THE ROLE OF THE MENTOR IN GEORGE ELIOT'S NOVELS

by

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Introduction

George Eliot considered the function of her work to be "the rousing of nobler emotions, which make mankind desire the social right."[1] Throughout her novels, there is one recurring figure, the mentor, who, regardless of his social role, illustrates how vital this concern is.

George Eliot reflected her age. Her outlook upon life had been dominated by rationalism, tempered by a severe religious struggle, and justified by a personal decision that violated the social mores but gave birth to the artist. It is not surprising that her novels should mirror these aspects of her life nor that her use of a spiritual guide or mentor should comprise part of her views.

Her concern was with the individual's search for a morally-rewarding, almost religious, way of life without the orthodox dogmas that would give it sanction. She wished that every one should learn the value of selflessness for the good of all humanity, that the individual's role within society should become not primarily the pursuit of personal satisfaction but an achievement of genuine significance

1 Gordon S. Haight, ed., The George Eliot Letters (New Haven, 1954-1955), VII, 44. Subsequent references will be to this edition. (Hereafter referred to as Letters).

through living for others. She realized, too, the very human need of mutual sympathy and aid if this hope were to be attained. As a helping hand, she supplied the mentor or prophet, who could point the way towards widened horizons. One could argue that this concept of gradual improvement in man is Utopian, impossible, idealistic; she was too much of a realist not to be aware of its limitations.

George Eliot lost her belief in traditional Christianity, but never her faith in the goodness of man or in sympathy and tolerance. She well understood that an individual can only be effective within his workaday world; his greatest contribution being an ability to adjust to, and, eventually, to improve his small circle. In an ever-widening vista, the influence of one insignificant act of goodness can perpetuate itself by effecting an improvement of the whole.

George Eliot's interest in moral perfection derives from various elements of her life and thought and from the influence of her contemporaries; Darwin, Bentham, Mill, and the Biblical critics. Chapter I presents a sketch of her social and ethical development and relates it to her use of the mentor as an "agent of social restoration."[2] The remaining

[2] Barbara Hardy, The Novels of George Eliot: A Study in Form (London, 1959), p. 30.

chapters discuss the mentor according to his function in society: the clerical mentors in "Janet's Repentance" from Scenes of Clerical Life, (1857), Adam Bede, (1859), The Mill on the Floss, (1860), Middlemarch, (1871-2) and Daniel Deronda (1876); the rural mentors in Silas Marner, (1861), Adam Bede, The Mill on the Floss, and Middlemarch; the intellectual mentors in Romola (1862-3), Felix Holt (1866) and Daniel Deronda. Taken together, these chapters cover the three main stages of human life -- social, personal and spiritual -- and consider the working out of her philosophy on these levels.

Each mentor is judged for his effectiveness as a spiritual guide. The churchmen involve various Protestant sects; yet each is treated individually and not as a member of a particular group. Mention is made, however, of George Eliot's view of the church and its effect upon the success or failure of the mentor. The rural mentors, as one would expect, are an integral part of the environment; their value lies in George Eliot's use of the past. Finally, the intellectual mentors are spokesmen for her melioristic views and are considered both as characters and prophets.

This thesis, then, will confine itself to those characters who serve as illustrations of George Eliot's attempt

to make each man more aware of his role in society. This is what she meant by "meliorism," the philosophy of gradual moral progress, which "would certainly never come at all save by the modified action of the individual beings who compose the world" (Letters, VI, 99).

CHAPTER I

THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEORGE ELIOT'S ETHICAL AND SOCIAL THEORIES

From an obscure farm in the English midlands, George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans, 1819-1880) rose to become the barometer of her century's thought[1] and one of its greatest literary figures. This achievement was the result of an extraordinary intellect and a rare artistic talent. When one considers the age in which she lived, her success seems even more remarkable. Exceptional women were limited in education and opportunity -- marriage being the only acceptable career -- and to embark upon such wide intellectual speculation as she did was unusual for her times.

The early nineteenth century was rapidly changing into a world we would recognize today: the canal gave way to the railway, the farmer to the factory worker and rural life to the urban. Money broke down class barriers and became the social equalizer. The sense of movement upset the old security and everywhere men sought new standards.

George Eliot reflected the problems of her day by her response to rationalism and scientific development, which,

[1] Basil Willey, Nineteenth Century Studies: Coleridge to Matthew Arnold (London, 1955), p. 204.

in probing the mysteries of life, had left nothing unscathed. Even Christianity was not sacred. The old religion, unable to adjust to new demands, sought refuge in tradition, only to expose further its inadequacies to the sceptic. The whole concept of religion was in a state of flux, and the "chameleon"-like (Letters, I, 302) nature of the young George Eliot was to receive a lasting impression from this controversy.

A strange mixture of egoism and diffidence, George Eliot became conscious at an early age of her "one besetting sin -- ambition" (Letters, I, 19). She wanted "to work for poor stricken humanity and never think of self again" (Letters, I, 216). Her intellectual energy was restricted by the emotional aspect of her nature and by her "too egotistic dread of failure" (Letters, III, 428). She needed someone to lean on.[2] She needed, also, to be consumed by a faith capable of developing her mind, satisfying her emotions, and giving some unity and direction to her life. The struggle to blend both emotion and thought underlies the religious dilemma of her formative years, compelling her first to

[2] "The absolute need of some one person who should be all in all to her, and to whom she should be all in all." John Walter Cross, ed., George Eliot's Life, as Related in Her Life and Journals (New York, 1885), I, 11. Subsequent references will be to this edition. (Hereafter referred to as Cross).

examine traditional Christianity and, eventually, to adapt the views of Feuerbach and Comte in her maturity.

From birth, George Eliot had been reared in the Anglican faith of her father, Robert Evans, a man of deep conservative views. It was "an unquestioning type of religion, teaching simply the rules of life with rewards and punishment in proportion to one's action,"[3] and with little concern for moral integrity. It offered neither intellectual satisfaction nor moral contentment, and to a nature as complex as George Eliot's, it was bound to hold little appeal. At the age of eight, she had encountered the Evangelicalism of her teacher, a Miss Lewis, and being susceptible to a dominant personality, had allowed herself to become more and more engrossed with her ideology. The emphasis the Evangelicals put upon self-discipline satisfied her desire to serve. This single-mindedness was to remain a marked characteristic of her personality and of her altruistic beliefs.

Although George Eliot's emotions were at rest for a time, her mind was not. The first signs of scepticism

3 Mary Deakin, The Early Life of George Eliot (Manchester, 1913), p. 23.

were evident. A childhood recollection gave birth to an early doubt; it was the realization that her aunt, who was a devout Methodist, and a woman convicted of lying adhered to the same religious beliefs.[4] It would imply that morals had little to do with religious dogma. Her reading of Bulwer Lytton's Devereux (1829), where Christian virtues were practised by the atheist as well, also forced her to realize "that religion was not a requisite to moral excellence" (Letters, I, 45). In Scott's novels, she found further confirmation of her scepticism. His wide sympathy and tolerance increased her belief in the possibility of living a useful life without religion.[5] Much of her reading, too, before 1841,[6] had been stimulated by a natural curiosity about the Oxford Movement, and one work she came across was Isaac Taylor's Ancient Christianity and The Oxford Tracts (1839).

Taylor's enquiry into the question of faith had a definite influence in unsettling her religious views.[7] He established that a Christian should either remain in total

[4] Sir Leslie Stephen, George Eliot (London, 1902), p. 27.

[5] Alfred W. Benn, The History of English Rationalism in the Nineteenth Century (London, 1906), I, 233.

[6] George Eliot and her father moved to Coventry in 1841; there, she encountered the Hennells and Brays, who had a decided effect upon her rejection of Christianity.

[7] See Cross, I, 52.

ignorance of the history of his religion or comprehend it to the point where he could realize how little bearing it had upon his faith.[8] As Joan Bennett has observed, the greatest impact upon George Eliot was Taylor's emphasis upon applying "common sense and a knowledge of the law of consequences to religious beliefs. These . . . considerations eventually led her to humanistic realism."[9]

Nor was she afraid to take Taylor's advice. "To fear," she wrote, "the examination of any proposition appears to be an intellectual and moral palsy that will ever hinder the firm grasping of any substance whatever" (Letters, I, 125). She had thrown herself into Evangelicalism with such exaggerated intensity that it was inevitable that her mounting scepticism would force her to examine its theological aspects. Taylor's book led her naturally enough to Charles Hennell's Inquiry Concerning the Origin of Christianity (1840).

Discontented with the Biblical controversy, Hennell wrote his own natural history of the Testaments, without referring to the supernatural. Jesus was revealed as a man of extraordinary power and virtue, who assumed the role of the Messiah. This concept was made believable by the Hebrew

[8] Deakin, p. 37.

[9] Joan Bennett, George Eliot: Her Mind and Her Art (Cambridge, 1948), p. 14.

faith in a spiritual deliverer.[10] Hennell's rational approach won George Eliot's admiration. The essence of Christianity itself had not been destroyed, but directed to the pursuit of a better life modelled after Christ's. She wrote in one of her letters that "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" (Letters, I, 237). In the words of Anne Fremantle, "faith in the theological meaning of the word she never had: Hennell's Inquiry merely removed her beliefs."[11]

When George Eliot examined her faith in the light of these criticisms, she came against that imprisoning aspect of Evangelical narrowness,[12] the Calvinistic belief in original sin. That "most pernicious" (Letters, I, 128) doctrine, as she later referred to it, roused her moral indignation. She could not accept the belief that man was born in original sin and that moral integrity had little,

10 Willey, pp. 207-212.

11 Anne Fremantle, George Eliot (London, 1933), p. 34.

12 Deakin, p. 23.

if any, bearing upon his final redemption.[13] It seemed to her that the church stressed selfishness in placing personal gratification before all else, and that in its lack of responsibility towards the individual, it stifled any social consciousness that may have existed. It professed piety with little regard for genuine morality.[14] The church, in short, represented hypocrisy and a lack of "moral dignity" (Letters, IV, 214).

She knew her moral evaluation was sound, and, at the age of "two and twenty" (Letters, III, 230), she rejected Christianity, although she never actually withdrew from the Church of England.[15] A friend, commenting upon her decision, aptly recognized that she "/rested/ her objections to Christianity on this ground, that Calvinism is Christianity, and this granted, that it is a religion based on pure selfishness." (Letters, I, 151, n.)

What she did retain from Evangelicalism, however, was fundamental to her nature and to her adult outlook -- the strong sense of sympathy for her fellow and a deep

[13] Mrs. John Cash's remark that George Eliot expressed her indignation with Calvinism on the grounds that it believed no man had any claim upon God substantiates this. (Cross, I, 114).

[14] Benn, II, 311.

[15] See Letters, IV, 213.

concern with moral improvement. She had experienced so much inward struggle herself in resolving her religious difficulties that she had considerable insight into the lives of others. What she still needed was a positive doctrine for her moral principles. Charles Bray's The Philosophy of Necessity (1841) seemed a likely prospect. Partly, too, Bray's concern with some sort of order in a world gone awry through growing materialism and the uprooting of old traditions supported her own need for a moral standard. He sought his answer, however, in Determinism, which she never fully accepted.

Philosophically, George Eliot's stand in relation to Determinism roused the critics' ire.[16] Since she was fundamentally a moralist, she extracted from Bray only that which appealed to her ideas on moral responsibility. Her

16 George Levine pointed out that her compromise was not sufficiently justified to reconcile determinism with responsibility on a moral basis. In other words, "George Eliot felt /author's italics/ she was free to will and /be/ responsible for her acts at the same time she believed in universal causality." "Determinism and Responsibility in the Works of George Eliot," PMLA, LXXVII (1962), 274.

Her insistence upon the inevitability of consequences was largely moral, argued Gerald Bullett, because on a philosophical basis her logic was not true. If man is determined, then so are his reasoning processes which determine his sense of free choice. "George Eliot did not think so far as this, or she would have seen a belief that denies the validity of reasoning can hardly be called reasonable." George Eliot: Her Life and Books (London, 1947), p. 145.

concern with heredity and the action and reaction of character and circumstance became a recurring motif within her novels, but since she was not an out and out Determinist, she was never as much concerned with showing her characters in the process of making their choice as with the results. (Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss is an example).

Charles Bray's doctrine concerned itself with the law of cause and effect; in other words, the same cause would always produce the same effect. He asserted that "a man could in no case have acted differently from the manner in which he did act, supposing the state of his mind, and the circumstances in which he was placed to be the same."[17] His reiteration of the law of natural sequence of events struck a responsive chord in George Eliot.[18] Her own rural background had instilled in her a sense of the "inevitability of the country, with its infinite succession of unavoidable sequences . . . /and/ the necessity of reaping what had first

17 Charles Bray, The Philosophy of Necessity (London, 1841), I, 168.

18 George Eliot wrote to Bray that "in the fundamental doctrine of your book -- that mind presents itself under the same conditions of invariableness of antecedent and consequent as all other phenomena (the only difference being that the true antecedent and consequent are proportionately difficult to discover as the phenomena are more complex) -- I think you know I agree" (Letters, II, 403).

been sown . . . with the adjustment of the human being to the consequences."[19]

The social implications were immense: what a given individual may choose to do or not do would appear to have an influence upon society. Every act of either good or evil, no matter how trivial, would have its consequences. In this sense, each individual must take care to avoid causing misery to others. George Eliot said something to this effect, too:

> I suppose there is not a single man, or woman, who . . . in considering his or her past history, is not aware that it had been cruelly affected by the ignorant or selfish action of some fellow-being in a more or less close relation to life. And to my mind there can be no stronger motive, than this perception, to an energetic effort that the lives nearest us shall not suffer in a like manner from us. (Letters, IV, 99)

"The individual, like the environment, has evolved, and is evolving /then/; . . . behaviour at any given moment is the inevitable result of what has gone before."[20] Although stressing a forward movement, this theory implies that the individual is determined at birth and, hence, incapable of any free choice. George Eliot objected most

19 Fremantle, p. 18.

20 Bennett, p. 101.

strongly to this particular aspect. She believed that the individual had the right to seek his own happiness provided he did not hurt others.[21] She believed, too, that the individual had the right to change the course of events, if he wished to. If he did not, the human race would not be morally progressing, and this, to George Eliot, constituted an evil. On the basis of past experience, it was man's duty to make an effort. It would follow, then, that such actions would have a progressively good effect on the general well-being. As one critic pointed out, the sense of laws and repetitions of Nature, and of the exact place that each man holds in the system of things,[22] gave George Eliot an almost Wordsworthian[23] sense of the continuing and self-renewing human spirit, and upon it, she placed her faith in man's eventual improvement.

A useful illustration of her thinking at this stage can be seen in her review of Robert William MacKay's

21 Her union with George Henry Lewes was partially based upon this belief.

22 Victor S. Pritchett, The Living Novel (London, 1946), pp. 87-88.

23 George Eliot had said of Wordworth: "I have never before met with so many of my own feelings, expressed just as I could like them" (Letters, I, 34).

