1922

George Eliot's early reading

Ina Bell Auld

State University of Iowa

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George Eliot's Early Reading

by

Ina Bell Auld

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts of the Graduate
College of the State University of
Iowa, 1922.
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INTRODUCTION.

This thesis is a study of the early reading of George Eliot. Its aim has been to make a survey of the books she read in the first thirty years of her life and to determine her reaction to them.

My sources of information have been the letters and journals included in the 1885 edition of Cross's biography. In addition her early works have been searched for suggestive references to particular books and authors and for evidences of the influence of her reading. These early works include Scenes of Clerical Life, Adam Bede, The Lifted Veil, The Mill on the Floss, Silas Marner, and Brother Jacob. When references either in the Life or in the novels are indefinite, I have secured the exact title of the book and name of the author from reference works, such as are cited in the formal bibliography at the close.

For the sake of convenience in analysis the years covered, are divided into three periods.

The first period, extending from about 1824 to the year 1837, covers her childhood and early youth. Schooling had ended for her three years before the end of this period, when she began keeping house for her father. The next period I have called her religious youth. It begins in 1838, the earliest time covered by published letters, and ends early in 1841, when she moved with her father from Griff between Bedworth and Nuneaton in Warwickshire to Foleshill near Coventry. The third period, during which her religious troubles reach their crisis and then their solution, ends with her father's death in 1849. This event marks approximately the middle point of her life and is a distinct break in its course.

At the beginning of each chapter, dealing with a particular period, there is given a chronological list of books known to have been read within that period of time, and another list of books that probably fall within this division. Dates that are uncertain are in parentheses. Then, follows in each chapter a discussion of the general nature and effect of the reading of the period with especial reference to the books listed. The order in which topics are taken up within each chapter
and the presentation of material under each topic has been made largely chronological, in order that the sequence may be clear and that progress in the development of George Eliot as a reader may be obvious.
## READING OF CHILDHOOD AND EARLY YOUTH

### 1834-1837

#### CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF BOOKS READ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
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<th>Year when read</th>
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<tr>
<td>Fables</td>
<td>Aesop</td>
<td>182(5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jest Book</td>
<td>Joe Miller</td>
<td>182(5)</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Sir Walter Scott</td>
<td>182(7)</td>
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<td>Charles Lamb</td>
<td>182(7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Devereux</td>
<td>Bulwer Lytton</td>
<td>1832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pensées</td>
<td>Blaise Pascal</td>
<td>1833</td>
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#### ADDITIONAL BOOKS PROBABLY READ IN THIS PERIOD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>Animated Nature</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pug's Tour of Europe</td>
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<tr>
<td>Robinson Crusoe</td>
<td>Daniel Defoe</td>
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<td>History of the Devil</td>
<td>&quot; &quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pilgrim's Progress</td>
<td>John Bunyan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rasselas</td>
<td>Samuel Johnson</td>
</tr>
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<td>Bible</td>
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<tr>
<td>Holy Living and Dying</td>
<td>Jeremy Taylor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lives of the Poets</td>
<td>Samuel Johnson</td>
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<tr>
<td>A View of the Evidences of Christianity</td>
<td>William Paley</td>
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</table>
Evidence regarding George Eliot's very early reading points to a scarcity of books in her home. Her husband biographer, J. W. Cross, says, "Having so few books at this time she read them again and again, until she knew them by heart." This recalls the statement in The Mill on the Floss that Maggie "had so few books that she sometimes read the dictionary." In a conversation with Burne-Jones, in which they agreed in disparaging some of the children's books of the time, George Eliot spoke of the dearth of child-literature in her home. She expressed gratitude to an old gentleman, a friend of the family, who used to bring her books. That the quality of her childish and youthful reading was above reproach the preceding lists bear sufficient witness.

The Linnet's Life published in 1822 was presumably the first book she read. It was a gift

2. The Mill on the Floss, Bk. I, Ch. 11, p. 102.
from her father, was read over and over in her childhood, and was cherished all her life. In the last year of her life she gave it to her husband, J. W. Cross, saying that any one who loved her would take care of it after her death. Maggie had a book called *Animated Nature*, "about Kangaroos and things," that may owe its origin to the author's own childish reading. These books seem to indicate that the love of animals which George Eliot afterward showed in her writing developed early in life. Her frequent mention and sympathetic treatment of dogs in all her stories is particularly noticeable. She seems, in later life, to have usually kept a pet dog and to have taken great delight in such humble and faithful companions. When her home was in London, she often visited the Zoological Gardens to study the animals and was especially interested in the intelligent conduct of the monkeys. She was much interested in efforts in behalf of humane treatment of animals and in the education of children along this line.

Maggie describes Pug's Tour of Europe to Luke as telling "all about the different sorts of people in the world," our fellow-creatures of whom we ought to know.

The next books on the list point to another trait of her childish make-up that had its counterpart in her later character and work. She greatly enjoyed Aesop's Fables, given her by the aforementioned old gentleman. The fable of Mercury and the Statue-seller particularly appealed to her sense of humor. Maggie, too, delighted in Aesop. George Eliot in childhood repeated the stories in a Joe Miller jest-book to her family. George Eliot's mention of this book in Janet's Repentance, "Pratt's anecdotes were of the fine old crusted quality to be procured only of Joe Miller," recalls Byron's in English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, "hackneyed jokes from Miller, got by rote." Adam probably referred to Miller, when he told Ben to keep his wit to the jest-book and let the Bible alone. Lamb's Essays of Elia seems to have been an early favorite with George

Eliot. Extracts from Elia were found in an almanac. Captain Jackson and his proverbs in praise of cheese rind especially pleased her. Lamb's Essays continued to delight her and were read in the last year of her life.

This sense of the comic that was stimulated thus early by these books was by no means absent later, though the impression made by her personality and writings upon the casual acquaintance and reader was one of gravity if not of gloom. To intimate friends she displayed the witty and fun-loving side of her nature.

Her friendship with Charles Bray was marked by an exchange of jests and repartee. One of her letters especially exhibits a humorous propensity at her own expense. In 1846 soon after she had completed the translation of Strauss, she wrote to an intimate friend a detailed and amusing account of her engagement to a German professor of the dry-as-dust type, who had come to England in search of a bargain in the shape of a wife and translator in one. Sympathetic humor characterizes her treatment of the people in her novels.

Besides the quiet skillful humor of character as in Mrs. Poyser and the Dodsons, the novels, particularly these earlier ones, are permeated with humor in the telling, and the comments by the author upon characters and humanity in general has brought her into comparison with Thackeray. Her humor is the result of keen-observation of life, alive to the incongruities of human nature instead of being dependent upon accidental or external circumstances or ingenious invention. She ranges from light satirical touches and eye-twinklings to keen-edged reflection of wit, sparkling epigram and biting sarcasm.

The masterly use of satire in her novels and essays recalls her early appreciation of Defoe's wit and irony. Like Maggie she read Defoe's History of the Devil.

Maggie's familiarity with Robin Hood, Jack the Giant-killer and St. George who slew the dragon, points to childish reading of a romantic type. Robinson Crusoe seems likely to belong here. It is mentioned in Brother Jacob and is

listed in a letter with standard works of fiction that one ought to know.

Her first novel proper was Scott's Waverly. It was lent to her older sister about 1827, when George Eliot was about eight years old, and returned before she had finished it, whereupon she began to write the story from memory until the book was again obtained for her. Reference is made to this in the loving and suggestive motto to the fifty-seventh chapter of Middle-March in the sixth-book.

"They numbered scarce eight summers when a name rose on their souls and stirred such motions there as thrill the birds and shape their hidden frame at penetration of the quickening air:
His name who told of loyal Evan Dhu,
Of quaint Brawardine, and Vich Ian var
Making the little world their childhood knew
Large with a land of mountains, lake and sca'wr,
And larger yet with wonder, love, belief
Toward Walter Scott, who living far away

22. Post, p.36.
Sent them this wealth of joy and noble grief.
The book and they must part, but day by day,
In lines that thwart like portly spiders ran,
They wrote the tale from Tully Veolan."

Ivanhoe also is believed to have been read during her childhood. Others of Scott's novels and probably his poems, she read in her early youth. Waverly, Ivanhoe, and The Pirate are all mentioned in The Mill on the Floss. Later we find her reading the novels aloud to her father during his last illness, and they were among the books Cross says they read together in the last years of her life. "Sometimes Maggie thought she could have been contented with absorbing fancies; if she could have had all Scott's novels and all Byron's poems!" She thought of Scott, too, as a great and kind man who would surely help her if she went to him and told him her troubles.

George Eliot early in childhood developed such a passion for reading that she troubled her mother by sitting up at night to read. Her

27. Ibid., Bk. 5, ch. 1, p. 281.
30. Ibid., Bk. 4, ch. 3, p. 264.
reading may have helped to arouse her ambition and to make her believe as she did when a little girl that some day she would be a person of importance in the world. In a later period she tells that the books she read in childhood made her live in a world created by her fancy. This recalls Maggie's "triple world of Reality, Books, and Waking dreams."

*Rasselas,* a later letter tells us, was one of her best loved companions and was re-read late in life to renew her childish delight. It was one of Miss Linnet's "serious and poetical" books which we are told in *Janet's Repentance* she had bought with her own pocket money when she was in her teens. It was also one of the books that Bob Jakin brought Maggie as a solace for the loss of the books that went at the sale.

*Devereux* by Bulwer Lytton must have been a pleasant stimulus to the youthful George Eliot's imagination. It was read when she was thirteen years old, and a letter later tells that it disturbed her faith by the impression that religion was not a requisite to moral excellence.

There are great gaps in the record of her reading for her teen* that we have no satisfactory means of filling. She spent most of the time from the age of nine to sixteen in boarding school not far from her home. She was doubtless reading all she could get besides her school books and probably longed for more and different books from those which she had at hand. There are some suggestive sentences from Maggie's experience that are poignant enough to be autobiographical and pertinent here or a little later, when with her mother's death she was forced to leave school. "And of all her school-life there was nothing left her now but her little collection of school books, which she turned over with a sickening sense that she knew them all, and they were all barren of comfort. Even at school she had often wished for books with more in them; everything she learned there seemed like the ends of long threads that snapped immediately."

The religious reading that is so prominent in the next period was begun early. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress, was probably one of the earliest of this type and without a doubt was first read when she was more interested in the story than in the spiritual allegory.

In her childhood she must have been on as intimate terms as Maggie with Christian, Christiana and Mr. Greatheart. The Pilgrim's Progress with Bunyan's Life and Holy War were among the books Adam read. On 1859, George Eliot wrote in her journal, "I am reading old Bunyan again after the long lapse of years, and am profoundly struck with the true genius manifested in the simple, vigorous, rhythmic style."

