wronged at the outset, had for years set himself to do work that seems simply fiendish. But all these forms through which the ever burning wrath against transgression visited him were less than the inward stripes

he was compelled to lay upon his own soul. Indeed, his gratitude for the torture with which he has been plied through years shows that remorse is more cruel, envenomed, insatiable than the most ingenious agencies of outward revenge which wait about our pathway.

Obviously the theory worked out in these stories is that the paramount punishment of sin is inward. That is true for this life, and, by parity of reasoning, likewise for the life to come. A strange power is ever pressing the offending soul to the sternest and most awful acts of self-judgment. But man is treated as a compound being, and the flesh is not left out of the judicial reckoning. Conscience, chafing under the recollections of past misdoing, and working from an invisible centre outwards, undermines the strength, wrecks the fair fabric of the physical life, and puts even its burning brand of infamy and reproach upon the outward frame of the transgressor. The lictors who carry out the sentences of eternal right have their home within us, and the woeful stripes they inflict show at last through the vesture of the body.

The emphasis Hawthorne puts upon the obligation to confess sin is significant. In his conception of religion the act of confessing sin becomes, if not a sufficient, at least the best practicable atonement. Perhaps the antinomianism sometimes found in the New England Churches, which makes light of the human conditions of salvation, may have suggested the necessity for a strong testimony on this subject, such as is borne in many of his writings. Hester gained in both personal character and the respect of the community by the open reprobation to which she was subjected. The love of her child threatened to leave

her when she wished to cover up the errors of the past, and it was only after she made some vague admission of her sin, under the parable of meeting the black man in the forest, that the heart of Pearl could rest in her. Such comfort and healing had she found in wearing the symbol which openly announced her disgrace, that after Dimmesdale's death, and when Pearl was married and settled in a far off land, she came back to live in the old cottage by the beach, and put the old symbol upon her dress, and to extreme age lived on as the ministering angel of her neighbours. Whilst the offending minister continued in the odour of a spurious sanctity, he sank every day into the deeper mire of the pit, and it was in a confession open as the noonday that he found momentary rest, followed by the absolving release of death. In his last moments the preacher declares that he can scarcely hope to be a companion spirit with Hester in a purer sphere, for their separation from each other in the life to come may be the penalty of their violated reverence for each other's souls here. The law to be satisfied is strict and eternal; no term can be put to the disabilities engendered by sin, and in the farewell words of the minister, as well as in the reassumption by Hester of the discarded badge, there is a touch of inevitable melancholy, and even a suggestion of mild despair. Confession cannot do all we expect, and there are limits to its efficacy. At the same time, we need the lesson of the romance that there can be no healing for the conscience which does not begin in absolute truth of lip and of life.

One great defect makes itself felt—in the undeclared theology which forms a subtle framework behind most of Hawthorne's stories. Without a compensating doctrine of

sacrifice and mediation, it is scarcely to be wondered at that the strict and sustained introspection he delineates should end in a remorse scarcely distinguishable from insanity. The balm of atoning love is needed to heal the conscience, or the solitary and continuous contemplation of the past must, sooner or later, have one sure and frightful result. If sin is punished by the conscience, and the conscience itself is a direct instrument of the divine will, sin must be dealt with by some method which gives a due and a fitting place to the principle of righteousness. Hawthorne is a stern and solemn schoolmaster, who makes us feel our need of an atonement which satisfies the claim of both justice and love. Said Roger Chillingworth, looking darkly at the clergyman, who is just mounting the scaffold to openly avow the sin of the past, "Hadst thou sought the whole earth over, there was not one place so secret, no high place, no lowly place where thou couldst have escaped me, save on this very scaffold." The demand for confession is inexorable, and there can be no salvation without moral honesty; but surely the place where we bow in sackcloth and ashes, the altar at which we find reconciliation with God and peace with our consciences, needs a higher consecration than that of our penitential tears. Conscience, no less than the divine righteousness which it reflects, asks something more. To come awhile under the guidance of a man of extraordinary insight into the workings of the moral life, to watch that life as his imagination makes invisible spiritual histories visible to us, without keeping at the same time the fact of redemption by divine love in view, makes the very flesh creep with horror.

The wise, solemn, sagacious ethic of Hawthorne, hidden

not infrequently under the veil of fantasy and romance, is a much needed corrective to the ribaldry of those fools of an ephemeral fiction who make a mock at sin, and have no sense of its criminality before God. He dramatises with transcendent skill some of those great facts of human nature which are at the very roots of all theology.

CHAPTER III

THOMAS HARDY

An ethical and theological contrast to the writers already dealt with may unhappily be found in a living novelist, who, if not the most subtle or profound, is perhaps the most brilliant of his contemporary craftsmen. To his delineations of Wessex life and landscape Thomas Hardy brings a sympathetic humour, an eye that sees surface things with the near-sighted accuracy of an expert who has been peering through a magnifying lens half a lifetime, and a munificent equipment of artistic tastes, instincts, diction. He can paint a meadow, a down, a coppice, a vale, a contour of bleak, crinkled hills, with a touch as true and as caressingly fond as that of Richard Jefferies himself, and in fewer phrases. His subjects are unsavoury, especially those last given to the world, and yet he deals with them by a method from which refinement is not altogether absent. He is coarse only by a too suggestive reticence, or when he allows the Dorset native to deal with delicate topics in a dialect that does the draping duty of Latin in other departments of literature. A prince in modern literature, attired in the noblest purple and fine linen, this author has a curious mania for exploiting sewers and acting Parisian ragman. Filth and defilement he faces with the calm, unshrinking countenance of

a Local Board labourer, and, amazing sight! the implements of his unholy toil are shod with beaten gold, and encrusted with rubies and pearls. To suppose for a moment that Thomas Hardy revels in the indelicate and the unclean would probably be unjust to the real man behind the mask of the author. Far from enkindling and encouraging common passion, he makes one feel the inevitable sadness to which the more superficial promptings of the flesh lead. He is no gay, laughing Silenus of romping wickedness; but a Silenus with broken heart, streaming eyes, and soughing like bleak autumn pines with the pathos of a summer irrevocably fled. A mere ghost of post-mortem animalisms, his genius lingers like an arrested shadow over the blighted and fire-scathed scenes of past revelry. In treating the sex question, it is difficult to say whether he has in view a specific remedy for existing evils, or whether he regards as irremediable the lawlessness and disastrous anarchy which convulse not a few lives in our midst. Sometimes he impeaches the conventions of a civilisation which admits of improvement and modification, and sometimes he impeaches the order of a universe which he seems to look upon as unalterably diabolic. This gifted man has made his home in the slime-pits of Siddim, as early ascetics betook themselves to the caves of the wilderness, and has studiously cultivated the most lachrymose and intractable types of pessimism that a morbid ingenuity can devise. He has all the distraught, melancholy, woebegone signs about him which stamp Bunyan's pilgrim when he is first presented to our notice. His pitiful concern, however, is not for his own poor soul, but for the ill-fated, the mismarried, the riotously

sensual people who are tricked by their own lusts, and are hopelessly immured in a nineteenth century City of Destruction.

In a preface to the fifth edition of *Tess*, this writer informs readers and critics "that the novel was intended to be neither didactic nor aggressive, but in the scenic parts representative simply, and in the contemplative parts to be oftener charged with impressions than convictions." Such a frank admission might seem to bar out any criticism of the book and the type of story it contains from the theological standpoint. But the question arises, How are we to draw a clear working line between a writer's "impressions" and those more deeply cut impressions which we commonly describe as "convictions"? Impression is half-formed and insufficiently accentuated conviction,—the faint sense-image that is conveyed by the mere superficies of things. In constructing true pictures of life, and equipping men with the veracious principles by which they must both live and judge the providential scheme to which they are related, the eye and the inner consciousness of necessity co-operate. The quality of silk must be estimated by something more than the fluctuating hues of its shot surface. We do not put physiognomists upon our benches of justice to determine the guilt or innocence of men by facial expression, the degrees of intensity with which they can blush, or the variations in the pulse as the trial proceeds, but men who can apply the deeper laws of evidence. The impressionist tempts us to judge the gravest problems of human life and destiny by tests that are scarcely even skin-deep. Does the average reader draw any line of demarcation between

those portions of a story which are "charged with convictions" and the other portions which are charged only with "impressions"? His note of warning notwithstanding, may not Mr. Hardy's impressions, set forth with all the force of a sympathetic imagination, be taken by his constituents for convictions, and allowed to determine their ethic and their theology? The realism of the hour, skilful and conscientious though it may often be, leaves unobserved much of which note must be taken, and common honesty demands that a true anatomy of character shall underlie the painted robe. Principles work in our social life, and great forces that must be written down and patiently explored act underneath it. The marvellous X rays have to play their part in genuine literature, and must pierce with luminous discriminations to the joints and marrow, or a science of character is impossible. We cannot conceive the rise of a school of medicine in which histology should be substituted for physiology, osteology, chemistry, the laws of nervous reaction, and other cognate studies; and a parallel movement in the philosophy of human life is equally absurd. Thomas Hardy represents a school and an insidious movement in society which are conjuring up a phantom science by treating one dimension in space only.

In prehistoric times the Chinese are said to have constructed a system of soothsaying from the marks which appeared upon the shell of the tortoise when that curious growth was subjected to the action of heat. Those marks suggested the sixty-four diagrams of the Book of Changes; and the Chinese, learned and unlearned alike, look upon that book as the highest product of Oriental genius,—science as

exact, profound, absolute as that of Euclid, Kepler, and Newton. The realists of modern fiction, by methods just as invalid and arbitrary, have brought us to the verge of an equally perilous and humiliating superstition. From the fortuitous indications that lie on the mere surface of things, the impressionist leaves his reader to draw the largest and most elaborate inferences. Fate and the entire theology of the universe may be predicated by watching the random configurations of caprice, passion, hatred, and idolatry, showing themselves in the integument that covers the more subtle mechanism of life. The barbaric empiricism of the method is worthy of Tartar hordes who had not reached the first stage of their civilisation. He who can analyse character in its inward motives and movements, who can trace and measure the finer undulations of the spirit, who can open up to us interior scenes and acts which need much beside the eye to interpret, may possibly help us to a just view of the realm in which our lot is cast, and of the motives and forces that subtend and overspread it.

Notwithstanding Mr. Hardy's disavowal of didactic motives, an absorbed and sympathetic reader of his books cannot fail to feel that his characteristic delineations shape themselves into terrible and inflammatory impeachments. There is an undeclared impeachment of the enduring principle which is behind all moral distinctions, and especially of those marriage laws which in civilised and uncivilised parts of the world alike are held to be indispensable safeguards of sex relations. Suspicion is cast upon the moral instincts as trustworthy guides to contentment, self-cultivation, and the best elements of well-being

The providential order under which our world is placed is challenged by implication again and again, and the doctrine of moral freedom and all that it involves minimised to a vanishing point. The optimism so luminously set forth in the imaginative writings of George Eliot and Nathaniel Hawthorne, which assures us that we need not deteriorate under pain and disappointment, and that no frustration must be regarded as final, is treated as though it were an amiable superstition of prosperous people. In *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure*, these atrabilious inferences are suggested with a dramatic force that appals and a sinister persistence guaranteed to produce weeks of melancholia in a moderately sensitive mind. Unlike some pictures of life which stir our pity for the victims of injustice and misfortune and brace us for action, these agonising chapters stir our pity, and then bring into all our fibres a creeping paralysis of despair. If we want to find the modern Ixion or Tantalus, every other man in Mr. Hardy's Wessex will be well qualified to personate him. This brilliant novelist seems to have set himself the task of rewriting the book of Ecclesiastes with the cheerful moral, "Fear God, and keep His commandments," dropped out. Whether he guides us over the purple heath, or through the lush pastoral valley, or by the restless sea, we are never quite away from the refrain, "Vanity of vanities."

The Illusiveness of the Moral Instincts

Thomas Hardy's vivid and tear-provoking sketches tend to cast discredit upon our noblest promptings. These promptings are untrustworthy, and betray us just as

wretchedly as our coarser appetites. Not only have actions which are informed by the best of motives unhappy results upon the outward fortunes,—a fact not altogether hidden from Bible writers,—but they issue in positions that are compromising, and beget states of mind that are base, degenerate, shameful. Tess, the daughter of a vain, lazy, drunken cottager named Durbeyfield, who towards the close of his life has been told that he is the descendant of knightly ancestors, is outraged by a loose, moneyed young man without scruples, who through the commercial success of his father finds himself in possession of the name and estates to which the family of his victim has an hereditary claim. Leaving the employment she has had in the house of her seducer, she returns to her miserable, ill-ordered village home, to find herself before long a mere child-mother. After some years her sense of gladness in life revives. She marries the son of a clergyman, with whom she has been thrown into contact on a dairy farm where she had taken service. On the eve following her marriage, having told the story of the past to her adoring husband, whose morals at one crisis in his life have also been speckled, she finds herself cast off and renounced. For the present at least, Angel Clare cannot live with her, and within a day or two sets out for Brazil to prospect for land on which to settle as a farmer. In the meantime Tess hires herself to do dismal field-work under a slave-driving farmer, who wishes to revenge upon the helpless girl an encounter he once had with Angel Clare. In these days of distress and privation, D'Urberville, her first betrayer, is always hovering near, watching his opportunity. After the death of

her silly, tippling, unprosperous father, this odious young man, through the stress of the family poverty, succeeds in getting her into his possession again. At this juncture the husband, for whom she has cherished the profoundest veneration, but whose return she has ceased to expect, comes back and sets himself to trace out his lost bride. When found, Tess stabs her seducer, returns for a few hunted days to the companionship of her legal husband, and at last expiates her technical crime upon the scaffold. The only defect ascribed to her is "some slight incautiousness of character inherited from her race."

Almost every step which gives rise to the complications and tragic entanglements of this melancholy and misguided career is taken from the highest of motives. To make good her drunken father's inability to deliver a load of beehives at the Casterbridge market according to promise, Tess and her little brother start out soon after midnight to drive Prince, the family hack, over thirty miles of rough and difficult road. Having fallen asleep through fatigue in the early morning, and the candle in the lantern on the shafts having burned itself out, she is run into by the driver of Her Majesty's mail, and the poor old horse, which has been the bread-winner of the household, is impaled, and must needs be left dead by the roadside. A misfortune brought about by her own carelessness and slumber she feels bound to atone for in ways repugnant to her better tastes. Her parents declare that in the calamity which has overtaken them their only hope of being saved from ruin is for Tess to go and appeal to the goodwill of the wealthy connexions who are settled upon the family estates. An inborn sense of self-

respect, and an instinctive foresight of the risks attaching to such a course, make the project singularly distasteful to her: but dutiful temper to these misguided parents, pity for the privation and wretchedness of this ill-ordered home, and the self-reproach she feels at the loss of the old hack, reconcile her to this step. Praiseworthy and disinterested considerations bring her within easy and constant reach of the unscrupulous sensualist who is the evil genius of her life. She has not been long installed at "The Slopes," as manager of a small poultry farm for Alec D'Urberville's blind mother, than her troubles begin. The people of the neighbouring village of Tantridge are accustomed to spend their Saturday nights at Chaseborough staring at the shop windows and loafing in the inns of the little town. Tess follows the multitude. When she is ready to return, she declines the escort of D'Urberville, who offers to drive her back, thinking she will be safer in a group of her own class. The motley crowd to which Tess commits herself is crazy and pugnacious with drink, and this comely and self-respecting inmate of the D'Urberville establishment is challenged to fight by a tipsy harridan of the party. In the midst of the tumult young D'Urberville rides up, places Tess upon his horse, and gallops away. Under such an unpleasant stress, the poor child is almost forced to accept his treacherous and distasteful escort as the lesser of two evils. At this moment her "guardian angel must surely have been sleeping or in a journey." The exultant libertine gallops on with his temporary ward mile after mile, and at last pretends that he has lost his way. Hitching his horse to a tree, and placing Tess in a sheltered nook in the coppice, covered from the damp

night-wind with his own overcoat, he goes off for a few minutes to enquire their whereabouts. This situation, into which she has been forced for the moment as an escape from a drunken quarrel, repugnant to her refined and self-respecting instincts, is the occasion of her ruin by a man she loathes, and whose too significant attentions she has up to this moment repelled with exemplary virtue. For the wrong that has been done to her honour she refuses to be compensated in money, and after the lapse of a few weeks goes back to the sordid cottage of her childhood, where she lives in long-continued seclusion. Her puny, hapless babe dies after a few months of miserable life, and Tess feels that she cannot justly continue to tax the poor resources of her afflicted, thriftless home. The best of motives lead her into a new experience of shame and misfortune. She sets out to undertake dairy-work in the valley of the Froom, and becomes the favourite of the farm. She here meets a new fate in the person of Angel Clare, the son of an Evangelical clergyman, who is qualifying himself by a brief, easy-going apprenticeship for the career of a gentleman emigrant. Angel Clare, with whom all the dairymaids are in violent love, is fascinated by the grace, sensibility, and instinctive refinement of Tess. He approaches the coy girl, proposes marriage again and again, but is refused—refused for reasons that must remain untold. At last Tess is overborne by his importunacy. In her perfect candour she writes a letter telling the sad story of the past, and pushes it under his door. But the letter unfortunately lodges beneath the carpet, and never reaches him. After the marriage ceremony they go to spend the honeymoon at

an old mill, where Angel Clare proposes to learn something about an industry that may help him in his future career. When they are alone in the parlour of the mill, and the quiet of the evening is upon them, the bridegroom tells of a sad, though brief, passage of debauchery in his own life, to which he looks back with remorse. Tess returns his confidence by relating the story of which the miscarried letter should have informed him. The disclosure is such a shock to Angel Clare that he resolves he cannot forthwith live with Tess, and within a few days sets sail for South America, where he proposes to establish himself on a suitable farm. His sense of honour compels him to make provision for the support of Tess in the meantime, but Tess at once applies the money to the needs of her own poverty-stricken home, and, when privation comes, refuses to ask for further supplies. All the after complications grow up out of her disinterestedness. She undertakes farm-work again in a part of Wessex where she hopes to be unknown, but the work is cruel and exacting. In the meantime D'Urberville, her early seducer, appears upon the scene. His animalism has given place for the time being to a fit of aggressive Plymouthism, which is soon dispelled by the sight of Tess. This high-minded girl, once his victim, meets his nauseous amiabilities with just contempt and indignation. In her misery and destitution she resolves to throw herself upon the sympathy and care of Angel Clare's parents, and with this in view makes a long Sunday journey on foot to the village where they live. Chancing by the wayside to overhear the cold, scornful conversation of Angel Clare's two priggish clerical brothers, she judges the parents by the sample sent forth from

their home; and this proves to be the greatest misfortune of her life. Without making herself known, she returns to the bitter, grinding slavery of Flint Ash farm. Tess is summoned home to bear the burdens of a sick father and mother and a brood of half-grown, helpless children. She tries to cultivate her father's little allotment, and Alec D'Urberville is not slow to watch and improve the opportunity made by the family straits. "Tess's heart quivered; he was touching her in a weak point. He had divined her chief anxiety. Since returning home, her soul had gone out towards those children with an affection that was passionate." After the death of the thriftless, tippling, braggart father, a heartless landlord thrusts the desolate family out of their cottage, and lodgings, hastily taken in a village close by the tombs of their ancestors, are refused them when the cart-load of piled up furniture is within a mile or two of its destination. D'Urberville is hovering round the scene of tribulation, and through the connivance of the weak-minded mother at last gets Tess again into his grip. This frightful complication has no sooner arisen than Angel Clare returns, full of remorse for the unjust neglect of his bride he has shown; and his return provokes the cruel tragedy in which the story ends. Such miserable situations spring from actions on the part of Tess which have the noblest and most unselfish motives, and the whole theory of obedience to the inward voice, which will bring results satisfying at least to our moral aspirations, if not to our craving for outward prosperity, is ruthlessly discredited and overthrown. It was dutiful and disinterested care for those of her own flesh and blood which twice over plunged Tess into relations with a man

she loathed, and at last brought about the stupendous shipwreck of her fair young life.