The Progress of the Intellect (1851):

> It is this invariability of sequence which can only give value to experience, and render education in the true sense possible. The divine yea and nay, the seal of prohibition and of sanction, are effectually impressed on human deeds and aspirations, . . . by that inexorable law of consequences whose evidence is confirmed . . . as the ages advance; and human duty is comprised in the earnest study of this law and patient obedience to its teaching.[24]

Here are the makings of the mature George Eliot. She believed that good and evil are the outcome of past actions and will influence human behaviour in the present. Experience alone is the best teacher. Man's duty is to learn from past experience and be responsible to his fellow being. Man should also concentrate upon the here and now and not upon a life beyond. In George Eliot's view, religion must be irrevocably bound with, and dependent upon, the law of sequences. "The will of God is the same thing as the will of other men, compelling us to work and avoid what they have seen to be harmful to social existence," she wrote in the "Notes on The Spanish Gypsy" (1868), (Cross, III, 34).

She was ready for the refinement of her beliefs. Her outlook beyond this point never altered basically; the influence of Strauss, Feuerbach and Comte mainly served as

[24] Thomas Pinney, ed., "The Progress of the Intellect," Essays of George Eliot (New York and London, 1963), p. 31.

extensions of her own thoughts. Yet they did provide her with an opportunity to discard or assimilate what she wanted from them. Not one of these writers, however, actually became her "mentor."[25]

In 1846, George Eliot translated Strauss's Leben Jesu (1845),[26] her first major literary effort. Typifying the century's concern with Biblical criticism, Strauss had discarded both the supernatural and rational elements of Christianity. As an alternative, he attempted to prove

25 George Eliot shared Mill's and Spencer's concern for some sense of order in a world grown steadily darker (as they thought), but what direct effect that had upon her is doubtful. She said herself: "I never had any personal acquaintance with J. S. Mill . . . and though I have studied his books, especially his Logic and Political Economy, with much benefit, I have no consciousness of their having made any marked epoch in my life. 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" (Letters, VI, 163-164).

Herbert Spencer confirms that he had little to do with her moral education, stating that when he met her in 1851 "she was already distinguished by that breadth of culture and universality of power which have since made her known to all the world." He goes on to say that he had been instrumental in urging her to write fiction, but doubts that he had any other influence. An Autobiography (London, 1904), II, 363-364.

26 David Frederick Strauss, The Life of Christ, or A Critical Examination of His History, trans. German 2nd American ed. (New York, 1845), pp. 68-87.

historically, that the Gospel was little more than a myth. By tracing the evolution of religious concepts, he revealed that as man's knowledge increased, the original notions of the legends were re-assessed to meet new demands. The Old Testament, in this light, could not be founded upon fact but upon the nature of the people themselves, who, being predominantly religious, tended to link all phenomena to God. Similarly, Jesus could not be the son of God, but merely the living embodiment of the Hebrew prophecies. The result was a reconstruction of Christian faith on ethical grounds, the only doctrine which had proved to be indestructible. God is seen as a spirit beyond the self created by man; therefore, man, in turn, must embody those qualities of God. "For Christ, substitute humanity; there lies the ultimate meaning of the myth."[27]

Although she did not admire Strauss's lack of reverence, she did, on the whole, concur with his views.[28] "There is nothing in its whole tone from beginning to end that jars on my moral sense," she wrote (Letters, I, 237). She never, however, rejected the idea of Christ. She believed

[27] Willey, pp. 227-236.

[28] See Letters, I, 203.

His sacrifice "the highest expression of the religious sentiment that has yet found its place in the history of mankind" (Letters, III, 231). She knew, too, from personal experience, that man always needed something to worship, and a removal of all vestiges of faith would produce a spiritual blight.[29]

Feuerbach's Das Wesen des Christenthums (1854), which she translated that year, presented a sociological answer to the Biblical critics. Feuerbach's work stressed the needs of man both as individual and as social being. Since man, as the centre of his own world, cannot conceive of anything higher than himself, or rather what he would like to be, he puts together the highest attributes of man and calls the total, "God," making this Being the epitome of good because that is the highest he knows. According to Feuerbach, "the consciousness of God is self-consciousness; knowledge of God is self-knowledge." Whatever is God to a man, that is, his heart and soul; and conversely, God is the

[29] See Letters, IV, 64.

Compare this passage from Daniel Deronda: "'the Christian sympathies in which my mind was reared can never die out of me'" (p. 497). The text is that of the Stereotyped Edition, Novels of George Eliot. 8 Vols. (Edinburgh and London, 1897). Subsequent references will be to this edition.

manifested inward nature, the expressed self of man."[30]

Feuerbach based this premise upon the "historical progress of religion" (p. 13), which proved

> that what by an earlier religion was regarded as objective, is now recognized as subjective; that is, what was formerly contemplated and worshipped as God is now perceived to be something human. /Therefore/ the divine being is nothing else than the human being, . . . all the attributes of the divine nature are, therefore, free from the limits of the individual, made objective -- i.e., contemplated and revered as another, a distinct being. (pp. 13-14)

Traditional religion is condemned for misdirecting man's energies; by insisting upon the contemplation of the Ideal (God), man is made to revere God instead of man. Goodness is pursued for the wrong end; for the glorification of a Being, who does not require it, instead of man, who does. Man neglects his own needs.[31]

What Feuerbach emphasized is that the love of man for man is of greater value than the love of man for God. The essential element of Christianity, God is love, is reversed and becomes "love is God Himself; . . . /it is/ the substantial

30 Ludwig Feuerbach, The Essence of Christianity, trans. 2nd German ed. Marian Evans (London, 1854), pp. 12-13. Subsequent references will be to this edition.

31 Charles Bray had somewhat the same view when discussing this subject with George Eliot. Phrases of Opinion and Experience During a Long Life: An Autobiography (London, n.d.), p. 73.

bond of reconciliation, . . . between . . . the divine and the human" (p. 48). Since God becomes "humanized" in this sense, a love for Him is a love for those qualities of goodness in man.

The Incarnation, removed from the supernatural, is then realized in terms of one central factor -- love. Out of love for man, God renounced His divinity, sacrificed His Son and became human. "Thus love is a higher power and truth than diety. Love conquers God" (p. 53), and "love attests itself by suffering" (p. 59). The idea of suffering lies deep in the Christian consciousness. Through it, the sinner progresses to self-knowledge and repentance, the necessary prelude to readmission to God's service. In Feuerbach's view, and in George Eliot's, however, the highest calling is now the "moral duty of benevolence" (p. 60) towards mankind. "To suffer for others is divine; he who suffers for others, who lays down his life for them, acts divinely, is a God to man" (p. 60).

The aims of a religion whose essence is love are moral. "Every man must place himself before a God, i.e., an aim, a purpose. He who has an aim has a law over him. He who has an aim, . . . has a religion, . . . in the sense of reason, in the sense of the universal, the only true love (p. 64).

It is the duty of man to lead another closer to a greater degree of goodness. If this goodness prompts a general moral improvement, humanity is closer "to the sacred idea of the species" (p. 247). "Heaven help us! said the old religions -- the new one, from its very lack of that faith, will teach us all the more to help one another" (Letters, II, 82).

The emphasis, then, is upon the relationship of man to man, the communion of love and sympathy rather than faith in a diety. "Religion is essentially emotion," said Feuerbach (p. 25). "We turn to the truth of feeling as the only universal bond of union" (Letters, I, 162), re-echoed George Eliot. Yet man must not be without some sort of faith. Although the essence of religion is love, its conscious form is a faith in human progress. Love unifies man with man; the old faith or traditional religion separates man from man by isolating God as a separate being; and that which isolates man from the good within himself is evil (pp. 126-128).

It is quite understandable how George Eliot found so many of her own ideas repeated here. It was a defence of Christianity without God, a faith which substituted man for dogma and which stressed morality without religion. Here, too, was a religion which dealt with human needs. Mankind

needed to be helped forward; only those with the social good at heart could bring it about. It was man's duty to develop this social good. George Eliot could now fulfil her ambition to be of some use.

Although George Eliot's acceptance of Auguste Comte's Positivism was "very much qualified and, indeed, hardly constituted her a Comtist in the full sense of the word,"[32] she did owe him "gratitude . . . for the illumination /he/ has contributed to /her/ life" (Letters, IV, 333).

What Comte had to offer was basically a study of social progress within a moral system. He began by stressing the unscientific aspects of current theology, and, like Feuerbach, complained that traditional religion only directed man's energies away from the problem of social well-being. In place of the traditional, he substituted a new religion, the religion of humanity, which believed in a morally enlightened mankind dedicated to the service of others.

In this new religion, the God of Christianity was to become man himself, "the whole of human beings, past, present and future."[33] The faith of Christianity was to

32 Spencer, II, 204.

33 Auguste Comte, The Catechism of Positive Religion, trans. Richard Congreve 3rd ed. revised and corrected. (London, 1891), p. 53. Subsequent references will be to this edition.

become faith in man and to be directed towards man's ultimate perfection and towards the "development of feelings" (p. 189), in "the three stages of human life -- personal, domestic, and social" (p. 62) -- the same areas in which George Eliot was later "to show the gradual action of ordinary causes" (Letters, V, 168) in her novels.

The main object of Positivism "is to teach us to live for others" (p. 60). To live for others, then, is the sole means of developing and perfecting humanity. Altruistic feelings are comparatively rare; human nature being what it is, man is usually concerned with his own pursuits and very little, if at all, with those of his fellow men. Comte knew this and turned to love as the most effective mover of men, a love which could break down the barriers of mores and beliefs and make possible a wider comprehension of one another. Move the emotions, and the mind will follow. Love must take precedence over the intellect; in social terms, over the individual. In this way, Positivism was able to stress the "social efficacy of man's feelings" (p. 63), and to believe it was not "when the self denies itself existence, but only when its existence is subsumed into the larger self of humanity . . . that human nature really fulfills its

highest function."[34]

Although George Eliot agreed that "there is nothing in Positivism which is not in the depths of human nature and civilized society" (Letters, IV, 287), she called Comte's philosophy a "one-sided religion" (Letters, III, 439), and she was right. His certainty that human beings can be ordered into a state of moral perfection was simply not feasible. She recognized the permanent, growing influences of ideas, but she was too much aware of the flaws in human nature. No one is capable of a sustained effort in pursuing that which is foreign to his more immediate wants. A few acts of goodness may be performed throughout a lifetime, but, spasmodically, and not with the general dedication to duty that Comte sought. She was too intelligent to offer the religion of humanity as a substitute way of life in her novels, at least not directly, although she did incorporate many aspects of it. She was what one critic has called "a self-made Positivist."[35] What she did see in Comte, however, reinforced "her devotion to duty, her recognition of the importance of mutual help -- especially since we may

[34] Bernard Paris, "Towards a Revaluation of George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XI (1956), 22.

[35] Pritchett, p. 94.

look nowhere for assistance except to one another[36] -- now that religion, to her, had proved inadequate.

All three philosophers in question emphasized man and his social and moral development as opposed to God, that is, "what is not man" (Letters, VI, 98). Again, in a letter, George Eliot shows how much their thinking had become part of her views.

> My books, which have for their main being a conclusion . . . without which I would not have cared to write any representation of human life -- namely, that the fellowship between man and man which has been the principle of development, social and moral, is not dependent upon conceptions of what is not man: and that the idea of God, so far as it has been a high spiritual influence, is the ideal of goodness entirely human (i.e. an exultation of the human). (Letters, VI, 98)

In Feuerbach and Comte she had seen her belief in love as the most powerful and most noble of human emotions confirmed. She knew that this feeling lay dormant within all of us. "These sentiments, which are born with us, slumbering as it were in our nature, ready to be awakened into action immediately they are aroused by a hint of corresponding circumstances, are drawn out of the whole of previous experience."[37]

36 Deakin, p. 169.

37 These words are not George Eliot's but quoted from Sara Hennell's Thoughts in Aid of Faith (London, 1860), p. 174. (Cross, II, 188, n.)

The answer lies in human nature itself. When an individual becomes aware of the suffering of others, those finer instincts of sympathy and pity are sometimes aroused, and a gesture of help is offered.[38] There may be a variety of reasons why one man will aid another: he may have greater perception through previous experience, a more strongly sympathetic nature, or the ability to imagine the state of others. Whatever the cause, sorrow can become a motivating force of positive action. "My own experience and development," she wrote, "deepen every day my conviction that our moral progress may be measured by the degrees in which we sympathize with individual suffering and individual joy" (Letters, II, 403). As Cooke pointed out, "sorrow," to George Eliot, "is regarded as the true means of man's elevation, as that purifying agent which is indispensable to his true development."[39] It is suffering that causes man to become "humanized" and look beyond himself. Moral insensitivity, or as George Eliot termed it, "that state of insensibility in which we are not alive to high and generous

[38] George Eliot considered this in great detail. See Letters, V, 31.

[39] George Willis Cooke, George Eliot: A Critical Study of Her Life, Writings and Philosophy (Boston, 1899), p. 297.

emotion, is stupidity" (Letters, VI, 287). The value of sympathy, then, lies in its final effect; that it will lead us to prevent others from suffering as we have.

The most extreme example of sorrow known to man, that of Christ's sacrifice, reinforces beyond any doubt the need for self-giving. In George Eliot's view, the Christian idea of sacrifice was closely related to her moral theory. The way of life demonstrated by Jesus in the old religion became the heart of her new religion.

The whole concept of meliorism rests upon a faith in the essential goodness of man, or as she called it, that "quantum of good" (Letters, VI, 53), of which we all have a share. The whole philosophy of gradual improvement fails without a belief in human goodness, or in the "truth of feeling" that can exist between men. How else can reconciliation of this scheme with modern society be possible? She shared, perhaps, the Romantic poets' belief in the ultimate perfectibility of man, a belief that became the raison d'etre of her novels.

> The inspiring principle which alone gives me courage to write is, that of so presenting our human life as to help my readers in getting a clearer conception and a more active admiration of those vital elements which bind men together and give a higher worthiness to their existence. (Letters, IV, 472)

She believed, too, that man was morally educable, that he could learn to live for a higher object than himself and for the good of others; and she hoped, by stimulating the imagination and feelings of her readers, to call forth these feelings.

> If Art does not enlarge men's sympathies, it does nothing morally. . . . the only effect I ardently long to produce by my writings, is that those who read them should be better able to imagine and feel the pains and joys of those who differ from themselves in everything but the broad fact of being struggling, erring human creatures. (Letters, III, 111)[40]

In the simple words of Adam Bede, this idea becomes enlarged to encompass an almost universal knowledge. "'It isn't notions sets people doing the right thing -- its feelings'." (Adam Bede, p. 153). In other words, "the greatest benefit we owe the artist, . . . is the extension of our sympathies . . . /towards/ the life of the People."[41]

Concerned mainly with painting life "in its highest complexity" (Letters, IV, 300), George Eliot turned her attention to a study of men and women and their failures

40 George Eliot's letters abound with passages on her principles of "aesthetic teaching." See Letters, IV, 300; V, 391; VI, 98.

41 George Eliot, "The Natural History of German Life," Essays and Leaves from a Note-Book (Edinburgh, 1884), pp. 235-236. Subsequent references will be to this edition.

and achievements in the social milieu to which they belonged.[42] She was aware, too, that "the moral sense of the stories of course /must depend/ upon /her/ power of seeing truly and feeling justly" (Letters, II, 363). For this reason, the total picture she presented had to reflect, as far as possible, the everyday life of ordinary man, socially, domestically, and personally.[43] She produced what she thought to be true to human nature.[44]

> Her realistic pictures, however, served a didactic purpose: These fellow-mortals, every one, must be accepted as they are: . . . these people . . . it is needful you should tolerate, pity and love: it is these more or less ugly, stupid, inconsistent people, whose movements of goodness you should be able to admire. (Adam Bede, p. 150).

