CHAPTER I

THE MAKING OF THE NOVELIST

The overwhelming popularity enjoyed by George Eliot as a novelist and her wide understanding of the nineteenth century intellectual milieu are the two factors which, when seen in conjunction, necessitate a close analysis of the exceptionally comprehensive mind that expresses itself in the thematic configuration of her novels. George Eliot occupies her position in English fiction not merely as a great nineteenth century novelist but also as one who "stands at the gateway between the old novel and the new." Her importance and fame rest on her claim as the first modern novelist whose attitude to life, unlike her predecessors—Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte, Mrs. Gaskell, Dickens, Thackeray etc.—resembled that of the Victorian intellectual, of Mill, of Spencer, of Comte. It would therefore be most appropriate to evaluate, briefly, the factors which worked to endow her mind with an outstanding critical intelligence and mature, philosophical outlook.

The youngest member of a family of five children, Mary Anne Evans was born on November 22, 1819, at Arbury Farm in Warwickshire. In March, 1820, the family moved to

Griff House, a larger and more comfortable building in Arbury Estate. It was here in this beautiful country house that Mary Anne spent her first twenty-one years of growing up. A difficult child from the beginning she was never her mother's pet. Rather, it was her father who had much patience with her and who frequently took her out with him on his business trips, giving her the precious opportunity of meeting and observing all shades of life. Robert Evans was, by all means, a remarkable man "held by those competent to judge as unique amongst land agents for his manifold knowledge and experience". The dominating role played by him in making her what she was, is evident in her love for precision and perfection, her extreme consciousness of duty and her inherent reverence for order and solidity.

Following her own comment in Looking Backward, which can justifiably be applied to her own father — "Nor can I be sorry, though myself given to meditative if not active innovation, that my father was a Tory who had not exactly a dislike to innovators and dissenters, but a slight opinion of them as persons of ill-founded self-confidence", one cannot help marking, with Cross, that "This early association of ideas must always be borne in mind, as it is the key to a great deal in the mental attitude of the future thinker and writer. It is the foundation of the

2. CIL III, 168.
latent Conservative bias". 4

This "latent Conservative bias" has a further relevance to the evaluation of Mary Anne Evans's views on society and its development. According to Cross, "Here was a large, slow-growing nature", 5 and it was the same slow and natural growth of life which elicited the approval of the perceptive author and on which centred her conception of the salubrious effects of childhood affections. The first chapter of Book Two in The Mill on the Floss describes the ethical importance of this sense of belongingness:

There is no sense of ease like the ease we felt in these scenes where we were born, where objects became dear to us before we had known the labour of choice, and where the outer world seemed only an extension of our own personality. We accepted and loved it as we accepted our own sense of existence and our own limbs. Very commonplace, even ugly, that furniture of our early home might look if it were put up to auction; an improved taste in upholstery scorns it; and is not the striving after something better and better in our surroundings, the grand characteristic that distinguishes man from the brute .... But heaven knows where that striving might lead us, if our affections had not a trick of twining round these old inferior things, .... if the loves and sanctities of our life had no deep immoveable roots in memory. (III, 169)

The moral need for a definite locus is stressed in almost all her writings. Her letters repeatedly refer to the joy of " .... that long familiarity rendered spontaneous in my early home "6, and in Daniel Deronda, her last novel, she lends her voice to "the soothing, strengthening, sacred

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5. Cross I, 11.
6. Mill 1, 93.
influences of home life, the home loves, the home duties, which Cross mentions as a distinctive feature in the development of her character:

A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amid the future widening of knowledge... (MR, 12)

Exceptionally possessive, passionate and jealous in her affections "she showed from the earliest years the trait that was most marked in her all through life — namely, the absolute need of some one person who should be all in all to her and to whom she should be all in all". Her affections at this early stage, clung round her brother, Isaac. Soon, however, her passionate nature suffered its first sorrow when Isaac was sent to a distant school at Coventry. She now turned her attention towards reading and soon developed a passion for books. Her well-developed features, a head bigger in proportion to her body and the serious, introspective and reserved expression on her face gave her a very unchild-like appearance. The inborn, rather prophetic, conviction of her own superiority, along with the ruling self-distrust, made it difficult for her to adjust herself anywhere, adding a sense of loneliness to an already grave and moody temperament.

In 1828, Mary Anne was sent to Mrs. Wallington's Boarding School at Nuneaton. The principal governess here was Miss Lewis, a young Irish-woman "with an ugly squint in one eye, but with a kind heart and good sense of humour about everything except religion". Miss Lewis too, was very fond of books and a close and lasting friendship soon struck up between the teacher and the taught. Learning of the "ugly squint in one eye", one is inevitably reminded of Maggie's attachment to Philip in George Eliot's second novel The Mill on the Floss, the main foundation of which was, as portrayed by her, Maggie's sympathy with Philip's deformity.