She must early have become familiar with the Bible. Her earliest published letters are full of Biblical references and quotations. Her Bible reading was continued after the unsettling of her religious faith and was kept up to the end of her life. Lewes did not care to read the Bible, but Cross says that he and his wife made it a practice to read it together, and that she liked to read aloud some of the finest chapters in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and St. Paul's Epistles. Apropos of Bible reading one thinks

39. Ibid., bk., I, ch. 3, p. 12; ch. 5, p. 34; ch...11, p. 102; bk. 3, ch. 6, p. 220.
40. Adam Bede, ch. 19, p. 130.
42. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 70-71-152-163-168.
43. Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 419-420.
of the beautiful description of Adam reading the Bible. "You would have liked to see Adam reading his Bible: he never opened it on a week day, and so he came to it as a holiday book, serving him for history, biography, and poetry.... Sometimes his lips moved in semi-articulation— it was when he came to a speech that he could fancy himself uttering, such as Samuel's dying speech to the people; then his eyebrows would be raised, and the corner of his mouth would quiver a little with sad sympathy—something, perhaps Isaac's meeting with his son, touched him closely; at other times, over the New Testament, a very solemn look would come upon his face, and he would every now and then shake his head and let it fall again; and on some mornings, when he read in the Apocrypha, of which he was very fond, the son of Sirach's keen-edged words would also bring a delightful smile, though he also enjoyed the freedom of occasionally differing from an Apocryphal writer."

There were doubtless pious books in her home with which she early became acquainted. One of these may have been Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying. It was mentioned by Mr. Tulliver as being among the books he bought at Partridge's sale and having the same binding as The History of

44. Adam Bede, ch. 51, p. 445.
the Devil. It was a good binding and he thought "they'd be all good books". This book of Taylor's was also among the books Adam read. Later complimentary reference in a letter shows that George Eliot was familiar with Jeremy Taylor's works.

The following citation from an article by a personal friend throws light upon her school life: "Prayer-meetings were in vogue among the girls [at the Misses Franklin's school, Coventry], following the example of their elders, and while taking no doubt a leading part in these, she used to suffer much self-reproach about her coldness and inability to be carried away with the same enthusiasm as others. At the same time nothing was further from her nature than any sceptical inclination, and she used to pounce with avidity upon any approach to argumentative theology within her reach, carrying Paley's Evidences up to her room, devouring it as she lay upon the floor alone."

Some idea of this book may be gained from what Charles Hennell said of it. "Paley agrees that Hume states the case of miracles fairly when he says that it is the question whether it be more

46. *Adam Bede*, ch. 19, p. 190.
improbable that the miracle should be true, or the testimony false. Paley, however, labours to prove that we ought to admit an antecedent probability in favour of a miraculous revelation, from our knowledge of the existence, disposition, and constant agency of the Deity."

Pascal's *Pensees* was given George Eliot as a prize when she was fourteen, and her liking for them continued throughout her life. In a letter to Miss Lewis, her former teacher, in 1838, she writes, "I do not wonder you are pleased with Pascal; his thoughts may be returned to the palate again and again with increasing rather than diminished relish." Much later in a letter to her publisher John Blockwood, in 1878, she says, "I am continually turning to them now to revive my sense of their deep though broken wisdom." John Morley finds traces in George Eliot's novels of Pascal's "sharp-art melancholy," "sombre rumination," "brief disdain" and "unrelenting voice."

Johnson's *Lives of the Poets* is another book that was read both in girlhood and in late womanhood,

when she wrote with affection of the book and author and of "a delicious revival of girlish impressions."

Her acquaintance with Shakspeare must have begun in this period, though her appetite for him appears to have increased in mature life. The fact that her home was only twenty miles from Stratford-on-Avon may have been an incentive to learn to know the great dramatist. Possibly her religious reading and strict opinions tended to crowd the reading of plays out of this and the following period. We learn from her cousin Lucy that Maggie knew Shakespeare. In 1839 in a discussion of books in a letter she wrote, "Shakspeare has a higher claim than this on our attention [that of need for reference]; but we have need of as nice a power of distillation as the bee, to suck nothing but honey from his pages." In 1840 there is a reference to As You Like It; "O how luxuriously joyous to have the wind of heaven blow on one after being stived in a human atmosphere— to feel one's heart leap up after the pressure that Shakspeare so admirably describes: "When a man's wit is not

54. Mill on the Floss, Bk. 6, ch. 3, p. 356.
seconded by the forward chick understanding, it
strikes a man as dead as a large reckoning in a
small room." When she was in London in 1852,
she wrote asking the Brays to send her Shakspeare
to her. It is probable that Lewes stimulated her
interest and appreciation of Shakspeare. At any
rate, during their life together all of Shakspeare's
plays were read and reread. Some of the plays were
among the last books she read. In her 1855
Journal we find the following entries "Shakspeare's
plays (Merchant of Venice; Romeo and Juliet, Julius
Caesar—very much struck with the masculine style of
this play [Julius Caesar], and its vigorous moder­
ation compares with Romeo and Juliet, Antony and
Cleopatra, Henry IV, Othello, As You Like It, Lear, —
sub timely powerful— Taming of the Shrew, Cariolonus,
Twelfth Night, Measure for Measure, Midsummer Night's
Dream, Winter's Tale, Richard III, Hamlet ... Read
The Tempest, Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet, Henry V,
Henry VII, Henry VI, Richard II."

60. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 382.
We have an interesting reference to Hamlet in The Mill on the Floss. "Character", says Novalis, in one of his questionable aphorisms, 'character is destiny.' But not the whole of our destiny. Hamlet, prince of Denmark, was speculative and irresolute, and we have a great tragedy in consequence. But if his father had lived to a good old age, and his uncle died at an early death, we can conceive Hamlet's having married Ophelia, and got through life with a reputation of sanity, notwithstanding many soliloquies, and some moody sarcasm towards the fair daughter of Polonius, to say nothing of the frankest incivility to his father-in-law.  

Hamlet also has a reference in Brother Jacob, and Twelfth Night in The Mill on the Floss where Maggie tells Lucy, "You see I am like Sir Andrew Aguecheek. I was adored once."

George Eliot has been honored by being many times compared to Shakspeare. She held in common with him the power to trace the decadence of Tito Melema as he sketched that of Macbeth and the power

63. Mill on the Floss, Bk. 6, ch. 3, p. 356.
to put wise sayings into pithy, epigrammatic language.

In spite of the fact that our knowledge of George Eliot's reading during childhood and girlhood is more scanty than of later periods, it is sufficient to give us a glimpse of the development of a mind that Herbert Spencer was later to declare the finest he had known in a woman and with few equals among men. The range of subject of the books read early in life begins to indicate what will become more pronounced as we proceed—a versatility of interest, grasp and appreciation commensurate with what would be expected of a mind whose reaching forth in mature life was unlimited.

64. Lyttelton, A. T., Modern Poets of Faith, Doubt and Paganism and other Essays, pp. 173-4; Moulton, Library of Literary Criticism, Vol. 7, p. 205-
### CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF BOOKS READ

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>When read</th>
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<tr>
<td>History of the Jews</td>
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<td>1838</td>
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<tr>
<td>Letters</td>
<td>Hannah More</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Night Thoughts</td>
<td>Edward Young</td>
<td>&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life of William</td>
<td>Robert Isaac and</td>
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<td>Wilberforce</td>
<td>Samuel Wilberforce</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mrs. Fletcher's Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Schism as opposed to the</td>
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<tr>
<td>Unity of the Church</td>
<td>John Hoppus</td>
<td>1839</td>
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<td>Church History</td>
<td>Joseph Miller</td>
<td>1839</td>
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<tr>
<td>Portrait of an English</td>
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<td>Churchman</td>
<td>Rev. W. Gresley</td>
<td>1839</td>
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<td>Poems</td>
<td>Wordsworth</td>
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<td>Oxford Tracts</td>
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<td>Lyra Apostolica</td>
<td>I. W. Bowden</td>
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<td>J. Keble</td>
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<td>J. H. Newman</td>
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<td></td>
<td>I. Williams</td>
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<td>The English Citizen</td>
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<td>Book</td>
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<td>When Read</td>
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<td>Fairy Queen</td>
<td>Spenser</td>
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<td>Mrs. Mary (Fairfax)</td>
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<td>Somerville</td>
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<td>and the Oxford Tracts</td>
<td>Isaac Taylor</td>
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<td>St. Paul</td>
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<td>Maria Stuart</td>
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<td>*John Harris</td>
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<td>of Our Lord's Ministry</td>
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**ADDITIONAL BOOKS PROBABLY READ IN THIS PERIOD**

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DISCUSSION OF READING OF THIS PERIOD

George Eliot was brought up in the Church of England and never in her life joined any other religious society, but in both the girls' school which she attended, Miss Wallington's at Nuneaton and Miss Franklin's at Coventry, she came under strong Evangelical influence. In the former she became attached to the pious principal governess, Miss Lewis, to whom her first published letters are addressed. She emerged from school with intense religious convictions of a Calvinistic hue. She set out, not only to govern her life by religious principles and to make it conform to the teaching of the New Testament, but she even bent all her energies
to make religion her life. She has described this period of her life in the spiritual experiences of Maggie Tulliver and of Dinah, like whom she at one time extended her renunciation of the world to marriage. In the religious aspect of Janet's Repentance as well, she must have drawn from her own life during this period of fervid faith. Her fervor carried her into a jealous asceticism which caused her, she afterward said, to sacrifice even the cultivation of her intellect; Within limits, however, this appears to have been regarded as a duty. The pleasure and desires caused by her mental thirst and its satisfaction, probably caused her to regard studious pursuits with ascetic suspicion and the conviction that to be entirely good they would need rigid supervision. Be that as it may, she did carry forward her reading and study of certain types and with greater latitude in some directions than might have been expected. She must have often found the road of solitary study a rocky, barren, and discouraging one as Maggie did in her efforts to "learn for herself what wise men

knew." "For a week or two she went resolutely enough, though with an occasional sinking of heart, as if she had set out toward the Promised Land alone, and found it a thirsty, travelless, uncertain journey." Perhaps she found in books the refuge from the disillusionment of life suggested in Maggie's story. "In books there were people who were always agreeable or tender, and delighted to do things that made one happy, and who did not show their kindness by finding fault. The world outside the books was not a happy one, Maggie felt; etc." Whether George Eliot attacked her brother's school books—"a Latin Dictionary and Grammar, a Delectus, a torn Eutropius, the well-worn Virgil, Aldrich's Logic and the exasperating Euclid", as did Maggie we have no certain record. One source for the books of this period was the library of the Newdigates, who owned the estate on which her father lived and was employed.