George Henry Lewes' views on realism supported her own. He said that "Realism is thus the basis of all Art, and its antithesis is not Idealism but Falsism,"

42 Jerome Thale, The Novels of George Eliot (New York, 1959), p. 143.

43 For George Eliot's views on realism, see Letters, II, 86 and her article on "The Natural History of German Life," Essays and Leaves from a Note-Book, pp. 233-234.

44 Understandably, George Eliot quite disapproved of her contemporary lady novelists. "It is clear," she said, "that they write in elegant boudoirs with violet-coloured ink and a ruby pen." Pinney, "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," p. 304.
See also Letters, I, 23; II, 299; III, 185.

/author's italics/ falsism referring to what is unreal.[45] He also believed that art could use idealism as a special form of realism. In other words, art can idealize reality when a specific effect is desired.[46]

George Eliot used this theory in her novels to dramatize her moral teaching. Her protagonists have a basic pattern to their behaviour: through lack of self-knowledge, most of them follow an illusory way of life, but one which they gradually abandon as they become more involved with reality, and through the help of a morally-sensitive person -- the mentor -- they learn to know themselves and their place in society.

The mentor, who is capable of this response to others, is specially gifted. He usually has a higher moral sense and a greater knowledge of good and evil. He is able to recognize his duty to his fellow being at the right time

45 George Henry Lewes, "Realism in Art," Westminster Review, LXX (1858), 493-494. Quoted from Alice R. Kaminsky, "George Eliot, George Henry Lewes and The Novel," PMLA, LXX (1955), 1001.

46 Kaminsky, p. 1009.
See also Letters, II, 347.
This is especially evident in George Eliot's later novels where she is concerned with a dogmatic presentation of her ideals, Daniel Deronda's crusade for Judaism. Her "aesthetic teaching" becomes the means more than the end.

and to become willingly concerned with another's needs. He, in turn, is subject to common human weaknesses; as a "mixed human being" (Letters, II, 299), his image as a moral example is made credible. Not all mentors are so aptly qualified. A few fail to perform their duty adequately; some are not even aware that they are functioning as mentors, and others are so intrinsically a part of George Eliot that they are hardly human at all. They all have one common characteristic, however, a sympathetic response to others. There has been much speculation[47] why George Eliot should examine one particular relationship so thoroughly and why she should use a character to perform one specific role. The most obvious reason, of course, is that she needed someone to carry her own moral theories and teach by example. This could be a link with Christianity; her old need for some respect towards traditional faith kept her novels peopled with "spiritual counselors,"[48] who could personify the Christian idea of

47 Edward Dowden maintained that the mentor was the voice of George Eliot's conscience. In an attempt to make amends for her union with Lewes, she moralized in her novels. Studies in Literature. 4th ed. (London, 1887), pp. 240-310.

Gerald Bullett confirmed this. He said that there is an undeniable sense of something in her work which could almost be called "guilt." p. 162.

48 Edgar Rosenberg, From Shylock to Svengali: Jewish Sterotypes in English Fiction (Stanford, California, 1960), p. 172.

charity by showing how one soul can aid in the redemption of another.[49] Or the mentor could be based upon a strange phenomenon of human nature, the "mutual influence of dissimilar destinies;" (Felix Holt, p. 45), the way in which one person can influence another at unexpected moments, "/passing/ across racial, class, age and sex boundries."[50] George Eliot had written in one of her novels that "there is no private life which had not been determined by a wider public life" (Felix Holt, p. 44).

Yet the relationship between mentor and sufferer could be what Speaight terms "a kind of reduced sacerdotalism,"[51] or confessional without the theological dogma. The sinner's need to confess and receive absolution is psychologically true, and George Eliot, no doubt, was well aware of this.

The soundest explanation is George Eliot, the woman. As Deakin mentions, the mentor or hero-priest is her favourite relationship: "it shows a great need of her soul" (p. 135). With a compassionate tenderness for those around her and a

49 Deakin, pp. 170-171.

50 Robert Preyer, "Beyond the Liberal Imagination: Vision and Unreality in Daniel Deronda," Victorian Studies, IV (1960-1), 46.

51 Robert Speaight, George Eliot (London, 1954), p. 27.

submissive nature to those who would teach her, she could not always find, herself, an object on which to expend these emotions; whereas in her novels, she could show the comforting effect of wise guidance (p. 135).

The proof lies in the experiences of her life. Her early emulation of Miss Lewis and the immeasurable support George Henry Lewes gave both the woman and the novelist would qualify them, in a sense, as her very own mentors. Since she knew the need for human fellowship and guidance, it is very likely that she would incorporate this truth within her work. It would be a comparatively easy step to give this relationship more significance by making the mentor a positive example of her meliorism in action. Then, too, moral inspiration had become a primary need amidst the increasing materialism and religious doubts of her age. The mentor was admirably suited to the role of prophet for her "religion of humanity."

CHAPTER II

THE CLERICAL MENTORS

Since religion had occupied much of George Eliot's intellectual energy, her novels naturally enough reflected her interest in the church. Her primary concern was to judge its moral and social values, not to examine the efficacy of a particular faith. She felt that the church at its best and worst was but the mirror of human nature. With her usual tolerance,[1] she measured "all beliefs by their moral influence and their power to enkindle the enthusiasm of humanity,"[2] and treated the clergy solely "in its human and not at all in its theological aspects; . . . representing the clergy like every other class, with the humours, sorrows and troubles of other men" (Letters, II, 269). Her churchmen and dissenters alike were drawn from "close observation in real life and not at all from heresay or from description of novelists" (Letters, II, 347-348).

1 In a letter to Harriet Beecher Stowe, the authoress of Uncle Tom's Cabin, George Eliot reveals what she considers true tolerance: "I think your way of presenting the religious convictions which are not your own, except by indirect fellowship, is a triumph of insight and true tolerance." (Cross, III, 66)
See also Letters, II, 301.

2 Cooke, p. 224.

Edgar Tryan, the mentor in "Janet's Repentance," from Scenes of Clerical Life, is an Evangelical or low churchman, but George Eliot makes it clear that "his feelings and actions /author's italics/ are those of a High Churchman" (Cross, II, 1). She admitted that he was perhaps too idealistic, but hoped "probable enough to resemble more than one Evangelical clergyman of his day" (Letters, II, 375).

Evangelicalism had always retained her sympathy;[3] she admired its democratic ideals and disregard of social pretensions. She realized, too, that most people were prejudiced against this sect. It was the Evangelical insistence upon duty that won her support:[4]

> Evangelicalism had brought into palpable existence and operation . . . that idea of duty, that recognition of something to be lived for beyond the mere satisfaction of self, which is to the moral life what the addition of a great ganglion is to animal life ("Janet's Repentance," p. 248).

The value of Evangelicalism lay in its emphasis upon the

[3] "Janet's Repentance" is set in England of the 1830s, where there was intolerance against Evangelicalism George Eliot allows Tryan's character and words to speak for him against his critics.

[4] I am indebted to Anton D. Raff's thesis, "The Church in the Novels of George Eliot," McGill University Master's Thesis, April, 1963, for George Eliot's final views on Evangelicalism and Methodism, a subject which is beyond the scope of this thesis.

power of human feelings. "The first condition of human goodness is something to love; the second, something to reverence. And this latter precious gift was brought to Milby by Mr. Tryan and Evangelicalism" (p. 249).

The weaknesses of Evangelicalism are those of its minister, Mr. Tryan. He is a mixture of strength and frailty. Seemingly resolute in his defence against the anti-Tryanites -- even obstinate -- he inwardly struggles against his own nature. The injury he caused another in his youth gave him a social conscience; as a result, he devotes his life to saving others from a similar misfortune. Only he can recognize Janet's plight. "'He puts himself on a level with one, and talks to one like a brother. . . . He has made the people love him so'" (p. 256).

He has not, however, removed Janet's prejudice against Evangelicalism. Pleasant, meek, exceptional only in an addiction to the brandy decanter, Janet represents the average Milby resident. Her two notable characteristics are a dissatisfaction with her lot and a longing for something better than the life she has known. When she first meets Tryan, she is "struck by his simple appeal for help" and "confession of weaknesses" (p. 258). Her compassion is aroused, and his obvious sincerity dissipates her prejudices.

Believing that Tryan can provide better comfort than the barren exhortation of Anglicanism, Janet turns to him after her husband, in a drunken rage, has cast her off. She wants something to rely on besides her own resolutions, someone who would understand her helplessness. A fellow sufferer is often nearer than any relative, who through familiarity, loses his or her sensitivity to others.

Instead of preaching, Tryan tactfully tells her of his own experience and by his sympathy makes Janet realize how shallow her life has been. He speaks of that "' state of mind -- self reproach and despair -- which enables you to understand to the full what you are suffering'" (p. 283), and reveals how this knowledge may be used to make a better life. He warns her that "'as long as we live in rebellion against God, desiring to have our own Will, seeking happiness in the things of this world'" (p. 285), we will never succeed in living a pure life.

Tryan's deeper faith reveals to Janet how to live for others. Inspired by it, she is able to follow his teaching. His words touch her natural altruistic feelings, which she calls her "religion" (p. 257). She accepts her past with resignation and dedicates herself to a future of

service to others.[5] Her salvation, therefore, is effected by the warm sympathy of a fellow sinner.

George Eliot commented upon the "blessed influence" of one soul upon another: "Ideas are often poor ghosts. . . . But sometimes they are made flesh. . . . Then their presence is a power, then they shake us like a passion, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame" (p. 288). The reward for a mentor of Tryan's calibre is "Janet Dempster, rescued from self-despair, strengthened with divine hopes, and now looking back on years of purity and helpful labour" (p. 330).

Dinah Morris in Adam Bede offers a different view of the clergy. A Methodist and dissenter, she is an ideal character -- her love for Adam Bede the only human touch in a somewhat sterile portrait. Dinah continues to show George Eliot's sympathy towards the downtrodden in this novel. She reflects her admiration for the Methodists' individualism and her belief that moral and spiritual ideas can thrive only when free from convention. Self-knowledge is not feasible in a society bound by rigid codes. In stressing the ethical

[5] This is George Eliot's ideal view of resignation -- the "unembittered compliance of the soul with the inevitable." (Letters, VI, 311)

values of social life, Methodism offers a greater chance for success than Anglicanism.

Dinah's faith may be summed up as "an ethic of feeling,"[6] a moral code concerned with more than one's own feelings. She has "the love of God" in her soul (p. 24), and guided by her simple faith, puts her feelings into practice. Her actions are spontaneous; she "'was never left to herself; but it was always given her when to keep silent and when to speak'" (p. 96). Only Dinah is able to feel for others; her eyes "had the liquid look which tells the mind is full of what it has to give out, rather than impressed by external objects" (p. 16). This compassion and sympathy perplexes the people of Hayslope; they only understand a religion that can be painlessly taken in "like a good meal o' victual" (p. 155). Dinah's sermons on moral improvement produce little more than a vague anxiety which fades after her departure.[7]

Dinah finds Hetty Sorel interesting because she is both beautiful and self-centered. She notes, too, that

6 Thale, p. 27.

7 Bessey Cranage removes her earrings under Dinah's influence, but has no compunction about putting them back on again as soon as Dinah has gone!

Hetty does not really love Adam. Dinah longs to warn her how ill-equipped she is for life, yet is unsure of the response. Dinah does tell Hetty, however, "'that trouble comes to us all in this life: we set our hearts on things which isn't God's will for us to have'" (p. 135). Living in an adolescent dreamworld, Hetty remains deaf to Dinah's warnings. Her world is carefree; any pain which comes to those about her leaves her untouched.

Like the villagers at Dinah's sermon, Hetty has only a child's fear of the unknown, and Dinah's words heighten that fear. With her usual hopefulness, Dinah mistakes Hetty's agitation for a divine impulse, when Hetty is merely irritated with her. Wisely, Dinah desists and promises that she will help Hetty in future trouble, "a promise which /her/ narrow imagination takes literally as a frightening prophecy,"[8] and which turns out to be true.

After Hetty has been seduced by Arthur Donnithorne and convicted of infanticide, Dinah becomes her mentor. She is, however, presented unrealistically. Her self-righteousness, which Bennett aptly describes as a "consciousness of virtue" (p. 109), is an obstacle to sympathy. As a result,

[8] Hardy, p. 82.

the real interest of the scene, set in a prison where Hetty is held, centers upon the pathetic criminal and not her admirable guide. If Dinah had acted less as a ministering angel and more as an ordinary mortal, the effect of her compassion on Hetty (and the reader) would have been greater.

Hetty has retreated within her shell of desolation and guilt, and to Dinah alone will she confess, if to anyone. Dinah is moved by her suffering and speaks of the need for mutual comfort. She warns Hetty that she is shutting herself away from God by her sin, and that she must confess to receive absolution. "'Dinah . . . help me . . .,'" Hetty replies, "'my heart is hard'" (p. 388). Hetty's breakdown comes largely from her fear of being watched (by God) and of the image which always haunts her (the burial place of the child). She is not completely remorseful, only stunned. When she knows her child has been found, she is neither frightened nor glad. She only knows that there is no escape from her guilt. Her real reason for confession is the need for peace of mind. "'Dinah, do you think God will take away that crying and the place in the wood, now I've told everything'?" (p. 393).

Hetty has not the mental capacity for true self-knowledge. The most she can manage is partial success.

"'The pride of her heart has given way, and she leans on me /Dinah/ for help and desires to be taught'" (p. 394). Dinah is weakened as a mentor by her inexperienced idealism. Until she becomes part of life, by marrying and having children, she cannot reach Hetty and, with words that she would understand, speak to her as a fellow human being.

Another representative of the church in Adam Bede is the Rector, Arthur Irwine, an Anglican. A successful churchman, distinguished and well-bred, "a cultivated pagan" as Thale calls him (p. 21), he yet seems indifferent to the well-being of his flock. He well earns the epithet "idle shepherd" (p. 52). He considered the church solely as a service to the community. By no means a theologian, he interests himself more in the historical aspects of the church and contents himself with his nominal duties without "fussing about trifles such as Bessy Cranage's earrings or Will Maskery's tippling."[9] As one of his parishioners remarked, Mr. Irwine "'got more sense nor to meddle wi' people's doing as they like in religion'" (p. 4). He is

9 Dorothy Van Ghent. The English Novel: Form and Function (New York, 1953) p. 405.

not vindictive or intolerant, but thoughtful of everyday wants. He has a certain "large-hearted indulgence" (p. 56), which, as Svaglic points out, "while not exactly a tribute to Anglicanism, . . . is at least a gesture of good will."[10]

When called upon to offer more than a gesture to Arthur Donnithorne, Irwine fails because of his shortcomings. Arthur had intended to speak of his growing interest in Hetty, but dreaded appearing foolish before his old tutor and friend. Irwine had warned him earlier of the danger of trifling with a girl beneath his station -- he would ruin her for a proper marriage -- and Arthur knows his own weaknesses well enough to realize that he lacks the power of resisting her by himself. At this point in the novel, the intensity of Arthur's struggle is lost upon Irwine.