Whatever may be the actual factor, Mary Anne, extremely impressionable by nature, was soon scanning the pages of the Bible, seeking solace by trying to live up to Miss Lewis's staunch Evangelical views. Miss Lewis's contribution towards the shaping of Mary Anne's intellect can never be underestimated. She gave to the extremely sensitive pupil her attention, sympathy and affection at a time when the immature mind was undergoing a severe emotional crisis due to her estrangement from Isaac, who was now spending most of his time with his lately acquired pony. Miss Lewis instilled in her the fervid piety which not only diverted the channel of her thought but also

inculcated the feeling of devotion and renunciation—the first step towards her "conviction as to the relative goodness and nobleness of human dispositions and motives". Miss Lewis's emphasis on the study of scriptural text and commentary was responsible for the vigour and expression of prose so marked in her novels. Moreover, the hours spent in introspection as part of her religious duties, gave her the power of insight, the basis of her profound concern with religion and the psychological analysis of her characters.

One drawback of Miss Lewis's training, nevertheless, was that Mary Anne developed a vocabulary that was extremely self-conscious and artificial. The credit of leading this young pupil to her characteristic Johnsonian, yet fluent and expressive style goes to Misses Franklin, daughters of Mr. Franklin, a British minister, with whom she was a boarder from 1832 to 1835. As always, Mary Anne's chameleon-like nature lost no time in becoming one with the Calvinistic atmosphere of Miss Franklin's school. This called for a gloomier attitude of mind than the faith advocated by Miss Lewis; and Mary Anne already simple in her habits, and bent upon thoroughness, became absolutely careless of herself. Religious scepticism had, however, not entered her mind yet. She was simply acting in accordance with her susceptible nature which required

10. GBL IV, 472.
complete surrender to the person who became her model. Thus, with Isaac, she had taken interest in all boyish activities; with Maria Lewis, she was an ardent evangelical; and now with Rebecca Franklin she had developed the spirit which made her "go about like an owl"11, with a stern conviction in predestination and a puritanical detestation of all mundane gratifications.

Zealously ambitious for perfection, Mary Anne, to be known later as Marian, outgrew her Midland accent completely and invested herself with a soft and gentle tone of speech and proper pronunciation. This measured, highly cultivated mode of expression, unfortunately, added to her air of maturity, placing her on a pedestal high above the other pupils. This, besides her saintliness and virtue, won tremendous respect from her contemporaries but, all the same, increased her loneliness.

Her parents' illness, followed by the death of Mrs. Evans in 1836, marked the end of Marian's school-days. Soon after, with Chrissey's marriage, the entire household became her responsibility. However, her unflagging sense of duty, imbibed from her father, enabled her to manage everything with exemplary prudence. She had as yet not the slightest thought of becoming a writer, but the writer in her had developed an appetite for knowledge that was insatiable. She spent her leisure hours in learning

Italian and German, taking lessons in music and carrying on a great deal of reading. The excess of her intellectual curiosity can be easily ascertained by the heterogeneous nature of her interests:

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. (GEN I, 29)

Moreover, her fervid longing to acquire "such an insight into what is truly good, that I may not rest contented with making Christianity a mere addendum to my pursuits, or with tacking it as a fringe to my garments!" as well as her earnest desire "to be doing some little toward the regeneration of this groaning, travailing creation!" which was, for the present, seeking satisfaction in organising clothing clubs and charity houses or visiting and attending the sick, marks an important bent in the developing mind of the future novelist.

Though interested in all fields of knowledge, she was severely critical of two—music and literature, especially fiction—the effects of which she considered extremely pernicious to young and developing minds:

"As to the discipline our minds receive from the perusal of fiction, I can conceive none that is beneficial." (GEN I, 25)

Happily, her literary taste was free from narrow fanaticism. She did not hesitate in admitting that certain standard works, for example, Scott's novels, Cervantes and Shakespeare, must be read for the sake of scholarship, but extreme care must be taken before prescribing a piece of fiction to students. This impartial statement is apparently the outcome of her latent critical faculty waiting to shine out at the suitable moment. The result of all this reading was clearly far from congenial. Not only did it add to her dissatisfaction and seriousness, it raised her mind to that mental calibre where it loses its feminine softness and becomes rather prosaic. Hence, now more than ever before, she feels alienated to her own sex and deplores what she later categorizes in Daniel Deronda as the "slavery of being a girl" (DD, 457).

November 1839 — her nineteenth birthday proves really to be 'an awakening signal'. She now arrives at the threshold of the most significant step of her life — the rejection of dogmatic Christianity. The break came less abruptly than is generally supposed. She did not achieve her theological emancipation all at once. The slowness with which new ideas seeped into the roots of her thinking

14. Margaret Crompton in George Eliot, the Woman, quotes George Eliot: "I shudder at the sight of a woman in society, for I know I shall have to sit on the sofa with her all the evening listening to her stupidities, while the men on the other side of the table are discussing all the subjects I care to hear about" (p.16).
15. GEW I, 12.
can easily be brought into focus. Her single-minded devotion to the person she loved led her to attempt a complete identification with that person's ideas. At this instance, her attachment to her teachers — Miss Lewis and Misses Franklin — and affection for her brother Isaac placed her in a dilemma due to the diversity of their views. She was therefore forced to seek satisfaction by exploring the doctrines of the Evangelical Church, and those of the Oxford Movement which commanded the allegiance of her brother. No doubt her intensive perusal of relevant literature led her to decipher much that was questionable. "A train of thought" is suggested to her "by the reading of Ancient Christianity and the Oxford Tracts by Isaac Taylor, one of the most eloquent, acute and pious of writers". 16 Taylor's emphasis on the application of common sense and the law of consequences to religious beliefs, besides his denunciation of celibacy and asceticism as upheld by the Roman Catholic Church led Marian to reflect seriously upon the validity of her own ethical assumptions.