And in *Jude the Obscure*, good motives, though perhaps in a less marked degree, lead on to the sickening and disastrous relations in which the speckled hero is inextricably ensnared, and bring about the eclipse of sackcloth darkness in which his sad days run out to their close. Hired as a boy to scare the birds from a farmer's ripening corn, the tenderness to dumb creatures which is one of his ruling instincts prompts him to indulge a school of hungry rooks in a brief, quiet meal. At this juncture the farmer, who has been made to feed unauthorised guests at his table, appears upon the scene, and after swinging the little bird-tenter in the air and half-frightening him out of his life, sends him about his business. Jude had been inspired by his early schoolmaster with the passion for learning, or at least with an eager desire for the distinction which is one of the common rewards of learning, and goes dreamily about in the baker's cart owned by his aunt, poring over Latin grammars and exercise books, and leaving the horse to the guidance of its long-established habits. With the view of finding his way to a university town, Jude sets himself to acquire the trade of a stonemason. It was whilst returning from his employment one Saturday afternoon, in a waking dream of classical authors and university life, that he first encountered Arabella, the evil genius of his destiny. In the story just referred to, the corrupter of virtue was a man; in this story the parts are reversed. This coarse, rotund, dimple-making, village girl, who had been sophisticated by a brief career as a barmaid, is the arch-plotter of the history. It was the easy-going, simple

charity of Jude which acquitted Arabella of a piece of obscene horseplay to which she had lent herself, and brought the young aspirant for culture within the circle of her baneful influence. As the result of a few minutes' conversation, relations spring up between the two which for the moment entirely blind his perceptions and deaden and destroy his aspirations after scholarship. In a few weeks, as a pure matter of honour, he marries Arabella, with the saddest of issues as his reward. This marriage is soon followed by separation, Jude contributing little or nothing to the quarrel, although he now knows that he has been wickedly tricked. Left quite alone, his plans of self-improvement revive, and he settles as a stonemason in Christminster, hoping to catch the spirit of that golden metropolis of culture about which he has been always dreaming, and find entrance in due time into one of the colleges. The old schoolmaster who had first fired him with these dreams, and has lived for some time in the university town, has not advanced a single rung up the ladder; and Jude gets no encouragement whatever from the heads of one of the colleges to whom he addresses a letter stating his hopes and aspirations. Life in this city, to which more or less worthy ambition had led him, receives a new turn from the influence and companionship of a cousin, who is full of intellectual fascination, but to whom some kind of hereditary unfitness for marriage cleaves. Sue Bridehead having quarrelled with the maiden ladies at the head of the ecclesiastical art firm for which she worked, Jude secures her temporary employment under his old schoolmaster, never dreaming of the miserable end to which this simple act of kindness was preparatory.

After a short experiment in teaching, Sue decides to prepare herself for the profession of schoolmistress, and removes to a training college at Melchester, to which city the young aspirant for learning follows, pursuing in the meantime his own trade as a mason, and turning his special attention to theology, with the view of entering the Church. As a punishment for being out one night when she had failed to catch a train, Sue is placed under restraint, but, impatient of the humiliation, escapes by a window, wades the river which separates the training college from the town, and presents herself in dripping clothes at the house where Jude lodges. In his kind-heartedness Jude takes her in for the night, with fatal results to both his reputation and hers. Devoted in heart to Jude, she subsequently marries the old schoolmaster who has befriended her, but towards whom she has a strong physical loathing, in spite of her respect for his character. The cousins meet at intervals, and seem necessary to each other's happiness. After the funeral of the aunt at Marygreen, where they have met as mourners, the squeal of a trapped rabbit takes the tender-souled Jude out of doors at midnight, and leads to an interview with Sue, who is also sleepless, that ultimately forced on her separation from a kind, innocent, incompatible husband. All this is assumed to arise out of the pity stirred by the cry of a dumb victim of man's cruelty. Leaving the schoolmaster with his full consent, she subsequently goes to live with Jude, and the schoolmaster secures a legal divorce. In the meantime Arabella comes back from Australia, whither she had emigrated, and, getting a divorce from Jude, marries a publican. This leaves Jude and Sue free to marry each

other, which, however, they shrink from doing, kept back in part by recollecting the bitter fruits of the ceremonies in which they have already taken part. Arabella arranges to send to the care of Jude a wizened, morbid, unhappy little boy who was born after her arrival in Australia, the offspring of her first marriage. The kind-hearted Jude needs no constraint. "The beggarly question of parentage —what is it after all? What does it matter when you come to think of it, whether a child is yours by blood or not? All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care. That excessive regard of parents for their own children, and their dislike of other people's, is, like class feeling, patriotism, save-your-own-soul-ism, and other virtues, a mean exclusiveness at bottom." This uncanny boy, received with such ready doctrinaire generosity, subsequently hangs the two children Sue has borne, and then commits suicide himself because his father and stepmother are in such poverty and children are not wanted. This leads to a separation between the two cousins, Sue having in the meantime become a High Churchwoman, and Jude, the ex-divinity student, an infidel. Arabella, who is again a widow, sets her heart upon Jude, presents herself at his door in distress asking for shelter, plies him with drink, appeals to his sense of honour, and brings about a second marriage with him; whilst Sue, as a matter of conscience, remarries the schoolmaster whom she left, and with hopelessly unhappy results. Jude, it is true, had his fits of both drunkenness and sensuality, and the author perhaps does not wish to make him quite so irresponsible as Tess, but all the ill-fated situations of his history are produced

by actions which have their motive-forces in truth, honour, refinement, unselfishness.

The same tendency to find a genesis for sin and sorrow in the best of motives shows itself in *Two on a Tower*. The flagrantly dishonourable and treacherous position into which Lady Constantine allows herself to drift is due to her consideration for the young astronomer. She fears at first lest she should thwart his ambitions, and when she has heard that by marrying him before he reaches twenty-five she would deprive him of an income to which he was entitled under an uncle's will, she is content to look upon their secret marriage as invalidated by a mistake in reference to the date of her first husband's death. To cover up her own shame, she then enters upon a treacherous marriage with the bishop of the diocese. Such ghastly situations and frightful obliquities are made to arise out of pure, tender, disinterested aims.

We are prepared to respond to the call Thomas Hardy makes upon our commiseration, for there are men and women in the world who are both victims and transgressors; but we can happily ignore these exaggerated plots as we forget bad dreams. The character drawing is not true to experience. A man who has fits of intoxication and sensuality cannot continue to act from high motives to the end. A woman who has been weak once cannot be weak a second time without deterioration, and the conception of an oft-betrayed woman who is half an angel to the end of her miserable career, is unreal. Men and women cannot consistently act from high principles for a lifetime when those principles are mocked again and again by the irony of events. Such views may fit in with fatalistic and

mechanical theories of temperament, according to which the virtuous are never refined and uplifted by sorrow nor the bad sunk to lower depths by an unbroken succession of moral failures. Indeed, if human affairs were entirely fortuitous, right motives could not uniformly have such ill-fated issues. The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes asserts that "time and chance happeneth to all." His modern successor seems to teach that the odds are always against virtue, innocence, and unselfishness. The theory of a divine providence may for the moment be left out of the discussion. Things could turn out as Thomas Hardy represents, only if the universe were under the direct sovereignty of the devil. The law of probabilities is against this everlasting run of bad luck for innocence, virtue, and heroism. The stories do not make holy instincts to be sometimes right and sometimes wrong, judged, that is, by their consequences, but always wrong; and our sense of moral guidance is sapped and destroyed by the sum-total of these descriptions. The plots are strained. These up-piled composite calamities are the products of literary artifice. Tragedy is imposed upon tragedy, ill-fated issue upon ill-fated issue, line upon line witnessing to the treachery of the best moral instincts, till we feel that the pictures are the suggestions of a morbid and overstrained ingenuity, and like no part of the habitable world whatever. Those who hunger and thirst after righteousness do not always cherish their foolish appetites in a wilderness where they can never be filled. In *A Laodicean* Thomas Hardy describes how an unscrupulous adventurer by processes well known to the photographer managed to put a drunken leer upon the face of a young man who had always been temperate

and well conducted. And Thomas Hardy puts an expression upon the face of the Providence that controls human life which is equally false and misleading. We are the sport of malign circumstance, the victims of its reckless freaks, and our best and most honourable determinations all tend to one miserable bourn of defeat and shame. The devil is ever crouching behind the trellis-work of Nature, and making grimaces at our small pieties and our futile heroisms. After wading through many sad and sickening pages, one feels the method is mendaciously cumulative. This pseudo-portraiture, this tricksy photography with Puck at the camera, this everlasting round of woefulness and grotesque mischance and diabolic chuckle, is not a true delineation of God's good world, or even of a world marred by man, but not altogether flung out into hopelessness and blank despair.

The Evil Star over Human Lives

Thomas Hardy speaks with the grave and melancholy responsibility of one who has been briefed to impeach the administration of the universe. The planets in the firmament above us are malign, and that on which our lot is cast looms the blackest of the group. The issue of all earthly toil and aspiration is mischance, vanity, baffilement, and leaden legacies of intractable pessimism, imposed alike on those who take part in the struggle and on those who watch it from afar. At the opening of the story Tess just misses dancing with the man for whom she was providentially made, and to whom she spoke only after the taint of a separating dishonour had come into her life. When Tess

and Clare reach the old mansion where they are to spend their honeymoon, they see, confronting them on the landing, panel pictures of ancient ladies, ancestresses of the bride, who resembles them in some of her features, but the pictures suggest arrogance, treachery, ferociousness; and such associations help to prepare Angel Clare for casting off his bride.

The miserable story of Tess is prefaced by a conversation with her little brother as they are driving to Casterbridge with the load of beehives her father was too tipsy to take. It is a little past midnight.

"Did you say the stars were worlds, Tess?"

"Yes."

"All like ours?"

"I don't know, but I think so. They sometimes seem to be like the apples on our stubbard tree. Most of them splendid and sound—a few blighted."

"Which do we live on—a splendid one or a blighted one?"

"A blighted one."

"It is very unlucky we did not pitch on a sound one when there are so many of 'em."

"Yes."

"Is it like that, really, Tess?" said Abraham, turning to her, much impressed on reconsideration of this rare information. "How would it have been if we had pitched on a sound one?"

"Well, father would not have coughed and creeped about as he does, and wouldn't have got too tipsy to go this journey, and mother would not have been always washing and never getting finished."

"And you would have been a rich lady ready made, and not have had to be made rich by marrying a gentleman."

"Oh, Aby, don't talk of that any more."

Old Prince ambled on in his dark and ill-starred journey. "The mute procession of trees and hedges became attached to fantastic scenes outside reality, and the occasional heave of the wind became the sigh of some immense, sad soul, conterminous with the universe in space and with history in time."

At a later stage, in one of her pensive moods on the dairy farm, when Angel Clare is seeking to fathom her sad thoughts, she says: "The trees have inquisitive eyes, haven't they? that is, seems as if they had. And the river says, Why do ye trouble me with your looks? And you seem to see numbers of to-morrows just all in a line, the first of 'em the biggest and clearest, the others getting smaller and smaller as they stand farther away; but they all seem very fierce and cruel, and as if they said, I'm coming! Beware o' me! Beware o' me!"

On the eve of her marriage to Angel Clare, she muses: "I don't feel quite easy. All this good fortune may be scourged out of me afterwards by a lot of ill. That's how Heaven mostly does."

This idea of some antagonistic force in the air jibing and girding at our best struggles recurs again and again in the pages of *Jude the Obscure*. The dreamy boy, peering in the evening twilight across the hills to Christminster, and catching now and again the gleam of its spires or the upcast glow from its lamps, looks upon the radiance with as reverential longing as though it were a halo over the New

Jerusalem itself; and that yearned for city becomes, in due time, the scene of his nethermost degradation, and of his pitiable, forsaken death. When his own path to scholarship is closed, he falls back upon the idea of one day seeing his son by Arabella a member of the university. It would be a sweet and soul-pacifying solace to find realised in his child the dreams that had failed in his own person. But this grave, miserable boy, who has never learned to smile, becomes the instrument of a tragedy which shatters the home; and as Jude and Sue stand in the room where these three little corpses are stretched that have just been cut down from the bed-posts, the organ of an adjacent college chapel peals out the anthem, "Truly God is good to Israel." In her uncontrollable grief, Sue asserts: "There is something external to us which says, You shan't! First it said, You shan't learn! Then it said, You shan't labour! Now it says, You shan't love." . . . "I said it was Nature's intention, Nature's law and *raison d'être*, that we should be joyful in what instincts she had afforded us—instincts which civilisation had taken upon itself to thwart. What dreadful things I said! And now Fate has given us this stab in the back for being such fools as to take Nature at her word."

Sue was a pagan when Jude was in pursuit of theological knowledge, and now the positions are transposed, she having become a High Churchwoman, whilst he is a pagan or even an atheist. An undercurrent of indestructible sympathy between them asserts itself, and a surface drift of repulsion. After the union is broken off, and both have gone back to the incompatible partners of their first marriages, Jude is left by Arabella to die alone without a ministering hand to give the drop of water for which he

is whining, and the hurrahs of the commemoration gala, to which she has gone, mingle with the repining into which his failing breath is shaped, "Let the day perish wherein I was born."

The same strain rules the sad stories of *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *Two on a Tower*. Love and science are equally hopeless pursuits. Circumstances always thwart and hoax and victimise at the crucial epochs of life. Swithin St. Cleeve, Lady Constantine's quondam husband, was in England, though he could not be found at Southampton when the bishop's proposal of marriage was accepted as an escape from disgrace.

It would be unfair to assume that this gifted writer has no concern for the improvement of men and the cure of the many running sores of modern civilisation. But a reformer surely defeats his own ends by associating all these misfortunes with a malign and immutable order in the universe itself. The conclusion to which such views must lead is either rigid despair or devil-worship.

Gentle Victims of a Cruel Order

To emphasise the wrongfulness of the destiny meted out to men, Thomas Hardy takes pains to show that those fated to be crushed, trampled down, and put under saws and harrows, are much tenderer in heart than the systems of Nature, the schemes of civilisation, the social polities by which they are immolated. In his interpretation of life the merciful obtain something very different from mercy. After Jude had indulged the rooks in a brief feed on the farmer's corn, and had received a castigation which re-

minded him that "what was good for God's birds was bad for God's gardener," in hurrying away from the scene of his humiliation, he does not forget to step clear of the earthworms which lie in his pathway. "Though Farmer Troutham had just hurt him, he was a boy who could not bear to hurt anything. He had never brought home a nest of young birds without lying awake in misery half the night after, and often reinstating them and the nest in their original place next morning. He could scarcely bear to see trees cut down or lopped, from a fancy that it hurt them; and late pruning when the sap was up and the tree bled profusely had been a positive grief to him in his infancy. This weakness of character, as it may be called, suggested that he was the sort of man born to ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life should signify that all was well with him again. He carefully picked his way among the earthworms, without killing a single one." It was the squeal of a trapped rabbit which drew him from his bed at midnight and revived one of the great, desolating temptations of his life. His whole soul revolted when he had to obey the brutal and unfeeling behest of a coarse-grained wife and fill the place of the belated pig-sticker. The wail of the afflicted creation is heard again and again; and the bruised and fate-transfixed martyrs of Thomas Hardy's stories are immeasurably more humane than the spirits which possess and rend every kingdom of terrestrial life. When Tess is wandering through the bleak, stony uplands of South Wessex in quest of employment, and, affrighted by the rudeness of a wayfarer, has rushed into a plantation to find a secure resting-place for the night, she is disturbed in the intervals of her

fitful slumber by noises in the trees overhead. There is a faint fluttering of wings in the trees, a sense of palpitating restlessness amongst the branches, followed by successive thuds upon the earth. Pheasants wounded by thoughtless sportsmen have made their refuge there, some of which have dropped helpless upon the sod "with their rich plumage dabbled in blood. Her first care was to put the birds out of their torture, and then to reflect that her own plight was after all less sad than that of these poor hunted and half-dead victims of an Englishman's passion for sport." The dog who so sagaciously supports the poor betrayed girl, Fanny Robin, in her last crawl to the Casterbridge Workhouse, and about whom she makes solicitous enquiries despite her prostration, is stoned away from the door by the porter. These pictures of animal suffering seem to be introduced to show that all parts of Nature are much of a muchness with human society itself, and what qualities of heart in Jude the Obscure, Tess Durbeyfield, and Fanny Robins are blighted by a malign civilisation and a mad callousness running amuck in every province of life alike. Virtuous, well-meaning, pitiful souls, who are the sport of merciless forces, stand upon a higher moral plane than the powers which dominate Nature, and are under just the same doom as snared rabbits, stuck pigs, pelted dogs, wounded pheasants. The sobs from a few broken hearts are but stray notes in a universal threnody.