In the second scene between Arthur and Irwine, the issue is at first camouflaged by a discussion on individual will. Arthur rationalizes his action -- his subsequent seduction of Hetty -- by stating that a man should not be blamed for acting contrary to his resolutions. Irwine hastens to correct him. "'A man can never do anything

[10] Martin J. Svaglic, "Religion in the Novels of George Eliot" The Journal of English and Germanic Philology, LIII (1954), 157.

at variance with his own nature;" (p. 146). Actions, both good and foolish, are true to character. Nor can a man be betrayed into an action by circumstances which have not arisen before. Although these circumstances may present a temptation, the individual's will decides whether to resist or comply. The cause cannot be controlled, but the effect can be by the will. A man who struggles against, yet finally succumbs to, temptation is more deserving of pity, for his suffering will be proportionately greater than his who did not struggle. It is necessary, therefore, for man to be aware of the consequences of his actions. "Consequences are unpitying," George Eliot wrote. "Our deeds carry their terrible consequences -- that are hardly ever confined to ourselves. And it is best to fix our minds on that certainty, instead of considering what may be the elements of excuse for us" (p. 146). Within the limits of his nature, then, every man is capable of altering his character by willing /italics mine/ to alter it.

Brought suddenly to the brink of confession by Irwine's directness, Arthur backs away through fear, fear that Irwine will consider his relationship with Hetty more serious than it really is (at this point) and that, upon revealing his resolution to avoid her, he might be

embarrassed later by his inability to keep it. The thought of Hetty crosses Irwine's mind, but he dismisses it, believing that Arthur's "honest, patronising pride in the goodwill and respect of everybody about was a safeguard even against foolish romance, still more against a lower kind of folly" (p. 147). Out of delicacy of feeling, Irwine does not probe further and so loses the opportunity. Mr. Irwine is not a man who goes "into those things," (p. 155), especially "'into deep spiritual experience'" (p. 154). Later he realizes his own mistake and regrets his hesitancy (p. 351).

As a mentor, Irwine is a failure. George Eliot did not approve of gentlemanly discretion when it involved moral issues. At best, Irwine succeeded in warning Arthur of the possible consequences of his action; his sense of duty was not powerful enough for him to do more.

Another Anglican, but this time representing a social force for good, is Dr. Kenn of The Mill on the Floss. As Stephen Guest described him, "' I don't care much about the tall candlesticks he has put on the communion table . . . or getting up to early prayers every morning. But he's the only man I ever knew personally who seems to me to have anything of the real apostle in him'" (p. 350). He

exemplifies the man who has attained some knowledge of the hardships of life and is sympathetic towards those who have not. Altruistic, sincere, and gifted with a strong sense of compassion, he sees that Maggie Tulliver has undergone some inward conflict. She, in turn, recognizes him as a worthy friend; he appeals to her as a man of experience, a man who has lived long and seen wisely. He is, therefore, admirably suited to be taken into her confidence, and "large-souled" Maggie needs help.

Promised to Philip Wakem, Maggie falls in love with and allows herself to be compromised by Stephen Guest, her cousin's fiance. She makes it quite clear to Dr. Kenn that she cannot break with her past by leaving St. Oggs.

> 'If the past is not to bind us, where can duty lie? We should have no law but the inclination of the moment. . . . I see one thing quite clearly -- that I must not, cannot, seek my own happiness by sacrificing others. Love is natural; but surely pity and faithfulness and memory are natural too. And they would live in me still, and punish me if I did not obey them. I should be haunted by the suffering I had caused.' (p. 417).

She knows that happiness does not lie in escape from responsibilities, nor in causing pain to others. As a fellow being, Dr. Kenn compliments Maggie on her moral fortitude that such a decision involves, but, as a churchman, he cautions her on the dangers of pitting the individual

will against convention. He tells her that society at large does not guide itself by the same rules of responsibility and fellowship as the individual. "'At present everything seems tending towards relaxation of ties -- towards the substitution of wayward choice for the adherence to obligation'" (p. 460).

Maggie's inexperience blinds her to a full realization of her predicament. Never free of slander, she would be condemned by the very people incapable of appreciating her conscientious struggle. Her self-sacrifice would be for nought, made for a society that was oblivious to subtleties and would have, no doubt, approved of an eventual marriage to Stephen. By marrying him, Maggie would have caused the least unhappiness, but "she resolves on a course that can bring no approval from the community and only a troubled peace to her conscience."[11]

Kenn surmises that an ultimate marriage would be the lesser evil, but he does not advocate this out of respect for Maggie's sense of duty; such a marriage would be a desecration to her. A reconciliation of all four

[11] Claude T. Bissell, "Social Analysis in the Novels of George Eliot," The Journal of English Literary History, XVIII (1951), 234.

involved seems equally improbable. Maggie's struggle is really between good sense and passion; a decision either way precludes the satisfying of both aspects of her nature.[12] Yet he would advise her to follow her conscience if it were not for "counteracting circumstances"(p. 460). Kenn has taken Maggie into his employ, but to avoid the "appearance" of evil, he is forced to succumb to social pressure. He must either advise Maggie to leave, or jeopardize his position as parish priest. Obviously, he has no choice and George Eliot has made her point.

So Kenn serves as the "balancer of consequences," giving a rational approach to Maggie's dilemma. He makes Maggie realize that she cannot find her happiness in a community where moral standards ignore individual needs. Although Kenn's action reveals the church's weakness, George Eliot defends his judgement because he struggled, an improvement over Irwine. Both are bankrupt Christians, however, in forsaking their duty as priests for social convention.

Camden Farebrother, the vicar in Middlemarch, is a "makeshift" (p. 129) cleric, a compromise of blighted

[12] C. B. Cox, The Free Spirit (London, 1963) p. 28.

ambition -- he prefers natural science -- and personal disappointment -- his love for Mary Garth. Reduced to a poor living,[13] he supplements his income by gambling. Worldly-wise, somewhat cynical in his outlook, he has a practical concern for the well-being of his parishioners, "whose lives he has to try and make better" (p. 367). He is a minister of the old school (pre-Oxford Movement), and his deficiencies as a clergyman therefore render him preminently the man to advise young Fred Vincy.[14] George Eliot has given him another valuable quality, too; he has learnt the secret of self-renunciation and is able to pass this knowledge on through his understanding of others.

Fred Vincy is a likeable young man, educated and reared in the expectation of an inheritance. When his hopes are thwarted by Featherstone's will, he still feels that the world owes him a living. In an attempt to find a satisfactory occupation, he considers entering the church and becoming a parish priest. Whether or not he would perform his duty adequately is a question he expects

[13] The abuses of plurality and non-residence were common in England during the 1830s.

[14] W. J. Harvey, The Art of George Eliot (London, 1961), p. 146.

Farebrother to answer. Here Farebrother is sympathetic; his own shortcomings weigh heavily upon his conscience. He is fully aware also that Fred has not considered the cost of such a profession.

Fred's need for Mary Garth's love becomes the deciding factor; without her sanction, he will not enter the church. He makes a great demand upon his mentor -- Farebrother loves Mary, too -- and asks him to determine Mary's opinion of the clergy. On the strength of this appeal, Farebrother willingly renounces any hope of winning her for himself.

Since Mary refuses to accept Fred as a cleric, he realizes that he must win her love through honest labour.[15] He becomes an apprentice land agent with her father, but his resolve to prove himself worthy is soon weakened by a liking for gambling. Farebrother perceives this backward slip and struggles with the impulse to allow it to continue. There is a possibility that he could win Mary, if her regard for Fred lessened because of his behaviour. He knows that "'there is a companionship of ready sympathy /with her/ which might get the advantage even over the longest associations'" (p. 501).

In sympathy for Fred, however, Farebrother resists the temptation. More importantly, he reveals his inner conflict

[15] See Chapter III for a discussion of Mary as mentor.

to Fred. By opening his heart, he makes a fine act appear even finer. He has proved himself a better man to Fred before, and by this renunciation, he proves it once again. For the first time, Fred is able to understand the turmoil of another and to appreciate Farebrother's goodness. The most valuable effect, however, is Fred's desire to emulate him and become a better man. "'I will try to be worthy . . . of you as well as of her. . . . I will try that your goodness shall not be thrown away. That's enough'," replies Farebrother (pp. 501-502). As his name, of course, implies, Farebrother is a true Christian. His one desire is to save Fred from moral and spiritual decay, and, with the help of Mary, he achieves partial success.

Mr. Gascoigne's contribution as a mentor is dubious, yet representative of the social pressures that exist in Daniel Deronda. He is, on the whole, an admirable figure; George Eliot treats him with fairness. An ex-army officer turned clergyman, he is naturally a good administrator; although not over-zealous in his duty, his approach to the church being ecclesiastical rather than theological. Social position and pretensions, cultivation of the "right people," all form part of his existence and motivate his decisions. The world to Gascoigne is a very manageable place of business, and his

desire to see Gwendolen Harleth make a successful marriage is undertaken with his usual sense of "practical wisdom" (p. 102). "But cheerful, successful worldliness," George Eliot explains, "has a false air of being more selfish than the acrid unsuccessful kind, whose secret history is summed up in the terrible words, 'Sold, but not paid for'" (p. 20). On the good side, Gascoigne shows family feeling and responsibility. Later, when adversity strikes Gwendolen's family, he proves himself considerably unselfish as well.

In handling the match with Grandcourt, Gascoigne epitomizes middle-class snobbery. He looks upon Gwendolen's marriage with almost an air of piety. To him, it is a "public affair; perhaps there were ways in which it might even strengthen the Establishment" (p. 102). For a man of humble origin like Gascoigne, marriage into the "gentry" is a solemn duty, nationally, because he believed in noblesse oblige, and, ecclestiastically, because aristocrats were elevated above the common moral standards.

Since Gwendolen is his niece, Gascoigne is naturally solicitous. His argument weighs in Grandcourt's favour at a crucial moment in her life. "'You hold your fortune in your own hands'," he tells her, "'a fortune which almost takes the question out of range of mere personal feeling, and makes

your acceptance of it a duty'" (p. 104). An opportunity of this kind should be greeted with responsibility not capricious hesitancy, and a refusal of Grandcourt's offer, he warns her, would cause her family much humiliation. This unpleasant truth makes Gwendolen conscious of the uncertainities of her own nature. Gascoigne's case is too strong for her to resist; she has no real ally but her weak conscious.[16]

The effect of Gascoigne's words are undeniable. Even after Gwendolen's initial rejection of Grandcourt, when she learns of his liaison with Lydia Glasher, her eventual acceptance complements Gascoigne's expectations. She, however, waives certain aspects of his advice; those "higher considerations" of the married state -- wifely duty and affection -- in which she does not believe.

Gascoigne's influence is weak; he does not instill any sense of duty in Gwendolen nor does this palpably alarm him. He hopes, ultimately, she will acquire the proper sentiments. Indirectly, his advice hastens Gwendolen's tragedy by forcing her into a disastrous marriage.

A successful clerical mentor has human sympathy and understanding. Denomination is immaterial; the character and moral worth of the clergyman, himself, qualify him as

[16] Speaight, p. 112.

confessor or priest. George Eliot believed that religion had to be modified, and

> that a religion more perfect than any yet prevalent must express less care for personal consideration, and a more deeply awing sense of responsibility to man, springing from sympathy with that which of all things is most certainly known to us, the difficulty of the human lot. (Letters, V, 31)

The deficiencies in religion are those of its clergymen.[17] All have equal power and opportunity to do good: whether they use them depends upon their moral superiority. Irwine lacked spiritual intensity; his penetration of another's heart was insufficient when compared to Tryan's greater compassion. Both Tryan and Dinah, however, are of a different order. Their portrayal is too idealistic, their conversions too perfect to be credible. One feels that in these earlier studies of the mentor, George Eliot was determined to make her message clear, and that her admiration for clerics of this order was excessive. There is greater

[17] In an article on "The Poet Young," George Eliot describes Young as a typical cleric: "he personifies completely /the church's/ nice balance of temporalities and spiritualities. He is equally impressed with the momentousness of death and burial fees; he languishes at once for immortal life and for "livings;" . . . He will teach . . . the nothingness of earthly things; and he will feel something more than private disgust if his meritorious efforts . . . are not rewarded by a substantial preferment in this /world/." Pinney, p. 337.

sophistication of social and individual pressures in her later efforts: Kenn presents the struggle of an individual conforming to society against his conscience; Farebrother, by becoming a moral example, teaches the value of self-sacrifice in a complex world; while Gascoigne, in his limited fashion, illustrates the dangers of bigotry and conformity.

The church has been a good place to begin a study of the moral nature of man. The function of the church, George Eliot believed, is "the recognition of a binding belief or spiritual law which is to lift us into willing obedience and save us from the slavery of unregulated passion or impulse" (Letters, V, 448). As the bulwark of traditional morality, however, the church tended to stifle individual needs. Its clerics reflected this deficiency in their worldliness and in their lack of social consciousness. She measured the clerical mentor by his moral influence and found him wanting. Too few have Dinah's moral enthusiasm or concern with others' needs beyond their own, or even Tryan's compassion. Where moral decisions had to be made, the mentor was bound by convention; and his faith was too weak to inspire dutiful action. The key to true morality is a love for one's fellow which transcends personal considerations.

CHAPTER III

THE RURAL MENTORS

Fellow-feeling is the essence of George Eliot's moral life. She believed that sensitivity to others is the result of feeling that flows naturally outward. Sympathy and pity are aroused by objects about the self such as nature or one's fellow man. Since both the cause and object of feeling are outside, there is, then, in those who feel best, an openness both ways -- a response to others and a giving in return.[1]

She saw that the church did little to inspire social consciousness and realized that man needs someone outside traditional faith to keep alive the sense of human brotherhood. A priest of some "natural" order is required, "whom life has disciplined and consecrated to be the refuge . . . of early stumblers and victims of self-despair" (The Mill on the Floss, p. 403). People of this nature -- the rural mentors -- are those deeply rooted in life with a wisdom born of past experience.

A childhood fondness for country life, together with a respect for old traditions, gave George Eliot her love

[1] Thale, p. 33.

for the poetry and romance of everyday existence.

> Here, one has conventional worldly notions and habits without instruction and without polish -- surely the most prosaic form of human life: proud respectability in a gig of unfashionable build: worldliness without side dishes. (The Mill on the Floss, p. 248)

The humble people, with their depth of being and essential dignity, made her realize that human nature is lovable.

She wrote in Adam Bede:

> The way I have learnt something of its deep pathos, its sublime mysteries -- has been by living a great deal among people more or less commonplace and vulgar, of whom you would perhaps hear nothing very surprising if you were to inquire about them in the neighbourhood where they dwelt. (p. 156)

In this pastoral world, where life is simpler and less corrupt, she saw the essential goodness of human nature at work more clearly. Removed from the evils of a sophisticated society, these lowly people have an inherent conscience; they practise a natural, spontaneous kind of goodness of which they are largely unaware, but their quiet virtues and well-balanced attitude towards life have a definite remedial effect. It was Wordsworth, "who made the feelings of these humble people interesting /to her/ by instilling the atmosphere of the ideal world into the situation and incident which has been deprived of all lustre by their everyday, ordinary character."[2]

[2] Mario Praz, The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction, trans. Angus Davidson (Oxford, 1956), p. 322

Here is the possibility of revealing, through these people, a more ideal way of life. The romantic faith in a rejuvenation of the human spirit through nature gave her a new sense of life and moral inspiration.