Of the Bible, she was, of course, during these years an earnest student. In July 1839, she wrote her first published poem. It was published

5. Ibid., Bk. IV, ch. 3, p. 263.
7. Ibid., Bk. IV, ch. 3, p. 263.
in the Christian Observer, January 1840, and has
this heading and stanza:
"Knowing that shortly I must put off this my
tabernacle." 2 Peter 1, 14.

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

Another stanza reads as follows:

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

In 1838 George Eliot made a trip to
London with her brother. "At that time she was
so much under the influence of religious and ascetic
ideas that she would not go to any of the theaters
with her brother, but spent all her evenings alone
reading. A characteristic reminiscence [of her
brother's] is that the chief thing she wanted to buy
was Josephus' History of the Jews, "which her brother got for her. Perhaps it was through Josephus that she became acquainted with Berosus to whom a later letter makes reference.

Hannah More was appreciated at this time. "I have highly enjoyed Hannah More's letters: the contemplation of so blessed a character as her's is very salutary." An interesting change in her opinion of this pious writer is evident in a letter written ten years later. "I am glad you detest Mrs. Hannah More's letters. I like neither her letters nor her books, nor her character. She was that most disagreeable of monsters, a blue-stocking—a monster that can only exist in a miserably false state of society, in which a woman with but a smattering of learning or philosophy is classed along with singing mice and card-playing pigs. Hannah More's Sacred Dramas were among Miss Linnet's books in Janet's Repentance.

The poet, Edward Young, shared with Mrs. More this adverse reaction. In 1838 George Eliot wrote to an intimate friend, "Turn to the passage in Young's Infidel Reclaimed, beginning, '0 vain,

vain, vain, all else eternity', and do.lovethelines for my sake." A quotation from Young appears in a later letter and this reference in still another: "I am just beginning to make some progress in the science, (of learning how to be happy) and I hope to disprove Young's theory that as soon as we have found the key of life, it ops the gate of death." An almost absolute repudiation of Young and his work appeared in the keen criticism of them set forth in the essay, Worldliness and Other Worldliness: the Poet Young, which was first published in the Westminster Review, 1857. Some excerpts from this will help to make clear the grounds for this later antipathy, which together with that for Hannah More, was probably a part of the general religious upheaval which George Eliot's mind had undergone in the meantime. "Young's biographers and critics have usually set out from the position that he was a great religious teacher, and that his poetry is morally sublime; and they have toned down his failings into harmony with their conception of the divine and the poet. Fou our own part, we set out from precisely the opposite conviction—namely that the religious and moral spirit of

16. Post, p. 89.
Young's poetry is low and false; and we think it of some importance to show that the Night Thoughts are the reflex of a mind in which the higher human sympathies were inactive. This judgment is entirely opposed to our youthful predilections and enthusiasm. The sweet garden breath of early enjoyment lingers about many a page of the Night Thoughts, and even of the Last Day, giving an extrinsic charm to passages of stilted rhetoric and false sentiment, but the sober and repeated reading of maturer years have convinced us that it would hardly be possible to find a more typical instance than Young's poetry, of the mistake which substitutes interested obedience for sympathetic emotion, and baptizes egoism as religion.... Most persons, in speaking of the Night Thoughts, have in their minds only the two or three first Nights, the majority of readers rarely getting beyond these, unless, as Wilson says, they 'have but few books, are poor, and live in the country'. And in these earlier Nights there is enough genuine sublimity and genuine sadness to bribe us into too favorable a judgment of them as a whole. Young had only a very few things to say or sing—such as that life is vain, that death is imminent, that man is immortal, that virtue is wisdom, that friendship is sweet, and that
the source of virtue is the contemplation of death and immortality,— and even in his two first Nights he had said almost all he had to say in his finest manner.... This disruption of language from genuine thought and feeling is what we are constantly detecting in Young; and his insincerity is the more likely to betray him into absurdity, because he habitually treats of abstractions, and not of concrete objects or specific emotions." Young's moral teaching is especially scored in this essay, because he finds a deterrent from crime in fear of punishment in an after world rather than in love and sympathy with fellow-mortals. At the close of the essay Young is compared with Cowper to the advantage of the latter. Since references in letters to Cowper indicate that his poetry was read during this period or before, the summary of this comparison is not inopportune here. "In Young we have the type of that deficient human sympathy, that impiety towards the present and the visible, which flies for its motives, its sanctities, and its religion, to the remote, the vague, and the

19. Post, p. 74-75.
unknown; in Cowper we have the types of that
genuine love which cherishes things in pro-
portion to their nearness and feels its reverence
grow in proportion to the intimacy of his know-
ledge."

Religious biography seems to have appealed to George Eliot's taste. In a letter late in 1838 she wrote, "I have just begun the life of Wilberforce, and I am expecting a rich treat from it. There is a similarity, if I may compare myself with such a man, between his temptation or rather besetments and my own, that makes his experience very interesting to me. Oh that I might be made as useful in my lowly and obscure station as he was in the exalted one assigned to him! I feel myself to be a mere cumberer of the ground. May the Lord give me such insight into what is truly good, that I may not rest contented with making Christianity a mere addendum to my pursuits, or with tacking it as a fringe to my garments! May I seek to be sanctified wholly!" An earlier reference shows that she was familiar with the works of the nonconformist divine, Philip Doddridge, whose book, The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul, in-

fluenced the conversion of Wilberforce. George Eliot writes of Doddridge as follows: Doddridge tells us, to rest satisfied with any attainments in religion is a fearful proof that we are ignorant of the first principles of it. Oh that we could live only for eternity! That we could realize its nearness."

Reference to another biography is made in a letter to her Wesleyan aunt, Mrs. Samuel Evans, the original of Dinah: "You were very kind to remember my wish to see Mrs. Fletcher's life: I only desire such a spiritual digestion as has enabled you to derive so much benefit from its perusal." This probably is the same Mrs. Fletcher of whom Adam speaks as a precedent for marriage.

Religious poetry seems to have been prominent in the reading of this period. Of the Lyra Apostolica a letter mentions being attracted "by some highly poetical extracts that I have picked up in various quarters." The same letter says, "I have just bought Mr. Keble's Christian Year; a volume of sweet poetry that perhaps you know." It was one of the books Robert brought Maggie and was

27. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 56.
chosen by her with then Bible and Thomas 'a Kempis
for her spiritual food.

Other letters point to other religious reading. "I am reading Harris's Great Teacher, and am innig bewegt, as a German would say, by its stirring eloquence, which leaves you no time or strength for a cold estimate of the writer's exact merits." A mention of Heber seems to refer to the bishop of Calcutta and author of sermons and pious poetry.

Religious books referred to in George Eliot's novels suggest possibilities in the way of additional reading that might belong here. Some of these are as follows: Bishop Jebb's Memoirs; Archbishop Tillotson's Sermons; Memoirs of Felix Neff; Father Clement, and anti-catholic book; Scott's Force of Truth; Life of Legh Richmond, Life of Henry Martyn, a pathetic Missionary story,

(Janet said—wonderful Henry Martyn he's just like Mr. Tryan—wearing himself out for other people.) Wesley's books, Wesley's abridgment of Mme. Guyon's

32. Clerical Life, Mr. Gilfil's Love Story, chII, p. 142.
34. Ibid., Ch. 23, p. 309.
George Eliot's mental and emotional state at this time combined probably with books congenial to her state of mind such as have been mentioned, enabled the agnostic novelist to portray religious faith and fervor and spiritual exaltation with a truth and sympathy possible only to one who had felt and believed exactly as Janet, Dinah, Maggie, etc., did.

Curiously enough in view of her own later contribution to literature but in accord with the ascetic and Puritanic attitude already described, George Eliot was at this age opposed to fiction. A lengthy discourse in condemnation of this type of reading appears in a letter in 1839 and will be given here in part. "I put out of the question all persons of perception so quick, memories so eclectic and retentive, and minds so comprehensive, that nothing else than omnivorous reading, as Southey calls it, can satisfy their intellectual man; for (if I may parody the words of Scripture with out profaneness) they will gather to themselves all facts, and heap unto themselves all ideas. For

36. Ibid., ch. 50, p. 435.
such persons we cannot legislate. Again, I would put out of the question standard works whose contents are a matter of constant references and the names of whose heroes and heroines briefly and therefore conveniently, describe characters and ideas: such are Don Quixote, Butler's Hudibras Robinson Crusoe, Gil Blas, Byron's Poetical Romances Southey's ditto, etc. Such, too, are Walter Scott's novels and poems.... Shakespeare has a higher claim than this on our attention, but we have need of as nice a power of distillation as the bee to suck nothing but honey from his pages. However, as in life we must/exposed to malign influences from intercourse with others if we would reap the advantages designed for us by making us social beings, so in books.... The Scripture declaration, 'As face answereth to the glass so the heart of man to man,' will exonerate me from the charge of uncharitableness, or too high an estimation of myself, if I venture to believe that the same causes which exist in my own breast to render novels and romances pernicious, have their counterpart in that of every fellow-creature. I am, I confess, not an impartial member of a jury in this case; for I owe the culprits a grudge for injuries inflicted on myself. When I was a child .... But it may be said 'No one ever dreamed of recommending children to read them: all this does not apply to persons come to years of 39. Ante p. 12.
discretion, whose judgments are in some degrees matured'. I answer that men and women are but children of a larger growth: they are still imitative beings. We cannot (at least those who ever read to any purpose at all)—we cannot, I say, help being modified by the ideas that pass through our minds. We hardly wish to lay claim to such elasticity as retains no impress. We are active beings too. We are each one of the *dramatis personae* in some play on the stage of life; hence our actions have their share in the effects of our readings. As to discipline our minds receive from the perusal of fictions, I can conceive none that is beneficial but may be attained by that of history. It is the merit of fictions to come within the orbit of probability; if unnatural they would no longer please. If it be said the mind must have relaxation 'Truth is strange—stranger than fiction.' When a person has exhausted the wonders of truth, there is no other resort than fiction: till then, I cannot imagine how the adventures of some phantom, conjured up by fancy, can be more entertaining than the transaction of real specimens of human nature, from which we may safely draw inferences.... The real secret of the relaxation talked of is one
that would not generally be avowed; but an appetite that wants seasoning of a certain kind cannot be indicative of health. Religious novels are more hateful to me than merely worldly ones: they are a sort of centaur or mermaid, and, like other monsters that we do not know how to class, should be destroyed for the public good as soon as born. The weapons of the Christian warfare were never sharpened at the forge of romance. Domestic fictions, as they come within the range of imitation, seem more dangerous. For my part, I am ready to sit down and weep at the impossibility of my understanding or barely knowing a fraction of the sum of objects that present themselves for our contemplation in books and in life. Have I, then, any time to spend on things that never existed?" While she came to take a broader view of fiction, still never in her life did she feel that she had much time or attention to give to popular and contemporary novels as a class.

