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I. THE DOCTRINE OF INSPIRATION AS AFFECTED
BY THE ESSENTIAL RELATION BETWEEN
THOUGHT AND LANGUAGE.

Do we think in words? Do we think only in words? Do we always when we engage in thought employ for that purpose language? Is it possible to think fruitfully, to think to any advantage, to think at all in any other way? On the assumption that one can think without words, is it possible to express, even to one's self, to formulate,—to communicate one's thoughts, *i. e.*, convey them intelligibly to others,—through any other medium? Must there not be some medium or vehicle for every form whatever of thought-expression; and must or must not that medium be language?

Some of these and kindred questions are not merely of curious interest, but also of profound significance and consequence, and have accordingly not only awakened the attention and occasioned and stimulated the researches of the great body of philologists and logicians, and the specialists in physiology proper, and of course those in mental physiology and what is now known as physiological psychology, but have also occupied the minds of some of the wisest philosophers and greatest intellects the world has ever seen. But what is still more to the purpose at present, the answers given to some of these questions have an incidental bearing on the inquiry as to the fact and extent of an infallible inspiration.

It will be the aim of this essay to indicate and touch upon the main problems which arise from a consideration of the more important of the interrogatories just referred to, and then to point

VI. GEORGE ELIOT.

HER PORTRAYAL OF RELIGIOUS CHARACTERS.

No one can read the writings of George Eliot without being struck with the frequently recurring types of religious character in her novels. Not only in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, where the title would lead us to expect them, but scattered all through her writings, especially those of her earlier years, her use of the religious type of character is as distinctive an element in her work as the rare skill which she displays in the analysis of motive and purpose. Her greatness as a novelist lies in her clear insight into human nature, and her marvellous fidelity in portraying that nature without exaggeration or distortion.

She has a passion for unfolding the gradual development of some particular feature in a character, which finally becomes the dominant trait in that soul. At first, a mere tendency, half-formed and wavering, it gathers strength as it is swayed by outward circumstances, until it assumes the place of a fixed habit, which enlarges and gains portentous strength, until, like some overshadowing fate, it hurries away at its own will the soul now blind and unresisting.

If we compare George Eliot with two other recent masters of fiction, Dickens and Thackeray, as to the presence of this religious motive in their works, we will see how large a place it occupies with her.

There is very little religion in Thackeray's novels—still less in those of Dickens. The latter caricatures, now and then, some vulgar religious pretender, or uses hypocrisy as a darker shade with which to blacken some odious character. But the portrayal of a deep, earnest, religious nature, swayed by tempests of passion, and, at times, well-nigh overthrown by human frailty, was far beyond his power. It was not in the soul of the man, and it could not, therefore, come out of him. Take his kindly, charitable people, and they are all secondary and shadowy personages

with little flesh and blood, as compared with his odd, or his criminal characters.

Thackeray has little place in his novels for the religious sentiment. His nobler characters, like Henry Esmond and Colonel Newcome, are somewhat stiff and stately; but we do not see down into the depth of their souls, and sympathize with their struggles against weakness and evil. Thackeray's sphere of observation is the "Vanity Fair" of this world. Would you see its hollowness exposed, its false pretences shown up, its foibles and follies laid bare to all eyes, you have only to follow the guidance of this master of satire. Your own shoulders may wince at times under the stroke of his cutting lash, but we cannot deny that he lets in a flood of light on all the inner springs of modern fashionable life. But are there many of Thackeray's women whom we can heartily respect or love? Does he not seem to treat the best of them with a pitying fondness, as if, after all, they were poor, weak, creatures from whom no strength of character could be expected?

Wonderful as he is in his knowlege of the world, and powerful as a preacher against shams, he is more an iconoclast than a hero-worshipper, and a better expounder of society as an organized whole than of the secret windings of one humble human heart.