> For she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish men,
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
> The dreary intercourse of daily life,
> Shall e'er prevail against us, or disturb
> Our cheerful faith, that all which we behold
> Is full of blessings.[3]

The slow pace of life and close harmony with the endless cycle of nature strengthened her sense of kinship. The exact place that each man holds in the scheme of things re-emphasized his importance as an ordinary man and his effect upon society.[4] In "The Natural History of German Life," George Eliot gives one reason for elevating the peasant in her novels: "how little the real characteristics of the working-classes are known to those who are outside them . . . is sufficiently disclosed by our Art."[5]

[3] "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," ll. 125-133. The text is that of Ernest de Selincourt, ed., The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, 2nd en. (Oxford, 1952), pp. 261-262.

[4] See Chapter I, p. 11.

[5] Essays and Leaves from a Note-Book, p. 231.

With Wordsworth, too, she recognized the significance of unhistoric acts and "humble duty."

> Duty, a support and a joyfully accepted rule, which brings man into harmony with the universe, with the stars in their changeless courses, with the patient hills that bear without complaint the heat of the sun and the violence of the storm, with the days and the seasons in their comings and goings, with the birds, the flowers, the clouds -- all of them things that are joyful because they are subject to the law of their own being, which they obey without murmuring.[6]

"These commonplace people . . . bear a conscience, and have felt the sublime prompting to do the painful right," she wrote in "The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton" (Scenes of Clerical Life, p. 39).

In the central design of her novels, the main characters are surrounded by these rural people, who compose the environment. They are the unsung heroes of the home, the working day, and all other aspects of daily life. They are also an integral part of the past that produced such an environment, steeped in hereditary customs and traditional morality. It is from this class that George Eliot created her rural mentors.

It is significant that all her novels, except Romola and Daniel Deronda, are set in the recent past. Adam Bede opens in 1799, when the artisan sang at his labour;

[6] Praz, p. 327.

Silas Marner is a tale of the early nineteenth century, when "the spinning-wheels hummed busily in the farmhouses" (p. 1). In The Mill on the Floss and Middlemarch, the impact of historical change is obvious; both are set in the 1830s. The old rural order was breaking up. With the slow encroachment of commerce upon provincial life, society increased in complexity. George Eliot is more interested though in the pressure than the complexity of this change, in the influence it exerts upon the individual and the problem of resisting or submitting to it. The individual, like his environment, has to evolve, too.

The past is invaluable for its shaping influences upon the present. The changes brought about have been the result of human feelings and human needs.

> It is not, primarily, the narrow institutions and customs which past generations have erected but rather the basic human feelings and human needs out of which many different kinds of institutes and social and ethical codes have arisen that are significant.[7]

Everywhere George Eliot reminds us of our debt to past history and its effect upon the future. "Our deeds are like children that are born to us," she wrote in Romola: "they live and act apart from our own will" (p. 141). The rural mentors are aware of past experience as a guide to

[7] Paris, p. 24.

the present: "the nature of things in this world has been determined for us beforehand."[8] The Garths in Middlemarch represent the ideal social attitude in recognizing the pre-determining function of past history upon human affairs. Caleb's is the wisdom which respects the "nature of things" (p. 303). Mrs. Garth "had that rare sense which discerns what is unalterable, and submits to it without murmuring" (p. 177).

They are the stable, somewhat static characters, who face life calmly and without illusion. " 'The people lead a quiet life among the green pastures and the still waters. . . . They take life almost as slowly as sheep and cows' " (Adam Bede, p. 77). It is the Maggies, the Dorotheas, or the Fred Vincys, who "stumble in self-despair," but it is the contented people such as Dolly Winthrop, Mrs. Cadwallader or Mary Garth, who stand in moral contrast to them. Unlike the major characters, the rural mentors are not involved in the process of change nor are they seeking a higher moral life. Their virtues lie in their quiet acceptance of the traditional ideas of good and evil and in their consistent goodness that appears in the same form whatever problems they face.[9] Because

[8] "Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt," Essays and Leaves from a Note-Book, p. 335.

[9] Cox, p. 16.

their lives are simple, they can see more readily the needs of others as a reflection of their own, and are able to feel with them.

Dolly Winthrop in Silas Marner is a patient woman, "whose nature it was to seek out all the sadder and more serious elements of life" (p. 60). She accepts life as it comes: " 'we may strive and scrat and fend, but it's little we can do arter all' " (p. 107). She expresses these virtues in honest service to the community, and out of the goodness of her heart, she aids the weaver of Raveloe.

Silas Marner is self-exiled from the world. For fifteen years, he endures a period of desolation, becoming more warped and miserly with each new guinea. Dolly comes to him after he has lost the gold coins and found the golden-haired child, Eppie. She urges Silas to attend church to " 'hear the anthim, and then take the sacramen',' " so that he would be " 'a deal the better' " and learn to put his " 'trust i' Them as knows better nor we do' " (p. 72). Dolly is ignorant; she does not understand the subtle workings of "Them," her name for God, but she has other qualities which matter -- sympathy and pity. Her simple faith prompts her to tell Silas about baptism and " 'noculation," and how it will protect Eppie from harm. Although Silas follows Dolly's advice, it is not the church that redeems him but her compassion for

him and his love for Eppie. He is brought back to life "by the aid of a strong feeling ready to vibrate with sympathy" (p. 110).

Dolly's act is a very human reaction to an unnatural way of life. As George Eliot points out in a letter, Dolly illustrates "the remedial influence of pure, natural human relations" (Letters, III, 382). Through her touch, Silas is restored.

The schoolmaster in Adam Bede, Bartle Massey, helps Adam in a similar way. Little is known of Bartle's past except that it has crippled him, mentally and physically. There was probably a Hetty Sorel in his life, too. Unlike Adam, however, Bartle has learnt to control his pride and confront life without bitterness. " 'You must learn to deal with odd and even in life,' " he warns (p. 209).

When Adam sits alone in sorrow and suffering, awaiting word of Hetty's trial, Bartle enters and assumes the role of priest. He offers Adam the sacrament of Communion. " 'Take a bit, then, and another sup, Adam, for the love of me,' " he begs. Adam "stood upright again and looked more like the Adam Bede of former day" (p. 371). The bread and wine they eat and drink together symbolize a communion of man and man, not of God and man. Communication is brought about by human

love. George Eliot's use of religious imagery shows how Adam's despair makes him respond to Bartle's gesture, and how human understanding brings him to a new realization of himself.

Adam was always one to trust in himself above all else, a self-righteousness which marred his relations with others. Now, for the first time, he is powerless to do anything. He cannot help Hetty any more than he can stand her suffering. Through Bartle's act, he becomes aware of human compassion and realizes that he must not judge others; he admits his limitations and is willing to stand by her side. " 'I've no right to be hard towards them as have done wrong and repent' " (p. 405).

The sense of struggle and social status is more apparent in The Mill on the Floss, even in the life of Bob Jakin, the pedlar. Bob lives in harmony with his environment, understanding and loving nature and her creatures. He knows that there are better ways to earn a living than his, but light-heartedly accepts his lot. " 'I . . . go about the country far an' wide, an' come round the women wi' my tongue, an' get my dinner hot at the public -- lors! . . . a lovely life!' " (p. 219).

Bob represents the complete fusion of character and society. He serves as a foil against which the other

characters are defined. In contrast, Maggie has no effect upon her society, whereas Bob knows how to use his world to the best advantage. In fact, he is not above exploiting the means at hand, and his loquaciousness reveals a very natural shrewdness.

> 'Bring me that muslin,' said Mrs. Glegg: 'it's buff -- I'm partial to buff.'
> 'Eh, but a damaged thing,' said Bob, . . . You'd do nothing with it, mum -- you'd give it to the cook, I know you would -- and it 'ud be a pity -- she'd look too much like a lady in it -- it's unbecoming for servants.'
> 'I'll give you six shilling for it," she said.
> 'Mrs. Pepper 'ull give me ten shillin' for that muslin, an' be sorry as I didn't ask her more.'
> 'Well, seven shilling,' said Mrs. Glegg. (pp. 295-296)

He criticizes society for making him what he is; at the same time, he shows himself a product of that order by asserting his individuality.[10] " 'I clap my thumb at the end o' the yard /he explains to Maggie/ and cut o' the hither side of it, and the old women aren't up to't. . . . I niver cheat anybody as doesn't want to cheat me, Miss' " (p. 260).

Bob's efforts may seem pathetic to the reader, yet he has undeniable appeal and even stature. He reflects, too, George Eliot's reverent handling of the "little man" in her novels. Since these people make up the majority of our society,

[10] Reva Stump, Movement and Vision in George Eliot's Novels (Seattle, 1959), p. 98.

she recognized the need for better understanding and appreciation of their qualities by the other classes. In a plea for social reform, she wanted each class to become more aware of the faults and virtues of the other. It is partly for this reason that the lower classes play such an important role. "Like Wordsworth, George Eliot takes the rustics and their world soberly, with a steady gravity, giving them dignity and simplicity."[11]

As an unheroic figure, Bob demonstrates the theme of fellowship on a different level. He is the only one who is kind to Maggie, when she, in quiet desperation, suffers the consequences of her father's business failure. He brings her a gift of second-hand books -- "a superannuated 'Keepsake' and six or seven numbers of a 'Portrait Gallery,' in royal octavo" (p. 257). Touched by his gesture, Maggie tells him that she has few friends. " 'Hev a dog, Miss! -- they're better friends nor any Christian'," he advises (p. 258), revealing his simple beliefs.

Unlike the Tulliver-Dodson concern with material gain, Bob is apart from the struggle to better himself, free from social pretensions and conventions. He is almost classless; his wanderings as a pedlar allow him to become aware of

[11] Thale, p. 17.

all levels of society. He can be kind to Maggie because he is unhampered by any needs of his own, and his instinctive goodness is at liberty to manifest itself. He represents the ideal in human nature.

Maggie's childish dislike of Bob reflects the prejudices towards the lower class that George Eliot was trying to break down. "She felt Bob was wicked" (p. 39), without really knowing why. Perhaps his experience with animals and ignorant cruelty offended her sensibilities, or his natural ability to master his environment aroused her envy. All is dispelled, however, by his generosity and sympathetic response to her needs. Bob admires and honours Maggie as someone beyond his reach and class, whom he can never hope to win, but whom he can serve.

He helps her again after her return from Mudport with Stephen Guest. When no one else would take her in, he does, and shows his understanding by bringing her his child to hold. His handling of an awkward situation is tactful and sincere. He knows that he cannot be of any real help to Maggie, but his presence eases her burden.

Bob's simple acts of kindness are unchanging. He is not capable of understanding Maggie, but he makes up for all this by his humour and the quality of his love. His happy adjustment stands in contrast to her painful life.

She realizes that Bob's easily-satisfied ignorance gives him a contentment which will never be hers, and she is grateful to him for a glimpse of such happiness.

The social picture in Middlemarch is more comprehensive and complex. Increasing commercialization has blurred class distinctions; the aristocrat, the bourgeois, and the provincial intermingle in a state of flux. Mary Garth stands apart, however, by her refusal to refashion the world according to her own wishes: "she neither tried to create illusions, nor indulged in them for her own behoof" (p. 81). A plain, virtuous girl, she has mature vision and orders her life with quiet proficiency. She knows Fred Vincy is not fitted for the clergy and tells his sister, Rosemary, so. " 'I would defend any parish from having him for a clergyman. He would be a great hypocrite; and he is not that yet' " (p. 83). In her forthright way, she refuses to marry him until he first wins her respect by learning how to provide for himself. His need to love and be loved by her is the moral foundation upon which he builds.

The injury Fred causes the Garths through his self-indulgence makes him aware of his responsibility to others, especially to those he loves. He feels no remorse for his careless borrowing until he sees the actual deprivation it causes Mary and her family. "Indeed we are most of us brought

up in the notion that the highest motive for not doing a wrong is something irrespective of the beings who suffer the wrong" (p. 182).

Mary might have had " 'a man worth twenty Fred Vincys' " (p. 417), but her childhood affection for him has grown into an adult emotion. She risks her own happiness quite willingly and would accept the consequences, if she should fail, without bitterness. Her sterling qualities contrast Fred's behaviour, and her moral example and love enable him to achieve a measure of moral solidity.

Caleb Garth is instrumental in giving Fred a push in the right direction, too. "One of those rare men who are rigid to themselves and indulgent to others" (p. 170), he is gifted with a deep sense of fellowship and responsibility. " 'I have been disappointed in Fred'," he says. " 'But I shall be ready to think well of him again when he gives me good reason to do so' " (p. 300). Although he may be incautious in money matters and over-generous to Fred, he still is concerned with his welfare. " 'The young man's soul is in my hands: and I'll do the best I can for him. . . . It's my duty' " (p. 418).

As a rural mentor, Caleb exemplifies all the fine qualities of his type. Thoroughly grounded in life, his aims and ambitions are those of society and the social good.

> The echoes of the great hammer where roof or keel were a-making, the signal-shouts of the workmen, the roar of the furnace, the thunder and plash of the engine, were a sublime music to him; /and/ had made a philosophy for him without the aid of philosophers, a religion without the aid of theology. . . . . His virtual divinities were good practical schemes, accurate work, and the faithful completion of undertakings: his prince of darkness was a slack workman. (p. 184)

He has high principles and a strong sense of right and wrong. He refuses to work for Bulstrode as estates manager of Stone Court, a position he readily accepted with Fred, when he learns from Raffles of his employer's past. " 'I would injure no man if I could help it'," said Caleb, " 'even if I thought God winked at it. I hope I should have a feeling for my fellow-creature. . . . But, . . . I can't be happy in working with you, or profiting by you. It hurts my mind' " (p. 516).

He tries to teach Fred the value of compromise with and adjustment to his lot and the dignity of honest labour. " 'You must love your work. . . . You must not be ashamed of your work. . . . You must have pride in your own work and in learning to do it well' " (p. 415). He gives him a moral standard to live by; and through Caleb's intervention, Fred finds a way to use the provincial society to fulfill himself and give shape to his character.

The slow movement of Middlemarch is considerably

enlivened by the presence of Mrs. Cadwallader, a most singular mentor. Indeed, she functions more as a social observer than a mentor to one particular person, but she is useful both to the reader and the other characters. As part of the novel's social structure, she pinpoints some of the difficulties involved in adjusting to a changing environment. She destroys the illusions the other characters have built up about themselves and each other. For the reader's benefit, she reveals certain aspects of a character which would otherwise take the course of the book to develop. In this way, the action and reaction of character upon circumstance is heightened by foreknowledge and greater perception.