Reading of an ecclesiastical nature engrossed her mind for the better part of two years. She even set out to make a chart of ecclesiastical history, but discontinued this labor when a chart of similar nature was published by someone else.

When she was twenty, church history, government and theological and doctrinal controversy of the most weighty kind seem to have been her delight. We may gather some idea of these books and her reaction to them by the commentaries in her letters during this time. "On no subject do I veer to all points of the compass more frequently than on the nature of the visible Church.... I have been reading the new prize essay on Schism by Professor Hoppus and Milner's Church History since I last wrote you: the former ably expresses the tenets of those who deny that any form of church Government is so clearly dictated in Scripture as to possess a divine right, and, consequently, to be binding on Christians; the latter... exhibits the views of a moderate Evangelical Episcopalian on the inferences to be drawn from ecclesiastical remains. He equally repudiates the loud assertions of a jus divinum, to the exclusion of all separatists from the visible Church, though he calmly maintains the superiority of the evidence in favor of Episcopacy, of a moderate kind both in power and extent of diocese, as well as the benefit of a national establishment." In 1839 she wrote, "I have been skimming the Portrait of an English

42. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 55.
Churchman by the Rev. W. Gresley: this contains an outline of the system of those who exclaim of the Anglican Church as the Jews did of their Sacred building... 'the temple of the Lord....'" 43

A year later we have the following in regard to the same book: "Mr. Harper lent me a little time ago a work by the Rev. W. Gresley, begging me to read it, as he thought it was calculated to make me a preselyte to the opinions it advocates. I had skimmed the books before..., but I read it attentively a second time, and was pleased with the spirit of piety that it breathes throughout." 44

Still another reference is made to Gresley's books. "His last work is one in a similar style [to Portrait of an English Churchman] The English Citizen, I have cursorily read.... Mine [opinion] is this: that they are sure to have a powerful influence on the minds of small readers and shallow thinkers, as from the simplicity and clearness with which the author, by his beau ideal characters, enunciates his sentiments, they furnish a magazine of easily wielded weapons for morning-calling and evening party controversialists, as well as that really honest minds will be inclined to think they have found a resting place among the footballing of religious parties. But it seems to me that there is unfair-

44. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 64-5.
ness in arbitrarily selecting a train of circumstances and a set of characters as a development of a class of opinions. In this way we might make atheism appear wonderfully calculated to promote social happiness."

Naturally she followed with interest the arguments of the promoters of the Oxford Movement and those of their opponents. She wrote in 1839: "... The authors of the Oxford Tracts go a step farther [than Gresley in *English Churchman*], and evince by their compliments to Rome, as a dear though erring sister, and their attempts to give a Romish color to our ordinance, with a very confused and unscriptural statement of the great doctrines of justification, a disposition rather to fraternize with the members of a church carrying on her brow the prophetical epithets applied by St. John to the Scarlet beast, the mystery of Iniquity, than with pious Nonconformists. It is not true they disclaim all this, and their opinions are seconded by the extensive learning, the laborious zeal and the deep devotion of those who propagate them; but a reference to facts will convince us that such has generally been the character of heretical teachers."

Isaac Taylor's books were especially liked. "I have been reading (Colossians) in connection with a train of thought suggested by the reading of Ancient Christianity and the Oxford Tracts by Isaac Taylor, one of the most eloquent, acute, and pious of writers." Later in the same year she wrote, "Isaac Taylor's work is not yet complete. When it is so I hope to reperuse it." This book was written to show that the early church was not to be taken as a model by the modern church. The daughter of a Nonconformist minister, with whose family George Eliot became acquainted a year or two later in Coventry, writes, "In her first conversations with my father and mother, they were much interested and learned in what high estimation she held the writing of Isaac Taylor. My father thought she was a little disappointed on the learning that he was a Dissenter. When his Ancient Christianity was published in numbers, Miss Evans took it in, and kindly forwarded the numbers to us. From the impression made on my own mind by unfavorable facts about "the Fathers", and from her own subsequent references to this work, I am inclined

to think it had its influence in unsettling her views of Christianity." The same writer tells that "She particularly enjoyed his Saturday Evening and that she "spoke in years afterwards of his Physical Theory of Another Life, as exciting thought and leading speculation further than he would have desired." The Saturday Evening is a work of pious and fervent exhortation to Christians to prepare for the coming of the Lord. The Physical Theory of Another Life is an ingenious speculation upon the nature of the after-life, deduced by supposing what sort of existence our mental faculties would permit us if they were unhampered by the present human limitations. The conclusion is that the increased powers in themselves would not make for either happiness or misery.

Bible reading of course, constantly accompanied the sort of reading that we have been reviewing. The writings of St. Paul appear to have been among her favorites. Of the Epistle to the Colossians a latter says that it "is pre-eminently rich in the coloring with which it portrays the divine fulness contained in the Saviour, contrasted with the beggarly elements that a spirit of self righteousness would in some way, mingle with the light of life, the filthy rags it would

tack around the fine rainment of His righteousness."

The reading of this period was no doubt responsible in part, for the ready knowledge of Church conditions and doctrines that George Eliot shows in her books, especially the *Scenes of Clerical Life*. Of her treatment of clergymen, an English bishop wrote thus: "It is worthy of notice that George Eliot has depicted representatives of all schools among the clergy, and that her remorseless accuracy, and yet unbounded sympathy, has never failed her in any of them. Whether they are the old-fashioned secular-minded but upright clerics of the Irwine and Gilfil type, represented in its more modern form by Mr. Gascoigne, or the High Anglican of early Tractarian days like Dr. Kenn, or, as in this story [Janet's Repentance] the fervid Evangelical who was the innovator of a previous period, she is able not only to sympathize herself, but to put her readers in sympathy with each." Another clergyman calls her books a "theological storehouse."

Religious reading, however, was not permitted to exclude entirely that of a broader

nature. The poets were by no means neglected. Among these Wordsworth was given a prominent place. In the later part of 1839, George Eliot wrote: "I have been so self-indulgent as to possess myself of Wordsworth at full length, and thoroughly like much of the first three volumes, which I fancy are only the low vestibule of the three remaining ones. I never before met with so many of my own feelings expressed just as I could like them. To this Cross adds: "This allusion to Wordsworth is interesting as it entirely expresses the feeling she had to him up to the day of her death. One of the very last books we read together at Cheyne Walk was Mr. Frederick Myers's Wordsworth in the English Men of Letters, which she heartily enjoyed. In 1840, George Eliot wrote to a friend, "I cannot do better than ask you to read, if accessible, Wordsworth's short poem on the Power of Sound, with which I have just been delighted." In 1852 she asked to have her Wordsworth sent her in London. About six years later she wrote, "He [Ruskin in last two volumes of Modern Painters] is strongly akin to the sublimest part of Wordsworth—whom, by-the-by, we are reading with fresh admiration

for his beauties and tolerance for his faults."

In the last year of her life we find the following
in a letter to Frederic Harrison: "I have found
the spot in The Prelude where the passage I
mentioned occurs. It is in Book VIII, The Retrospect
toward the end:—

The human nature unto which I felt
That I belonged, and reverenced with love,
Was not a punctual presence, but a spirit
Diffused through time and space, with aid derived,
Of evidence from monuments erect,
Prostrate or leaning towards their common rest
In earth, the widely scattered wreck sublime
Of vanished nations.'

The bit of brickwork in the rock is 'with aid
derived of evidence.' I think you would find
much to suit your purpose in The Prelude, such as—

'There is

One great society alone on earth:
The noble Living and the noble Dead!'

Except for travelling and for popular distribution
I prefer Moxon's one-volume edition of Wordsworth
to any selection. No selection gives you the perfect
gems to be found in single lines, or in half a dozen

lines which are to be found in the *dull Poems*.

I am sorry Matthew Arnold has not included the sonnet beginning "I grieved for
Buonaparte' with a vain
And unthinking grief;
and which had these precious lines—

"Tis not in battles that from youth we train
The governor who must be wise and good,
And temper with the sternness of the brain
Though motherly, and weak as womanhood.
Wisdom doth live with children round her knees.'

Has he the magnificent sonnet on Toussaint O'Onverture?
I don't know where there is anything finer than the
59 last eight lines of it." References to Wordsworth that show continued reading are frequent.
60 The Lyrical Ballads is mentioned in *Adam Bede*.
61 It is not surprising that George Eliot
found a congenial spirit in Wordsworth when we
consider the similarity between their views of life
and art. Both emphasize the common and ordinary in
incident and people and show great sympathy with
humble life. The quality ascribed to one of George
Eliot's stories in the following quotation is
exactly the purpose Wordsworth had in writing much
of his poetry. ~"In *Amos Barton*, more perhaps than

61. *Adam Bede*, ch. 5, p. 56.
in any other of her novels, we are struck by one of her peculiar characteristics, the power of drawing out the interest that lies in commonplace, even contemptible characters without in the least idealizing them or ascribing to them actions or sayings inconsistent with their real natures."

The letters have no reference to Coleridge, though he must have been read. It will be remembered that in Adam Bede, Captain Donnithorne said to Mrs. Irwine: "That reminds me that I've got a book I meant to bring you, god-mamma. It came down in a parcel from London the other day. I know you are fond of queer, wizard-like stories. It's a volume of poems, Lyrical Ballads: Most of them to be twaddling stuff; but the first is in a different style - The Ancient Mariner is the title. I can hardly make head or tail of it as a story, but it's/strange striking thing."

Southey's Poetical Romances were among the standard works that should be known named in the discussion of fiction. His Life of Cowper is mentioned in Mill on the Floss.

Of Mrs. Hemans there is this comment:

"I am reading eclectically Mrs. Hemans's poems, and

63. Adam Bede, ch. 5, p. 56.
64. Ante p. 36.
65. Mill on the Floss, Bk. 6, ch. 2, p. 350."
venture to recommend for your perusal, if un­
known to you, one of the longest ones— The Forest
Sanctuary. I can give it my pet adjective—
Exquisite."

Shelley appears to have won her un­
qualified admiration. In 1840 we find these
comments in a letter: "I have not read very many
of Mr. B's poems nor any with much attention. I
simply declare my determination not to feed on the
broth of literature when I can get the strong soup­
such for instance, as Shelley's Cloud, the five or
six stanzas of which contain more poetic metal
than is beat out in all Mr. B's pages. In 1857
in her Recollections, Scilly Isles, there is this
note: "I never enjoyed the lark before as I enjoy­
ed it at Scilly—never felt the full beauty of
Shelley's poem on it before."