Though the main credit goes to the Brays and the Hennells, yet many other factors, which united to bring about the liberation of thought in George Eliot, can be traced right down to this early age. Her newly born interest in literature — Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth —

16. GEL I, 63-64.
reveals a cooling of her fanaticism even though the sanctimonious longing for self-abasement and renunciation is still uppermost in her mind. Besides, the presence of immorality in certain professed and regular followers of the Church drew a number of question marks before her. No doubt, for want of mature reasoning these were speedily erased by her staunch piety, yet the after-effects must have lingered long enough to draw further question marks at the sight of 'unbelievers' leading highly moral lives. Later, according to her own account, the novels of Sir Walter Scott, which she read out to her father at Foleshill, played the leading role in unsettling her beliefs. 17 Scott was one fortunate writer who remained immune to her fluctuations of taste. The admiration that he had evoked in her in childhood elicited her appreciation even during her severe censure of fiction. The originality, universality and morality of the Waverley novels made Scott a powerful cultural and intellectual force in the nineteenth century. Loyalty, purity and other admirable qualities were distributed among his characters irrespective of the faith they professed. For him, no religious doctrine could be associated with the promise of salvation. The emphasis was clearly on the inherent goodness of man which was by no

17. '.....to the inquiry of a friend in after years as to what influence she attributed the first unsettlement of her orthodox views, she quickly made answer: "Oh, Walter Scott's".' Cross I, 369.
means a product of his creed. Scott's heroes are brave, honourable, lovable — in short, embodiments of commendable human traits; yet their actions or thoughts are never governed by any articulate religion. His novels provide the great lesson of life, i.e. tolerance, and Marian was quick to grasp it.

The 'awakening signal' is now fully realised in the birth of the conviction that "religion was not a requisite to moral excellence". Thus we can safely assert that the Brays, the Hennells and An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity did not force a change in her religious ideology. They "merely precipitated a revolution that had been long in preparation in her mind".

Marian was introduced to Charles Bray in November 1841, a few months after her migration to Coventry. It was at his attractive house, Rosehill, that she received the real education of her life. Himself a writer and a thinker, Bray's lawns and the bear-skin under the acacia tree, were always open to intellectuals leading to much profitable discussion on varied subjects. Marian's life of intellectual isolation could desire no better company as there was no dearth of affection and ideas in this new circle of friends. First-hand information of latest political and social movements in response to the Reform Bill, lay bare before her. Her long-standing regret of having nobody to

18. CEL I, 45.
19. CEL I, Introduction, p. XLIV.
share her feelings was now fully compensated. Discussions on Chartism, Trade Unionism, Catholic emancipation, Free Trade, Anti-Law League, Cooperatives and Sanitary reforms, introduced her to a panorama of knowledge hitherto unknown to her. Marian, for the first time realized the pedestal on which she had isolated herself, shutting her eyes to the problems of the day. The informal atmosphere of the gathering at Rosehill was stimulant enough for this young idolator of glory to shed much of her priggishness, and build up a broader attitude towards life. She quickly discarded the stamp of her father's provincial, conservative bias and dislike for all revolutionary activities, and exhibited a whole-hearted sympathy and understanding of the radically innovative reforms.

For the next few years, Charles Bray proved to be a very important influence on Marian. To him goes the credit of introducing her to a systematic determinism. As a young man he too had been a fervent Evangelical, but under the influence of George Combe, the phrenologist, he became a sceptic and gave up his religion. In 1841, he published The Philosophy of Necessity, in which he expounded his theory of determinism based on the 'doctrine of consequences' consistent with the popular theories of phrenology. It was argued that the mind was subject to certain fixed laws before which man was helpless. It was, therefore, essential to apply scientific principles for the regeneration of society, making it more flexible and tolerant. His wife,
Caroline Bray, belonged to a devout Unitarian family. In an attempt to convert him back to faith, her brother, Charles Hennell, had undertaken to re-examine, thoroughly, all evidences in proof of Christianity. As a result he too became a sceptic. His conclusions are convincingly summed up in An Inquiry into the Origins of Christianity (1838), which is particularly important for its effort to assess Christianity in the purely historical context.