Although Mrs. Cadwallader's glance may be panoramic, her "telescopic" eye focuses with startling clarity on the foibles of her neighbours. She may soften her quick analyses with humour; nevertheless, with one cryptic comment, she lays character bare. Casaubon, for example, is ruthlessly exposed by a single remark: there can be no illusions about a man whose soul is " 'a great bladder for dried peas' " (p. 40).

Yet Mrs. Cadwallader has her weaknesses. The simple rural life limits her interest to "the exact crossing of genealogies which had brought a coronet into a new branch and

widened the relations of scandal;" and "she believed as unquestionably in birth and no-birth as she did in game and vermin" (p. 41). Her poor marriage to a country parson had left her with an active stinginess as well. Snobbery and close-fistedness combine to sharpen a ready tongue.

The Middlemarch world is judged by Mrs. Cadwallader and found wanting. At Featherstone's funeral, her succinct comments neatly and correctly designate Messrs. Vincy and Ladislaw as a sleek merchant and a ne'er-do-well, respectively. Even her good friend, Mr. Brooke, is seen as a "Guy Fawks" (p. 36). True to her prediction, his political career is a fiasco. When Dorothea Brooke sacrifices herself in marriage to Casaubon, Mrs. Cadwallader registers the natural horror of any sensible person, and the reader applauds her. After Casaubon's death, she even foresees the inevitable union of Dorothea with Ladislaw.

No one, unfortunately, heeds her prophecies, and she is often disliked for her accuracy. Human behaviour never surprises her, however; only the blindness of others. In good faith, she attempts to make people aware of their faults, but as she, herself, says: " 'it's no use being wise for other people' " (p. 466). They have to find out for themselves.

Collectively, the rural mentors are a moral force for the good: through their intervention, Silas is restored to the community, Adam acquires new wisdom, Maggie's self-despair is made easier, and Fred finds himself in an honest vocation. Their acts of kindness and of love are an integral part of human relationships; they dramatize George Eliot's belief that experience is the only moral teacher; human feelings the only true instinct. Although their effect may be diffusive,

> the growing good of the world is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs. (Middlemarch, 'Finale,' p. 621)

These mentors, however, are restricted to a domestic circle of family, friends, or lovers. Just as the clerical mentors are subservient to social codes, so are the rural mentors to a similar rule. The small range of their influence coupled with their inferior intellect and education -- and, of course, their social class -- limits their effectiveness. Their actions are emotional and instinctive, not the result of an intellectual dedication to an ideal. Although the clerical and rural mentors together supply one half of George Eliot's meliorism, the beneficial effect of mutual aid, the real heart of her theory rests upon the sense of

personal duty to one's fellow. Without it, the haphazard efforts of a few morally superior people are insufficient.

CHAPTER IV

THE INTELLECTUAL MENTORS

George Eliot always insisted that good and evil are but the reflection of human nature. Disregard of the needs of others is evil; sympathy and compassion are good. Egoism is a strong obstacle to genuine sympathy; having little awareness of others, the egoist is incapable of directing his energies outward. The worst evils are those committed by the "morally stupid"; the well-meaning, self-indulgent, thoughtless characters who place little value on the results of their actions. "We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder to feed our supreme selves," wrote George Eliot in Middlemarch (p. 155). We are all of us born with some good, too, and, with a little self-discipline, could become better people. As Preyer observes, "the conflict between sympathy and selfishness constitutes the staple of her moral dramas" (p. 37).

The struggle from self-regard to social love reinforces a need for the intellectual mentor. An act of kindness done out of sympathy does not necessarily imply that such action is habitual. A person must be taught, morally and intellectually, how to react to the suffering of others and to resist temptation and master his desires. The only way is

through self-renunciation, the basis of her moral principles. "Renunciation, for George Eliot, is the essential part of virtue; and it is the chief moral reality implied by her whole outlook."[1]

In the novels, George Eliot shows how the self-centered can be broken down by suffering and repentance -- basically a Christian process in psychological terms.[2] The egoist dwells in a world of his own; his energy spent upon self-gratification. Inevitably, his desires thwart those of another, and he perceives reality is not what he expected. The disparity of the inward-outward worlds awakens him, and he understands himself for the first time. He stands now at the crossroads of his life: whether to go forward to a better way, or regress to a defensive egoism.[3] At this crucial point, the intellectual mentor exerts his influence. He is more than

1 John Holloway, The Victorian Sage (London, 1962), p. 126.

2 In Letters, I, 251, George Eliot gives a lengthy description of her "cure" for egoism. She explains how the intellect restrains the passions: "add to this consciousness, and there is a power of self-amelioration. . . . The intellect, by its analytic power, restrains the fury with which /the passions/ rush to their own destruction; the moral nature purifies, beautifies and at length transmutes them."

3 The state of prostration -- "that mathematical abstraction, a point" -- is the key psychological stage leading from illusion to resurrection of self. (Letters, I, 264)

a spiritual advisor or kind friend; he is often the hero of the novel (Felix and Daniel).

The relationship between the mentor-hero and sufferer, usually the heroine, is essential to this pattern. He has won her respect, even affection (Esther marries her "angry pedagogue"; Gwendolen falls in love with Daniel); she, in turn, has someone to lean on. Like George Eliot, herself, these heroines have a decided tendency to hero-worship. The mentor's message takes on new significance, a "kind of revelation"[4] of a great unknown vista. He holds up the vision of a moral way of life made better by individual selflessness and charity.

> 'I am a man who am warned by visions. Those old stories of visions and dreams guiding men have their truth; we are saved by making the future present to ourselves. . . . I do believe in you; but I want you to have such a vision of the future that you may never lose your best self.' (Felix Holt, p. 237)

Inspired by his prophecy, the heroine resolves to become worthier of him. It is true, too, that love makes all difficult things easier.

The relationship of the ignorant heroine and the didactic hero plays a significant part in George Eliot's belief in the power of love. Affection and consideration begin

4 Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven, 1957), p. 314.

in the home. Her heroines, as future wives and mothers, have a responsibility to society. Through them, moral goodness is passed on to the next generation. Since a woman's lot is determined by her marriage, it becomes essential for her to marry the right kind of man -- her altruistic hero -- and to know the value of love. In this way, the role of the mentor-hero is vital:

> what in the midst of that mighty drama are girls and their blind visions? They are the Yea or Nay of that good for which men are enduring and fighting. In these delicate vessels is borne onward through the ages the treasure of human affections. (Daniel Deronda, p. 90)

Whether moral successes or failures, most of George Eliot's major characters move through a similar pattern of moral education; their diametric opposites standing as moral warnings to the reader. Mrs. Transome's bitter despair might have been Esther's; Grandcourt points to the mature Gwendolen. The failures, too, represent various steps in the process: Tito Melema (Romola) completely succumbs to temptation; Arthur Donnithorne emerges too late from his egotistical shell after destroying another's life; Casaubon never emerges at all.

George Eliot did not expect complete agreement with this dramatization of her moral solution;[5] yet she did hope

[5] See Chapter I, p. 21 for George Eliot's objections to the "religion of humanity" in itself.

that some effort would be forthcoming. Her mature novels are noticeably persuasive and more empirical; there is also an inclination to "believe out of hand in the goodness of human nature."[6]

The intellectual mentor demonstrates George Eliot's ethical beliefs. Through him, she reveals the beneficial effect of moral inspiration upon one person. He speaks of the values of compromise and selflessness in a workaday world and how goodness can perpetuate itself. As a prophet of her "religion of humanity," he envisions an improvement of his fellow man.

It is possible that the idea of the mentor as a prophet reflects typical Victorian dogmatism. As Houghton points out: "the Victorians might be, and often were uncertain about what theory to accept or what faculty of mind to rely on; but it never occurred to them to doubt their capacity to arrive at truth" (p. 14). In a radically changing world, the "pain of doubt and the intense will be believe made the dogmatic /italics mine/ assertion of a doctrine a . . . virtue."[7] George Eliot is no exception.

She fashioned the mentor into a prophet gradually.

6 Thale, p. 78.

7 Houghton, p. 154.

In earlier chapters in this thesis, he appears as a character in his own right and in relationship with others. As a prophet, he carries the moral theme as well. This understandably complicates his function, and makes his role as character subservient to his role as mentor. As a result, he loses vitality and dimension.

Philip Wakem in The Mill on the Floss is an early prophet, serving primarily as George Eliot's voice. Savonarola, a historical figure in Romola, is only interesting for his effect upon Romola. With Felix Holt and Daniel Deronda, she widens her vision; Felix is a political scientist, and Daniel, a supranationalist, is a crusader of Judaism.

The first of George Eliot's heroines in need of a mentor is Maggie Tulliver in The Mill on the Floss. Under the influence of St. Thomas à Kempis, Maggie renounces the world; all the beautiful things, books and music, she casts off without full realization of the cost. In rebellion against the narrow confines of provincial society, Maggie's unsatisfied intelligence longs for some higher culture, and her discontent with life leads her to believe that isolation and renunciation will bring happiness. By this act, she reveals an egotistical flaw in her nature; the rejection of her emotional needs by a conscious effort of will. Her actions also reinforce the essential weakness of her character: rash

action without adequate knowledge of the consequences. This, too, is the pattern of her behaviour with Stephen.

Moved by love and pity for her misguided, senseless privation, Philip Wakem argues that " 'there are certain things we feel to be beautiful and good, and we must hunger after them. How can we ever be satisfied without them until our feelings are deadened?' " (p. 278). He sounds a note of warning, and it is clear that George Eliot speaks with his voice, when he tells Maggie that she is " 'shutting herself up in a narrow self-delusive fanaticism, which is only a way of escaping pain by starving into dulness all the highest powers of your nature.' "

'Joy and peace are not resignation /he continues/: resignation is the willing endurance of a pain that is not allayed -- that you don't expect to be allayed. . . . It is stupefaction to remain in ignorance -- to shut up all the avenues by which the life of your fellow-men might become known to you. . . . You are not resigned: you are only trying to stupefy yourself.' (pp. 301-302)

Maggie hopes for strength to pursue her course.

'No, you will not, Maggie /Philip replies/: no one has strength given to do what is unnatural. It is mere cowardice to seek safety in negations. No character becomes strong in that way. You will be thrown into the world some day, and then every rational satisfaction of your nature that you deny now, will assault you like a savage appetite.' (p. 303)

When the prophecy is fulfilled, temptation take the form, not of a "savage appetite," but of a powerful love. Stephen represents "the nemesis that lies in wait for those

who, whether in fear or spiritual pride, wilfully starve themselves of happiness."[8]

Although Maggie pays no heed to Philip, he gives her "a temporary resting-place and peace which she mistakes for love."[9] His childhood affection for her has matured, but her feelings are pity for a cripple and admiration of his mind. Loving him involved self-sacrifice, which appealed to her then, but her love could not withstand the passion she felt for Stephen.

Philip is not a good mentor for Maggie. He is weakened by his artistic sensibilities, which win her attention but not her respect. His approach is emotional rather than intellectual; he thinks always in terms of her nature. As a cripple, he is outside the social world to a certain extent, and his knowledge of compromise and adjustment is limited. Through him, however, George Eliot points out the dangers of shutting oneself away from life and of practising an unnatural selflessness without real knowledge of self-discipline.

The next mentor, Fra Girolama Savonarola, was a fifteenth century Florentine and reformer of the Roman Catholic

8 Bullett, p. 189.

9 Hardy, p. 56.

Church. He is essential to George Eliot's theme because of his moral zeal; like Dinah, he has a strong sense of self-sacrifice for the good of others. Savonarola believed that "God had committed to the church the sacred lamp of truth for the guidance and salvation of man, and he saw that the church, in its corruption, had become a sepulchre to hide the lamp" (Romola, p. 182). His difficulty arose over the discrepancy between ideal faith and that practised by man. His strong sense of wrong-doing caused him to believe more in his own faith, and he took it upon himself to go against tradition. Ambition defeats him. Concentrating upon his own ends, he loses humility as a priest of the Church. He is led to announce that "the cause of his party is the cause of God's kingdom" (p. 427), and to believe that God will destroy his enemies. He fails to bring about reform; the very faith that enabled him to struggle against his superiors defeats him. His efforts were not in vain, however, for he manages to make Romola's life more worthwhile.

Reared in a pagan home and used to self-indulgence, Romola is inexperienced in life. She is not unintelligent, having a keen, receptive mind. She has pride and high moral principles; "all Romola's ardour had been concentrated in her affections" (p. 214), George Eliot tells us, but her idealism leaves her unprepared to face the coming trials.

Most of the blame for her marriage to Tito is placed upon her husband, but Romola is at fault, too. A woman of more tenderness might have urged him to confess, but Romola's life is based, not on passion alone, but on admiration for Tito's moral qualities. When Tito proves unworthy (he sells her father's library), Romola's affections turn to loathing, and she determine to leave. On the way from Florence, she meets Savonarola.

Despite a resentment against the Church, Romola recognizes his personal power and worth as a fellow-being. He reminds her of her wifely duty, and his words re-echo George Eliot's ethics. " 'You chose the bond; and in wilfully breaking it . . . you are breaking a pledge. . . . You are seeking your own will' " (pp. 311-313). His message appeals to an essential part of Romola's nature, her desire to serve. " 'Make your sorrow an offering' " (p. 313), and live for Florence, he advises. Romola is brought face to face with the Christian aspect of moral truth, and "she follows Savonarola, not because she is converted to Christianity, but because of her fundamental need for self-sacrifice."[10] Her self-devotion to her father and Tito is a form of living for

[10] Speaight, p. 78.

others, so her reaction to Savonarola's influence is credible.

Returning to Florence, she throws "all the energy of her will into renunciation" (p. 319). Like Maggie, she does not realize that conscious selflessness can be just as egotistical as selfishness. As Thale mentions, "denial of the will involves an act of will itself" (p. 84). Her emotional needs are satisfied by this renunciation, but she is ignorant of the difficulty involved in living her ideals in real life.

For two years, Romola struggled to unite her ideals with reality, but was driven back to Savonarola in despair. In the scene where Savonarola refuses to try and save her godfather, Bernardo del Nero, who is condemned to death, she breaks away from him.

> 'Be thankful, my daughter /he tells her/, if your own soul has been spared perplexity; . . . You see one ground of action. I see many. I have to choose that which will further the work intrusted to me. . . . The death of /one man/ is . . . a light matter weighed against the furthering of God's kingdom on earth.' (pp. 426-427)

All Romola's ardour cries out in protest: " 'I do not believe it!' " (p. 427). To her, this is sophistry, and Savonarola forfeits his right to guide her by this selfish judgement. "She learns self-denial from /him/ and then comes to reject what she sees in him as self-interest."[11] Her emotional needs

[11] Hardy, p. 60.

were satisfied by Savonarola's moral inspiration, but her intellect despises this flaw in him. It is virtually the same revulsion she experienced towards Tito.

Romola feels bereft; her moral strength has seemingly vanished with her illusions, but George Eliot answers her prayers, as she did Maggie's with the flood, by conveniently depositing her drifting boat near a plague-stricken village. Caught in the crisis of the moment, Romola forgets herself and her problems. When she returns to Florence, she realizes how selfish her life has been and how needy are the Florentines. At the end of the novel, she is shown succouring Tito's illegitimate children.