Though we have nå opinions given upon
Byron's poetry, there is sufficient evidence that
it was read. It was listed among the standard works
that ought to be known. She accuses herself in a
letter with"Byronic invective." When in London
she asked to have her Byron sent to her.

67. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 73.
69. Ante, p. 36.
Maggie wished for all of Byron's poems. There is a mention of the Corsair and The Siege of Corinth in Brother Jacob. Of Thomas Moore we find only the mention of Lalla Rookh in Brother Jacob.

The older poets come in for their share of attention. An 1840 letter says, "Will you try to get me Spenser's Fairy Queen in the cheapest edition, with a glossary, which is quite indispensable, together with a clear and correct type." Another letter says Spenser was received.

There are several merely passing references to Milton. In 1872 she wrote to a friend, "Glad you are reading my demigod Milton!" Cross says: "Her reading [aloud] of Milton was especially fine; and I shall never forget four great lines of the Samson Agonistes to which it did perfect justice—

'But what more oft in nations grown corrupt,
And by their vices brought to servitude,
Than to love bondage more than liberty—
Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty.'

72. Mill on the Floss, Bk. 4, ch. 3, p. 262.
74. Ibid., Brother Jacob, ch. 2, p. 218.
76. Ante, p.
78. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 149.
The delighted conviction of justice in the thought—the sense of perfect accord between the thought, language, and rhythm—stimulated the voice of the reader to find the exactly right tone."

The eulogy of Cowper in the essay Worldliness and Other-worldliness: the Poet Young has already been mentioned. The Task is there especially praised for sympathy, truth and melody. Two letters contain allusions to Cowper.

The reading of George Eliot was by no means limited to English literature alone. She had been taught French at school. Le Sage's Gil Blas, it will be remembered, was among the standard books previously cited. In 1843 she wrote to a friend who had been studying French:

"I have been trying to find a French book that you were not likely to have read, but do not think that I have one, unless it be Gil Blas which you are perhaps too virtuous to have read, though how any one can opine it to have a vicious tendency, I am at a loss to conjecture. They might as well say that to condemn a person to eat a whole plum-pudding.

80. Ante, p. 32.
82. Ante, p. 36.
83. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 27.
would deprive him/all future relish for plain food."

Mme. de Staël's Corinne is mentioned in several places. Molière was later a great favorite, especially his Misanthrope. La Fontaine and Balzac are mentioned in Brother Jacob, and Bossuet in a chapter title of Mill on the Floss.

She took lessons in German and Italian in 1840. On March 23rd she wrote, "I have just received my second lesson in German." On October of the same year we find the following: "I have made an alteration in my plans with Mr. Brezzi, and hence-forward take Italian and German alternately, so that I shall not be liable to the consciousness of having imperative employment for every interstice of time. There seems a greater affinity between German any my mind than Italian, though less new to me, possesses." This strong predilection for German literature is marked throughout her life.

Late in 1840, there is in a letter a little poem translated from German into English. Maria Stuart by Schiller was read in 1840, and we will find her

84. Cross, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 120.
85. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 77, 282; Mill on the Floss, Bk. 5, Ch. 4, p. 306.
88. Mill on the Floss, Bk. 4, ch. 1.
reading his books later.

We have no record of her first acquaintance with Goethe, but it would seem to fall into this period. In 1852, she asked to have her Goethe sent to her in London. In 1853 she wrote that Goethe was her companion and that she had felt the truth of a passage about him in an article she had been reading. The gist of this criticism was that he was an observer of life but not a part of it. Her study of Goethe was no doubt stimulated by her union with his biographer, Newes. Cross, wrote: "Immediately before her illness we had read, together, the First Part of Faust. Reading the poem in the original with such an interpreter was the opening of a new world to me. Nothing in all literature moved her more than the pathetic situation and the whole character of Gretchen. It touched her more than anything in Shakspeare." Other chance allusions to Goethe occur in the letters.

Neither do we know when she began to read Heine. She has given a careful estimate of his work in the essay, German Wit: Heinrich Heine. There are a few references to other German writers.

94. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 311-12.
including Lessing and Stahr, in letters later than this period. German quotations are frequent in the later novels. A reference to a Water-Nixie in German lyrics in The Lifted Veil may indicate a knowledge of poetry of the romantic school. A consideration of George Eliot's knowledge of German would be incomplete without a note of the translation of Strauss, which we should have occasion to take up later.

Other Italian studies we have this suggestion in a letter of 1840: "May I trouble you to procure for me an Italian book recommended by Mr. Brezzi, Silvio Pellico's Le Mie Prigioni— if not Storia d' Italia? If they are cheap I should like both." There are some chance reference to Tasso in letters and in one story.

The Greek and Latin classics were read in the originals. Greek quotations occur in the early novels. Spinoza's books were translated from the Latin. Schylus and Epictetus were favorites.

102. Post, p. 58.
Hebrew was studied later in connection with the Strauss translation, and whether this study had been started before we cannot tell. The Old Testament and Talmud were read in the original.

The scientific side of language study was not without its appeal to George Eliot as the following quotations will show: "I am beguiled by the fascination that the study of languages has for my capricious mind. I could e'en give myself up to making discoveries in the world of words."

Cross said that "Philology was a subject in which she was most deeply interested."

Various books and authors of a miscellaneous character appear in reading of the years under consideration. Writing of the profitlessness of fiction reading, George Eliot says "I dare say Mr. James's Huguenot would be recommended as giving an idea of the times which he writes; but as well be recommended to look at landscapes for an idea of English scenery."

Don Quixote was cited among the "standard works," but would seem not have been read at that time, for we later learn of her borrowing it to read.

104. Ibid., Vol. III, p. 421.
106. Ante, p. 36.
There is an allusion to Sancho Panza in a later letter. *Don Quixote* was read by Latimer in *The Lifted Veil*.

There is a lone reference to Addison in a letter, and there are two to Bacon.

Carlyle is mentioned in 1840 but with no indication of what she may have read or just when. Later references express esteem and are more specific.

In a letter to John Sibree in 1848 she wrote: "You and Carlyle (have you read his article in last week's *Examiner*?) are the only two people who feel just as I would have them—who can glory in what is actually great and beautiful without putting forth any cold reservations and incredulities to save their credit for wisdom. Soon after *Adam Bede* was written, George Eliot wrote this to her publisher: "I want the philosopher himself to read it because the pre-philosophic period—the childhood and poetry of his life—lay among the furrowed fields and pious peasantry. If he could

110. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 60, 129.
be urged to read a novel! I should like, if possible, to give him the same sort of pleasure he has given me in the early chapters of *Sartor*, where he described little Diogenes eating his porridge on the wall in sight of the sunset, and gaining deep wisdom from the contemplation of the pigs and other higher animals of **Entepuhl.** The same letter adds these more unfavorable comments: "Your critic was not unjustly severe on the *Mirage of Philosophy*—and I confess the *Life of Frederic* was a painful book to me in many respects; and yet I shrink, perhaps, superstitiously, from any written, or spoken word which is as strong as my inward criticism." The contrast between George Eliot's emphasis on what is common to humanity with Carlyle's on the exceptional, makes it natural that they should not always agree and likely that he did not have much influence over her mind and writing.

The following excerpt from a letter near the end of this period points not only to a book she read but as well to her own attitude of mind: "I am/impressed than ever with a truth beautifully expressed in *Woman's Mission*—

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Learning is only so far valuable as it serves to enlarge and enlighten the bounds of conscience. This I believe it eminently does when pursued humbly and piously, and from a belief that it is a solemn duty to cultivate every faculty of our nature so far as primary obligations allow."

A little later she writes: "Since I wrote you I have had Aime Martin's work, L'Education des Meres, lent to me, and I found it to be the real Greece whence Woman's Mission has only imported a few marbles—but Martin is a soi-disant rational Christian, if I mistake him not. I send you an epitaph which he mentions on a tomb in Paris—that of a mother: 'Dors en paix, O ma mere, ton fils 'obeira toujours.'"

A historical work seems to have fired her interest and imagination. "I have been reading the three volumes of the Life and Times of Louis the Thirteenth; and am eagerly waiting for the fourth and last as any voracious novel-reader for Bulwer's latest. I am afraid I am getting quite martial in my spirit, and in the warmth of my sympathy for Lurenne and Conde', losing my hatred of war."

There is record of but one scientific book, though it seems from the passage quoted below and from her later marked interest in scientific works that there must have been others. The one mentioned in Mrs. Somerville's *On the Connexion of the Physical Sciences*. Her subsequent association with Lewes and other scientists no doubt stimulated her interest in this direction. The use of illustrations from science is a remarkable feature of her work as a novelist.

The scope of the reading and the study of these three years is evident from the survey we have taken. A passage in a letter sets forth her various interests in a striking way. "My mind presents just such an assemblage of disjointed specimens of history, ancient and modern; scraps of poetry picked up from Shakespeare, Cowper, Wordsworth and Milton; newspaper topics; morsels of Addison and Bacon, Latin verbs, geometry, entomology, and chemistry; Reviews and metaphysics— all arrested and petrified and smothered by the fast-thickening every-day accessions of actual events, relative anxieties, and household cares and vexations." 118

118. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 69.
READING OF PERIOD OF RELIGIOUS CRISIS AND READJUSTMENT
1841-1849

CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF BOOKS READ

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Time when read</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Architecture of the Heavens and Phenomena of the Solar System</td>
<td>John Pringle Nichol</td>
<td>1841</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hallam</td>
<td>1841</td>
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<tr>
<td>An Inquiry concerning the Origin of Christianity</td>
<td>Charles Hennell</td>
<td>1841</td>
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<td>Aenid</td>
<td>Vergil</td>
<td>1842</td>
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<td>Manzoni</td>
<td>1843</td>
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<td>Leben Jesu</td>
<td>David Friedrich Strauss</td>
<td>1844</td>
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<td>The Crofton Boys</td>
<td>Harriet Martineau</td>
<td>1845</td>
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<td>Sybil</td>
<td>D'Israeli</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Fawn of Sertorius</td>
<td>Robert Landor</td>
<td>1846</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life and Correspondence of John Foster</td>
<td>J. E. Ryland</td>
<td>1846</td>
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<td>Heliados</td>
<td>Sara Hennell</td>
<td>1846</td>
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<td>Sir Charles grandison</td>
<td>Samuel Richardson</td>
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<td>Letters d'un Voyageur</td>
<td>George Sand</td>
<td>1848</td>
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<td>Lavater</td>
<td>1848</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fair Maid of Firth</td>
<td>Sir Walter Scott</td>
<td>1848</td>
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<td>De Imitatione Christi</td>
<td>Thomas a Kempis</td>
<td>1849</td>
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<td>Nemesis of Faith</td>
<td>J. A. Froude</td>
<td>1849</td>
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<td>John Keats</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tractatus Theologico-Politus</td>
<td>Spinoza</td>
<td>1849</td>
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**ADDITIONS NOT CHRONOLOGICAL**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Book</th>
<th>Author</th>
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<tr>
<td>The Education of the Feelings</td>
<td>Charles Bray</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Philosophy of Necessity</td>
<td>Kant</td>
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<tr>
<td>An Outline of the Various Social Systems founded on the principle of Co-operation</td>
<td>Mary Hennell</td>
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<td>Wallenstein</td>
<td>Friedrich Schiller</td>
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<td>History of the Thirty Year's War</td>
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<td>Joan of Arc</td>
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<td>Anabasis</td>
<td>Xenophon</td>
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<td>Christianity</td>
<td>Edgar Quinet</td>
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<td>The Life of the Rev. Joseph</td>
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<td>Blanco White</td>
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<td>Coningsby</td>
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DISCUSSION

A great change in George Eliot's thought and outlook upon life came about in the year 1841. In this year she and her father moved from the Griff house to one on the Foleshill road near Coventry. Here, under the influence of new friends and books, her religious point of view was completely reversed, though the beginning of this change are believed by some to have been evident earlier.