Marian took a keen interest in the book and bought a copy for herself, obviously, to check the validity of its contents. Her attempts at compiling the Chart of Ecclesiastical History and her extreme preoccupation with divinity had given her a sound knowledge of the subject. Religious doubts already present in her truth-seeking mind and strengthened, ironically enough, by the perusal of Isaac Taylor's Ancient Christianity and the Oxford Tracts before she had met the Brays, gradually begin to take a vivid shape. For quite some time she was

20. Margaret Crompton (George Eliot: The Woman) wrongly mentions the date as 1836 (p.25) author.
21. "I think no one feels more difficulty in coming to a decision on controverted matters than myself. I do not mean that I have not preferences, but however congruous a theory may be with my notions, I cannot find that comfortable repose that others appear to possess after having made their election of a class of sentiments". GEI I, 25.
22. In 1840, Marian had planned to produce a chart of Ecclesiastical History, but the publication of another similar chart led her to abandon it. author.
23. "On no subject do I veer to all points of the compass more frequently than on the nature of the visible church. I am powerfully attracted in a certain direction but when I am about to settle there, counter assertions shake me from my position". GEI I, 25.
much exercised mentally to find an answer to the queries of the rising sceptical tendency of her mind. Hennell attacked the foundation of external evidence, the miracles by which Christ was held to have proved the divine origin of his teaching. All scattered suggestions now began to coalesce in her mind until she finally cast off her apprehensions and launched from fervid Evangelicalism into the new sea of thought.

The revelation of this emancipation, accelerated by Hennell's earnest and impartial study was, by no means an easy affair. Yet her conscience would not allow her to continue in an equivocal position even though it meant losing her most intimate friend (Miss Maria Lewis) and inviting the wrath of the rigid father who could never approve of such rebellion.

"My whole soul has been engrossed", Marian wrote to Miss Lewis on 13th November, 1841, "in the most interesting of all enquiries 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...... There are various preservatives for ...... love, ours I venture to say will not decompose under the influence of separation, unless you excommunicate me for differing from you in opinion". Excommunication was exactly the price she had to pay for

24. "Denial has been wrung from me by hard experience — not adopted as a pleasant rebellion". GEL IV, 472.
this liberation, but whereas her father was after a time reconciled, Miss Lewis's friendship was soon dissolved.

It is essential to realise that what Marian abandoned was not Christianity or religion or even the importance of sacrifice as exemplified by Christ. What she adopted was not a negative creed. Rather she was severely critical of Freethinkers and believed that "spiritual blight comes with No-faith".26 She had the greatest regard for Christianity which, she held, is "the highest expression of the religious sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind".27 She felt the "profoundest interest in the inward life of sincere Christians".28 The most striking feature of her writings which eventually lent the characteristic charm to her novels, is her perpetual commendation of the sanctity of love as upheld by Christianity for its propitious effects on human morals. "Learning to love any one", she writes in one of her letters, "is like an increase of property".29 This sentence could well serve as the epitome of her exact spiritual position. She further elaborates her ideas by expressing that she has "no longer any antagonism towards any faith in which human sorrow and human longing for purity have expressed themselves".30 Her life-long endeavour at seeing the white in the black of us and the black in the white of us, helped

26. GNL IV, 64.
27. GNL III, 231.
28. GNL III, 231.
29. GNL V, 106.
30. GNL III, 231.
her to retain all reverence for the good she had realized in Evangelicalism. This tolerance, as opposed to the proselytising impulse of the past led her to detest any attack on the religious views of others. "It is quackery.... to say", she writes, "Swallow my opinions and you shall be whole". 31.

Her actual targets of revolt and censure were the distortions that had enmasked the true nature of religion by tying it to doubtful miracles and revelations lost in the mists of time. Her drift was from the God-centred piety to a man-centred religion of love, tolerance, sacrifice and duty. It was from the fountain of this new-found creed, that her writings derive their true source of energy and power. Her craving for truth 32 succoured by her stoic resignation, gave her the strength to face all disagreeable facts and unpleasant consequences. The crisis was nevertheless, overcome —— what ensued was a period of gradual and consistent consolidation.

The affection, the sympathy and the intellectual 'manna' supplied to her by Cara, Sara, and Charles Bray "the trio destined to exert the most important influence over the life of George Eliot", 33 did not take long in producing effect. Marian, sensitive to all shortcomings, very soon shed the stamp of rural upbringing, and the

31. GEL I, 162.
32. "The highest 'calling and election' is to do without opium, and live through all our pain with conscious clear-eyed endurance". GEL III, 366.
33. Cross I, 85.
priggish attitude and diction cultivated under Maria Lewis and Misses Franklin's care. The touches of humour, the buoyancy of spirit and the unrestrained language are the assets of her Coventry-correspondence.

The death of Robert Evans in 1849, left her in an utterly dejected and lost state. The constant preoccupation with him for the past few years, along with her own pursuit of the translation of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico Politicus*, all came to a stand-still leaving, what appeared for the moment, an unbearable void in her life. Fortunately the Brays had planned a trip to the continent and before the sense of loneliness could take a fatal turn, she was whisked away from home to forget herself in the beauties of Switzerland. This step proved a landmark in her life. Her intellectual strength had, by now, far surpassed that of her friends and she easily moved out beyond their sphere, without the crutches of their support. But morally, she was still not fitted to stand alone. The thirst for someone to lean upon "who should be all in all to her and to whom she should be all in all" was yet to be quenched.