The Moral Imperviousness of Nature

In Thomas Hardy's Wessex, earth and air and sky mirror the joy and sadness of human life, especially the

latter, but are quite unresponsive to those emotions which take their rise in the mysterious depths of the conscience. Nature will neither dance when man, the moral and responsible creature, strikes the keynote of victory and jubilation, if ever he has occasion to do that; nor will she lament when he mourns the dishonour, culpability, and baseness of the past. We are reminded of "the imperturbable countenance of the heath." "Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings sadly overtinged. Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair. . . . The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule; human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. . . . The heath had a lonely face, suggesting tragic possibilities." Nature scorns human repentance, and is "contemptuous of man's finer emotions." When Sergeant Troy, in a passing spasm of remorse, goes with spade, basket, and lantern at midnight to plant crocuses, snowdrops, hyacinths, and lilies over the grave of the poor girl he has betrayed, a storm comes on as soon as he has accomplished his task and is sleeping in the church porch, and a torrent of rain-water from one of the demoniac gurgoyles makes a whirlpool of brown liquid on the grave, and washes out every root he

has planted over the sleeping dust of his forsaken sweetheart. "Troy in his prostration at this time had no perception that in the futility of these romantic doings, dictated by a remorseful reaction from previous indifference, there was an element of absurdity." "To turn about would have been hard enough under the greatest providential encouragement; but to find that Providence, far from helping him into a new course, or showing any wish that he might adopt one, actually jeered his first trembling and critical attempt in that kind, was more than nature could bear. He slowly withdrew from the grave. He did not attempt to fill up the hole, replace the flowers, or do anything at all. He simply threw up his cards and forswore his game for that time and always."

Sue blames "the universe—things in general—because they are so horrible and cruel," rather than herself, for voluntarily accepting wedlock with one towards whom, in spite of his kindness, honesty, uprightness, she cherished a fastidious physical repugnance. In *Two on a Tower* we are reminded that "the vastness of the field of astronomy reduces everything terrestrial to atomic dimensions." Nat Chapman, when a group of rustics are speculating about the meaning of a comet that has appeared in the heavens, is made to hit upon the thought elaborated by the late Lord Tennyson in his poem on *Vastness*. "It isn't to be supposed that a strange fiery lantern like that would be lighted up for folks with ten or a dozen shillings a week and their gristing and a load of thorn faggots when we can get 'em."

It is by a mere freak of the imagination, the perversity of an ill-instructed and inexperienced conscience, that

physical nature in her subtlest moods is made to respond in any degree to the varying and oft-contrasted conditions of man's moral life. "Tess knew how to hit to a hair's-breadth that moment of evening when the light and dark are so evenly balanced that the constraint of day and the suspense of night neutralise each other, leaving absolute mental liberty. It is then that the plight of being alive becomes attenuated to its least possible dimensions. She had no fear of the shadows; her sole idea seemed to be to shun mankind, or rather that cold accretion called the world, which, so terrible in the mass, is so unformidable, even pitiable, in the units." "At times her whimsical fancy would intensify natural processes around her till they seemed a part of her own story. . . . But this was a creation of Tess's own fancy—a cloud of moral hobgoblins by which she was terrified without reason. It was they that were out of harmony with the actual world, not she. Walking among the sleeping birds in the hedges, watching the skipping rabbits on a moonlit warren, or standing under a pheasant-laden bough, she looked upon herself as a figure of Guilt intruding into the haunts of Innocence. But all the while she was making a distinction where there was no difference. Feeling herself in antagonism, she was quite in accord. She had been made to break an accepted social law, but no law known to the environment in which she fancied herself such an anomaly." After learning contentment by comparing her lot with that of the maimed and slaughtered pheasants, she feels still more strongly that this open-air environment is no party to the reprobation under which her life is consumed. "She was ashamed of herself for the gloom of the night, based on nothing more

tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which had no foundation in Nature."

Of course we must not exaggerate these hints that Nature holds herself entirely aloof from man's moral emotions. In his story of *Tess*, Thomas Hardy is seeking to show how far a girl who has become a forlorn and a despised outcast may be in part the victim of circumstances, and blameless in a far less degree than society would be prepared to admit. It may be open to us to question the entire consistency of the picture, for the case is so extreme, if not actually impossible, as to be outside the limits of a working philosophy of life. At the core of her consciousness there is a vague sense of innocence, and the spirit of Nature as immanent in fields, woods, twilights, and gentle winds, does not perhaps gainsay her self-vindication. Yet at the same time it is obvious that a strain of moral colourlessness runs through that ampler world which lies outside the habitations of men. Field and sky look, if not with manifest complaisance, yet with the civility meted out to strangers, upon those who are banned by the communities of their fellows. External Nature is little more than an extension of the personal psychology of her children, and in the ethic of her children there is not always body enough to cast a discernible shadow or accentuate a light. So at least Thomas Hardy seems to think.

In the pages of Nathaniel Hawthorne an old, stern view of Nature is presented which is nobler, deeper, more scrupulously true to fact. Hester Prynne has gone out into the forest for the purpose of meeting Arthur Dimmesdale, and the sin which overshadows the two

seems to link itself with every mood and movement of the primeval forest. The trees "hemmed in the footpath so narrowly, and stood so black and dense on either side, and disclosed such imperfect glimpses of the sky above, that to Hester's mind it imaged not amiss the moral wilderness in which she had so long been a wanderer. The sportive sunlight—feebly sportive at best in the predominant pensiveness of the day and scene—withdrew itself as they came nigh, and left the spots where it had danced the drearier, because they had hoped to find them bright. 'Mother,' said little Pearl, 'the sunshine does not love you. It runs away and hides itself, because it is afraid of something in your bosom. Now see, there it is playing a good way off. Stand you here, and let me run and catch it. It will not flee from me; for I wear nothing on my bosom yet.' 'Nor ever will, my child, I hope,' said Hester.

"A brook flowed through the little dell where they had seated themselves, over fallen and brown leaves. . . . Continually as it stole onwards, the streamlet kept up a babble, kind, quiet, soothing, but melancholy, like the voice of a young child that was spending its infancy without playfulness, and knew not how to be merry among sad acquaintance and events of sombre hue.

"'What does this sad little brook say, mother?' enquired she.

"'If thou hadst a sorrow of thine own, the brook might tell thee of it,' answered her mother, 'even as it is telling me of mine.'

"The child went away singing, following up the current of the brook, and striving to mingle a more lightsome

cadence with its melancholy voice. But the little stream would not be comforted, and still kept telling its unintelligible secret of some mournful mystery that had happened —or making a prophetic lamentation about something that was yet to happen—within the verge of the dismal forest."

Nature, as depicted by Thomas Hardy in her varying moods and shows and atmospheres, is inaccessible to moral distinctions. Nathaniel Hawthorne paints her as a temple whose "stones" upon just occasion may "cry out." She enshrines a sensitive presence of purity and righteousness. Or, to put it from another point of view, with the one writer, moral distinctions have not sufficient definiteness, constancy, permanence, and tangibility to be reflected into Nature; they are the flimsiest of thin spirit photographs: with the other writer, they are the most incisive and substantial realities of human life, and are reflected everywhere as in a perfect mirror.

The Vanity of Ethics

This treatment of Nature, which makes it so indifferent to the hopes and fears begotten within the conscience, is perhaps closely connected with a fluid and drifting philosophy of morals. No certain and well-marked distinction between right and wrong seems to be recognised, and the sanctions of the inwritten law are temporary, make-believe, and conventional. It is impossible for some characters to love those whom they ought to love, and an ill-regulated fancy is confessed as the supreme force controlling human life. Moral delinquencies are inevitable accidents, lapses in foresight, technical blunders and miscalculations, academic

trespasses only. Tess asks tremulously of the fanatical text-dauber, who goes through the country-side preaching repentance with a brush and a paint-pot, wherever wooden gate or blank wall invites, "Suppose your sin is not of your own seeking?" Most of the misery of the poor girl had been generated by her conventional aspect, and not by her innate sensations. When Angel Clare, having heard the secret of Tess's past life, had forsaken her and was proposing to elope with Izz, another of the susceptible dairymaids, and settle on a South American farm, he says to her, "But I ought to remind you that it will be wrong-doing in the eyes of civilisation—Western civilisation that is." "Outside humanity Tess had no fear. Her condemnation came from an arbitrary law of society only." And this belittlement of critical moral principles is peculiarly characteristic of his treatment of the subject of marriage. Sue says to Jude, "Some women's love of being loved is insatiable; and so often is their love of loving; and in the last case they may find they can't give it continuously to the chamber officer appointed by the bishop's license to receive it." The lives of Jude and Arabella were ruined, —"ruined by the fundamental error of their matrimonial union—that of having based a permanent contract on a temporary feeling which had no necessary connexion with affinities that alone render a lifelong comradeship tolerable." Of the family to which she belongs Jude's maiden aunt observes, "There's summat in our blood that won't take kindly to the notion of being bound to do what we do readily enough if not bound." "I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson," says Sue, "living a calm life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs.

Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about all alone with aberrant passions and unaccountable antipathies." And to demean the outward form of marriage, registry office and church alike are invested with the most revolting associations. The dandering parson who celebrates the secret union between Lady Constantine and Swithin St. Cleeve is discovered stumbling about amongst the graves, for "he had got it into his head 'twere a funeral." In due time this depressing marriage is apparently invalidated by late news from Central Africa, which tends to prove that at the time it was celebrated the first husband was still alive. The morality or otherwise of the act is made to hinge upon news carried by native messengers of precarious arithmetical capacity. *Jude the Obscure* is full of moot points in marriage law, and the solemn ethic of sexual relations is ticklishly pivoted on quibbles and conundrums. There is an attempt to travesty the sanctity of marriage by diverting attention to the mere letter of the rite which seals the contract, and keeping out of sight those mutual protestations of fidelity which precede, accompany, and underlie marriage. The method applied to other subjects would destroy all faith, and dissolve the fabric of society. Men and women must be free to swear, and, if it is to their own seeming hurt, to change as often as the fit takes them. Freak, fancy, wilfulness are painted as though they were royal forces, which had the claim to override every obligation of the past. That no public ratification of love-vows is needed implies a flattering view of human nature, not sustained by Thomas Hardy's own delineations of character. Imperfect creatures are assumed to have an indefeasible title to ideal

companionships. Compromising situations are made to spring up without the consent, responsibility, or willing co-operation of those who are stranded in them, and a license is hinted at, and half asked for, which would soon reduce men to the condition of wild beasts.

When Jude's first temptation from Arabella came, "a compelling arm of extraordinary muscular power seized hold of him—something which had nothing in common with the spirits and influences that had moved him hitherto. This seemed to care so little for his reason and will, nothing for his so-called elevated intentions, and moved him along, as a violent schoolmaster a boy he has seized by the collar, in a direction which tended towards the embrace of a woman for whom he had no respect, and whose life had nothing in common with his own, except locality."

The invincible tyranny of impulse is often associated in these vivid pessimistic stories with heredity. The mysteries of blood descent are looked upon as a sufficient vindication of all fatalistic theories of character and fortune. The stock from which both Jude and Sue sprang had hanging about it some mysterious idiosyncrasy which made marriage a curse to any of its branches. Mixed descent in Thomas Hardy's delineations is closely connected with riotous wickedness and inaccessibility to those motives and arguments by which law-abiding people are supposed to regulate their actions. Moral and intellectual anomalousness, as in *Trilby*, implies a composite racial strain. Sergeant Troy, who is a compound of mercurial baseness and criminality without moral mainspring or balance-wheel, and who always lives in the moment without think-

ing of either a past or a future, is the son of a Parisienne mother and an English father. The treacherous, impulsive, voluptuous Eustacia, who warns her admirer against offering "tame love, or away she would go," is the daughter of a Corfiote bandmaster by an English mother. And it is hinted that Dare, the quick-witted and unscrupulous villain in *A Laodicean*, is of foreign blood on his mother's side. When a fatalistic theory of morals needs to be driven home, the majority of readers feel that they are left out of count by this device, for the consciousness which in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred protests against determinism is not the special consciousness which is associated with diverse strains of ancestry. Mixed blood, it is true, very often means neglected training and opposite forms of faith, which neutralise each other, and so encourage a temper of irreligion; but it does not involve all Thomas Hardy attributes to it. It is interesting to compare Thomas Hardy's monsters of mixed descent with the half-French Esther Lyon of *Felix Holt*, and to see how, in spite of a biological birthright made up of two types of national temperament, moral influences are not utterly wasted, nor do impulses of blood overmaster the disposition and the destiny. The progress, unfolding, and enrichment of character through stress and pain and honourable love are not foreclosed by the inexorable forces of birth. In *Elsie Venner*, by Oliver Wendell Holmes,—the science is not perhaps to be taken literally,— this problem in another form is most nobly treated, and we are shown how qualities due to inherited inoculation through snake-bite become amenable to those moral and religious influences which pulsate through human life. The philosophy of

these Wessex stories provides a place for the degeneration of character, but scarcely for its ascent and perfecting. The nearest approach to a recognition of the fact that disposition and improvement may come out of distressful and disheartening conditions is the statement that Tess's "corporeal blight proved her mental harvest." What his characters are by birth and blood and temperament that they are bound to be, with scarcely appreciable modifications, to the end.

The Fitfulness and Futility of Spiritual Motives

The high aims which faith begets within the human heart are as impotent to drive back the down-grade forces of animal temperament as the springing flowers on an Alpine slope to arrest the avalanche. The things that are looked upon as divinest in human life are no counterpoise to the fierce impulses of the blood. It is a wild extravagance to think that Christianity can create that condition of equilibrium which is the antecedent of a rational doctrine of responsibility. Religion itself is painted as though it were a passing mirage outside the true history of the soul, a spasmodic surge of the feelings, an intermittent caprice, just as much so as a fickle soldier's furlough - courtship and love. It is the passing dulness which follows mad excitement, whilst Nature in the meantime gathers herself up for fresh outbreaks of lawlessness.

Our author's estimate of professional Christianity may be gathered from a description of Christminster, put into the lips of an illiterate carter: "'Tis all learning there—nothing but learning, except religion. And that's learning

too, for I never could understand it. Yes, 'tis a serious-minded place. You know, I suppose, that they raise parsons there like radishes in a bed? And though it do take—how many years, Bob?—five years to turn a lirruping hobbledehoy chap into a solemn preaching man with no corrupt passions, they'll do it if it can be done, and polish un off like the workmen they be, and turn un out wi' a long face and a long black coat and waistcoat, an' a religious collar and hat, same as they used to wear in the Scriptures." A parish clerk observes, "The best men goes into the brewing or the shipping nowadays, you see, sir; doctrines being rather shadery at present, and your money's worth not sure in our line."

But the depreciation of faith goes much beyond a perhaps reasonable contempt for mere clericalism. "Tess and Angel Clare had rambled round by a road which led to the well-known ruins of the Cistercian abbey behind the mill, the latter having in centuries past been attached to the monastic establishment. The mill still worked on, food being a perennial necessity; the abbey had perished, creeds being transient. One continually sees the ministration of the temporal outlasting the ministration of the eternal." Destructive criticism has to be reckoned with even in Wessex. Sue makes her New Testament readable by cutting it up and arranging it according to a chronology of her own. Jude is overcome at last by Sue's Bohemian temper, and makes a bonfire of his theological books. The most odious characters in *Tess* and *Jude* have spells of blatant piety. The callous seducer of Tess becomes a convert and a lay preacher for a few months, but relapses precipitantly as soon as he gets another glimpse

of the pretty face of his former victim. With Thomas Hardy as with Zola, vice and religious fervour are transposable quantities, and D'Urberville's "animalism becomes enthusiasm." After the death of her publican husband, Arabella has a fit of religiousness; but on meeting Jude at Kennet Bridge, whither she had gone to attend the foundation-stone laying of a chapel, emerges into her natural lustfulness. "'Feelings are feelings. I won't be a creeping hypocrite any longer, so there!' Arabella had hastily drawn from her pocket a bundle of tracts which she had brought with her to distribute at the fair, and of which she had given away several. As she spoke, she flung the whole remainder of the packet into the hedge. 'I've tried that sort of physic, and I've failed wi' it. I must be as I was born.'" When virtuous resolutions came to Jude, he had no confidence in their permanence, and seemed to see his own worst self lurking behind the specious disguise. "He knew he should go and see her again according to her invitation. Those earnest men he had read of, whom Sue with gentle irreverence called his demigods, would have shunned such encounters if they doubted their own strength. But he could not. He might fast and pray during the whole interval, but the human was more powerful in him than the divine."