At Coventry she made the acquaintance of and formed strong friendships with a group of Unitarians. These were Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray, Mr. Charles Bennell and Miss Sara Hennell. Mr. B ray

and Miss Hennell were both authors of books which we shall have occasion to note later, but it was a book by Charles Hennell that seems more than anything else to have caused George Eliot to break with her past. This book was *An Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity*.

Blind states that before beginning the *Inquiry* George Eliot read the Bible through. Charles Bray says that upon their acquaintance, "We soon found that her mind was already turning toward greater freedom of thought in religious opinion, that she had even bought for herself Hennell's *Inquiry*, and there was much mutual interest between the author and herself in their frequent meetings at our house."

In order to give some idea of the nature of this book, some excerpts are introduced here. In the preface to the first edition we read this:

"The right of private judgment in the separation of truth from fiction being once accorded, the precise limits which ought to be assigned to the

the credible portion of the miraculous narratives are far from being obvious; and the ascertaining of these limits becomes a matter of interesting research to all who wish to know what they are to believe or disbelieve on the subject of the Christian religion.

The following pages are the result of an investigation undertaken with this view, and pursued for some time with the expectation that, at least, the principal miraculous facts supposed to lie at the foundation of Christianity would be found to be impregnable; but it was continued with a gradually increasing conviction that the true account of the life of Jesus Christ, and of the spread of His religion, would be found to contain no deviation from the known laws of nature, nor to require, for their explanation, more than the operation of human motives and feelings, acted upon by the peculiar circumstances of the age and country whence the religion originated. "

The following comments upon the Gospels appear in summaries of their treatment: "Thus it

appears that the first three Gospels were written at a considerable distance of time from the transactions recorded; that it is not improbable, although not certain, that there may be some parts which the writers learned direct from the Apostles or other eye-witnesses but that it is uncertain which these parts are, and that they are largely mingled with second-hand narratives, hearsay, and traditions which had passed through several stages."

"It has been seen that if John be admitted to be the author of this Gospel, whilst the hypothesis of real miracles be rejected, it becomes inevitable to charge the apostle with wilful fiction; or at least with allowing his imagination to take the place of his memory to such a degree as is nearly equivalent to it."

George Eliot, herself wrote an analysis of the Inquiry for the Analytical Catalogue of Mr. Chapman's publications, issued in 1852. A part of this may be conveniently introduced here. "The author opens his inquiry with a Historical Sketch, extending from the Babylonish Captivity to the end of the first century, the design of which is to

6. Ibid., ch. 5, p. 134.
7. Ibid., p. 158.
show how, abstracting the idea of the miraculous, or any specialty of divine influence, the gradual development of certain elements in Jewish history, contributed to form a suitable nidus for the productive of a character and career like that of Jesus, and how the devoted enthusiasm generated by such a career in his immediate disciples rendering it easier for them to modify their ideas of the Messiah than to renounce their belief in their Master's Messiahship, - the accession of Gentile converts and the destruction of the last remnant of theocracy necessitating a wider interpretation of Messianic hopes, - the junction of Christian ideas with Alexandrine Platonism, and the decrepitude of Polytheism, combined to associate the name of Jesus, his Messiahship, his death and his resurrection, with a great moral and religious revolution."

It should be noted that while Hennell in this book rejected everything supernatural in Christianity, that he showed no atheistic tendencies and that he accepted the moral teaching of Jesus.

The first indication in the letters of the change that was taking place in George Eliot's 8. Cross, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 94-5
mind occurs in November, 1841: My whole soul has
been engrossed in the most interesting of all
inquiries for the last few days, and to what result
my thoughts may lead, I know not—possibly to one
that will startle you; but my only desire is to
know the truth, my only fear to cling to error."

For a time she gave up going to church.
This offended her father and caused them to think
of breaking up housekeeping. She did go to stay
for a few weeks with her brother after which a
reconciliation was effected and church-going resumed.

In two letters George Eliot makes very
clear statements in regard to her debt to Hennell's
Inquiry. In 1847 she wrote to the sister of the
author: "I have read the Inquiry again with more
than interest—with delight and high admiration.
My present impression from it far surpasses the one
I had retained from my two readings about five years
ago. With the exception of a few expressions which
seem too little discriminating in the Introductory
Sketch, there is nothing in the whole tone from
beginning to end that jars on my moral sense; and
apart from any opinion of the book as an explanation
of the existence of Christianity and the Christian documents. I am sure that no one, fit to read it at all, could read it without being intellectually and morally stronger— the reasoning is so close, the induction so clever, the style so clear, vigorous, and pointed, and the animus so candid and even full of wit to me. It gives me that exquisite kind of laughter which comes from the gratification of the reasoning faculties.... I think the Inquiry furnishes the utmost that can be done towards obtaining a real view of the life and character of Jesus, by rejecting as little as possible from the Gospels. I confess that I should call many things 'shining ether' to which Mr. Hennell allows the solid angularity of facts; but I think he has thoroughly worked out the problem—subtract from the New Testament the miraculous and highly improbable, and what will be the remainder."

In 1870 she wrote to the same person/following: "When I remember my own obligation to the book, I must believe that among the many new readers a cheap edition will reach, there must be minds to whom it will bring welcome light in studying

the New Testament, sober serious help toward a conception of the past, instead of stage-light and makeups. And this value is, I think, independent of the opinions that might be held as to the construction of probabilities or in particular interpretations. Throughout there is the presence of grave sincerity."

Hennell had a later work called Christian Theism, with which George Eliot must have been familiar, although she has left no notice of it. In it he argued largely from nature for a belief in God.

George Eliot formed a close friendship with Sara Hennell, the sister of Charles Hennell and Mrs. Bray. She now (1842) took the place of Miss Lewis as chief correspondent. She was an earnest believer in Christianity in as far as that was possible to one who totally rejected its objective reality. She was the author in later years of two books which George Eliot valued highly and with the ideas of which she must have been familiar from her association with their author: Baillie Prize Essay on Christianity and Infidelity: an Exposition of the Arguments on both sides, 1857;

Thoughts in Aid of Faith, 1860. Of work from her pen we have mention in letters to her within this period. In 1846: "I thank you most heartily for sending me Heliados first, because I admire it greatly.... As yet I have read it only once, but I promise myself to read it again and again...."

Two months later: "Lying in bed this morning grievously tormented, your Heliados visited me and revealed itself more completely than it had ever done before. How true that it is only when all portions of an individual nature, or all members of society, move forward harmoniously together, that religious progress is calm and beneficial."

Various books dealing with religious matter, both orthodox and unorthodox belong to these years. Reading of a distinctly pious kind continues to appear. In 1846 we read the following: "Did you notice the review of Foster's Life? I am reading the life and thinking how you would like it. It is deeply interesting to study the life of a genius under circumstances amid which genius is so seldom to be found. Some of the thoughts in his journal are perfect gems."

Apropos of the same: "This conscious kind of false life

that is ever and anon endeavoring to form itself within us and eat away our true life, will be over­come by continued accession of vitality, by our perpetual increase in 'quantity of existence' as Foster calls it."

In 1846 there is mention of a review of Quinet's Christianity to be written by George Eliot for the Prospective.

Blanco White's autobiography was evidently much appreciated. In 1847: "I was interested the other day in talking to a young lady who lives in a nest of clergymen, her brothers, but not of the Evangelical school. She had been reading Blanco White's life, and seems to have her spirit stirred within her, as every one's must be who reads the book with any power of appreciation. She is unable to account to herself for the result at which Blanco White arrived with his earnestness and love of truth; and she asked me if I had come to the same con­clusions." Later: "... when the hazy effect of twilight is gone— as our dear Blanco White said of death."

Francis Newman was another favorite:
"Thank you for a sight of our blessed St. Francis's letter. There is no imaginable moment in which the thought of such a being could be an intrusion. His soul is a blessed *yea*.

Of Froude's *Nemesis of Faith*, George Eliot wrote a review in the *Coventry Herald* early in 1849. A letter says: "I have so liked the thought of your enjoying the *Nemesis of Faith*! I quote Keats' sonnet apropos of that book. It has made me feel-

'Like some watcher of the skies
When a new planet swims into his ken;
Or like stout Cortez—when with eagle eyes
He stared at the Pacific, and all his men
Look'd at each other with a wild surmise—
Silent, upon a peak in Darien.'

... I cannot take up the book again, though wanting very much to read it more closely. Poor and shallow as one's own soul is, it is blessed to think that a sort of transubstantiation is possible by which the greater ones can live in us. Egotism, apart, another's greatness, beauty or bliss is one's own.

And let us sing a *Magnificat* when we are conscious

that this power of expansion and sympathy is growing, just in proportion as the individual satisfactions are lessening. Miserable dust of the earth we are, but it is worth while to be so, for the sake of the living— the breath of God within us." Other references to Froude and his books occur later.

Tom Paine, to whom there is a solitary allusion in Amos Barton, would probably belong to the reading of this period.

Like Maggie, George Eliot found a treasure in Thomas à Kempis. When she first discovered the Imitation we cannot tell, but early in 1849 she wrote: "I have at last the most delightful De Imitatione Christi, with quaint woodcuts. One breathes a cool air as of cloisters in the book,— it makes one long to be a saint for a few months. Verily its piety has its foundation in the depth of the divine human soul."