George Eliot sensed that she had failed to expose the central issue of Romola: "the great problem of her life," she wrote, "essentially coincides with a chief problem in Savonarola's" (Letters, IV, 97). Both characters experience difficulty in reconciling their emotional needs with reality; their idealism is inexperienced. Savonarola's personal ambition causes him to lose sight of the good; Romola's altruism causes her to reject the good because of an evil, but George Eliot saves her by a timely intervention and by Savonarola's moral example. In the "Epilogue," Romola explains to Lillo, Tito's son, what he meant to her.

'He had the greatness which belongs to a life spent in struggling against powerful wrong, and in trying to raise men to the highest deeds they are capable of. . . . If you mean to act nobly and seek to know the best things God has put within reach of men, you must learn to fix your mind on that end, and not on what will happen to you because of it.' (pp. 503-504)

He gives Romola her ideal of fellowship, which is for her a passionate idea, whereas her higher principles drive them apart.[12] Nor does she surrender into his keeping the conscience he has awakened in her. At the end, she stands alone, but redeemed by his inspiration. The conversion is not convincing, however, as Romola's growth is never felt as a natural process.[13] She is still basically aloof from life; her efforts remain personal rather than altruistic.[14]

George Eliot's message is obscured, too, by Savonarola's role. He moves across the pages as an inspiring force, never a vital character. In the actual crises of his career, the shirking of the ordeal by fire and his subsequent meditations, George Eliot does not allow him to reveal his own thinking processes, but describes them herself, carefully and

12 Hardy, p. 61

13 Thale points out that "though Romola's beliefs have changed, the force behind her conduct has remained constant: her Christian self-abasement and her final altruism are as much products of activism /her will/ as her initial pride or her flight from Tito had been" (p. 85).

14 Harvey, p. 182.

elaborately. He is not distinguished as either a historical or dramatic figure; George Eliot falls artistically between the two.

She leaves these early prophets behind, and, in a determined effort to widen her field, creates Felix Holt as the "model" politician. Her political views in Felix Holt are consistent with her essay, "Address to Working Men, by Felix Holt,"[15] which was suggested by Disraeli's defense of the Reform Bill in 1867.[16] Her publisher, John Blackwood, was delighted with her sentiments, but added, not surprisingly, "I wish the poor fellows were capable of appreciating /them/" (Letters, IV, 402).

The whole speech revolves around the working man's duty, now that he has won the vote, and his responsibility as a "future master of the country." It is meliorism disguised as politics. George Eliot was no political scientist, much less a radical. Her views, which she held from childhood,[17]

15 Essays and Leaves from a Note-Book, pp. 322-350.

16 See Letters, IV, 394, n.

17 "The welfare of a nation lay in a strong government which could maintain order; and I was accustomed to hear /my father/ utter the word 'government' in a tone that charged it with awe, and made it part of my effective religion. "Looking Backward," Impressions of Theophrastus Such (New York, 1879), p. 34.

were too conservative. Nor did she approve of sudden change, politically or socially; real changes came about only by the slow progress of history.

In the novel, set in England at the time of the Reform Bill (1830), Felix persuades the labourers that mere votes will never give them political power worth having; only public opinion can do that. " 'I say, no fresh scheme of voting will much mend our condition' " (Felix Holt, p. 266). "The franchise /does/ not really count so much as . . . moral responsibility,"[18] but this doctrine would hardly please the working man. He would only look upon it as a convenient argument to take the vote away.

Felix's strong sense of social purpose is the root of his "radicalism." He is an upright improver of the working man's lot, which is "deserving of /his/ exhortation about the dangers of drink, ignorance and the ballet."[19] His principles prevent him from supporting any candidate. "He wants the elections honest and the public well-informed;"[20]

18 Fred C. Thomson, "The Genesis of Felix Holt," PMLA, LXXIX (1959), 583.

19 Thale, p. 94.

20 George Eliot was not that idealistic: the National Education Act came into effect in the early 1870s; Felix Holt was written in 1866.

he wants everything to be right before anything can be right, and thus he is almost completely ineffectual" writes Thale (p. 95). In contrast, Harold Transome's practicality makes him the better politician.

As a character, Felix is "a woman's idea of what a good man should be."[21] A dogmatic idealist, he gives up his apprenticeship and refuses to sell patent medicine thus reducing his mother to near poverty. He scorns marriage for fear a woman's foolishness will deter him from his self-appointed task. His lack of realism in politics is reflected in his rejection of a corrupt social system. " 'I do choose to withdraw myself from the push and scramble for money and position' " (p. 234). His is a rebellion of personal dislikes for moral reasons, not of practical reforms. He is proud and intolerant of those he thinks unworthy, stubbornly believing in his own autocratic course of action. " 'The world's a largish place, and I haven't turned everything inside out yet' " (p. 120), he prophesies. He says he intends to " 'make life less bitter for a few within /his/ reach' " (p. 238), but he goes about it the wrong way, not because he lacks intelligence -- his mind is discerning -- but because he wears blinkers. He sees the world as it ought to be, not as it really is. He

21 Lawrence and Elizabeth Hanson, Marian Evans and George Eliot: A Biography (Oxford, 1952), p. 256.

hopes to bring about political reform by showing men a vision of the good and not by analyzing the evils.

Rufus Lyon recognizes the potential danger in a man like Felix: " 'the right to rebellion is the right to seek a higher rule and not to wander in mere lawlessness' " (p. 138). Heaven help the country if he were in power! All his over-confident self-righteousness would manifest itself. His lack of experience and political insight might bring him to illogical decisions, but he would always cling to the belief that he was acting for the right moral reason.

None of Felix's ideas is put into effect in the novel; there is mention of an abortive attempt to run a school for working men. His fellow townsmen, too, either misunderstand or laugh at him, although they think " 'he's a good fellow at the bottom' " (p. 406); nevertheless, they prove him wrong. His "rash humour" forces him into unwise action at the Election Riot, and he discovers that he cannot influence public opinion. This same flaw causes him to reject Esther's love until she makes him realize he needs her when she defends him at the trial. His experience appears to mellow him:

'I'm proof against that word failure. . . . As long as a man sees and believes in some great good, he'll prefer working towards that in the way he's best fit for, come what may.

. . . . . .
And then, as to one thing I believe in, I don't think I can altogether fail. If there's anything our people want convincing of, it is, that there's some dignity and happiness for a man other than changing his station.' (pp. 389-390)

Apart from his moral values, he does not appear to be George Eliot's political ideal. It is possible that she created him, as part of her moral theme, to point out that there is more to human happiness than the vote. Bennett suggests that "in drawing him she was not contemplating and trying to discover a human being so much as inventing a mouthpiece for her own belief that the amelioration of man's lot will not follow directly upon improved political machinery" (p. 157). With an aggressive and domineering personality, Felix is admirably suited to her purpose, but once he has proved his point, she must break him down. As a political figure, he is indeed a "radical." Felix is motivated by duty towards and love for his fellow; George Eliot believes in these aspects of him. If the novel is considered solely for these moral principles, then some of the confusion about Felix is resolved.

Felix is attracted by Esther's beauty and intelligence, but he resents her foolish affectations and wants to shame her into realizing how petty they are. She is a romantic

daydreamer with a liking for the "abominable" Byron.[22]

> The daughter of a dissenting minister with tastes and refinements above her station, . . . she finds herself discontented, unhappy with her narrow lot, contemptuous of the genteel pretension of Treby society, irritated by the dinginess of her father and the smell of cooking in their house.[23]

She believes that the life of those with money and breeding will be free from mediocrity, but Felix bluntly redefines taste as a "quality" of little consequence:

> /Esther/ 'O, . . . I know you are a person of right opinions.'
> /Felix/ 'But by opinions you mean men's thoughts about great subjects, and by taste you mean their thoughts about small ones: dress, behaviour, amusements, ornaments.'
> 'Well -- yes -- or rather, their sensibilities about those things.'
> 'It comes to the same thing; thoughts, opinions, knowledge, are only a sensibility to facts and ideas.' (pp. 110-111)

" 'I want you to change' " (p. 112), he thunders. "For the first time in her life Esther felt herself seriously shaken" (p. 114); no wonder, she believed the fault to lie with the world, not herself. Her natural resentment -- she laughs at Felix's French accent -- gives way to reluctant admiration for his superior values. She begins to feel

22 George Eliot and Felix agreed on Byron: "he seems to me the most vulgar-minded genius that ever produced a great effect in literature." (Letters, V, 57)

23 Thale, pp. 98-99.

compunction for her step-father and to realize that her

> favourite Byronic heroes were beginning to look something like last night's decorations seen in the sober dawn, . . . that if Felix were to love her, her life would be exalted into something quite new -- into a sort of difficult blessedness. (p. 207)

She sees Felix as the means of "checking her self-satisfied pettiness with the suggestion of a wider life" (p. 319).

Felix offers her a challenge no woman could resist. He loves her and the goodness within her, but he wants his love "to rush in one current with all the great aims of his life" (p. 236); and she to be

> 'that woman I was thinking of a little while ago when I looked at your face [he tells her]; the woman whose beauty makes a great task easier to men instead of turning them away from it. . . . Nothing but a good strong terrible vision will save you.' (p. 237)

The moment of disenchantment does arrive when Esther realizes all the things she wanted with the Transomes. The easy life is not a dream world after all. Its very freedom seems to nourish a "moral mediocrity" (p. 364), a corrosive self-interest which saps energy and purpose. The soft life of pleasure is a worse evil than anything she has known before when she sees what it has done to Mrs. Transome. Her "joyless, embittered age" (p. 413) could be Esther's one day. George Eliot draws a deliberate parallel between the two women: "Harold, who might have made Esther's love "freeze

into fear" (p. 335), is the son of Jermyn -- the man who mastered Mrs. Transome."[24]

Esther has the choice: to accept Felix's quest and poverty[25] with his love, or live in "silken bondage" without it. She meditates in her room and ushers forth a converted woman. "Her woman's passion and her reverence for rarest goodness rushed together in an undivided current" (p. 402). Esther's renunciation is too easy; her growth is made with Felix's help and by her attempt to prove herself, but the struggle is facilitated by their mutual love. Esther is not a well-developed character, but a kind of sophisticated Hetty without Gwendolen's conscience; Felix tells her how to improve herself, George Eliot describes the process, and she dutifully makes the correct decision. We are aware of her struggle to give up all the things she wanted for a more worthwhile marriage, but we do not realize it as a painful process. Esther's recognition of her duty is synonymous with her love. Felix is a successful mentor because this love makes it easy for him. She has to see clearly the road

[24] Hardy, p. 137.

[25] A contemporary review of Felix Holt did not see why a man had to be poor in order to do good. "Voluntary poverty is /not/ necessary to a man's doing his work in this world." (Letters, IV, 280, n.)

ahead or his guidance is futile.

In Daniel Deronda, George Eliot extends her sympathies to include a new national scheme and her most idealized portrait of the mentor as prophet. It is also her Jewish novel. In spite of the reader's preference for Gwendolen's story, she "meant everything in the novel to be related to everything else" (Letters, VI, 290). She wrote the book in an attempt to show the "relation between . . . the Jewish elements and those of English social life" (Letters, VI, 379).

Partly in reaction to an early prejudice[26] and the typical Christian attitude towards the Jews,[27] George Eliot treats them sympathetically and somewhat unrealistically. Their objectionable characteristics such as "ignorance, narrowness and superstition" (p. 400) are glossed over. These very faults of the Jewish people, however, are the source of their strength; the strong sense of family and mutual responsibility that enabled them to survive centuries of persecution has given them a social purpose and a moral

[26] "Everything specifically Jewish is of low grade." (Letters, I, 247)

[27] "The usual Christian's attitude towards Jews is . . . impious or . . . stupid." (Letters, VI, 301)

superiority over the Christians. Mirah's defence of her father best illustrates this kinship:

> 'I was forced to flee my father; but if he came back in age and weakness and want, and needed me, should I say, 'This is not my father'? If he had shame, I must share it. It was he who was given to me for my father, and not another.' (pp. 280-281)

The Jewish religion is family and duty, and they stand as a moral example to the Christian world. This is the credo of the Jews: "let us bind love with duty; for duty is the love of law; and law is the nature of the Eternal" (p. 543).

George Eliot attempts to gain sympathy for the Jews through her hero, Daniel Deronda. She gives him a sense of quest, some need for an "enthusiasm," or duty, which would satisfy both mind and heart and implies that English society of the 1870s does not offer this to a man of Daniel's moral aspirations.[28] "His history had given him a stronger bias in another direction. He felt himself in no sense free" (p. 120). In this way, he is able to move through the novel passively, without entanglement -- he is always beyond

[28] Bennett points out that by the time George Eliot wrote Daniel Deronda, she no longer dwelt in a traditional community of slowly evolved and universally accepted beliefs. "Daniel's quest /is/ the outcome of a lack . . . of just such a background" (p. 83).

Gwendolen's reach.

Daniel is at first prejudiced against the Jews, but when he becomes friends with Mirah and the Cohens, he realizes their finer qualities and how irrational his previous attitude has been. He is proud to become one of them when he learns of his Jewish blood and to be their champion of the new Israel.

'It is the impulse of my feeling -- to identify myself . . . with my hereditary people' (p. 497).
. . . . . .
'I hold my first duty is to my own people, and if there is anything to be done towards restoring or perfecting their common life, I shall make that my vocation' (p. 545).

His acceptance of the Jews, however, is difficult to believe. Daniel does not grow with the novel; he is described, analyzed, and excused by George Eliot, but he never evolves naturally.[29] He suffers, too, from her ethics. Grossly over-idealized, a paragon of virtue, he has no discernible flaws except a tinge of jealousy when he hears of Hans Meyrick's love for Mirah. Only then, is he human. In the scenes with Hans, he comes briefly alive; with Gwendolen,

[29] Bullett points out that such a conversion to Judaism would be "natural . . . in a man born and bred as a Jew; we find it difficult to sympathize with in Daniel, who discovers his racial origin at the age of 30 or so" (p. 213).
Hardy adds that the "passages describing his isolation and his sense of destiny . . . are not sustained throughout /to present/ a convincing and moving portrait of man being shaped by life" (p. 109).

he is always her "terrible-browed angel" (p. 507), or the judge and tutor; whereas her speech reflects a lively personality.

Daniel is drawn to Gwendolen Harleth, not because she is beautiful or willful, but because she is an enigma. She is the most fascinating of George Eliot's heroines and the most complex.

> A perfect picture of youthfulness -- its eagerness, its presumption, its preoccupation with itself, its vanity, its silliness, its sense of its own absoluteness. But she is extremely intelligent and clever, and therefore tragedy can take hold of her.[30]

Gwendolen's false social values, limited education, and ignorance of the world leave her unprepared to face reality. Her gambling symbolizes her attitude towards life -- to take her "gain out of another's loss" (p. 521). She has a "root of conscience" (p. 503); she knows when she has done wrong thus she is capable of being saved, but " 'so as by fire' " (Letters, VI, 188). As a child, she strangled her sister's canary because its singing irritated her; remorse prompted her to replace it by a white mouse. Her compassion for her mother's unhappiness also points to the

30 Henry James, "Daniel Deronda: A Conversation," Selected Literary Criticism, ed. Morris shapiro (New York, 1948), p. 45.

better side of her nature, which only needs awakening by some beneficial influence.