Dickens has little skill in depicting mixed characters. He rarely attempts to analyse the growth of some trait, at first indifferent in its moral character, but deteriorating gradually as it trends toward the base and selfish side of our nature. His characters come on the stage duly labelled, classified, and consistent all through with a fixed type. They are personified virtues, vices, oddities or sentiments, but that is all. Take them as you will, they are like the prophet's figs, the good, very good, and the naughty, very naughty. Pecksniff is a walking embodiment of hypocrisy, Mark Tapley is cheerfulness in human form, Agnes is always prim, pure and perfect, Micawber always gushing and expectant, and Uriah Heep always crawling and deceitful. When you once know these people, you can rely with certainty on what they will do under all circumstances.

Thackeray stops as he pulls the strings of his puppets to moralize on their follies. Perhaps there is too much of this

preaching, if we judge him merely as an artist. But he means to be more than an artist, and does not hesitate to set aside many of the so-called canons of art. He writes with a purpose and a meaning, and if you are too dull to apprehend it he will come from behind the scenes to impress it on you.

George Eliot does very little of this preaching, except in brief paragraphs which seem more like comments on actual events than lessons which her characters are designed to bring out. The lesson she has to teach is impressed by the development of her characters, and they become such real flesh and blood creatures to us, that we find it quite natural to ponder on their destiny or their influence. And among the varied types of human beings, those of a decided religious character seem to have the greatest interest for her. Religious motives and feelings are recognized by her as among the most powerful forces which act upon the character, and in all fiction no finer studies of these types are to be found. Take her portraits of Dinah, of Seth and Adam Bede, of Savonarola and his power over Romola, or the spiritual aspirations of Dorothea Brooke, as contrasted with the one-sided, dry, intellectual creed of Casaubon, or the half-unconscious hypocrisy of Bulstrode; and how true to life they all are! How clearly has she looked into some of the deepest recesses of the human heart! It is said that her books are disappointing and dreary, that her characters break down in the most unexpected places, and that they are not consistent with their own high ideals.

But in this is to be found their consistency with actual life. Who of us is always consistent with his own ideal? Who does not learn from life this very lesson of disappointment, arising from our perception of sadly mixed motives in those persons in whom we have believed most fully? It is much the same picture that Thackeray sets before us, but painted in somewhat different colors, and lit up by another atmosphere.

The interest which George Eliot takes in religious types of character seems to find its best explanation in the fact that she herself possessed a deeply religious nature; while her prevailing tone of sadness and even despondency, in her later books, may be owing to the fact that her religious nature craved nourishment which

it never received, because her intellect was over-clouded by doubt. And perhaps the break-down in her characters, and their failure to realize their own high ideals, may be an echo out of her own life, caused by the step which she took in her relation to George Henry Lewes.

George Eliot, or rather Miss Evans, had a deep, earnest, religious nature. There was a spirituality in her which made her turn, even in her unbelief, to the contemplation of spiritual things. She was much more truly religious than some whose easy Christianity never takes any hold upon their nature, and whose shallow and selfish lives declare that no true idea of religion has ever dawned upon their minds. We can but feel a deep sympathy with a nature so deep, so earnest, and so unsatisfied as hers, and our judgment of her life-work is full of the wish that she might have had a clearer light upon her earthly path. In her treatment of religion there is no shade of irreverence. She does, indeed, disclose the ugliness of hypocrisy, and show how far a soul may fall below the standard which it seeks to attain; but there *is* a standard which she respects, although she had lost her faith in the great motives which lead to seeking it.

Those of her characters who are represented as striving after the right and the true, are among the noblest and purest forms in literature. No shadow of doubt in their sincerity, no sneer at human inconsistency, no attempt to throw discredit on their religion by their failure to embody it in perfection, is to be detected in her writings. They may fail, and *do* fail often; but she does not say with a sneer, "See! this is what must be expected from those who dream of the impossible." Rather does she mourn, with the sorrow of a generous nature, over that weakness of humanity which makes these failures inevitable.