Maggie, we are told in The Mill on the Floss, "read on in the old book, devouring eagerly the dialogues with the invisible Teacher, the

pattern of sorrow, the source of all strength; returning to it after she had been called away, and reading till the sun went down behind the willows. With all the hurry of an imagination what could never rest in the present, she sat in the deepening twilight forming plans of self-humiliation and entire devotedness; and in the ardour of first discovery, renunciation seemed to her the entrance into that satisfaction which she had so long been craving in vain. She had not perceived—how could she until she had lived longer?—the inmost truth of the old monk's out-pouring, that renunciation remains sorrow, though a sorrow borne willingly. Maggie was still panting for happiness, and was in ecstasy because she had found the key to it. She knew nothing of doctrines and systems, of mysticism or quietism, but his voice out of the far-off middle ages was the direct communication of a human soul's belief and experience, and came to Maggie as an unquestioned message.

"I suppose that is the reason why the small old-fashioned book, for which you need only pay six-pence at a book stall, works miracles to this day, turning bitter waters into sweetness;
while expensive sermons and treatises, newly issued, leave all things as they were before. It was written down by a hand that waited for the heart's prompting, it is the chronicle of a solitary hidden anguish, struggle, trust, and triumph, not written on velvet cushions to teach endurance to those who are treading with bleeding feet on the stones. And so it remains to all time a lasting record of human needs and human consolations; the voice of a brother who, ages ago, felt and suffered and renounced,—in the cloister, perhaps, with serge gown and tonsured head, with much chanting and long fasts, and with a fashion of speech different from ours,—but under the same far-off heavens, and with the same passionate desires, the same strivings, the same failures, the same weariness."

George Eliot's 1859 Journal notes reading 24 Thomas à Kempis. The Imitation is said to have been found by her bedside after her death. Its spirit of mysticism, resignation and renunciation may well have had its share of influence in bringing about these characteristics in her philosophy of life and in her books.

25. Cooke, G. W. George Eliot, p. 239.
The religious reading of this time that we have just surveyed is very important because it laid the foundation for her later creed in as far as the agnostic George Eliot can be said to have formulated one. Evident already in her reality rejection of the objective of Christianity, are her leanings toward positivism so clearly expressed in the motto to *The Lifted Veil*.

"Give me no light, great Heaven, but such as turns To energy of human fellowship; No powers beyond the human heritage That makes completer manhood."

That she never fully subscribed to the religion of humanity is not surprising when one notes her continued reading and thorough appreciation of truly pious and orthodox books. This is consistent with the sympathy she shows in her books with pure and simple faith and religious fervor.

Coincident with the religious upheaval and very closely connected with it, in the formulation of her moral system, appears an interest in philosophy. Not long after the move to Foleshill
(Coventry) she is said to have expressed a fervent desire "to reconcile the philosophy of Locke and Kant!" In the modified form of positivism which she accepted, it is to be presumed that she found this reconciliation. The evolutionary theories of Darwin and Spencer, upon which she set great value some few years after this period, tended to harmonize the two philosophic positions. They held with Locke, that "all knowledge begins in sensation and experience but with Kant... that knowledge passes beyond experience and becomes intuitional."

George Eliot's acquaintance with Charles Bray and with his philosophic speculations, through both conversation and his written books, no doubt stimulated her interest in philosophy and influenced the bias of her thought. His Education of the Feelings published in 1839 was written from the standpoint of phrenology, in which science George Eliot has left evidence of belief. More important was The Philosophy of Necessity published in 1841. It was written on the thesis that mind and matter are one, and that man is as much subject to law as anything else in nature. Happiness is the test, he says, of all moral action.

The idea of this book and of a similar nature from other sources profoundly influenced George Eliot's personal philosophy and moral teaching. In accord with the positivists she set aside every inquiry into causes, and limited her search to laws.

This view of life as being under the reign of the fixed and unalterable law is the basis of the moral teaching of her books. These books present the interrelation of human lives binding all things, great and small together. Our lives and actions have their effect upon others. We cannot escape the eternal consequence of our deeds. There is no break in the endless chain turning motives into acts, acts into habits, and habits into character. A regard for others, for all humanity affected by our lives, she considered the highest moral motive.

An anecdote related by a friend and recorded by Cross is significant. "On one occasion at Mr. Bray's house at Rosehill, roused by a remark of his on the beneficial influence exercised by evangelical beliefs on the moral feelings she said energetically, 'I say it now, and I say it once and for all, that I am influenced in my own conduct at the present time"
by far higher considerations, and by a nobler idea of duty, than I ever was while held the evangelical beliefs." This position is elaborated in the essay, Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: the Poet Young. That the Hegelian theories were not unknown to or unvalued by George Eliot, it would appear from a reference in a letter.

She sympathized heartily with transcendentalism as represented by Emerson. This is not surprising when we remember her appreciation of Wordsworth's poetry. In July 1848 she met Emerson when on his second visit to England, he came to spend a day or two with the Brays and visit Stratford. In regard to this meeting she wrote to Miss Hennell: "I have seen Emerson—the first man I have ever seen. But you have seen still more of him, so I need not tell you what he is."

At this time there is no information as to what she may have read from Emerson. Later references are more specific. In 1860: "I have been reading this morning for my spiritual good Emerson's Man the Reformer, which comes to me with fresh beauty and meaning. My heart goes out with venerating gratitude to that mild face, which I

dare-say is smiling on someone as beneficiently as it one day did on me years and years ago." In 1870: "I wonder if you have read Emerson's new essays. I like them very much." A mysticism, derived in part perhaps from transcendental influence, appears in George Eliot's writing. The fundamentals of mysticism, the unity of mind and matter, and the emphasis on feeling as the source of truth, were incomplete harmony with her philosophy discussed above.

Besides her father's illness, the time she spent on translations is an all-sufficient reason why, though this period is so much longer in years than the preceding one, there is not a correspondingly large number of books read. These translations, because of their nature and the thorough study of them that her painstaking translation would necessitate, are important factors in her mental development. Roughly speaking, the two years 1844 and 1845 were spent in turning the German scholar, Strauss's Life of Jesus into English. This work subjects the life of Jesus to much the same critical examination as Hennell's Inquiry does, but in keeping with its German origin.

32. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 270.
is of a much more weighty character. Her own and her friends' letters indicate the extremely laborious nature of the task and her determined industry in the face of fatigue and satiation. She kept Thorwaldsen's image of the crucified Christ over her desk where she worked, and it alone made her endure the dissection of the beautiful story. In the midst of the work she wrote: "I am never pained when I think Strauss right—but in many cases I think him wrong, as every man must be in working out into detail an idea which has general truth, but is only one element in a perfect theory in itself."

I was not able to find positive first-hand evidence that the translation of Feuerbach's *Wesen des Christenthums* or *Essence of Christianity* belonged to this period as George Eliot's biographer Cooke, says it does; I know, however, of nothing to bar the assumption that it was begun at this time, though not published until 1854. The teachings of Bray and Hennell would have prepared her for Comte, to whom her mind gave ready response though not complete consent later.

Feuerbach probably made greater her appreciation of the spiritual essence of Christianity. His emphasis upon feeling as the basis of all subjectivity may well have had a share in making her books often seem enlargements or illustrations of the statement in Adam Bede that people may at the same time have "erroneous theories and very sublime feelings." Possibly, too, the strictly spiritual conception of marriage, which Feuerbach presents, may have contributed to justify to her mind her later action in ignoring the legal obstacle to her union with Lewes.

Spinoza's works were the next translations with which she grappled. These were from the Latin. His Tractatus Theologico-Politicus was begun during the last illness of her father but was not finished until after his death. The De Deo may have been done before. Later the Ethica was translated but not published. Lewes, it is interesting to learn, had early become attracted to Spinoza.

Some reading in contemporary literature is recorded during this time. Early in this period we read: "I strongly recommend Hallam to you. I shall read it again if I live."

38. Adam Bede, ch. 3, p. 31.
41. Cooke, op. cit., p. 25.
In 1845 a letter reads: "What an exquisite little thing that is of Harriet Martineaus- The Crofton Boys'. I have had some delightful crying over it. There are two or three lines in it that would feed one's soul for a month. Hugh's mother says to him, speaking of people who have permanent sorrow, "They soon had a new and delicious pleasure, which none but the bitterly disappointed can feel- the pleasure of rousing their souls to bear pain, and of agreeing with God silently, when nobody knows what is in their hearts." In this year, 1841, George Eliot met Harriet Martinea and the relations between them appear to have been very pleasant and to have continued so through the years that George Eliot was working on the Westminster Review in London, though they were not entirely so later.

Once George Eliot referred to Harriet Martinea as "the only Englishwoman that possesses thoroughly the art of writing."

A 1846 letter says; "I have been reading the Fawn of Sertorius [by Robert Landor]. I think you would like it though the many would not.

It is pure, chaste, classic, beyond any attempt at fiction I ever read. If it be Bulwer's, he has been undergoing a gradual transfiguration, and is now ready to be exalted into the assembly of the saints."

Unqualified pleasure was taken in George Sand's books. Of Lelia she wrote, "It has been a very deep meaning to my apprehension." In 1848 a letter states: "I am reading George Sand's Lettres d'un Voyageur with great delight and hoping that they will sometime do you as much good as they do me." Again: "I send you a stanza I picked up the other day in George Sand's Lettres d'un Voyageur, which is almost the ultimatum of human wisdom on the question of human sorrow:-

"Le bonheur et le malheur,
N'ont viennent du même auteur,
Voilà la ressemblance
Le bonheur nous rend heureux,
Et le malheur malheureux,
Voilà la différence.'"

Another letter says of George Sand: "I should never dream of going to her writing as a moral code or text book. I don't care whether I agree with her about marriage or not—whether I think the design

46. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 149.
of her plot correct, or that she has no precise
design at all, but began to write as the spirit
moved her, and trusted to Providence for the
catastrophe, which I think the more probable case.
It is sufficient for me, as a reason for bowing be­
fore her in eternal gratitude to that 'great
power of God manifested in her,' that I cannot
read six pages of hers without feeling that it is
given to her to delineate human passion and its re­
sults and (I must say, in spite of your judgment)
some of the moral instincts and their tendencies,
with such truthfulness, such tragic power, and
withal, such loving, gentle humor, that one might
live a century with nothing but one's own dull
faculties, and not know so much as those six pages
will suggest. The psychological anatomy of Jaques
and Fernande in the early days of their marriage
seems quite preternaturally true—I mean that her
power of describing it is préter-natural: Fernande
and Jacques are merely the feminine and the
masculine nature, and their early married life an
every day tragedy."