34. Marian quitted the translation of *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* because she felt that "what is wanted in English is not a translation of Spinoza's works, but a true estimate of his life and system. After one has rendered his Latin faithfully into English, one feels that there is another yet more difficult process of translation for the reader to effect, and that the only mode of making Spinoza accessible to a larger number is to study his books, then shut them, and give an analysis. For those who read the very words Spinoza wrote, there is the same sort of interest in his style as in the conversation of a person of great capacity who has led a solitary life, and who says from his own soul what all the world is saying by rote; but this interest hardly belongs to translation". OMR I. 321.
Jan. 1844, Marian received her first notable literary assignment — the translation of David Friedrich Strauss's *Das Leben Jesu* in which Strauss has sought to give a metaphysical explanation to the validity of miracles which he interprets, fundamentally, as poetic symbols or dramatized expressions of religious ideas. The highly controversial theories that this German philosopher raised in theological circles proved no less repulsive to Marian's own feelings. The long contact with Strauss, though utterly ineffectual in thought, won for her great admiration and prestige and also imparted an invaluable training in the accurate rendering of ideas. The translation, *Life of Jesus*, appeared in 1846 without her name.

An important event in the intellectual career of George Eliot was her review35 of R.W. Mackay's book, "The Progress of Intellect as Exemplified in the Religious Development of the Greeks and Hebrews* (1850). Mackay, whose ideas are remarkably analogous to those of Hennell and Bray, maintains in his book that the religion of any given period emblems the noblest thoughts prevailing at the time of its formation. George Eliot took a deep interest in Mackay's work because he succeeded in preserving religious feeling amid the destruction of its historical foundation with a recognition of the ubiquity of natural law. She readily subscribed to his faith "that divine revelation is not con-

tained exclusively or preeminently in the facts and inspirations of any one age or nation, but is co-extensive with the history of human development". She therefore concludes with a suggestion for the "development of the Christian system corresponding to the wants and the culture of the age", which "... would enable it to strike a firm root in man's moral nature, and to entwine itself with the growth of those new forms of social life to which we are tending". The serious mood and the substantial treatment of this review are notable for unveiling Marian's wide knowledge and ingenious cognizance of the social and intellectual atmosphere within which her work was to be presented. This acute understanding of the humour and aptitude of the reading public is discernible throughout her career as the editor of Westminster Review and accounts for much of her success as a novelist.

The only work which appeared with her real name 'Marian Evans' was the translation of Ludwig Feuerbach's Das Wissen des Christenthums which she began in 1853. Published by John Chapman in July 1854 it contributed much to the downfall of metaphysics. Feuerbach makes a successful attempt to strip Christianity of its theological drappings and give an anthropological interpretation to the Christian religion.
Pursuing the unorthodox explication of the Christian rituals, Feuerbach insisted that these were essentially an expression of man's deep regard for the forces of nature. This work proved far more harmonious to Marius Evans's philosophy than Strauss's *Life of Jesus*.

Feuerbach's appendix to his book clearly reveals the extent to which his theory consolidated that of George Eliot's hard-earned faith in the nobility of human life. His belief that God is nothing but the outcome of "the yearning of man after something above, himself" leading him to conclude that

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36. "Water, as a universal element of life, reminds us of our origin from Nature, an origin which we have in common with plants and animals. In Baptism we bow to the power of a pure Nature-force; water is the element of natural equality and freedom, the mirror of the golden age. But we men are distinguished from the plants and animals, which together with the inorganic kingdom we comprehend under the common name of Nature; we are distinguished from Nature. Hence we must celebrate our distinction, our specific difference. The symbols of this our difference are bread and wine. Bread and wine are, as to their materials, products of Nature; as to their form, products of man. If in water we declare: Man can do nothing without Nature; by bread and wine we declare: Nature needs man, as man needs Nature. In water, human mental activity is nullified; in bread and wine it attains self-satisfaction..... Hence this sacrament (The Lord's Supper) is only for man matured into consciousness, while baptism is imparted to infants..... Hunger and thirst destroy not only the physical but also the mental and moral powers of man; they rob him of his humanity..... of understanding, of consciousness. Oh if thou shouldst ever experience such wants, thou wouldst then bless and praise the natural qualities of bread and wine; which restore to thee thy humanity, thy intellect. It needs only that the ordinary course of things be interrupted in order to vindicate to common things an uncommon significance, to life as such, a religious import. Therefore, let bread be sacred for us, let wine be sacred and also let water be sacred. Amen". *The Essence of Christianity*, translated by George Eliot (Harper Torchbooks, 1957) pp. 273-278.
"to deny man is to deny religion" and the stress on the importance of Love gave, as it were, an exact rendering to her own thoughts. Writing to Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1869 George Eliot had declared that "as healthy, sane human beings we must love and hate, love what is good for mankind, hate what is evil for mankind." The anthropocentrism contained in her avowal 'to love what is good for mankind, hate what is evil for mankind' significantly underlines the analogy of her viewpoint to Feuerbach's. Her humanism is substantially exhibited in her conception of religion and art. Religion is seen in terms of the individual rather than in terms of God. The church for her is little more than an institution important not for its sacramental authority but for its set of clergymen. She values art not for its diverting capacity but for its aesthetic teaching and its subscription to the spiritual beauty of man. In fact humanism, the very essence of her philosophy is the basis of her faith in human experience as the positive foundation of knowledge. Commendable analyses of the parallelism between Feuerbachian doctrine and her writings—for instance, * Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss*, *Silas Marner* further express the extent of her idea--