There was a time in Miss Evans' history when she was distinctively and entirely Christian. But she reached that stage of mental development when the intellect discovers that there are doubts and difficulties in the way of faith. This crisis is not inevitably followed by unbelief, but when the mental struggle is over our faith is stronger; for now we believe, not through ignorance of the difficulties of belief, but from a knowledge of the greater difficulties of unbelief.

Many an earnest Christian has had this same struggle to encounter, and it has come upon some who afterwards have been most active and sincere in their defence of religious truth. But Miss Evans seems to have lacked, just at this time, some friend intellectually strong enough to meet her doubts honestly, and able to convince her of their futility. Those who defended her former faith used arguments which she could but feel to be puerile, while those to whom she turned for light were seeking some new and better way. These later friends directed her attention to the freshest and most formidable school of German criticism. She applied herself to the translation of Strauss' *Life of Jesus*, and this was followed by a translation of Feuerbach's *Essence of Christianity*. This was tough spiritual meat for a young maiden, not long out of her teens. To her active and gifted mind there was a great attraction in this contact with men of learning and powerful intellect, although, under their withering touch, all the fair blossoms of faith seemed to droop and decay. The very title of the *Positive Philosophy* had a charm for her earnest nature. Is it any wonder, that with Strauss apparently resolving the whole story of the founder of Christianity into a slender background of history, with a surrounding atmosphere of clouds and myths and imaginative coloring; while on the other hand the Positivists announced that they had touched bottom in metaphysical speculation—is it any wonder that she should turn from myth and shadow, as she supposed, to substance and reality?

Yet many earnest seekers after religious truth have gone as far and farther than she did then, and yet returned to the stand-point of simple faith. Charles Kingsley was thus "perplexed in faith and pure in deeds," for a long time; and we find abundant evidence of the questioning spirit of the age in Alfred Tennyson.

Hand in hand with this loss of faith went that error in life, arising from her relation to George Henry Lewes. Upon this delicate subject let us speak honestly and plainly. It was not an indifferent action, and while we may hesitate to lay to her charge any conscious wrong-doing in the matter, it is hard to believe that she did not sin against her own better judgment and her deeper convictions. However we admire her genius and respect her

ethical teaching, we must always be perplexed and disappointed by this act. If she was free of any evil in intention and conscience, we cannot deny that it was anomalous and illegal. Lewes had a wife living, from whom it was impossible to obtain a divorce, and any legal marriage with Miss Evans was out of the question. Yet he offered to her what he was pleased to call marriage, and she, after learning all the facts, accepted the proposal. Some sort of a ceremony was gone through with, which, we are told, satisfied her conscience, and she was ever afterward, until her second marriage, known by courtesy as "Mrs. Lewes." No wonder that this step saddened and shocked her former friends. Is marriage a subject to be left entirely to the individual conscience, however enlightened? Leaving out of consideration the precepts of Christ and the laws based directly on them, which she would claim had lost their significance for her, had she a right to set herself in defiance of the laws of the state, and the strong, unanimous opinion of the vast majority of her fellow-men?

It is a dangerous precedent for a great genius to claim exemption from those laws which control the lives of less highly gifted men and women. Those who set themselves up as teachers of mankind, whether openly claiming such a title or not, should take heed to their own course, and walk as they direct others.

There was one great soul in the past, a quaint, homely, gifted teacher of mankind, who has left an enduring example of the reverence felt by the highest natures for the majesty of law.