Of D'Israeli's novels there was not so
much admiration. In 1845, a letter says; "I
received Sybil yesterday quite safely. I am not
utterly disgusted with D'Israeli. The man hath good veins, as Bacon would say, but there is not enough blood in them. In 1847: "This is a piece of impiety which you may expect from a young lady who has been reading French novels. This is the impertinent expression of D'Israeli, who, writing himself much more detestable stuff than ever came from a French pen, can do nothing better to bamboozle the unfortunates who are seduced into reading his Tancred than to speak superciliously of all other men and things— an expedient much more successful in some quarters than one would expect." Of the same: "I am provoked with you for being in the least pleased with Tancred; but if you have found any lofty meaning in it, or any true picturing of life, tell it to me, and I will recant." Again to a different correspondent: "It is some time since I read Tancred, so that I have no very vivid recollection of its details; but I though it very 'thin' and inferior in the working up to Coningsby and Sybil. Young Englandism is almost as remote from my sympathies as Jacobitism, as far as its force is concerned, though I love and respect it as an effort on behalf of the people. D'Israeli is unquestionably an able man, and I always enjoy his

his tirades against liberal principles as opposed to popular principles—the name of which he distinguished his own. As to his theory of races, it has not a leg to stand on, and can only be buoyed by such windy eloquence as—You chubby faced, squabby nosed Europeans owe your commerce, your arts, your religion, to the Hebrew ...." She goes on to express resentment against D'Israeli's Jewish arrogance. She says: "I bow to the supremacy of the Hebrew poetry, but much of their early mythology and almost all their history, is utterly revolting. Their stock has produced a Moses and a Jesus, but Moses was impregnated with Egyptian philosophy, and Jesus is venerated and adored by us only for that wherein he transcended or resisted Judaism. The very exaltation of their idea of a national deity into a spiritual monotheism seems to have been borrowed from the other oriental tribes. Everything especially Jewish is of a low grade." Daniel Deronda notwithstanding!

Of Charlotte Bronte's novels, George Eliot seems to have been more struck with Villette than with Jane Eyre. In 1848 she wrote to Charles 58. Ibid., Vol.I, pp. 170-173.
Bray: "I have read Jane Eyre, and shall be glad to know what you admire in it. All self-sacrifice is good, but one would like it to be in a somewhat nobler cause than that of a diabolical law which chains a man soul and body to a putrefying carcase. However, the book is interesting, only I wish the characters would talk a little less like heroes and heroines of police reports." In 1853 a letter reads: "I am only just returned to a sense of the real world about me, for I have been reading Villette, a still more wonderful book than Jane Eyre! There is something preternatural in its power."

A few days later: "Villette, Villette—have you read it?" A month later: "Lewes was describing Currer Bell to me yesterday as a little plain, provincial, sickly looking old maid. Yet what passion, what fire in her!" Quite as much as in George Sand, only the clothing is less voluptuous."

Macaulay's history was read in this period as well as later. "I am delighted", says a letter to Miss Hennell, "to find that you mention Macaulay, because that is an indication that Mr. Hennell has been reading him. I thought of Mr. H.

all through the book, as the only person I could be quite sure would enjoy it as much as I did myself. I didn't know if it would interest you: tell me more explicitly that it does...."

Of Lamartine she wrote in 1848: "Lamartine can act a poem if he cannot write one of the very first order."

Her classical studies, both Greek and Latin, were pursued during these years. In 1842 she wrote: "I am beginning to enjoy the Enéide though, I suppose, much is the same way as the uninitiated enjoy wine compared with the connoisseurs."

In 1846: "I want to complete Xenophon's works. I have the Anabasis; and I might perhaps get a nice edition of the Memorabilia and Cyropedia in a cheaper way than by ordering them directly from our own book seller."

Her German study also/continued by means of Schiller. To Mrs. Bray she wrote: "I send you the first part of Wallenstein, with the proposition that we should study that in conjunction with the Thirty Year's War, as I happen to have a loose copy, We had better omit the Lager, and begin Die Piccolemini. You shall have Joan of Arc, my grand favorite,

as a bonne boîte when you have got through Wallenstein, which will amply repay you for any trouble in translating it."

Traces of scientific reading occur. One of the first books read after settling at Coventry was one of the works of Nichol, so effective in popularizing science, "I have been reading Nichol's Architecture of the Heavens and Phenomena of the Solar System and have been in imagination to universe, winging my flight from universe, trying to conceive myself in such a position and with such a visual faculty as would enable me to enjoy what Young enumerates among the novelties of the 'Stranger' man when he bursts his shell to

'Bethold an infinite of floating worlds
Divide the crystal waves of ether pure
In endless voyage without a port.'

'Hospitable infinity! Nichol beautifully says.
How should I love to have a thorough going student with me, that we might read together." There is one mention of Cuvier, the French naturalist. Near by, there is a reference

to the pseudo scientist, Lavater's *Physiognomische Fragmente zur Beförderung der Menschen Kenntnis und Menschenliebe*. "I have tired myself... and... in vain endeavored to refresh myself by turning over Lavater's queer sketches of *physiognomies*, and still queerer judgments on them."

We have left to discuss a somewhat miscellaneous group. Very early in this period she wrote: "How is it that Erasmus could write volumes an volumes and multifarious letters besides, while I, whose labours hold about the same relation to his as an ant-hill to a pyramid or a drop of dew to the ocean, seem too busy to write a few," Voltaire is given merely passing attention.

Of Manzoni it is stated: "I have skimmed Manzoni, who has suffered sadly in being poured out of silver into pewter. The chapter on *Philosophy and Theology* is worth reading."

The old fiction received some attention. "Thank you for putting me on reading Sir. Charles Grandison. I have read five volumes and am only vexed that I have not the last two on my table at this moment, that I might have them for my convives.

71. *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 120.
I had no idea that Richardson was worth so much. I have had more pleasure from him than from all the Swedish novels together. The morality is perfect—there is nothing for the new lights to correct." Years later: "The Sir Charles Grandison you are reading must be the series of little fat volumes you lent me to carry to the Isle of Wight, where I read it at every interval when my father did not want me, and was sorry that the long novel was not longer. It is a solace to hear of any one's reading and enjoying Richardson. We have fallen in on evil generation who would not read Clarissa even in an abridged form. The French have been its most enthusiastic admirers, but I don't know whether their present admiration is more than traditional, like their set phrases about their own classics."

Scott's novels were read aloud to her father during his illness. The Fair Maid of Perth and The Antiquary are specifically mentioned.

Keats has been mentioned earlier and is again. In 1849 she wrote: "You must read The Shadows of the Clouds. It produces a sort of

73. Blind, op. cit., pp. 64-5.
75. Ante, p. 72.
palpitation that one hardly knows whether to
call wretched or delightful."

Evidently Rousseau's Confessions, of
which George Eliot was so fond, or something of
his was read in this period, though her references
to him are not definite and come near the close of
these years. The first is brief: "Send me the
criticism of Jacques the morn's morning,—only
beware there are not too many blasphemies against
my divinity." The second is significant not only
of her reading of Rousseau but of her attitude
toward all her reading and may well close the study
of this period.

"I wish you thoroughly to understand that
the writers who have most profoundly influenced me—
who have rolled away the waters from their bed, raised
new mountains and spread delicious valleys for me—
are not in the least oracles to me. It is just
possible that I may not embrace one of their opinions,—
that I may wish my life to be shaped quite differently
from theirs. For instance, it would signify
nothing to me if a very wise person were to stun me
with proof that Rousseau's view of life, religion
and government are miserably erroneous,—that he

was guilty of some of the worst bassesses that have degraded civilized man. I might admit all this; and it would be not the less true that Rousseau's genius has sent that electric thrill through my intellectual and moral frame which has awakened me to new perceptions,—which has made man and nature a fresh world of thought and feeling to me; and this is not by teaching me any new belief. It is simply that the rushing mighty wind of his inspiration has so quickened my faculties that I have been able to shape more definitely for myself, ideas which had previously dwelt as dim Anhängen in my soul; the fire of his genius has so fused together old thoughts and prejudices, that I have been ready to make new combinations."

CONCLUSION

From this survey of George Eliot's first thirty years' reading, it would appear that in many respects her reading and her relation to it did not greatly differ from that of the ordinary person. On the other hand, outstanding points of difference would reside in the fact that it was so voluminous, that its character was so elevated, and that so great emphasis was put upon the profit to be derived from it.

The profit, however, was not at the expense of pleasure. There are no great readers without great enjoyment, though, of course, the type of reading that will afford enjoyment differs from individual to individual. The delight George Eliot experienced through much of her reading must be clear from the foregoing pages. It gave her companionship of a peculiarly intimate sort. Persons whose gifts of mind set them apart from their associates are often lonely in the midst of company. Her books took the place of the fellowship with equals lacking in her early years.
At different periods in her life, the general nature of her reading naturally varied somewhat, although many-sidedness was always a distinctive feature. In her childhood she read, as most of us do, what she could get. During her youth she applied herself, in a large measure, to earnest study, and after her religious revolution, this took on a broadened horizon, especially with respect to philosophy and contemporary literature. This purposive reading was always accompanied by much that appealed to her aesthetic taste.

Her reading was never in any sense a primary source for her early books, which were built from her own observation of life. It is true that she made use, in incidental ways, of her stores of information for instance, in regard to church and clerical conditions and to scientific investigation. Her reading of novels may have contributed to make her believe that fiction should represent real life as nearly as possible. Her ideals of life-like character drawing may have been derived in part from George Sand, although her own characters and pictures of life in her early books are drawn from materials presented to

2. Ante, p. 64.
her own eyes and reworked by her own brain.

The chief function performed by George Eliot's reading in respect to her writing was that of a stimulation to her thinking. Before her books were written she recognized and acknowledged this effect upon her perceptions and ideas, particularly in the case of Rousseau. Certainly, the books she read, aided much in the development of her philosophy of life. This is true especially in the third period. From the influence, in part at least, of Charles Hennell and Strauss she came to take a critical, sceptical point of view. This scientific attitude of mind is the backbone of her moral teaching. Denying that any but secondary causes in the form of laws are knowable to man and believing that these laws of cause and effect are always present and in force, she stressed the consequence of human acts as the motive for abstinence or performance. For these views Charles Bray's necessitarian teaching was partially responsible. Strangely enough, though consistently, linked up with her doctrine of consequence is one of renunciation taught by the saintly, orthodox Thomas à Kempis. These consequences must always be considered in relation to others before that to ourselves. That is George Eliot's message to mankind.

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