Temptation is one of the irresistible forces of life, and religion is an insipid, absurd, ineffectual counteractive, as irrelevant as the nostrums of mediæval herbalists in a modern fever hospital. To see the different ethical planes on which Thomas Hardy and Nathaniel Hawthorne move, it is only necessary to contrast the ever-recurring temptations which overwhelm and draw down Thomas Hardy's

characters with the heroic conquest of temptation achieved by the decrepit Arthur Dimmesdale and Hester Prynne, when the picture of a new sin half captivates them in the forest, and they propose to cross the sea and live together in a love that must necessarily have been unholy. In Wessex country, at least, when temptation is resisted for a time, it never fails to return with augmented force, and the horizon shrinks over the heads of the vanquished, immuring them like a tomb in corruption, hopelessness, and unbroken gloom. Morality itself and the institutions into which it is organised are expedients invented for the torture and subjection of the race. "What had not been in Tess's power, nor is it in anybody's power, to feel the whole truth of golden opinions while it is possible to profit by them. She might have ironically said to God with St. Augustine, Thou hast counselled a better course than Thou hast permitted." Religion is far too faint and transient a force to neutralise the sheer evil impact weighing upon human souls through the power of blood and environment.

The Chaos of Catastrophe

These stories teem with tragedy, disaster, and blind, reckless pain, but there is scarcely any trace of either providential chastisement or righteous penalty. We meet with the counterfeit of remorse,—remorse that is so fanciful and against all evidence, that we grow sceptical about the existence of the genuine experience. Bathsheba reproaches herself for the death of her worthless husband, Sergeant Troy, although she has treated him with meekness and

magnanimity. Clym Yeobright is, after the death of his mother, tortured by the thought that "for what he had done no man or law could punish him"; and all the time the neglect and disdain which have been so closely connected with the forlorn death by the roadside were shown by Eustacia, who had scarcely any particle of feeling on the subject. The man who is the instrument of a vengeance upon Sergeant Troy, not altogether undeserved, only just misses the gallows, and is confined for the rest of his life as a criminal lunatic. A chief sinner in one of the sketches has no sense of self-condemnation, and murmurs that "she has made a bad bargain with life." She and her paramour are drowned in the dam of a mountain stream when they are plotting an elopement, but the guiltless husband, who has been immersed and resuscitated, is reserved for a life of unmitigable sadness. The sense of satisfied justice we feel when D'Urberville meets his doom at the hands of the infuriated Tess is outraged again when poor Tess herself has to die on the scaffold at Wintoncester. This torment without punishment, these disasters which obey no ethical law, and in nine cases out of ten contradict all ethical law, are the corollaries of the unconfessed philosophy which pervades the later writings of this typical man of the hour. We are never allowed to cheer the black flag when it rises over the prison walls as a sign that a wholesome and righteous sentence passed upon some flagitious offender has been honestly carried out. The plots often mock our sense of righteousness. Thomas Hardy's evangel seems to be that the devil has been manifested to destroy the works of virtue, justice, and righteousness; and if we were bound to accept such views

of life, we might soon find ourselves devotees of the black sacrament.

Our view of the world and of the life it fosters will be coloured by the point of view from which we contemplate it. If we look at it from the standpoint of pleasure, it may not be all we desire; for desire is insatiable, be the world good or bad, and a point must be reached when the world will begin to mock our discontent, and seem little better than a hell. If we look at it from the standpoint of duty, as a sphere of moral training and discipline, it will seem not ill-adapted to its work, and not altogether wanting in the sunshine and encouragement needed for our growth. The world is criticised by the man who expects to find it a Mohammedan paradise, and has become a pessimist because it is not up to his expectations. It should be much more of an Eden if an indulgent Father were administering its affairs. So he thinks. And the world is criticised by the fictionist of the Larger Hope. He tells us that it is too good for the reformation of the deeply dyed sinners. They will have to go into a world with a little more fire and brimstone in it before they can slough off their guilt and ingrained baseness. The world is rather too much of a paradise for them. The truth surely lies between the two extremes. Speckled men and blemished women are ever crying out for ideal comrades in life, and to find these ideal comrades all the ties and obligations of the past must be spurned when the whim demands it. And these imperfect beings who insist on ideal affinities must have an ideal planet on which to live, in which there shall be no stress or vexation or blight of any kind. This surely is the apotheosis of madness. The sane and the

lowly man will recognise that imperfect companionships and imperfect environments and imperfect fortunes are the fitting and just accompaniments for the present of the imperfections which lie within his own heart and life. Nathaniel Hawthorne tells the story of an old-world chemist who set himself to remove the birth-mark which disfigured the cheek of his beautiful bride. But the little purple hand on the cheek went down into the centre of her being, and was the bond which clasped soul and body into one. In trying to remove the birth-mark by the subtle distillations of the laboratory he destroyed the life. And it is equally fatal for men and women to insist upon a dreamy and ideal perfection in their companions, in their surroundings, in the society of which they form a part;—immaculate excellences that do not as yet exist within themselves. Such a demand is an insane, a curse-disseminating, a death-provoking tyranny.

The hopeless note in much of Thomas Hardy's writing is, perhaps, more hurtful than even his disparagement of some of the essential distinctions of right and wrong. He sounds the muffled knell of all progress and social redemption. Most of his characters are charged with malign influences, which diffuse insidious disaster through the circles of their confederates. He rarely brings them through their tribulations to wear white robes. The clouds which overspread life are charged with blight and pestilence rather than with sweet rains that purify and revive the world. His death-scenes are enshrouded in a gloom that is simply pagan. The great American writer already quoted tells the story of an Italian physician of the Middle Ages, who was so possessed with the passion for scientific research that his instincts of humanity were

sacrificed to it. He cultivated in his garden all kinds of poisons, anticipating some of the secrets of cross-fertilisation. The life of a fair infant daughter he fed with virulent exhalations from a gorgeous flower planted in the centre of his garden, and she grew up to love its sinister splendour, and to delight in its fatal scents, and adorned herself by bearing its scarlet blooms on her bosom. Lizards touched by the sap exuding from the broken stem of this plant at once writhed in pain and died. Painted insects coming within range of her breath fell from the sunny atmosphere dead at her feet. Nosegays with which she was presented withered at her touch. Her grasp placed upon the form of the lover she wished to save from disaster left behind it a patch of scarified skin. And her father, moreover, sought to practise his malign experiments upon the student to whom she had given her heart, and diffused a subtle poison through his apartments which by-and-by tended to make his touch malign. But in dying, Rappaccini's daughter found escape from the elements she had been made so unhappily to imbibe from her infancy. She declares that "though her body had been nourished with poison, her spirit was God's creature, and craved love for its daily food, and that the evil her father's science had wrought upon her would pass away like a dream." We need the faith and the sober-minded optimism gleaming through that romance to remind us that the malign influences with which some characters seem to be charged by the fate that rules their birth or determines their training will be dispelled at last, and that in some bitter and ill-starred lives there may chance to be found in the end of the days a core of goodness and hope.

CHAPTER IV

GEORGE MAC DONALD AND THE SCOTTISH SCHOOL

To pass from Wessex and its pits of night-soil to the sweetness of Caledonia and the kailyard, is like flitting from Purgatory to Paradise. The rural life of the Far North does not consist of undiluted swinishness and heathenism, judging it at least from the character-painting of Mac Donald, Crockett, Barrie, and Ian Maclaren. The bleak, austere Calvinism of the past, which is rebuked with becoming tenderness and affection for its inexorable rigidity by most of those who comprise the Scottish school of fiction, has achieved moral and spiritual results amongst all classes, hard to find in the scenes portrayed by Thomas Hardy.

The novelists, of whom George Mac Donald is the pattern, the patriarch, and the forerunner, have created one of the great purifying forces of our generation. Their influence upon the epidemic of fevered eroticism, fostered by much recent literature, is like that of the coming of a life-reviving wind upon the depression of a plague-stricken tropical city, bringing promise of health, amelioration, recovered hope, and happiness. The school is entirely sweet in its ethical temper, and its chief representatives are not ashamed to confess that they cherish the high faith and hope of the gospel. Perhaps its foundations do not always go down to the roots of

the mountains. It may be compared to one of those floating islands which are adorned with fair flowers and delightful fruits, but which lack secure anchorage amidst the drifting seas. Delighting to depict the gracious and beautiful sentiments and dispositions which have been nurtured in the homes where the Bible is read and its teachings are reverently discussed, this body of writers is prone to constitute such sentiments the tests and the determinative forces of Christian theology. The hardness of the old doctrine of decrees, of the abstract rights of divine sovereignty, and of limited redemption, has been softened to the point of maceration: and in many respects an approximation of Presbyterian theology to that of the Evangelical Arminians has grown up that would have afforded the basis of a concordat for the bitter disputants of the eighteenth century. But, after all, the five points so fiercely debated for generations by astute and conscientious controversialists will not be finally solved by an appeal to the sentiments. Such a short and easy method cannot accomplish the hard things of the old dialectic, and untie with the speed of a professional magician the knots which have baffled assemblies of experts.

To know the chief characters of George MacDonald's earlier books is a means of grace, although we may demur to some things in the theology taught. The genial warmth of the divine Fatherhood pervades the scenes where they act their part, keeping their souls charged with fervour, and prospering them in the grand ends set before their hope. Robert Falconer and David Elginbrod are full of the serenity of faith, and of the faith that is of a true, practical, love-begetting type. Pain itself is faith-

constraining in its intent and effect: and the ostracism of a not altogether undeserved shame is tempered by a sense of the divine compassion. Jessie Hewson, who has been led astray, is found by Robert Falconer in a poor, ill-furnished room, up a narrow stone stair. "In the bed lay a tiny baby fast asleep. Robert approached to look at the child, for his heart felt very warm to poor Jessie. 'A bonnie bairn,' he said. 'Isna he, sir? Think o' 'im comin' to me! Nobody can tell the mercy o' 't. Fowk think it's a punishment: abu', eh me, it's a merciful ane.' Robert wondered at her words." A high-principled, chivalrous man is made out of Shargar, the son of a drunken gipsy and the same profligate nobleman who had ruined Jessie Hewson. In these delineations of life no trouble is a millstone dragging the sufferer down into perdition, present or to come. The Scotch lad, who is the hero of the first story, and who becomes one of the working philanthropists of the metropolis—a prototype of our modern settlement wardens—is a pattern of wise hopefulness and cheerful faith. "Some natures will endure an immense amount of misery before they feel compelled to look there for help whence all help and healing comes." "Strange condition of despair into which the Spirit of God drives a man in which the best alone is the Possible." When Maggie Elginbrod is lost in the snow, and her distracted mother is looking at the dark side of the mischance, David exclaims, "She's i' the Lord's han's, Janet, be she aneath a snaw-vraith! Dinna forget that, woman." Margaret herself, as she grows into womanhood, catches her father's spirit, and flowers into an exquisite impersonation of the love that casteth out fear. Perhaps she is painted a little too superhuman in her goodness and

spiritual beauty. When the half-convalescent Lady Emily is beginning to suffer from the presence and sinister power of the German mesmerist, Maggie reminds her that "God is nearer to you than any thought or feeling of yours, Lady Emily. Do not be afraid. If all the evil things in the universe were around us, they could not come inside the ring He makes about us. He always keeps a place for Himself and His child, into which no other being can enter." To the weak and morbid Lady Emily, Margaret proves herself an angel of God. "As often as you come into my room," says Lady Emily, "I feel as if the sun shone, and the wind blew, and the birds sang, and the tree-tops went waving in the wind as they used to do before I was taken ill." Poor Euphra, the victim of the mesmerist, is taught by unselfish service the secret of hope, and under Maggie's influence and unostentatious instruction at last declares, "Margaret dear, I begin to like my lameness, I think." "Why, dear?" "Why, just because God made it and bade me bear it."

Salvation outside the Church

The earliest and the latest workers in this school present us with delightful pictures which remind us that grace is not limited by the walls of kirk and meeting-house—pictures obviously intended as a protest against the spiritual clannishness to which High Calvinism tends, and a testimony to the breadth, diffusiveness, and perennial energy of God's redeeming love. The types of goodness set up are eminently practical, for the doctrines of grace had sometimes been pushed to hurtful and antinomian excess.

Indeed, most of the heroes of the Scottish school of fiction are mild rebels against the orthodoxy of a generation past. In tracing the steps by which Robert Falconer's youth unfolded without very specific religious helps into a truly religious manhood, George MacDonald says: "God be praised by those who can regard religion as the truth of humanity, its own truth that sets it free, not blinds and lops and mutilates it; who can regard God as the Father of every human soul—the ideal Father, not an inventor of schemes or the upholder of a court etiquette, for whose use He has chosen to desecrate the name of justice." The righteousness which is the ruling note in the old evangelical theology certainly deserves a more reverent description than that of a mere "court etiquette," and is not truly or fittingly treated when made an antithesis to the goodwill of the divine Fatherhood. We can listen perhaps with more unqualified sympathy to David Elginbrod as he expounds his doctrine of imputed righteousness. "That man only is justified wha pits himsel' into the Lord's han's to sanctifee him. Noo! An' that 'll no' be dune by pittin' a robe o' richteousness upo' him afore he's gotten a clean skin aneath it." The past peril consisted in making the doctrine of justification overshadow that of regeneration; the peril of the moment is lest we should reverse the process, and forget the equal importance and the inseparable connexion of the two parts of man's salvation.

In the faith which George MacDonald preaches through his stories, the qualities furnished by the heart and the moral senses predominate, rather than those contributed by the understanding. The dying student, Ericson, proves that he has more trust and love in his character than the

dogma-accepting Mary St. John, although he cannot fully convince himself by rational methods that such beings as God and Jesus Christ really exist. He must go through the gates of death and see for himself, and he is hotly eager to lavish his trust and love upon these divine Persons should he awaken from the sleep of death into their presence.

Dr. William Maclure, whose imperishable portrait Ian Maclaren has added to the glorious company of our immortals, is too busy to be much inside the kirk; but he has the faith which never wearied in working by love, and, when the end comes, makes a tender and childlike confession of it.

Whilst the kirk and its influences are treated with blended fondness and awe, undue emphasis is perhaps put upon the part played by natural processes in the work of man's salvation—fiddles, kites, landscapes, music, friendship; and there is danger lest we should think the centre of regenerating force has shifted, and that all events are moving on right lines, apart from the light and power and earnest enterprise which focus themselves in the Christian Church.

"Robert's mind was full of the kite and the violin, and was probably nearer God thereby than if he had been trying to feel as wicked as his grandmother told God he was."

With all his show of repudiating the old Calvinism, George MacDonald remains a benign determinist. His views lull us like the sweetness of a tropical flower, and the notion is instilled into our souls that things are going on so well through the providential plan which is fulfilling itself in human life, that the co-operation of Christian

teacher and worker with these divine processes is almost a superfluity. Grace, and the channels through which it flows, and the instruments by which it works, are absorbed and lost in the providential sovereignty which orders our lives. That is true, too, of the writings of one or two of his followers. Their distinctive effect is to tranquillise the mind into a Sabbatic somnolence, rather than to feed the flames of zeal.

The Evangel of Nature

The moors and woods, the streams and skies of Scotland, lend themselves to an interpretation differing widely from that so perversely attached to Wessex scenes. The countenance of the outdoor world is not scornful, unsympathetic, saturnine. George MacDonald would seem to look upon Nature as a faint and partial expression of the gentleness and benignity of the Most High. It would perhaps be doing no injustice to his theology to say that there is more than a grain of pantheism in his treatment of inanimate nature, and that he regards it as a faint and inferior incarnation. His optimism scarcely allows him to reckon with the terrors that sometimes run riot in the world; and in the bright and beautiful things that environ the habitations of men he finds symbols and attestations of his own faith, hope, and holy mirthfulness. The world, at least where it is unspoiled by man, is lit with the grace and benignity of the divine Fatherhood. While yet a child Margaret Elginbrod sits at the feet of Wordsworth, and learns to feel the presence of a kindly, living, and sacred spirit in Nature. To her young, innocent soul

it was no mirror of disappointment and despair. "The purple hillside was almost as dear to her as the fir-wood now; and the star that crowned its summit at eve sparkled an especial message to her before it went its way up the blue. She extended her rambles in all directions, and began to get with her neighbours the character of an idle girl. Little they knew how early she rose and how diligently she did her share of the work, urged by the desire to read the word of God in His own handwriting; or rather to pore upon that expression of the face of God which, however little a man may think of it, yet sinks so deeply into his nature, and moulds it towards its own likeness."

The morbid little Harry Arnold, in the days when he is neglected by his love-sick tutor, and has seated himself in the solitude of the wide, burgeoned oak, would sometimes feel for a moment as if "lifted above the world and its sorrows, to be visited by an all-healing wind from God, that came to him through the wilderness of leaves around him —gently, like all powerful things."

"The lark sang of something greater than Robert Falconer could tell; the wind got up, whispered to it, and lay down to sleep again; the sun was at hand ready to bathe the world in light and gladness, alone fit to typify the radiance of Robert's thoughts, . . . the well-spring of day, fresh and exuberant, as if now first from the holy will of the Father of lights, gushed into the basin of the world, and the world was more glad than pen or tongue could tell. The heart alone, filled with supernal light, can alone surpass the marvel of such a sunrise. And shall life itself, indeed, be less beautiful than one of its days? Do not believe it, young brother. Men call the shadow thrown upon the

universe where their own souls come between it and the sun, life, and then mourn that it should be less bright than the hopes of their children. Keep thou thy soul translucent, that thou mayst never see its shadow; or at least never abuse thyself with the philosophy which calls that shadow human life. Or rather would I say, become thou so pure in heart that thou shalt see God, for that vision alone is life." George Mac Donald seems not altogether blind to the fact that conflicting interpretations of Nature are inevitable when she is looked upon by men of divergent —characters, conflicting views, and variously focused eyes, by men who at the very moment may be passing through such contrasted experiences that her smile may be sympathy to the one and mockery to the other; and he holds that for the true interpretation of Nature some kind of moral change is necessary. With the merciful she will show herself merciful, and with the froward she will show herself froward. God is so closely identified with the scenes and movements of the world that vision can come only to the holy. The divergent interpretations attached to Nature by the writer just glanced at and the one under notice may be explained in part by the totally different types of character they sketch. A noble proportion of George Mac Donald's characters are on the highway to holiness, and are more or less conscious of God in nature through the spiritual discernments into which they are growing. And to a great extent that is true of all the writers of the Scottish school, although some of them are devout realists rather than seers and mystics like their founder. In Thomas Hardy's pages Nature is like a blinded and mad-struck apocalyptic angel pouring out vials of

wrath upon the wrong victims, and letting loose tornadoes of pain, resentment, and blasphemy. In George Mac Donald's pages Nature is the angel flying through the midst of heaven, preaching the peaceful gospel of God's Fatherhood to hearing ears and understanding hearts.