tification with his ideology. 38

Considering her mental state at the time of the translation when the desire for a settled life 39 and the craving for someone to lean upon -- a sequel to the unfortunate love affair with John Chapman and the painful indifference of her family members, pressed heavily on her mind -- the appeal of Feuerbach's theories regarding the institution of marriage in obvious. Acknowledging the importance of married life, he pronounced that it is "the free bond of love" the sanctity of which depends on the outlook of the people concerned "for a marriage the bond of which is merely an external restriction, not the voluntary, contented self-restriction of love, in short, a marriage which is not spontaneously concluded, spontaneously willed, self-sufficing, is not a true marriage, and therefore not a truly moral marriage". 40 Ironically,

38. For an elaboration of the idea see the following:
   George E. Creeger: "An Interpretation of Adam Bede" ELH LXIII 1956.
   George Levine: "Intelligence as Deception: The Mill on the Floss" P A L A L I X X 1965.

39. "The only ardent hope I have for my future life is to have given to me some woman's duty, some possibility of devoting myself where I may see a daily result of pure calm blessedness in the life of another". G H L I, 322.

within very few days of its publication, she took the boldest step of her life and left for Germany with George Henry Lewes as his wife without any legal binding.

Before discussing the paramount influence of G.H. Lewes in the life of Marian Evans, it is essential to cast a glance at 142, Strand, the house of John Chapman, where she settled as assistant editor of the Westminster Review in 1851. Convinced of the cold apathy of her own relations on her return from Geneva in March 1850, she was eager to establish herself independently. The sleepless sense that nobody wanted her, accentuated by her feeling of loneliness, endlessly tortured her. Chapman not only solved her problem of living but also introduced her to an impressive circle of nearly all the literary lions of the day. John Chapman's plan was to make the Westminster Review the leading advocate of the popular liberal thought. Marian's wide knowledge of German, French and English literature, besides an acquaintance with other foreign literatures, her capacity for taking pains assisted by her love for precision, qualified her remarkably for the post. Direct contact with various shades of thoughts — Theodore Parker, Harriet Martineau, James Martineau, Carlyle, Dickens, Thackeray, Mrs. Gaskell, Troupe, W.E. Forster, J.S. Mill, Barbara Leigh Smith, Bessie Rayner Parkes, Richard Owen, Huxley, Louis Blanc, F.W. Newman, H.G. Atkinson, Emerson, Spencer — and the diversity of views held by them contributed much to her intellectual advancement. Moreover, her knowledge, at par
with the best of them, evoked deep admiration and thus satisfied her desire for recognition. What remained yet to be achieved was the emotional stability in the guise of someone to whom she should be all-important.

Of all her contemporaries, George Eliot was most impressed by Herbert Spencer, the person destined to play the decisive role in her life by introducing her to George Henry Lewes. Spencer's admiration for her is fully expressed in his Autobiography in which she is described as "the most admirable woman, mentally, I ever met" (394). Close affinity soon developed between the two, not only on the intellectual but on the personal level as well. Possessing an impressive faculty for abstract thinking, she was able to discuss philosophical questions with confidence. Spencer's 'Development Hypothesis' published in the Leader and 'Theory of Population' in the Westminster Review, his "Social Statics" (1851), and "Principles of Psychology" (1855) were enthusiastically appreciated by her. It can, therefore, be claimed without hesitation that Spencer contributed much towards the clarification of her ideas, though the extent of his share in causing those ideas is doubtful. George Eliot's own view is worth quoting: "Of Mr. Herbert Spencer's friendship I have had the honour and advantage for twenty years, but I believe that every main bias of my mind had been taken before I knew him. Like the rest of his readers, I am of course indebted to him for
much enlargement and clarifying of thought". 41

Spencer had an obsessive concern with history as an evolution of mind. He noticed a developing correspondence between life and its environment: past, future, cultural background, standards of morality --- all having their share in the evolutionary process. Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859), though epoch-making, failed to impress Marian as similar beliefs in the transmutation of species by natural selection had already been expounded by Robert Chambers in *The Vestiges of Creation* (1844) and by Herbert Spencer. Spencer, apart from being an intimate friend followed a method of presenting his ideas which, though scientifically defective, had much in it to attract the creative mind. His effective phrases, for instance, "the survival of the fittest", and his illustrations, derived from a very broad canvas of knowledge, held a magnetic charm for the imaginative artist, thereby making up for the lack of Darwin's text.