In that scene, immortalized by the genius of Plato, where Socrates, condemned to an unjust death, is wakened at the early dawn by his friend Crito, with the offer of an escape from his doom, the philosopher rejects the offer on the ground that he cannot violate the laws of his city simply because they turn now, even though unjustly, against himself. He who believed so firmly in the voice of God speaking in his own breast, yet seems to see the laws embodied before him in the prison, and to hear them pleading with him not to lessen their authority by his own transgression. How that earnest voice, through all the centuries, has rung out of the darkness of that prison, nerving the soul to tread unflinching and uncomplaining the rugged path of duty! Nay, let us hear George Eliot herself on this point:

“Where is the rebel’s right for you alone?
 Noble rebellion lifts a common load;
 But what is he who flings his own load off,
 And leaves his fellows toiling?
 Say, rather, the deserter’s!”

“It is certainly curious,” says Miss Blind in her little book on *George Eliot*, “that the woman who had in her own life followed such an independent course, severing herself in many ways from her past with all its traditional sanctities, should yet so often inculcate the very opposite teaching in her works; should inculcate an almost slavish adherence to whatever beliefs, surroundings, and family ties a human being may be born to.” But is this so strange? Is not this deliberate utterance of an honest woman the real judgment of her true and better self? Is it not significant that this very subject of marriage should be treated in so serious and thoughtful a strain in all her works? How clearly she brings out the truth that a mistake here may be the warping of a whole life! Romola and Tito, Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon, Adam in his love for the shallow little Hetty, Lydgate and Rosamond Vincy are all types of ill-assorted couples; while in *Middlemarch* the contrast between Mary Garth’s fine influence over Fred Vincy sets off his pretty selfish sister’s ruin of her gifted husband. And what abject misery does Gwendolen bring on herself by her match deliberately made for wealth and luxury!

Not one hint is ever given in George Eliot’s books that it is well or wise or justifiable in man or woman to despise the lowliest duty which is laid on them by our common lot. Reverence for truth, loyalty to duty, continuance in the humble path of order, these are the lessons most frequently inculcated. And what are we to think of her second and speedy marriage to Mr. Cross, if her whole heart had been laid in the grave with Lewes? A woman of sixty is not apt to be hurried by the fickleness and ardor of youth into such a connection; and in *this* case, all the outward sanctities of marriage were observed.

Another prominent feature in George Eliot’s novels brings out her clinging womanly nature. Her characters are often represented as seeking some one on whom they may lean for help and guidance. Deronda becomes “an embodied conscience” to Gwendolen Har-

court; Dorothea turns to Mr. Casaubon because she thinks his great intellect will direct her spiritual aspirations; Dinah brings strength to poor weak Hetty in her distress; and Romola, after discovering her husband's baseness, seeks a director in Savonarola. But side by side with this longing for help, we find taughth the weakness of all the sources from which that help is sought. One after another these helpers fail and disappoint the soul that leans upon them. Either their own weakness and inefficiency bring fresh sorrow to the trusting heart, or the circumstances of life interpose some barrier which keeps them forever apart. It is a sad lesson, a dreary outlook, if this were truly all of life. Culture, philosophy, intellect, and genius—what do they avail in the presence of those darker shadows which must fall at times upon every human soul!

There is one figure, patient in suffering, and perfect in obedience, who moves in the clear light of truth, across the stage of human history. To Him, many hearts who have found their earthly idols but clay, their earthly props but broken reeds, have turned in the hour of disappointment for help and consolation.

In Ary Scheffer's great picture, the weary and suffering souls of earth are grouped around that gracious figure. The slave lifts his shackled hands in supplication, the mother lays her dead baby at his feet, the helpless turn their pleading gaze to him, and the dying smile as the light of his countenance irradiates the dark valley. Yet, as of old, even so now is it true, that in that little company, not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty are found. While the ignorant and the oppressed turn to him for consolation; while the weak and obscure rest on his arm, too often some of the gifted sons and daughters of mankind pursue the flickering *ignis fatuus* which guides them no whither, and sheds not one fitful gleam of light upon the sullen stream of death.

Out of the heart of revelation echoes the sad voice of the doubter who rings his perpetual refrain over all the coveted objects of human life: "The thing that hath been it is that which shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun. * * * For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow!"

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