Perhaps the optimism of George Mac Donald has, in its texture, a large element of poetry as well as of faith, and takes insufficient account of the facts of human life and character, and of the philosophy which must ever be founded on those facts. He ignores the scientific interpretation of Nature, and never attempts to adjust it to his rosy Wordsworthian æstheticism. These may be some of the reasons why his influence outside Christian circles is scarcely appreciable. The course of thought has grown more bitterly pessimistic in spite of the voice of hope he has been uplifting in the wilderness. And yet, if the optimism is dreamy and exaggerated, his view is at least nearer the truth than its opposite.

Human Instincts and the Divine Fatherhood

The doctrine of God's universal Fatherhood is the dominant note in the stories of George Mac Donald and the Scottish school, as well as of a group of writers in both England and America who have either accepted him as their master or followed parallel movements of religious thought. Within certain limits the change of key is most welcome, for there was a crying need that the gloom and rigour associated with the old conception of God should be irradiated, its harshness modulated into music, its appalling severities softened into the benignity and love manifested

by the Son of man. Of Robert Falconer's grandmother it is said, "There was no smile in her religion, which overlaid and half-smothered all the lovelier impulses of her grand nature." That such a theology should often beget in the souls of the devout a living and a soul-assuring faith is one of the miracles of evangelical history. From the time of the Reformation onwards, the conception of God had been one-sided; but the peril of fragmentary and unsymmetrical views is now equally great in another direction. The modern temper is inclined to interpret the divine Fatherhood from a sentimental standpoint, and to make domestic emotions a scale by which to measure God and the principles of His government. The eternal mystery is built up out of thin, delicate sections of flesh and blood sensibilities, and then we are told that we have before us a true view of God, and that at the sound of harp and sackbut we must fall down and worship the image. But it is not possible to create the ideal Fatherhood which is synonymous with God out of any number of superfine and rarefied human feelings; for ideal Fatherhood must include righteousness. The theology of modern fiction often treats God's relation to mankind as though it were the parenthood which rules a French family consisting of one child only; and such an error could perhaps take its rise only in a generation habituated to look at things from the standpoint of an overweening individualism. When paternal love has two or more children to deal with, it must take the scales of justice into one hand and the sword into the other, and become august and unswerving righteousness. Some of our religious fiction writers, who are in a not unkindly revolt from the

High Calvinism of the past, teach a neo-Christianity which is compounded chiefly of the insular fondnesses of a compact and self-contained family. The only theology they recognise is a product of that facile surface emotion for the offspring which is shared by eagle and tiger in common with man, and which does not send its roots into those deep, broad, sacred qualities of human nature which constitute its supreme distinction. In their underlying philosophies both George Eliot and Nathaniel Hawthorne were more profoundly Christian, although the one repudiated the Christian name and the other was attached to a defective type of doctrinal Christianity. Their teachings take truer and more constant account of the moral sense in man and of that eternal principle of equity of which it is the organ and the expositor. These classical writers never assume that the ultimate analysis of the ethical mystery behind human life, and of the theological expressions assumed by that mystery, is to be found in a sweet and effeminate type of domestic love. Love is God's shrine, and we cannot be sufficiently thankful for a school of fiction which treats it as a holy thing, and not as the debasing passion in which it masks in much of our recent literature. But the ideal man must have a conscience at the core of his tendernesses and impulsive affabilities, or we shall err greatly when we turn him into a mirror of the knowledge and righteousness of God. The inscription on the tombstone of one of David Elginbrod's ancestors gives us the capital article of George MacDonald's concise creed, and we hear the refrain in all his books—

> Here lie I, Martin Elginbrodde,
> Have mercy o' my soul, Lord God,
> As I wad do were I Lord God
> And ye were Martin Elginbrodde.

Such an epitaph is a grotesque mixture of the boldness of faith and of the irreverent Gnosticism which is puffed up with the conviction that it can solve all mysteries. The poor morbid boy, Harry Arnold, says to the cousin who has often slighted and neglected him, "I shall be quite content if God is as kind as you." In her letter to Hugh Sutherland, Margaret Elginbrod writes: "My father was like God in this, that he always forgave anything the moment there was anything to forgive; for when else could there be such a good time? although, of course, the person forgiven could not know it till he asked for forgiveness." The difficulty of arguing from the human to the divine in a world where we are all more or less imperfect is felt and admitted, and the material for theological propositions formulated in this way can only be found in circles of preternaturally unblemished and far-sighted saints. Maggie has to warn poor Euphra against applying the rule. "Don't measure God's mind by your own, Euphra."

A God whose thoughts and ways are often above our thoughts and ways as the heavens are high above the earth does not always correspond to the desires of George MacDonald's heroes. To Robert Falconer the consumptive, faith-perplexed, and half-sceptical student, Ericson, says:

"If I only knew that God was as good as that woman, I should be content."

"Then you don't believe that God is good?"

"I didn't say that, my boy. But to know that God was good and fair and kind,—heartily I mean, and not halfways, with if's and but's,—my boy, there would be nothing left to be miserable about."

Again Margaret says to Euphra: "But He's your Father,

whether you wish it or not. He cannot be more your Father than He is. You may be more His child than you are, but not more than He meant you to be, nor more than He made you for. You are infinitely more His child than you have grown to yet. He made you altogether His child, but you have not given in to it yet. The prodigal son was his father's child. He knew it, and gave in to it. He did not say, I wish my father loved me enough to treat me like a child again. He did not say that, but, 'I will arise, and go to my father.'"

"One evening he was scraping away at 'Tullochgorum,' when the minister walked in. Robert ceased. Mr. Maccleary gave him one searching glance, and sat down by the bedside. Robert would have left the room.

"'Dinna gang, Robert,' said Sandy; and Robert remained.

"The clergyman talked very faithfully as far as the shoemaker was concerned, though whether he was equally faithful towards God might be questioned. He dwelt upon the sins of the soutar, while of the special tenderness of God to the sinner he said not a word. After Mr. Maccleary had taken a far kinder leave of them than God could approve, if he resembled his representation, Robert sat still, oppressed with darkness.

"'It's a' true,' said the soutar; 'but, man, Robert, something beirs 't in upo' me 'at he wadna be sae sair upo' me himsel'. Canna ye help me oot wi' 't, man?'

"Robert could think of nothing but the parable of the prodigal son. Mrs. Alexander got him the New Testament, and he read it. She sat at the foot of the bed listening.

"'There!' cried the soutar triumphantly, 'I telled ye sae! O Lord,' he broke out, 'I'm comin' hame as fast 's I can; but my sins are jist like muckle bauchles upon my feet, and winna lat me. I expec' nae ring and nae robe, but I wad fain hae a fiddle i' my grup when the neist prodigal comes hame. Eh, man! but that is what I ca' gude, an' a' the minister said—honest man—'s jist blether till 't.'"

Some of our teachers of popular theology might think that the New Testament consisted only of the Sermon on the Mount and the parable of the prodigal son. The rest is treated as though it were a mere apocrypha of mixed value and uncertain authority. No one can overesteem the parable, which is the charter of our sonship; but we inadequately honour the divine Teacher and stultify His choice of apostles and His promise of the Spirit when we carry out the process of simplifying Christianity after the ruthless and narrow-grooved precedent of iconoclasts and book-burners.

The history and analysis of the idea of human fatherhood ought to teach us that we cannot adequately apprehend what the divine Fatherhood is by simply expanding to an infinite scale the rudimentary instincts and affections which are the basis of family life. Many errors and limitations need to be eliminated from our earthly examples of the relationship, and new principles which have their source in the moral consciousness need to be inspired into the relationship before it can be hallowed into the supreme name of God. The term is suggestive rather than fixed, final, exhaustive. The sense of parentage is sometimes strong where there is little or no capacity for moral ideas. God's Fatherhood is

not entirely fatherhood as it comes within the scope of our poor finite and fallible experience and observation. Earthly fatherhood is often blind, and is always prone to err, through both the excess of fondness and the excess of severity. In the evolution of human society one of the first things the law had to do was to take away the father's power of dealing with the graver offences arising within the family, and transfer it to the elders or magistrates of the community; and those races are still in a condition of semi-barbarism where parental power over the life and welfare of the child is unlimited and absolute. It was one of the earliest discoveries made by the race, as soon as it acquired the habit of weighing and comparing things, that the parental sentiment is not uniformly competent for the ends of common righteousness; and yet it is to this sentiment that some of our recent religious novelists make their appeal when they wish to modify past views of the mysteries of Christ's sacrifice, and to deliver us from our fears by toning down into less appalling significance the last verdicts of the great Judge of all the earth. The parental sentiment is capricious, unstable, ill-informed, and too often exerts a deflecting influence upon the faculties of reason, imagination, and conscience, swinging again and again from undue fondness to excess of severity, and from excess of severity to undue fondness, and that the more violently because of the greatness of the hopes which may have been baffled and the ideals of home affection which may have been vexed and mortified. The life and the welfare of the child, and the interest of the community in the child, must have higher guarantees than the instincts and impulses which inhere in the flesh. The power of life

and death must sometimes be exercised; but that power must be put, if possible, into the hands of one who represents an equity that is serene, unbiased, clear-seeing. The noblest and most unselfish sentiment needs the conscience, which interprets right and separates it from wrong, to regulate its action, just as much as a watch needs a balance-wheel. And not only does the parental instinct sometimes lean to partiality within the home circle itself, but it narrows man's conception of what is due to those who are folded in other homes. It is the parental sentiment inadequately qualified by a broad and a conscientious altruism which creates the social problem of our century; for in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred those who are grasping, scornful of the just and reasonable rights of others, wolfish in temper towards the community, the nation, and the outlying races of the world, are so through the sheer force of an animal instinct for their children. The sentiment of fatherhood is often a vice in relation to the community, which is gathered together beyond the family or the clan, needing the guidance and control of deep and enduring ethical principles to subdue, instruct, and broaden it into a virtue. If finite fatherhood is to be the last court of appeal on all questions of theological belief, as George Mac Donald seems to regard it, the type must be wise, holy, prescient, and large-minded beyond all earthly precedent.

It is not without significance that the revelation of the divine righteousness preceded the revelation of the divine Fatherhood, and the fact that Jesus Christ and His disciples used the term Father in association with other names shows that in their judgment the title needed a divine standard of ethical interpretation. Although Jesus was the

only begotten Son, and His relation was unique, the Father is often spoken of as His "God." "Him hath God the Father sealed"; "the God of our Lord Jesus Christ the Father of glory": He is the "holy Father," the "righteous Father": it is to "God even the Father" the kingdom is delivered up: "He is the God of all mercy" as well as "the Father of consolation"; "To us there is but one God even the Father." In these compound phrases the Old Testament spirit of righteousness blends itself with the New Testament spirit of love. Such heaped up epithets are idle words falling under the condemnation of Christ's own teaching if the term "Father" is self-interpreting, and can be adequately apprehended through the natural instincts inherent in flesh and blood.

Fatherhood and the Atonement

The attempt to see "the human in God," as well as "the divine in man," and to make parental instincts a scale by which to measure all the elements in the being and government of God, leads by a straight path to silence, reserve, or denial upon the Bible doctrine of vicarious sacrifice. If we are dealing with love in the most simple and rudimentary sense of the word, and nothing more, the idea of legal reconciliation to God is irrelevant and adventitious. The sentimental view of the divine Fatherhood palliates sin, and glosses over the fact of its heinousness. Robert Falconer's grandmother "led him to the corner for prayer, and poured forth a confession of sin for him and for herself, such as left little that could have been added by her own profligate son had he joined in the prayer."

A healthy, virtuous lad cannot be expected to have a keen sense of spiritual sin, and has to feel that by degrees as he comes to know that the things which are within are as significant as outward acts; but the criticism on the grandmother implies that Robert was right, and that she was wrong. Such a criticism has already taken as its standard the ethic of Simon the Pharisee, and permanently disqualifies from the loftier experiences of love the man who has the misfortune to be virtuous. Where inadequate and superficial views of sin are held, there can of course be no sense of the demand for salvation by vicarious sacrifice and mediation. It is scarcely just to those austere conceptions of the divine righteousness once current among the Churches when Robert Falconer compares the God of Calvinistic worship and fear to "a puir, prood, bailey-like body, fu' o' his ain importance, an' ready to be doon upo' onybody 'at didna ca' him by the name o's office—ay thinkin' aboot 's ain glory, in place o' the quaiet, michty, gran', self-forgettin', a'-creatin', a'-uphaudin' eternal bein' wha took the form o' man in Christ Jesus."

"But, laddie, He cam' to saitisfee God's justice for oor sins; to turn aside His wrath and curse; to reconcile Him to us."

"He did naethin' of the kin', grannie. It's a lee that. He cam' to satisfy God's justice by giein' Him back His bairns; by garrin' them see that God was just; by sending them greetin' hame to fa' at His feet and grip His knees, and say, 'Father, ye're i' the richt.'"

David Elginbrod's interpretation of Christ's death is much to the same effect.

In such representations there is this degree of truth, —that for the whole time man's heart has been estranged from God, and has shown little or no desire to return to His feet, God's heart has never failed in its pity or goodwill towards man. Whilst the visible work of redemption is Jesus Christ's, the motive of it is just as much the Father's as the Son's. The personification of the divine attributes used in illustrating the old theology of the atonement seemed to give the Father an unfair monopoly of the righteousness and the Son an unfair monopoly of the compassion. God does not need to be reconciled if to be reconciled is to be inspired with motives of goodwill towards the offender. The alienation, too, is on the part of man, inasmuch as he is the author of his own trespass and estrangement. But the theory of Christ's work which underlies the animadversions of George MacDonald's favourite characters is one-sided, and for some time past it has been felt that the conception of Christ's work associated with the names of Thomas Erskine and M'Leod Campbell, and popularised in some of the noblest religious fiction of the present generation, is not adequate, influential, or quite candid in its New Testament exegesis. The sublime and mysterious doctrine of redemption must ever admit of being stated from new standpoints and presented in new aspects; but it is fatuous to make way for some new or forgotten aspect of the subject by entirely turning out the old. The theological criticism of the hour is too honest to ignore the fact that the New Testament makes Christ's death a basis for the righteous forgiveness of sin. Those to whom such a doctrine is unpalatable now try to find for St. Paul, who is such a doughty advocate of

it, a place amongst the men of third-rate inspiration only. The Church and its most advanced thinkers will come back to the substance, if not to the crude definitions of the old doctrine; for the modifications suggested in this cardinal article of Christian faith, imply a God of magnificent parental sentiments only, and to whose being there attaches no mystery of inviolable holiness. Men void of moral sense are sometimes found who are rich in all the emotions of fatherhood; but there is every reason why we should not make God an amiable abnormality of that order. It is not necessary here to refute in detail, and replace by more comprehensive evangelical statements, bald and one-sided interpretations of Christ's work. It is sufficient for our present purpose to ask, Are the conceptions of God, by which such interpretations are preceded, adequately and profoundly ethical?

Fatherhood and Punishment

The exclusive attention given by George MacDonald and his school to one sublime and commanding aspect of the divine character has led to revolutionary changes in the doctrine of punishment as commonly held, which must necessarily have the transiency of all partial and unbalanced views. The wrath revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men is tender chastisement —not chastisement even which by the sheer resistance it encounters transmutes itself into punishment, but from first to last pure chastisement, and only chastisement. Ideal fatherhood is incapable of anything that verges upon vengeance and retaliation. Amongst High Calvinists at

least, current views of punishment had become identified with a doctrine of decrees that made them a burden of insupportable horror: and the Scottish story-writers never seem to be quite sure in their own minds whether it is a dogma of reprobation they are denouncing, or a dogma of punishment. We cannot but sympathise with some of the devout souls of the old régime whose reason and conscience are partially engaged on the side of the new spirit which protests against the old orthodoxy.

"O Lord, save my father," prayed Robert Falconer, and there paused.

"If it be Thy will," suggested his grandmother. But Robert continued silent. His grandmother repeated the subjunctive clause.

"I'm tryin', grandmother," said Robert, "but I canna say 't. It would be like giein' in till 's damnation."

The old grandmother is too tender for her theological training, and prays regardless of all the traditions of catechisms, "O Lord, cudna he be eleckit yet? Is there nae turnin' o' Thy decrees?"

At a later stage in the history, Robert is found kneeling in his garret: "O Father in heaven, hear me, and let Thy face shine upon me." Like a flash of burning fire, the words shot from the door of his heart, "I dinna care for Him to love me gin He doesna love ilka body." No more prayer went from the desolate boy that night, although he knelt for an hour in the freezing dark. He had a dim consciousness that he would be a traitor to his race if he accepted a love even from God given him as an exception from his kind."

David Elginbrod also says: "Gin the clergy of thae

times warna a gey hantle more enlichtened nor a fowth o' th' clergy hereabouts, he would hae heard a heep aboot the glory o' God as the thing that God Himsel' was maist anxious aboot uphaudin', jist like a prood creater o' a king; an' that He wad mak' men, an' feed them, an' cleed them, an' gie them braw wives and toddlin' bairnies, an' syne damn them a' for 's ain glory."