Spencer's concept of the social state had much in common with the ideas of Comte, and, to some extent, of Charles Bray. He too believed firmly in the undeviating laws of society and felt that it is the duty of the individual to adjust the fluctuations of his character to the demands of the state of which he is an indispensable member. He pointed out that forceful legislative laws as means for the amelioration of society would be absolutely ineffectual

41. *GEL* VI, 163-64.
unless the individual, by his own accord, learns to respect social laws. Marian, already familiar with this stream of thought through her study of the Philosophy of Necessity, was quick to grasp and reproduce it years later, in her novels.

The disease of the age, unbelief, and with it the paralyzing uncertainty as to what is right, dominated the minds of this generation. The fear of the birth of irrational, materialistic and amoral passions occupied the thoughts of most writers. Leading philosophers like Herbert Spencer, Auguste Comte, J.S. Mill, were flung into activity in an endeavour to offer stepping stones, enabling men to stick together in close brotherhood. The insistence on charity, sympathy, solicitude and slow growth as opposed to revolution and selfishness is the crux of their ideology, the importance of which had been realised by Marian too. Her entire philosophy of determinism shows the extent of her identification with their ideas. Expressing exactly the thoughts of Auguste Comte, she had written to Charles Bray in 1857: "...in the fundamental doctrine of your book — that mind presents itself under the same condition of invariableness of antecedent and consequent as all other phenomena (the only differences being that the true antecedent and consequent are proportionately difficult to discover as the phenomena are more complex) — I think you know I agree". 42

42. GEL II, 403.
The Positive philosophy of Auguste Comte was introduced in England in 1838. It soon succeeded in winning over an illustrious body of followers including J.S. Mill, George Henry Lewes and George Eliot. The Positivists distinguished themselves from the myriad of unbelievers by claiming to have drawn up a scientific system, a way of life meant to fill the void created by discredited beliefs. Comte's metaphysical approach to philosophy, his law of Three Stages tracing intellectual evolution from the Theological to the Metaphysical and from thence to the Positive, and his interpretation of history as a record of the shift of the innate tendencies of human nature towards altruism and rationality, evoked deep admiration. Above all, his Religion of Humanity emphasizing love and the inter-relationship of individuals in society, designed to direct and utilize the energy of the masses in the services of the human race, along with his slogan "live for others" to gain immortality in the memory of those who are served, won adulation from many quarters.

A marked feature of Positivism, which was to reveal itself in George Eliot's later novels, was her distrust of politicians and political programmes. Like Comte, she believed that the intellectual immaturity of the masses and their innate selfishness would always be the most influential factor in political and social life. Politics always tended to assert rights rather than duties. The desire for power, in itself corrupting, undermined the moral standing of man
by forcing him to take dubious steps. It is therefore essential for intellectuals, holding the reins of the views of the masses, to keep away from political involvements.

Marian's interest in Comte was, to some extent, indebted to George Henry Lewes's enthusiastic acceptance of Positivism. He wrote a number of articles on various (especially the scientific and the sociological) aspects of the Positivistic approach. On the other hand, Marian's nostalgic search for some rational faith found great consolation in Comte's "Catechisme Positive" translated by Richard Congreve in 1858.

As already mentioned, the greatest wealth that Spencer bequeathed to Marian was the acquaintance with George Henry Lewes. Victim of his own free-thinking, voluntary, Bohemian way of living, Lewes's life was more or less a complete wreck at the time of his first meeting with Marian. With the gradual ripening of their friendship, Marian, for the first time realised that here was somebody genuinely in need of her as a companion: somebody to whom she could profitably devote her life. Apart from the sympathy evoked by the misery of Lewes's domestic situation which prompted her to violate the social code of behaviour, her mental frame at this period was in a most receptive order for such a defiance. Her own depreciation of marriage laws, accentuated by those of Herbert Spencer who decried

43. "All 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". BEA I, 268.
the "legal bond" of marriage, and finally supported by Ludwig Feuerbach, whose Das Wesen des Christenthums she had just finished translating, equipped her with all the sanction required for her momentous decision. And in July 1854, she left for Germany with Lewes in, what was technically, an adulterous liaison.

Incredibly versatile, Lewes was author of two novels, and a number of articles on literature, philosophy and criticism. He had published A Biographical History of Philosophy (1845-6) and was handling the literary editorship of the Leader, a weekly of the Westminster Review standard. Like Marian, he too was singularly lacking in physical beauty which, as in her case, was redeemed by deep and intelligent eyes. Himself a patient of severe headaches and palpitations, he knew exactly how to nurse her oft-recurring pain and moods of depression, offering, at the same time, ample opportunities of being nursed himself — a perfect personification of her "need of some one person who should be all in all to her and to whom she should be all in all".