To illustrate the evils of egoism, George Eliot paints Gwendolen one-sidedly. "What else does she do, think feel besides explicitly egoism?"[31] Her creator is merciless in her condemnation: even Gwendolen's fierce maidenhood stems from the feeling that love involves submission to another's will. " 'I shall never love anybody. I can't love people. I hate them' " (p. 59), she tells her mother.

Gwendolen is by no means corrupt; she still possesses a kind of innocence, but the "iridescence of her character" (p. 28) makes her a psychological problem. A girlish egoism which craves the centre of attention meets a far deadlier egoism in Grandcourt. Roused from her dream world by the reality of marriage, she has nothing to cling to. She discovers that evil exists in the real world, and since it is an evil she cannot vanquish, she has to acknowledge the inadequacy of her own will.[32]

31 William C. Brownell, Victorian Prose Masters (New York, 1901), p. 114.
See Bullett, p. 182: "Gwendolen's selfishness . . . /is/ insisted on to the total exclusion of any other human quality."

32 Thale, p. 132.

Gwendolen resolves that no one will know her humiliation -- circumstances partly force her to break her promise to Lydia Glasher and marry Grandcourt -- or that she will give way to resentment. She begins to fear herself; from childhood, she has been haunted by a superstitious fear of a dead face. In her desire to escape Grandcourt, this dread becomes a death-wish, and, eventually, a reality.

Self-hatred and misery drive her to Daniel, whose worth she instantly recognizes and whose approval she suddenly discovers she needs. Since the time he disapproved of her gambling, his words have touched her conscience, and she realizes that she cannot ignore him in spite of herself. She appoints him as her mentor,[33] but the role is not an unusual one for Daniel. " 'You are always looking tenderly at the women and talking to them in a Jesuitical role' " (p. 269), chids Sir Hugo. His enormous compassion and ready sympathy are well-prepared for by George Eliot.

Gwendolen confesses her murderous thoughts to him:

> 'Suppose I had gambled again; . . . what should you have thought of me? . . . You wanted me not to do that -- not to make my gain out of another's loss . . . -- and I have done a great deal worse. . . . What should you do if you were like me?' (pp. 334-335)

[33] Compare Henry James's remark that the function of Daniel was to have Gwendolen fall in love with him. (p. 41)

Daniel answers her in imperatives.

'The refuge you are needing from personal trouble is the higher, the religious life.' (p. 340)

. . . . . .

'Look on other lives besides your own. See what their troubles are, and how they are borne. . . .

Try to care about something . . . besides /self/ gratification.' (p. 335)

. . . . . .

'Turn your fear into a safeguard. Keep your dread fixed on the idea of increasing that remorse which is so bitter to you. . . .

Try to take hold of your sensibility, and use it as if it were a faculty like vision.' (pp. 340-341)

His words become her catchphrases, but in a social world where life is "like a dance set beforehand" (p. 399), she discovers how difficult it is to put his advice into practice. Gwendolen is not winning now; her marriage is "all a part of that new gambling in which the losing was not simply a minus, but a terrible plus that had never entered into her reckoning" (p. 450). When she watches Grandcourt drown, she thinks all her innermost hopes are realized.

'I saw him sink, and my heart gave a leap as if it were going out of me. I think I did not move. I kept my hands tight. It was long enough for me to be glad. . . . 'The rope!' he called out in a voice -- not his own. . . . I stooped for the rope . . . I felt sure he would come back . . . and I dreaded him. . . . There he was again -- his face above the water -- and he cried again -- and I held my hand, and my heart said, 'Die!' -- and he sank.' (p. 524)

Remorse follows her willful act; she jumps into the water to try and save him. Later, when speaking to Daniel,

she accuses herself of murdering Grandcourt. This is the beginning of her salvation; the admittance of an evil in having contributed to her husband's death. For the first time, she realizes the terrible consequences of her actions. She believes now that the suffering of her marriage and widowhood has given her an invaluable lesson, but Daniel's explanation of his mission forces her to recognize her narrower horizons. "She was for the first time being dislodged from her supremacy in her own world, and getting a sense that her horizon was but a dipping onward of an existence with which her own was revolving" (p. 607). When she learns, too, that Daniel loves Mirah, she has only one consoling thought in her isolation. " 'I said . . . I said . . . it should be better . . . better with me . ... for having known you' " (p. 608), she whispers brokenly.

Gwendolen is redeemed, yet the open ending points to her difficult future. She is left with her fears for a safeguard and her sensibility for a vision. This, however, is the only ending to her story; in a more complex society (the novel was written in 1876) her path will be arduous. Although there is a sense of a new beginning, she is still incomplete.

Daniel acts as mentor and prophet, devoted both to the needs of the individual and the general well-being, but this dual role "dehumanizes" him. Meliorism becomes too much the theory and not enough the personal way of life in this book. Daniel's efforts on behalf of the Jews undoubtedly benefit the community more than the individual.[34] As the ideal of empathy and compassion, he loses effect as a moral example to Gwendolen. His ideas are always beyond her reach; he talks like the propagandist he is, pointing to a future moral improvement; but, as a mentor, he fails to convince her, now, on her level, how she can struggle upwards to his larger vision.

Then, too, there is the final irony of their relationship. "Their two lots had come in contact, hers narrowly personal, his charged with far-reaching sensibilities" (p. 467). They cross briefly and move on in opposite directions; she to tragic isolation, he to an altruistic mission. Daniel can only help her for a while. When he is restored to his people, he begins to find his responsibility irksome -- he feels a "self-martyring pity" (p. 561) for her -- and longs to fulfill his wider calling. "His larger aims appear to be

34 Walter Naumann, "The Architecture of George Eliot's Novels," Modern Language Quarterly, IX (1948), 43.

bedevilled by his relationship with Gwendolen until the end of the novel when it is precisely his contact with her supreme suffering that makes real for him the suffering of the Jews and precipitates him into his public role."[35] In the process of "relating everything to everything else," Daniel's role as mentor is sacrificed for that of prophet. The Jewish theme imposes an unnatural restriction upon his attraction for Gwendolen, for in George Eliot's scheme of things the personal relationship must give way to altruism.

An intellectual awareness that altruism is necessary to bring about social improvement is George Eliot's idea of the good life. This can only be accomplished, however, by replacing selfishness with sympathy on the personal level. The road from self-regard to social love is never easy, but she created her blameless hero, Daniel, to show that it is possible. He has all the qualities she admires: the personal concern and the wider vision; compassion and empathy; an adult mind and mature judgement; and, above all, a sense of duty to his fellow.

Savonarola, Felix, and Daniel, too, have a serious flaw. As prophets, they hope to effect social amelioration

35 David R. Carroll, "Felix Holt: Society as Protagonist," Nineteenth-Century Fiction, XVII (1962), 238.

through moral inspiration, but, in so doing, neglect, to a certain extent, the personal struggle to achieve this goal. Daniel's public role throws the mentor-hero and heroine relationship off balance, and George Eliot's heavy theme destroys him as a character. Gwendolen, left in a bleak position with a few inspiring words to guide her, is forsaken by her mentor at the most difficult time of her life. George Eliot implies, of course, that she has no further need of him; his work is done. Still, there is no sense of moral victory as there is with Felix and Esther or Mary and Fred Vincy. Possibly George Eliot's growing realization that there is no ideal mentor is reflected here. No human being can stand in such relation to another throughout life; the guide changes with the need.[36]

The Philip-Maggie relationship is too immature to come under this failing, and Savonarola is handicapped by his historical position and an unsatisfactory relationship with Romola. Like Daniel, her thrust into public life is not entirely convincing. Felix, alone, learns the discrepancy between theory and application. He realizes he can do more good in helping the few around him. Esther answers to the

[36] Deakin, p. 136.

rein because she is susceptible to a masterful hand, even if there is a suspicion of complacency about her redemption. She makes the correct decision out of love, but is quite self-satisfied for doing so. Their life together, dedicated to the service of others, however, is credible.

The intellectual mentors have greater sophistication than their clerical or rural brothers. They are involved with the difficulty of uniting the intellect with emotional needs. George Eliot was well aware that personal salvation depended upon such a reconciliation. Her heroines struggle, under the mentors' influence, to meet the demands of their own natures and her ethical principles.

Her characters all have a flaw through which they can be reached. Although Romola rejects her mentor's egoism, Savonarola satisfied her emotional needs with the ideal of service to the needy. The opportune village assures her moral triumph. Esther's disillusionment is effected by a contrast to Felix's superior qualities. She realizes that the material things in life are not intellectually satisfying. Gwendolen's will is curbed by an encounter with a stronger will and her recognition of the harm she can cause others. Taken together, the heroines share with their mentors a

sense of their littleness in the world beyond themselves, an understanding of the interdependence of human life, and a willingness to strive towards a nobler way of life.

Conclusion

George Eliot's search for a morally-rewarding life is based on her concern for the moral catastrophe that might follow the changes wrought by science, Biblical criticism and the growth of socialism. The very world she felt approaching is the one we fear today -- an atheistic, amoral society. The waning of religious convictions made her realize that man needed some other form of worship, that conventional faith was not morally powerful enough to help him amidst a steadily darkening world. Her "religion of humanity" is no more than this desire to find a substitute for religion. Her faith for the future becomes a faith in man; the church is humanity; God, the ideal goodness in man; her mentor, the priest or rabbi.

George Eliot was not one to discard conventional religion; the church has its integral role in society. For those without her strong idealism, it is a necessary part of their lives. What she despised, however, was its hypocrisy; what she admired was its ability to produce the Dinahs, the Tryans, and the Savonarolas -- people interested in improving the lot of mankind. These are the members of the true church -- the only one that matters to George Eliot -- the church of

humanity, where the best of man is worshipped and the noblest of acts inspired. "There is one comprehensive Church whose fellowship consists in the desire to purify and ennoble man's life, and where the best members of all narrower churches may call themselves brother and sister in spite of differences" (Letters, VI, 89).

She offers nothing practical except the Christian message of traditional service to the family and community. The spirit of Christ pervades her work. His sacrifice and love are the symbols by which man must live and to which he must aspire. The sense of moral duty -- a concern for others' needs beyond one's own -- is the standard; gradual moral improvement brought about through accumulated human goodness is the goal.

Her extensive use of the mentor as a character reflects her attempt to demonstrate her thesis. Two principles become apparent: the mentor himself must have the essential qualities of self-discipline, compassion, and a sense of duty; and his success depends upon the ability to teach self-renunciation for the good of humanity, and to show the value of the selfless life and the moral goodness that comes from it, both to oneself and others.

Man is selfish and unaware of his debt to society, but he can realize his shortcomings through the intervention of the mentor. George Eliot believed in the creation of an ideal individual, for character is malleable and man educable. "The truest knowledge of living" (Letters, VI, 99) can be obtained through the union of the emotions with the intellect. The pitting of the individual will against that of society produces suffering, which, in turn, leads to salvation. For George Eliot, a faith in "the working-out of higher possibilities than . . . any . . . church has presented" is the answer.

> Those who have the strength to wait and endure are bound to accept no formula which their whole souls -- their intellect as well as their emotions -- do not embrace with entire reverence. The highest 'calling and election' is to do without opium and live through all our pain with clear-eyed endurance. (Letters, III, 366)

To live without opium is to see reality without illusions and to accept one's lot in society, to live without inexperienced idealism (Romola), romantic literature (Esther), daydreams (Hetty and Gwendolen), even alcohol (Janet). George Eliot's redeemed character knows why he does what he does and the probable effect of his actions upon others; he understands the influence of habit and circumstance upon his life and the necessity for moral responsibility.

George Eliot began her search for the ideal mentor in the church. The clerics, however, proved to lack moral responsibility and to sacrifice the individual to the laws of conformity. Social consciousness becomes stifled, and the clerics' faith is too weak to inspire dutiful action. Tryan is the best qualified because of his self-discipline and knowledge of having hurt another, but his personality is weak. Dinah is simply not possible as a human being. As practical Christians, Kenn is commendable for his social awareness; Farebrother for his charity; both, however, lack moral inspiration.

The rural mentors are valued for their instinctive benevolence and common-sensical attitude towards life. Each offers a social good, which, when taken collectively, illustrate the best that is in man. Dolly manifests the power of compassion; Bartle, the realization that all men are bound by society and must be aware of their responsibility; Bob, the ideal qualities of the rustic -- generosity, kindness, simplicity and independence; Mary, true self-knowledge without illusion; and Caleb, the dignity of honest labour for the social good. These people are unfortunately restricted in their influence by their social class and inferior intellect. Bob and The Garths are exemplary rustics; the former for his

laudatory virtues and the Garths for their clear-eyed endurance, but, again, they are limited by their type.

The working-class mentors reflect George Eliot's Wordsworthian treatment of the peasant. Partly because of her nostalgia for provincial life, her genuine affection for the lower classes, the backbone of the nation, and her didactic attempt to win recognition of their virtues, she handles the realistic details of their lives with sympathy and understanding and a touch of the inevitable Victorian sentimentalism. They function, too, as moral examples to the other classes: the solid reliability of Caleb, the idyllic goodness of Bob, and the climatic gesture of all, Felix's renunciation of worldly ambition to aid the working man.

The intellectual mentors are her most important group; in reality, her heroes and hope for humanity. It is their responsibility to redirect the egotistical nature outward, to replace selfishness with sympathy and compassion. Philip and Savonarola demonstrate two valuable aspects of her theory; the need for self-knowledge before renunciation is possible, and the power of moral inspiration; but it is Felix and Daniel, who remain as her true heroes. She saw no reason why such characters could not exist in real life, but

the masterful Felix, who, at least, has a personality, and the ethereal Daniel fail artistically under the weight of her ideology.

George Eliot sets them up as ideal men to be worshipped and emulated by her heroines. Since woman's duty lies in the realm of the affections, it is imperative that she realize the virtue of love, both within the family and the community. That is why the women mentors -- Dinah, Dolly, and Mrs. Cadwallader -- dramatize the ennobling power of love, although Mrs. Cadwallader's influence is governed more by good intentions than love. Hetty and Silas are redeemed by love alone. There is no necessity for these mentors to be didactic: George Eliot insisted that her heroines' value lay in their compassionate sympathy -- values which must be shown them by the mentor-hero.

The function of the mentor must be passed on. It can only be taken up for a time by one person and then laid down. When the next crisis comes, the same mentor may not suffice; a new guide must be chosen or one must go the way alone. This, too, is borne out in the novels. Fred Vincy has three mentors -- a cleric and two rustics -- each satisfying different needs. Maggie, unfortunately, benefits little

from either Bob or Philip. Perhaps Stephen would have been more effective, but then his character is unsuitable as a mentor. Gwendolen is thrown into an unfortunate marriage by her clerical mentor, bullied by Daniel, and left to face reality alone.

There is no ideal guide and no final answer, but the need for moral improvement never ends. The change of values that came with increasing materialism revealed this, and George Eliot's mentors appear to speak directly to those most at fault -- the middle class.

The growing despondency towards the end of her productive years and a "consciousness tending more and more to consist in memories of error and imperfection rather than in a strengthening sense of achievement" (Letters, IV, 300) did not prevent her from struggling to avoid a tragic conclusion. A product of her age, she was "the very last of the yea-sayers."[1]

[1] Thale, p. 18.

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