When praying for her drunken, apostate runaway son, father of Robert, the old grandmother says: "O Lord, I canna say Thy will be done. But dinna lay it to my chairge, for gin ye was a mither yersel' ye wadna pit him there."

One may sympathise with the old saint's unconfessed repugnance to damnation by an eternal decree, but such an idealisation of the temper of parental partiality is as false in one direction as the grim dogma of reprobation dishonours the divine goodwill in the other, and would make all punishment impossible, effacing from God's judicial treatment of men the eternal distinctions of right and wrong. It is just the same sentiment which leads the ignorant and selfish mother of an afflicted child to hide that child from the eye of the sanitary authorities, and impels her to reproach the authorities for their inhuman cruelty when they insist upon taking it to the fever or smallpox ward. To the eye of parental affection there is but one child, and the countless children of the community are not to be brought into the reckoning. God has His obligations to multitudes of other people's sons besides Mrs. Falconer's prodigal, and to other realms of conscious life besides that in which our lot is cast; and he who seeks to solve all the problems of this portentous subject

through the parental instincts scarcely sees one angle of that which he claims to have finally measured.

A Defective Theory of Volition

The writer under review has a vague and inadequate sense of the part played by the will in the moral history of the individual and the race. He is in ostentatious revolt from the High Calvinism of the past, and yet he has tenaciously kept what was perhaps its capital offence, —that invalid philosophy of human freedom once supposed to be inseparable from the doctrines of grace. Mankind is no longer divided into an elect and a reprobate section, but into an earlier and a later elect. George MacDonald is a determinist, but his determinism is gracious, amiable, and smile-wreathed, leaving no member of the human race unsaved at last. The Fate in which he believes may never frown, and may be transfigured into love; but it is Fate all the same. He reckons with one factor of the problem only, the divine sovereignty, the sovereignty of a mercy which always endures; and he takes little account of the part played by the human will in resisting the righteousness of God, and of the sinister potentialities of that will. The will of a bad man in the MacDonald philosophy is simply inactive; it is not deliberately and desperately set upon evil. Sin is simply an unhappy fit of somnambulism. Depravity is not so much enmity towards God and resentfulness of virtue and its demands, as a stubborn indisposition to exercise the power of choice. Men do wrong because they dislike the demand the law of right makes upon the forces of the moral life, and perhaps never take active delight in

evil for its own sake and in those who work evil. Sin is inertia, passivity, unresisting supineness, and not positive malignancy which may be as aggressively purposeful as a career of righteousness. This one-sided philosophy of the will often underlies the delineation of some of the incidents of common life, and gives a touch of artificiality to the scenes. Hugh Sutherland fights the coarse Jamie Ogg, an insolent odd hand of the harvest field, and next morning the saintly David Elginbrod shook him by the hand and thanked him, whilst expressing the hope that the man would live to be "thankful for his doonsettin'." Robert Falconer knocks down a bloated carter who obstructs him in his work in the London streets, and then squares the carter by the gift of a sovereign. The carter must have been much easier to be entreated than his class, or have had a terrible drunkard's thirst upon him if he could have been assuaged after that fashion. And the theology is a conclusion built up from premisses into which like views of human nature enter. Under no circumstances does evil enlist the unknown powers of the will, and after a due "doonsettin'" by judicial pain the sinner will cringe into submission and be appeased by divine favours which are yet in store for him. When men have been tortured and terrorised in hell for an uncertain time, they will accept with unresentful minds the gifts offered by the hand of a chastising God. If depravity is mere languor of will, it is of course quite conceivable that the malady may be subdued by a few æons of fire. After Robert Falconer had found his drunken father in the streets of London, and carried him off to lodgings, where he tenderly nursed and watched over him for days, he ventured at length to

say to him: "Father, you've got to repent: and God won't let you off, and you needn't think it. You'll have to repent some day."

"In hell, Robert," said Andrew. It seemed that so much acknowledgment of the truth had already made him bolder and honester.

"Yes, either on earth or in hell. Would it not be better on earth?"

"But it will be no use in hell."

"In these few words lay the germ of the preference for hell that some poor souls enfeebled by wickedness feel. They will not have to do anything there—only to moan and cry and suffer for ever, they think. It is effort, the outgoing of the living will, that they dread. The sorrow, the remorse, and the repentance they do not so much regard: it is the having to turn, be different, and do differently that they shrink from; and they have been taught to believe that this will not be required of them there—in that awful refuge of the will-less. I do not say they think thus: I only say they are in the condition of dim feeling which, if it grew into thought, would take this form. But if you tell them that the fire of God without and within them will compel them to bethink themselves: that the vision of an open door beyond the flames of their torture will compel them to call up the ice-bound will; that it may be thawed by those very flames into obedient motion: that the torturing spirit of God in their hearts will keep their consciences ever awake, not merely telling them what they ought to have done, but what they ought to do and must do now,—hell will not wear that aspect of attraction which it does wear to such through all its

terror, all its ghastly horror and torture." If that conception of human nature and of the efficacy of torture to reinvigorate latent wills be true, we ought to find a new door of hope for the habitual drunkard in successive attacks of delirium tremens. It is not a common experience, however, that the palsied will is restored by such terrible foretastes of hell upon earth.

The poor girl Euphra, who has fallen under the power of the vile mesmerist adventurer, and has been made the unconscious instrument of his felonies, is obviously meant as an example of the same one-legged moral philosophy. Functions of the mind, as of the body, may sometimes be more closely observed in disease than in health.

"Does the person so influenced act with or against his will?"

"That is a most difficult question, involving others equally difficult. My own impression is that the patient —for patient he is in a very serious sense—acts with his inclination and often with his will; but in many cases with his inclination against his will. This is a very important distinction in morals, but often overlooked. When a man is acting *with* his inclination his will is in abeyance. In our present imperfect condition, it seems to me that the absolute will has no opportunity of *pure* action of operating entirely as itself, except when working in opposition to inclination. . . . The will requires an especial training and a distinct development before it is capable of acting with any degree of freedom. The men who have undergone this are very few indeed, and no one whose will is not educated as will, can, if subjected to the influence of biology, resist the impulses aroused in his passive brain by the brain of the operator."

The redemption of the unhappy girl is brought about not so much by the reawakening of the will as by its conversion to the choice of better things under the influence of healthy friendship and religion, which replace the vitiated inclinations of the past. The view set forth ignores the fact that there are inclinations to good as well as to evil within us, and the choice of evil involves the refusal of good and implies acts of volition just as positive as those necessitated by the selection of what is noblest and best. As a matter of experience, most men find that the will is preternaturally active on the side of evil, in many cases much more so than on the side of good. The theories of restoration to which this mutilated doctrine of human freedom is preparatory can only be made to wear the faintest touch of verisimilitude when this crowning gift of choice bestowed upon human nature is ignored, and the problem of man's destiny is treated as though the love of the divine Fatherhood were all that need be considered.

The Gospel in Hades

Upon the subject of the future life and its opportunities for repentance, George MacDonald's teaching is bold, sometimes grotesque, and, it is to be feared, has proved itself as somnolent to the senses of many nominal Christians as a vast poppy harvest. Tens of thousands who have come under the influence of this type of teaching have ceased to be intent on working out their salvation here, and have hailed the notion that salvation hereafter will do quite as well. Perhaps this extreme reaction has been forced on in part by the attempt to forecast the divine judgment

upon individual souls, especially where many difficult and intricate problems are involved. But the tendency now is to shift the centre of the evangel from this to the other side of the grave. One's heart cannot but ache for the old-fashioned saint when she has heard a rumour of the death of her miserable son, and thinks she must no longer pray for his salvation.

"Close the door, Robert. I canna lat ye gang to the schule the day. We maun lea' him oot noo."

"Lea' wha oot, grannie?"

"Him, him—Andrew. Yer father, laddie. I think my hert 'll brak."

"Lea' him oot o' what, grannie? I dinna understan' ye."

"Lea' him oot o' our prayers, laddie; and I canna bide it."

"What for that?"

"He's deid."

The Scotch doctor, who has lived long in India, says on his deathbed: "I wadna like to tak' to ony papistry; but I never cu'd mak' oot frae the Bible—and I hae read mair i' the jungle than may be ye wad think—that it was a' ower wi' a body at their deith."

In one of his conversations with Robert the old doctor says: "The mair the words o' Jesus come into me, the surer I feel o' seein' my auld Brahmin frien' again. It's true, his religion seemed not only to begin but to end inside him. It was a' a booin' doon afore and an aspirin' up into the bosom o' the infinite God. I dinna mean to say that he wasna honourable to them aboot him. The first commanment was a' he ken. . . . Still there was religion in him."

The strictest orthodoxy, speaking by the mouths of its responsible teachers at least, would scarcely venture to forbid to the dying doctor the charitable hope he cherished; but the problem raised by the condition of virtuous and sincere souls beyond the confines of Christendom has little or no bearing upon the broader question, and should not be used to prejudice it.

So confident is George MacDonald of the regenerating efficacy of infernal torments, that he is sometimes betrayed into an antinomianism quite as ghastly and unscriptural as any to which extreme Calvinism has sometimes led. To rescue Shargar's sister from the clutches of her dissolute gipsy mother, Robert Falconer pays down the one hundred and fifty pounds that are demanded; and this is the comment made upon the transaction: "Within six months the woman had drunk herself to death: perhaps the best thing she was capable of doing this side of hell-fire." Such theology is a little too fantastic and impractical to influence the policy of Church or State, or we might expect to see the torture of Chinese prisons instituted for the benefit of those who have proved themselves obdurate to all the common motives which stimulate men to practise Christian morality.

The philanthropist theologian of the London slums says to his friend, Hugh Sutherland, of a man who has just died of typhus fever: "What a thing it must be, Mr. Sutherland, for a man to break out of the choke-damp of typhus fever into the clear air of the life beyond!"

"Yes," said Hugh, adding after a slight hesitation, "if he be at all prepared for the change."

"Where a change belongs to the natural order of things," said Falconer, "and arrives inevitably at some hour,

there must always be more or less preparedness for it. Besides, I think a man is generally prepared for a breath of fresh air. . . . If you will still accompany me," resumed Falconer, "you will, I think, be soon compelled to believe that at whatever time death may arrive, or in whatever condition the man may be at the time, it comes as the best and only good that can at the moment reach him. . . . I think of death as the first pulse of the new strength shaking itself free from the old mouldy remnants of earth garments, that it may begin in freedom the new life that grows out of the old. The caterpillar dies into the butterfly. Who knows but disease may be the coming of the keener life breaking into this, and beginning to destroy like fire the inferior modes or garments of the present? And then disease would be but the sign of the salvation of fire; of the agony of the greater life to lift us to itself, out of that wherein we are failing and sinning."

The passage illustrates again a defective philosophy of the will, and is vitiated by the taint of Manichæism. Depravity is a speck in the skin that may be pared away. It implies that one of the things needed by the spirit for its purification is liberation from the flesh; and that step gained, redemption into a better life is comparatively easy for the most abandoned natures. At the same time it takes away half the argument for the indefinite extension of man's probation after death. If there be always more or less preparedness for the change effected by death, inasmuch as it belongs to the natural order of things, it is difficult to see why the probation of the present life should be deemed insufficient. The entire tone of the teaching tends to stultify our Lord's counsels about equipment for

His coming. Some power overshadowing our lives, like a benign and sagacious nurse, takes us in hand, and without our willing and conscious co-operation makes us ready for the crisis that is at hand. We have no need to gird our loins and have our lamps burning and to watch, if such be the case, for the responsibility is taken off our shoulders. Such doctrine centres the hope of salvation in the inevitable processes of Providence, rather than in the constraints of a spiritual grace that men may, alas! receive in vain. Redemption is a sure and certain fruit of the disciplines at work in every life, rather than of our docility to the spiritual ministries which are fulfilling themselves within us.

From such statements it is a short and easy step to the belief that the condemnation of the impenitent is terminable, and that the final recovery of every offending member of the human race to truth and blessedness is fully assured. Such a faith George Mac Donald holds with dogmatic certitude, and preaches in season and out of season. This was the great dream of the amateur hero and theologian in the days of his boyhood.

"Weel, gin I win there, the very first nicht I sit down with the lave o' them, I'm gaein' to rise and say—that is, gin the Maister at the heid o' the table disna bid me sit doon—'Brithers and sisters, the haill o' ye, hearken to me for ae minute; an', O Lord, gin I say wrang, jist tak' the speech frae me and I'll sit doon dumb an' rebukit. We're a' here by grace an' no' by merit, save His, as ye a' ken better nor I can tell ye, for ye hae been longer here nor me. But it's jist ruggin' and rivin' at my hert to think o' them that's doon there. . . . I call upo' ilk ane o' ye that has a frien' or neebor doon yonner to rise up nor taste nor

bite nor sup mair till we gang up a' thegither to the fut o' the throne and pray the Lord to let 's gang and du as the Maister did afore 's, an' beir their griefs and cairry their sorrows doon in hell there; gin it may be they may repent an' get remission o' their sins, an' come up here wi' 's at the lang last an' sit doon wi' 's at this table, a' thro' the merits o' our Saviour Jesus Christ at the heid o' the table there.'"

When Robert has outgrown in some degree the priggishness and ill-veiled pharisaism which marks that boyish outburst and become a working philanthropist, he describes a clergyman whom he hears at his occasional visits to a place of worship. The portrait is obviously that of Frederick D. Maurice. "He believes entirely that God loves, yea, is love, and therefore that hell itself must be subservient to that love." Such a statement one may readily accept without endorsing the inference from the statement drawn by either Maurice or his Scotch disciple. The question at issue is whether the love is love to the one individual who suffers there the due recompense of his deeds, or love which is part of a larger love to the collective universe of moral and intelligent beings.

"Stop," said Robert Falconer to Hugh Sutherland, when he was about to fling himself upon the mesmerist-felon and strangle him. "No revenge! Leave him to the sleeping divinity within him, which will awake some day and complete the hell that he is now building for himself, for the very fire of hell is the divine in it."

A few pages before the last quotation this seer of future mysteries asserts: "So long as the wicked themselves remain impenitent there is mourning in heaven; and when

there is no longer any hope over one last remaining sinner, heaven itself must confess its defeat, heap upon that sinner what plagues you will."

The conclusion might be inevitable if we could accept a view of moral freedom which is unspeakably inadequate, and a conception of the divine Fatherhood which is a mere confection of spongy sentiment. The teaching, which is often a grave blot upon George MacDonald's beautiful workmanship, comforts not those who mourn, but those who are in the heyday of their frivolity and transgression, building them up into resolute indifference to spiritual things. In one of his *Unspoken Sermons* entitled "The Uttermost Farthing," George MacDonald has presented the future punishment of sin in a terrible light, well fitted to awaken the fears of the careless; but the fair hopes set forth in his stories are fastened upon by those who wish to be free from the restraint of fear, and to revel in the life of the present, and the solemn and constructive teaching of his graver essays is all but unknown by the masses of those who need that temper of wholesome thoughtfulness it is fitted to foster. The theology of George MacDonald's fiction is courtly, affable, gracious, and winning in tone, clad in soft clothing, velvet tongued, fitted for an agreeable society life; but the first question we need to ask about a theology is, Can we trust it? Is its word good? The theology that is rough-spoken, clad in coarse raiment, lightning-eyed, corybantic in its stormy dissonance, may chance to be more scriptural, more in harmony with a true philosophy of human nature, and more effectual in its power to influence character and life than the theology which is smooth, unoffending, welcome to impenitent sinners

as to contrite saints, and proved in the last analysis to be the child of poetry and emotion. It is a fine dining-out theology, but it awaits not only the sanction of Christ's word, but the seal of its effectual virtue in the conversion of those who were once in darkness and bondage. It would be reassuring to see a nineteenth century revival matching that of the eighteenth, with George MacDonald's amiable teaching for its watchword.

In his vivid and noble stories of Scottish life and character, Ian Maclaren does not favour us with metaphysical asides and dissertations intended to be a contribution towards a new theology. His realistic, sententious, swiftly allusive style scarcely permits it. Some of his most ardent admirers regret the fact that he more than hints his sympathy with the modern attempt to make death a line of negligible significance in the destiny of the soul. The chapter in the days of *Auld Lang Syne* which describes the career of Aircheebald MacKittrick, the Drumtochty postman, is entitled "Past Redemption," a heading which is probably intended both to poke fun at those who tried to reclaim him from his dram-drinking, and to satirise the theology of those who would pronounce that his chances of redemption were closed by a death into the circumstances of which so much unselfishness and heroism entered. For many long years Posty has had an undisguised fondness for whisky. He is astute, kindly, unfailing in the fulfilment of his official duties, and more than a match in witty diplomacy for all who set themselves to reclaim him from the error of his ways. This village favourite is battered to death by the torrent into which he has plunged to save a drowning child; and the

act of heroism in which he ends his days seems to be painted both as an atonement for the frailties of the past and as an argument for hope in reference to the salvation he had apparently failed to work out here.

"When the new Free Kirk minister was settled in Drumtochty, Jamie told him the story on the road one day, and put him to the test.

"'What think ye, sir, becam' o' Posty on the other side?' And Jamie fixed his eyes on Carmichael.

"The minister's face grew whiter still.

"'Did you ever read what shall be done to any man that hurts one of God's bairns?'

"'Fine,' answered Jamie with relish: 'a millstane aboot his neck, an' intae the depths of the sea.'

"'Then, it seems to me it must be well with Posty, who went into the depths and brought a bairn up at the cost of his life'; and Carmichael answered softly, 'Whose angel doth continually behold the face of the Father.'

"'Yir haund, sir,' said Jamie.

"And when the great heresy trial began at Muirtown, Jamie prophesied Carmichael's triumphant acquittal, declaring him a theologian of the first order."