Reading and writing, singing and travelling in perfect companionship, their life was ever crowned with happiness. Anxiety appeared on the horizon only with ill-health and concern for the other's welfare. This unison is further marked by a hectic literary activity for both. Though Marian had resigned from the Westminster Review in 1853 she, along with Lewes, had to work harder than before in order to provide for Agnes, Lewes's wife, and her children.
While George Lewes completed his *Life of Goethe*, Marian, besides some very interesting articles, produced, in 1856, another work of repute — the translation of Baruch Spinoza's *Ethics*, which was, unfortunately never published. Spinoza's interpretations, a fruit of his scrupulous analysis of the Bible, have great similitude with those of Charles Hennell and David Freidrich Strauss. A distrust of all records convinces him that true religion is nothing but to love God above all, and our neighbour as ourselves.

The *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, with its stress on obedience as the fundamental concept of religion, had further confirmed her liberation "from the wretched giants' bed of dogmas".\(^{44}\) The *Ethics*, on the other hand, endorsed the idea conveyed to her by Isaac Taylor's *Ancient Christianity* and the *Oxford Tracts*, that self-repression was good only so far as it promoted the welfare of others.

One can indubitably deduce that in spite of the motley heterogeneity of her avocations, the fulcrum of her intellectual interests continued to be ethics and the necessity of relating religion to morality. Two of her reviews of this period, namely *Evangelical Teaching: Dr. Cumming* and *Worldliness and Other Worldliness: The Post Young*,\(^{45}\) deserve a special mention for the light they throw on her mental preoccupations. Confining herself to "the perverted moral judgment that everywhere reigns in them",

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44. *GEL* I, 162.
she is severely critical of Cummings's conclusions which, she feels, are 'likely to nourish egoistic complacency and pretension, a hard and condemnatory spirit towards one's fellow-men, and a busy occupation with the minutiae of events, instead of a reverent contemplation of great facts and a wise application of great principles'. She fails to appreciate Cummings mainly because "the disinterested elements of human feeling —— are totally absent from his religious theory". Young, too, impresses her as having "no conception of religion as anything else than egoism turned heavenward", and possessing "a mind in which the higher human sympathies were inactive". Quoting his line — "Far beneath / A soul immortal is a mortal joy" — she rejects his postulation that "the human soul is above the bliss of love and fidelity, of art and nature: which of us has the impiety not to feel that our souls are only too narrow for the joy of looking into the trusting eyes of our children, of reposing on the love of a husband or wife, --- may, of listening to the divine voice of music, or watching the calm brightness of autumn afternoons?"

The self-centred motivation of Young's ethical philosophy is held to open disparagement as she attacks his concept of moral actions: "If it were not for the prospect of immortality, he considers, it would be wise and agreeable to be indecent or murder one's father, and heaven apart it would be extremely irrational in any man
not to be a knave". Her assertion that "the fear of consequences is only one form of egoism" and the idea that transience is itself conducive to intense moral feeling, for "to us it is conceivable that in some minds the deep pathos lying in the thought of human mortality — that we are here for a little while and then vanish away, that this earthly life is all that is given to our loved one and to our many suffering fellow-men — lies nearer the fountains of moral emotion than the conception of extended existence", are of paramount importance as they reflect the philosophical texture of the mind which, in 1856, stood at the threshold of the illustrious career of a novelist.

With the writing of The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton, Marian, who had always cherished the desire of becoming a novelist, launched upon the coveted field of fiction writing. Spencer too, anticipating her abilities, had urged her to the same effect, but he lacked the persuasive quality of Lewes's enthusiasm. Moreover, Lewes's concept of the novelists' fundamental purpose, outlined in his essay, "The Lady Novelists" (Westminster Review, July, 1952), that fiction should be based on real experience and that it should enable the readers to share a profounder realization of the feelings and the plight of common humanity, corresponded exactly with her own notions of the

46. George Eliot had completed The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton on 5th Nov. 1856, and the article on Young was finished, according to her journal, on December 4, 1856 — author.
artists' responsibility. Thus with Lewes's constant encouragement to sustain her and with the cloak of anonymity to vitalise her diffident mind, she finally set out on the road of eminence as the first modern and philosophical novelist — George Eliot.

It is, nevertheless, essential to realise that George Henry Lewes was by no means the cause of George Eliot's genius or ideology. They were introduced in 1851, a time by which most of their ideas had taken ground and had matured in clearly conceived motions. Further, they had too much veneration and deference for each other to impose conformity or harmony of views. The typical coloration of her powers of comprehension and cognition were, no doubt, broadened by the ideas that came her way, but absolute dependence on any is improbable. Wordsworth, Ruskin, George Sand, Rousseau, Comte, Mill, Bray, Spencer, Feuerbach, Spinoza --- countless names can be quoted in connection with her intellectual development, with the refinement and clarification of the sensibility which was, at every level, intrinsically her own.

47. "If art does not enlarge men's sympathies it does nothing morally. I have had heart-cutting experience that opinions are a poor cement between human souls; and the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and to feel the pains and the joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring, human creatures". EL III, 111.