We may rightly cherish a spirit of charity towards those of whom poor Posty is the type, but we carry our charity into unlawful spheres when we constitute ourselves into a grand jury to cut out work for the all-wise God at the great assize. In both poetry and fiction the method has been used before: a bad man much worse than Posty has been made to die in an act of generous sacrifice, and a human judgment has been snatched upon him from the readers of the incident before he has passed to the judg-

ment seat of God. The rude representatives of the old theology of retribution created not a few of the difficulties which made it intolerable to many minds, by applying it to individual examples and forecasting a judgment that is entirely beyond the province of human reason. Ian Maclaren has fallen into the same error in attempting to read the eternal destiny of Posty in the light of the Larger Hope. The only practical effect of such representations is to make other dram-drinkers feel perfectly comfortable in their excess, and to minimise to a vanishing point the significance of our present opportunities.

The Doctrine of Kharma

In a closely related school of American fiction, of which *John Ward, Preacher*, may be taken as the type, we find the old-fashioned idea of retribution replaced by a dogma which has dominated the religious thought of India and the Far East for a score of centuries or more. In that forceful book Margaret Deland paints the portrait of a logical, conscientious Presbyterian minister, who had the tenderest of hearts, and yet was full of a fiery zeal for the dogma of retribution, not excluding even from his creed the possibility of infant damnation.

"He is a wicked man," Lois cried inconsequently. But Gifford shook his head.

"No, he is not; and more than that, you ought to consider that this belief of Ward's, if it is crude, is the husk which has kept safe the germ of truth; the consequences of sin are eternal. There is no escape from character."

"Oh yes," she answered; "but that is not theology."

The doctrine of retribution assumes for the moment some such form as that in many of the cultivated minds of the present day. It is a recoil from the reprobationary dogmas of the past, and seems to relieve God from all direct responsibility for the punishment of sin. It brings into the reckoning some of the undeniable facts of human character and life of which the optimistic restorationists seem to have taken but little account. It was popularised to many in our midst at the time theosophy was a much talked about topic in both thinking and unthinking circles of society. And it is a movement of thought in moral science which has been influenced by the traditions of physical science, inasmuch as it seems to interpose a vast system of so called law between the creature and the Creator God, who gave to the evolution of the universe its initiatory force. A God who has put a huge body of inviolable natural or moral laws between Himself and His creatures is imperfectly personal, and such conception fits in at a great many points with the intellectual attitude of the decade. Indeed, the doctrine of Kharma is the form by which the human mind deals with the great residuary facts of retribution when the mind has dispossessed God of most, if not all, the attributes of personality. It is by the inevitable and automatic operation of psychological law that sin is avenged, ay, and eternally avenged; and God, if indeed He be a personal God, and can love after the fashion of a father, is vindicated from the opprobrium which has been unintentionally cast upon Him by the retributionary theology of the Churches.

But to infer that by making the vengeance which visits sin a thing of unalterable sequence and impersonal

necessity we can disburden God of responsibility for the punishment of sin, and protect the idea of the divine Fatherhood against reproach and misconception, is a piece of not over-clever legerdemain carried on under the forms of philosophy and logic. Such a conception of providential government is grotesque, and reminds us of the ancient régime of Japan, when the country had a twofold head,—a Tycoon and a Mikado,—the one actively participating in the affairs of the empire, the other hidden from view, vacuously nominal, unseen, unknown, an object of popular reverence, kept inviolably sacred by his very quiescence. God's concern with the punishment of sin cannot be devolved, whilst in some far off shrine of mystery and love He waits for worship and faith. Whatever result follows from the action of those moral and spiritual laws which are a part of ourselves, God holds Himself immediately responsible. Who ordained that condition of things in which it comes to pass that certain effects follow certain causes in the spiritual as in the natural world, and that character is permanently influenced by the separate acts of a man's life? By an artful dialectic of this sort we cannot put God Himself out of the arena of controversy; and unless we make the sovereign Ruler of the universe impersonal, His relation to the punishment of sin will remain what it was under the old theology. The punishment of sin by mysterious and irresistible agencies, which it is impossible to connect in thought with the volitions of a living king and judge, moreover, must always prove itself ineffectual for rebuke and regeneration. Punishment can have little or no effect unless it is the expression of a stern personal repugnance to the sin it brands; for men

manage to fortify themselves against its perils and tribulations just as they fortify their minds against the risks of earthquake, cyclone, or volcanic eruption, and grow stolid in presence of such calamities. The men who live face to face with those terrific hazards which so often overwhelm human life are not changed in character by that fact, because they look upon such forces as impersonal. Against the pains and perils which take their rise in the inanimate realms of the universe we harden ourselves. Men have always succeeded in making themselves proof by the cultivation of a serene philosophy against the wounds and bruises that befall them by a law of inevitable sequence, and an impassive fatalism has been begotten within them rather than a deep ethical change. Besides all this, the old doctrine of retribution, modified into a neo-Buddhist doctrine of Kharma, leaves God's actual relation to us and our self-invited pains just what it was before, and at the same time fails to bring us within the spell of that divine Fatherhood, which, it is assumed, has been put into a more pleasing light by the theological change.

An Academy picture for the present year has for its subject a story of the Inquisition. Pope Urban VI. had discovered a plot amongst a group of his cardinals, and had invited the ringleaders to his country house with the view of subjecting them to torture when they were once in his power. The picture portrays the Pope with skull-cap over his white locks, a face benign, smiling, childlike in its innocent winsomeness, walking to and fro in his flower garden, reading aloud a breviary he holds in his hands. Through the casement of the house the red

flames which have been kindled within by the tormentors are glowing, and the reading of the breviary is a sign to them to add to the pains and terrors with which the plotting cardinals are being plied. His voice as he wanders amongst the flowers is the lever which sets the machinery of terror in motion, although he is not ostensibly connected with that which takes place within the walls. The view of punishment under discussion puts God into some such position as that. It is dishonest theology to paint Him amidst the flowers of Paradise with the smile of a gracious benignity upon His face, and to assume that He has no direct connexion with the order of things under which transgressors suffer. If it be right to punish sin at all, God will not be ashamed to identify Himself directly with the process. By constructing a complex machinery of cause and consequence, and making Fate God's substitute in the application of judicial pain; by a modernised doctrine of Kharma, which, if it does not deny God altogether, puts Him out of sight when transgression is punished; by cunning and elaborate philosophies of psychological necessity,—we cannot, in any honest analysis of the elements of the problem, dissociate God from the awful and enduring pains which alight upon all forms of sin. We try to put Him outside that body of laws under which men are compelled to suffer for their offences and the offences of their forefathers,—we paint Him in a paradise of love with the bloom and the breath of the flowers about Him,—and a moment's thought will make the trick as obvious to ourselves as it is to others. Wherever sin is punished, God is not slow to assert His own sovereign connexion with the process. There is no judicial pain which does not

admit of being traced back to His presence and will,—His will, that is, under those unhappy conditions which the transgressor has created. What is done by law is done by the God who appoints the sphere within which the law acts, and who makes His law a two-edged sword. The subtle, intricate, and far-removed methods by which the law operates cannot invalidate the fact. Indeed, this whole conception of a body of recondite, inevitable, deftly adjusted, self-propelling laws interposed between ourselves and God is but an expedient for veiling our own ignorance, and a subterfuge by which we hide from ourselves the fact that we are too unspiritual to see God and His providence of righteousness. "One only is the lawgiver and judge, even He who is able to save and to destroy."

CHAPTER V

MARK RUTHERFORD

UNDER the pseudonym of Reuben Shapcott, there have appeared from time to time sets of forceful, boldly drawn sketches of life amongst the old-fashioned Independents of the Eastern Midlands, varied with glimpses of London suffering and toil. The sketches represent a recoil from many things in the theology of the decrees parallel to that which asserts itself in most of the Scottish novelists,—a recoil, however, often tending to greater and more perilous extremes than are apparent as yet across the Border. Little ingenuity is shown in the plots of the stories, which are often glued together as loosely as German toys; but the portraiture is both vivid and profoundly discriminating. So much unadorned personal and contemporary history is incorporated into the successive volumes of the series that their title to rank as fiction may be open to dispute. The social and religious life depicted groups itself round a centre made immortal by the life and labours of John Bunyan; and this denominational descendant of the grand Puritan, whilst no longer having part or lot in the theology of his robust forbear, might really have caught, in the scenes of his Bedfordshire upbringing, that mighty secret of brief, virile, clean-cut Saxon phrasing held by the inspired tinker. It is to be regretted that, in a more or less pronounced form,

the ever-insistent sex question is mixed up with all the stories; and the last of the series represents an ethical unsettlement that almost smacks of Thomas Hardy, whilst at the same time it seems to revert to a metaphysical phase of the religious fatalism which characterised the Calvinism of most of the Independent meeting-houses during the first half of the century. It is not difficult to trace the influence of Frederick D. Maurice upon Mark Rutherford through the greater part of his course; but in the later books his authority seems to wane, vague mysticisms not being entirely satisfying to the scientific temper. The unconventional, much-questioning Madge Hopgood asks of her lover, Frank Palmer, who sits under the ministry of Maurice, "What is there in him which is positive? What has he distinctly won from the unknown?"

Against a gray background of fen-country landscape, the *Autobiography* paints the mental experiences of one who had been designated to the ministry amongst the Independents, but who found himself soon repelled by the mechanical and sapless theology of his college professors, the crudeness and religious superficiality of his fellow students, and who was finally stung into secession by the mean and captious orthodoxy which embittered his first pastorate. His subsequent fortunes whilst in charge of a small dead Unitarian Church were not much more encouraging. In his youth he professed conversion, not altogether insincerely, but with a sense of strain, artificiality, and self-suppression in forcing his soul into the mould of denominational requirements. "Conversion amongst the Independents and other Puritan sects is supposed to be a kind of miracle wrought in the heart by the Holy Spirit,

by which the man becomes something altogether different from what he was previously. It affects, or should affect, his character; . . . but this is not considered its main consequence. In its essence it is a change in the emotions and increased vividness of belief. It is not altogether untrue. Yet it is an undoubted fact that in earlier days, and indeed in rare cases as late as the time of my childhood, it was occasionally a reality." An Independent of the old school would probably wish to improve that statement; and, moreover, it is not entirely just to scriptural teaching upon the subject. It is perhaps only too true, however, that conversions of the old type do tend to cease. The new emphasis put upon the doctrine of prevenient grace, and the just and reasonable expectation of finding signs of spiritual life in children who have been nurtured in Christian homes, without abrupt transition, may explain in part the fact Mark Rutherford deplores. But if the power that converts men does tend to disappear from the Churches of the present generation, it is due in no small degree to that doctrinal oscillation and unsettlement of which Mark Rutherford himself is a pathetic and a noteworthy example.

At an early period in his college career, the subject of this *Autobiography* experienced a second conversion, the interest and significance of which far eclipsed the first,—a conversion, however, which was specifically intellectual. Wordsworth was the chosen instrument for its accomplishment, and the "Lyrical Ballads" the word through which faith came. "It conveyed no new doctrine, and yet the change it wrought in me could only be compared with that which is said to have been wrought on Paul himself by

the divine apparition. . . . It excited a movement and a growth which went on till by degrees all the systems which enveloped me like a body gradually decayed from me and fell away into nothing. . . . God is nowhere formally deposed, and Wordsworth would have been the last man to say that he had lost his faith in the God of his fathers. But his real God is not the God of the Church, but the God of the hills, the abstraction Nature; and to this my reverence was transferred. Instead of an object of worship which was altogether artificial, remote, never coming into genuine contact with me, I had now one which I thought to be real,—one in which literally I could live, move, and have my being,—an actual fact present before my eyes. God was brought from that heaven of the books, and dwelt on the down, in the far-away distances, and in every cloud-shadow which wandered across the valley. Wordsworth unconsciously did for me what every religious reformer has done,—he re-created my supreme divinity, substituting a new and living spirit for the old Deity, once alive, but gradually hardened into an idol." The confession is full of interest; but such a conversion surely marks a stage in the mental rather than in the religious development, and is the harbinger of an æsthetic day-dawn that, sooner or later, comes to all susceptible and imaginative temperaments. For the time being, ethical were displaced by semi-artistic interests, and the reader is not surprised at the change which soon passes over his conception of the atonement. That supreme fact in the Christian faith begins to lose its outstanding significance. "I remember, for example, discoursing about the death of Christ. There was no single word which was ordinarily

used in the pulpit which I did not use. . . . But I began by saying that in this world there was no redemption for man but by blood; furthermore, the innocent had everywhere and in all time to suffer for the guilty. It had been objected that it was contrary to our notion of an all-loving Being that He should demand such a sacrifice; but contrary or not, in this world it was quite true, apart from Jesus, that virtue was martyred every day, unknown and unconsoled, in order that the wicked might somehow be saved. This was part of the scheme of the world, and we might dislike it or not; we could not get rid of it. The atonement and what it accomplishes for man were therefore a sublime summing up, as it were, of what sublime men have to do for their race; an exemplification rather than a contradiction of Nature herself, as we know her in our own experience."

The modern and scholarly young man who succeeds the Rev. John Broad in the ministry of Tanner's Lane Chapel tells his hearers, with "fluent self-confidence, that salvation meant perfect sympathy with Christ." To such a statement, of course, most Christians can subscribe, if it be clearly understood that it is not exhaustive, and need not be taken to replace everything that was struggling to express itself in the old theology of sacrifice.

The Wordsworthian cult did not wear long. In the second and the nobler part of the *Autobiography*, "Mark Rutherford's *Deliverance*," the limitations of this inspiring worship paid at the shrine of Nature are candidly recognised. The evangel of sky and landscape is narrow as the most clannish election of grace, for those in the grim imprisonment of city life are excluded from the realisation

of God through the beauty of the world. The young and passionate Nature-worshipper was soon brought to feel that the kingdom of heaven was meant for wider circles than those who could plunge into the heather of the Scottish moors, or muse in the presence of the English lakes. Once launched into the grime and monotonous serfdom of London life, and learning deeper lessons through work for the London poor, the ex-divinity student found the God of whom Wordsworth was the high priest painfully inadequate. "When I was living in the country, the pure sky and the lands formed a large proportion of my existence,—so large that much of myself depended on it, and I wondered how men could be worth anything if they could never see the face of Nature. For this belief my early training on the 'Lyrical Ballads' is answerable. When I came to London the same creed survived, and I was ever thirsting for intercourse with my ancient friend. Hope, faith, and God seemed impossible amidst the smoke of the streets. . . . I cannot help saying, with all my love for the literature of my own day, that it has an evil side to it, which none know except the millions of sensitive persons who are condemned to exist in great towns. It might be imagined from much of this literature that true humanity and a belief in God are the offspring of the hills or the ocean; and by implication, if not expressly, the vast multitudes who hardly ever see the hills or the ocean must be without a religion. The long poems which turn altogether upon scenery, perhaps in foreign lands, and the passionate devotion to it which they breathe, may do good by keeping alive in the hearts of men a determination to preserve air, earth, and water from pollution; but, speaking from experience as a Londoner,

I can testify that they are most depressing." In connexion with this life in the metropolis, the passion for righteousness, humanity, social and moral improvement seems to have been profoundly stirred; and the reader cannot but feel that the departure from the theology of childhood and youth was due in part to a half-starved or an undeveloped ethical sense. In the chapter on Drury Lane theology there is a return to much that had been unmeaning or incredible at an earlier stage. "In my younger days the aim of theologians was the justification of God to man. They succeeded no better than ourselves in satisfying the intellect with a system. Nor does the Christian religion profess any such satisfaction. It teaches rather the great doctrine of a Remedy, a Mediator, and therein it is profoundly true. . . . Everywhere in Nature we see exaction of penalties down to the uttermost farthing; but following after this we observe forgiveness, obliterating and restorative. Christianity, in strange historical fashion, is an expression of Nature, a projection of her into a biography and a creed. . . . No religion, so far as I know, has dwelt like Christianity with such profound earnestness on the bisection of man,—on the distinction within him, vital to the very last degree, between the higher and the lower, heaven and hell."

The rejection of Calvinism as a religious creed, described in Mark Rutherford's first essay in literature, is followed by a final return to it as a philosophy of life and destiny. Modern science seems to have given a new lease of life to the root principle of a doctrinal system which once magnified the power and prerogative of the divine sovereignty to the disparagement, if not to the exclusion,

of finite volition. The system, of course, is logical within itself, and the only question that can be asked is, Do the premisses take account of all the facts? From the theological standpoint, *The Deliverance of Mark Rutherford* is the most satisfactory volume of the series. It represents the discipline of an enlarged experience, a return from the crude negations of cocksure youthfulness, the smiling patronage, if not indeed the personal acceptance, of a Calvinism mellowed, symmetrical, disengaged from excess and extravagant onesidedness, and giving due and fitting place to God's sovereign will in the scheme of things. "'Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.' This is the last word that can be said. Nothing can go beyond it, and at times it is the only ground which we feel does not shake beneath our feet. . . . Mrs. Butt's Calvinism hardly took, however, the usual dogmatic form. . . . She fully understood what St. Paul means when he tells the Thessalonians that because they were called therefore they were to stand fast. . . . There is no doubt that this dogma of a personal calling is a great consolation and a great truth. Looking at the great masses of humanity driven this way and that way, the Christian teaching is not to be forgotten, that for each individual soul there is a vocation as real as if that soul were alone upon the planet. . . . The truth of truths is, that the mind of the universe is not our mind, or at least controlled by our limitations."

In *Clara Hopgood* this doctrine of the divine sovereignty, of which John Calvin is supposed to be the chief champion, passes into sheer pantheism as interpreted by Baruch Cohen. "I believe that all thought

is a manifestation of that Being who is One whom you may call God if you like, and that as It never was created It will never be destroyed." Baruch visits the second-hand book shop where Clara Hopgood is employed as clerk, and whilst waiting for her to finish up the work of the day, so that he may attend her home, he takes down a volume from the shelves, and is for a few moments "lost in revolving the doctrine afterwards repeated, and proved by a greater than Maimonides, that the will and power of God are coextensive; that there is nothing which might be and is not." The proposition eliminates the created will from the universe, and ignores the new directions to which the divine will may adjust itself in presence of either the resistance or the co-operation of finite beings gifted with a certain power of self-determination. This half-veiled fatalism which sometimes crops out in earlier books seems to make the prospect of radically improving human character practically hopeless. Of the coarse, conceited, politic minister of Tanner's Lane, the Rev. John Broad, it is said that he "was probably as sincere as his build of soul and body allowed him to be." This pantheism, which is a resuscitated Calvinism minus the Christian ethic and the Christian reverence of the original system—the resurrection, in fact, of a body of doctrine amputated of its saving virtues—leads to ways of speaking concerning Christ and His sacrifice which demand earnest protest and criticism. When Clara Hopgood, disappointed in her secret love for Baruch, has devoted herself to the cause of Italian freedom, and become a martyr upon its altar, Mazzini is made to say to her sister, "The theologians represent the crucifixion

as the most sublime fact in the world's history. It was sublime: but let us reverence also the eternal Christ, who is for ever being crucified for our salvation." To describe two such events by one common phrase assumes that God is equally immanent in common martyrdoms as in the supreme suffering of the sinless Son of man for the sins of the race. The mere hint of such a conjunction must either belittle the incomparable sacrifice of Jesus Christ or deify the fugitive heroism of a moment, and one scarcely knows which is the more reprehensible of the two tendencies. The atonement is continuous alike in its influence and in its inspirations, but such pantheistic extravagances blur the essential and measureless distinctions of things.

Chapters of *The Revolution in Tanner's Lane*, and one or two of the dialogues in *Clara Hopgood*, give a painful and instructive insight into the genesis and genius of the atheism so often, alas! associated with the progressive movements of modern times. Zachariah Colman, the chief hero of the first of these two books, is a Socialist who had been trained under an ultra-Calvinistic ministry of immense power and uncompromising statement, and he never quite ceases to be a Christian, although the political programme is uppermost in his mind, and he is thrown into association with those who have cast religious beliefs to the winds. A man who has neither the passion for liberty nor a vehement pity for the woe-begone and the oppressed may perhaps somnolently maintain his faith in the all-determining, sovereign providence of God; but the man who with a mind acutely sensitive dares to look upon the oppressive and agonising inequalities which weigh upon half the world, and yet is compelled by his theology to

regard this cruel turmoil, against which the sense of right rebels, as foredetermined by unalterable counsels, must find himself brought into painful straits indeed. As we follow the fortunes of Zachariah, we are always expecting him to step over the frontier and either deny or blaspheme God; but in spite of his sense of intolerable wrong, and his belief that whatever is must be ascribed to God, he never does fulfil our fear and become an infidel. In fact, his belief in providential decrees helps him to quietly possess his soul; whilst the famished Methodist, with whom he is thrown into contact, breaks out into curses upon the heads of those who have insolently refused him help. The poor printer Zachariah, hunted by the London police because of his connexion with a revolutionary club, is searching wearily for work in the streets of Manchester. "Those of us who have craved unsuccessfully for permission to do what the Maker of us all has fitted us to do alone understand how revolutions are generated. . . . Zachariah had some self-respect; he was cared for by God, and in God's book was a registered decree concerning him. These men treated him as if he were not a person, . . . but as an atom of a mass to be swept out anywhere, into the gutter, into the river. He was staggered for a time. Hundreds and thousands of human beings swarmed past him, and he could not help saying to himself, as he looked up to the gray sky: 'Is it true, then? Does God really know anything about me? Are we not born by the million every week like spawn, and crushed out of existence like spawn? Is not humanity the commonest and cheapest thing in the world?' But as yet his faith was unshaken, and he repelled the doubt as a temptation of Satan." The

hard-pressed printer, upon the verge of starvation, is kept from rebellion and despair by remembering the precedents of religious story. He calls to mind the quagmire in *Pilgrim's Progress*, and thinks also upon the words of the psalmist, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil." Before long, Zachariah is found in a Liverpool workhouse, broken down in health, delirious, within an ace of the grave. "The thought that thousands of human beings, some of them tender-hearted, have had to face the king of terrors there, is more horrifying than the thought of French soldiers freezing in their blood on the Borodino or of Inquisitional tortures." The sick man is at last discovered by his friends, and carried off to private lodgings. In the days of his slow and weary convalescence he turns to an old copy of Ferguson's *Astronomy*, which opens a new world to him. The thought that the planet is so insignificant, and that it is destined one day to perish, fills him with terror and deep distress. "Zachariah was a Christian, but the muscles of his Christianity were not—now at any rate, whatever they may have been—firm enough to strangle this new terror. His supernatural heaven had receded into shadow; he was giddy, and did not know where he was. . . . There are many truths, no doubt, which we are not robust enough to bear. . . . As we lie prostrate we curse the day on which our eyes were opened, and we cry in despair that it would have been better for us to have been born oxen or swine than men." The story of Zachariah Colman is unfinished, but up to the stage reached in the narrative he is not driven either by his own wrongs, or by smouldering indignation at the wrongs and

privations of others, combined as these feelings were with a fatalistic theology, to deny God or impiously to arraign His righteousness. In fact, his lifelong belief in the decrees enables him to maintain a stately and an admirable self-control.

It is otherwise, however, with the disciples of revolution in *Clara Hopgood*, the time of which story follows close upon the heels of the Chartist agitation. The amateur innovators here are half-hysterical theorists, who have had little personal experience of want, and are not under the controlling influence of religious faith. Their fatalism passes at a bound into angry irreligion. "That will do, Dennis," said Marshall, who was evidently fidgety. "The room is rather warm. There is nothing in Vincent which irritates me more than those bits of poetry with which he winds up—

'God made the man—man made the slave.'

If God made the man, God made the slave. I know what Vincent's little game is, and it is the same with all his set. They want to keep Chartism religious, but we shall see."

In some respects it has been a misfortune for our country that many of the old Independent meeting-houses, which were homes of such magnificent and robust piety, should have cherished at the same time two doctrines which, in nine cases out of ten, when they work together in the same mind, are bound to produce a more or less godless type of Socialism,—the doctrine of civil liberty and the doctrine of foreordination, which so often runs to seed in various forms of fatalism. It is faith in the great prin-

ciple of moral freedom which will keep the democratic movements of the age from exacerbating into atheism; and where maddening wrongs have to be removed, the less said about the divine sovereignty and the more stress put upon human responsibility the better. A doctrine of reprobation brought into the sociology of our times will work far more mischief than the extremest form of the doctrine in the old-time Churches of our own and other lands. A neo-pantheistic dogma of decrees, separated from the authoritative ethic and the reverential temper of the Bible, is like gunpowder separated from the ground glass with which it is sometimes mixed to render it non-explosive. The quotation just given from Reuben Shapcott's last book may be read as a veiled apology for the illogical course of keeping Zachariah Colman at one and the same time an ultra-Calvinistic Christian and a perfervid Socialist into whose soul the iron had cruelly entered.

It is a fact to be greatly lamented that the sex question, sometimes in a most unpleasant form, taints the strong, manly, soul-moving work of Mark Rutherford. Perhaps the theology would not be so widely read unless it were sauced and served in this particular way. Almost every volume contains a mismarriage; and in *Clara Hopgood* the heroine dismisses her lover and bears unmarried a terrible impending shame to escape what she has fancied might prove an incompatible union. In the *Autobiography*, Mark Rutherford, after getting his wings free from the imprisoning cerements of orthodoxy, discovers that the young person to whom he is engaged is dull, prosy, conventional, and breaks his betrothal vows. In this course he is encouraged by the experiences of a lady in

his congregation, supposed to be an aged maiden, who had left her husband within a few days of her marriage because she had discovered that he was wooden, wilful, unsympathetic. In the supplementary volume, *The Deliverance*, this error, for which it seems more or less of compunction had been felt, was repaired, and Mark Rutherford marries the discarded sweetheart of his youth, who had then become a middle-aged widow—with results not quite so disastrous as the young preacher had imagined. The quiet peace and affection which attend this belated union lead us to expect that this gifted writer has got his feet upon the ethical rock. His more recent books, however, disappoint our expectation. Love is treated as a fate rather than as a moral vocation. With the exception of *Miriam's Schooling*, in which case a flighty girl who has passed through sundry chapters of romance does in the end bring herself to care for a husband of commonplace virtue, death is treated as the only way of escape from incompatibility. The Rev. Theophilus and Mrs. Cardew, who are respectively of the flighty and the practical types, come into entire unison with each other only when she is sickening for death; and Catherine Furze throughout the story is depicted as the true mental affinity of the clergyman. It is true she has the good sense to run away from her admirer when the love passages are becoming perilous, and she pays a just tribute to the proprieties of life by dying before Mr. Cardew had been very long a widower. A thunderstorm once saves Catherine from the moral jeopardy to whose verge she had just come. She is rescued a second time, when she had gone out with the express purpose of

meeting the clergyman, by the accident of a young man being engaged in conversation with the clergyman,—in fact, the young man who aspires to her own hand, and who is making the clergyman his confidant. Her escape from the toils of Satan is wrought out by foredetermined circumstance rather than by the victory of her own conscience, although she is not without moral and spiritual qualities that are both forceful and attractive. "Do not those of us who have been mercifully prevented from damning ourselves before the whole world, who have succeeded and triumphed—do we not know, know as we hardly know anything else, that our success and our triumph were due to superiority in strength by just a grain, no more, of our better self over the raging rebellion beneath it? It was just a tremble of the tongue of the balance: it might have gone this way or it might have gone the other, but by God's grace it was this way settled, —God's grace as surely, in some form of words, everybody must have acknowledged it to have been." "We have discarded providence as our forefathers believed in it; but nevertheless there is a providence without the big P, if we choose so to spell it, and yet surely deserving it as much as the Providence of theology, a Providence which watches over us and leads us. It appears as instinct prompting us to do this and not to do that, to decide this way or that when we have no consciously rational ground for decision, to cleave to this person and shun that other almost before knowing anything of either; it has been recognised in all ages under various forms as Demon, Fate, Presiding Genius." But Reuben Shapcott unfortunately puts Nature on the side of reprobation

besides making her a divine instrument in the election unto life. He is not satisfied that a thunderstorm should have saved Catherine Furze from a plunge into illicit love, for in his last book he makes a thunderstorm the occasion for the betrayal and fall of Madge Hopgood.

Towards the close of the story Catherine Furze becomes the apologist for free love; and Dr. Turnbull, a sceptic of the old school, has to preach to her the inviolability of the marriage vows—possibly a grouping of figures intended to remind us of that revolutionary frenzy against the elementary morals which is symptomatic of the most recent developments of pure materialism. "Do you think, Dr. Turnbull, a man ought to love what he cannot love?" "Yes; but I must explain myself. A man marries a woman whom he loves. Is it likely he would have selected this one woman if he had seen, say, fifty more before he married her? Certainly not; and when he sees other women afterwards, better than the one he has chosen, he naturally admires them. If he does not he is a fool, but he is bound to check himself. . . . He may—and this is my point—he may wilfully turn away from what is admirable in his own house, or he may turn towards it. He is as responsible for turning away from it, or turning towards it, as he is for any of his actions."

A less noble morality marks the last volume from this gifted pen. When Madge Hopgood is entreated to marry the man who has been her accepted lover, and with whom she has sinned, she protests.

"It would be a crime."

"A crime, but I——"

She stopped him.

"I know what you are going to say. I know what is the crime to the world; but it would have been a crime—perhaps a worse crime—if a ceremony had been performed beforehand by a priest, and the worst of crimes would be that ceremony now. I must go."

Baruch Cohen, who afterwards weds Madge Hopgood, and gives a home to her illegitimate child, speaking of Shelley, says—

"As a man he is not very attractive to me."

"Nor to me," replies Madge. "I shall never forgive his treatment of Harriett. I suppose he had ceased to love her, and he thought, therefore, he was justified in leaving her."

Baruch, who holds this free love doctrine, is the predestinarian of the story, whose Semitic version of the doctrine is quoted with apparent sympathy. If faults of character are foredetermined and unamenable to correction, if conversions are becoming less frequent with every decade, if temperament is already immutable, of course there is every reason why we should bespeak pity for people who cannot get on with each other, and agitate against the stringency of marriage laws. With his apparent return to the underlying philosophy of his ancestral Calvinism, the ethic of Mark Rutherford tends to deteriorate. The leaven of determinism in the old-fashioned Calvinism was held in check by the precepts of the Bible, and was not always as hurtful as one might imagine. But the scientific spirit has brought into our midst a virulent Calvinism that has been stripped of all that made it Christian. We are face to face with a new antinomianism, which dwells among the tombs, and sets itself to tear away the very decencies of

civilisation. Mark Rutherford's last book is a specimen of literary atavism, and will doubtless be followed by a return to the noble type of which *The Deliverance* is an example.

The Fiction and the Theology of the Future

It is impossible to say what place the novel will occupy in the literature of the next century, and to what extent it may be pervaded by the theological element. The swarms of stories that issue from the press are, with rare exceptions, short-lived. In proportion to the sum total of the output, less survives than in history, science, criticism, or theology. The cry of the moment is for reading that does not tax the attention. It sometimes seems as though the man who has fresh light to throw upon the problems of theology will be compelled to write a novel to get himself listened to. The incursion of religious teachers into the department of fiction suggests a promise of wide opportunity for the man with a message, but who finds the message discounted unfairly when delivered from the pulpit. The public temper is singularly credulous towards everything but orthodox Christianity; and the pressmen and the novelists are accepted with the implicit confidence accorded to priests and bishops in the Middle Ages. Perhaps it may not always be thus. Men may even apply an old maxim to the manufacturers of modern fiction: "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." It is even conceivable that those who look upon the message of the pulpit as a message that is paid for and got ready to order may ask the question,

whether those who write what is most likely to sell, be it good or bad, should not be looked at with more caution than is perhaps exercised in the passing moment? It is not impossible that the discovery may one day be made that the novel-writer who would free us from the ethical restraints of the past has been selling indulgences for gains, and gains devoted to less worthy objects than the building of churches and cathedrals, and that close upon the discovery there may be heard the tocsin of a reformation that shall bring about the purging of our literature. Time is a great sifter, and possibly some of the books that the reader may think should have been noticed in these chapters will be forgotten ten or fifteen years hence. We ourselves may have grown to a wisdom which will enable us to ignore books concocted of hysteria, personal spite, and a fantasy that resembles madness rather than imagination. A new generation, unless deterioration at least be the law, will appraise at their real worth books which, without directly touching theology, seek to create a prejudice against one religious communion and in favour of another by playing upon motives which are at their high-water mark in the breast of the snob. The meretricious, the erotic, the unreal are bound to die, as surely as the race is bound to mount yet higher in the scale of life and civilisation; and in the long-run the fiction which survives the test of years because it is true to all that is best and deepest in human nature, will be found to contain some of the elements of a sound, trustworthy, and permanent theology.

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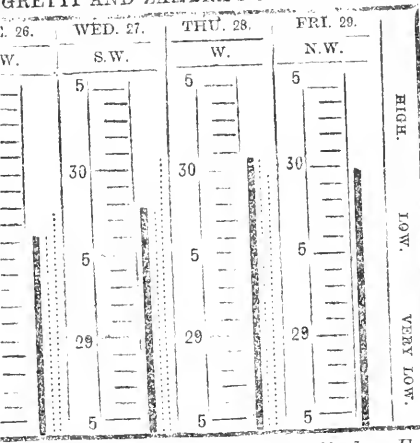
and without any ill effects to those who were not
orating the occasion. But the "perfervidum in-
im Scotorum" has been brewing on a large scale,
Willie's insignificant brew is of no account. The
hero of the Queen's Jubilee, Sir W. H. Bailey,
made a speech, and harnessed Burns with Shake-
re, and the enthusiastic Scot has kindly offered us
no rest if we will only [illegible]
examined—he had admitted the adultery, but
denied it with Mrs. Charrington. He had offered
ly evidence of the adultery in 1892, but these
s had not been put forward.
case was then adjourned.

ETEOROLOGICAL REPORT.

"DAILY NEWS" OFFICE.

READINGS THIS MORNING BY
GRETTI AND ZAMBRA'S BAROMETER.



rrected to sea-level and reduced to 32 deg. F.

black lines show the height of the barometer at 1 o'clock on
nd three previous mornings. The dotted lines indicate the
ne variations during yesterday and the two previous days.
initial letters show the direction of the wind.
Mercury falls for Rain, with S.W., S.E., and W. winds—if
y, for heavy storms; if slowly, for continued bad weather.
ises—if rapidly, for unsettled weather; if gradually, for fine
d weather.
ise, with wind vesring N.E., may be indicative of rain.

ıe TEMPERATURE in the open air at 1 o'clock
morning, as taken at our office in Bouverie-street,
32°; the reading at the same hour yesterday was
The temperature on the corresponding morning
year was 40°.

THE FORECASTS OF WEATHER.

The following forecasts of weather for this
were issued from the Meteorological Office
3.30 p.m. yesterday:

Districts.	Forecasts.
Scotland, N.	Northerly to north-easterly or
Scotland, E.	easterly winds; cloudy, some snow.
England, N.E.	

[illegible] things that were
nearest approach to a Utop[illegible] o'clock
strong an attraction for the young. He [illegible] of
uld have a strong aspiration to be useful [illegible] some
mong whom they lived, for they might [illegible] reater
, that what was true in the ideal politics [illegible] oets,
s would live. Let them be thankful, [illegible] odern
the dreamers were not as other men EES.
glare and dust of our common day. 7.