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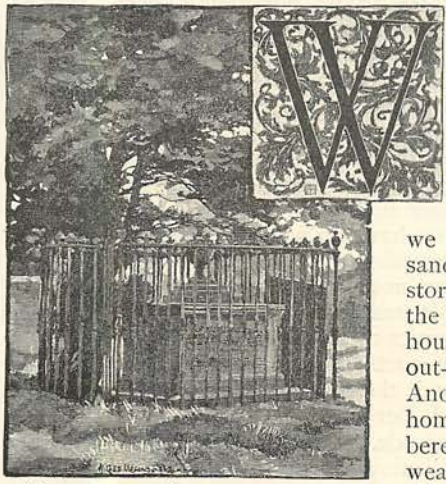
GEORGE ELIOT'S COUNTY.



"MILLY'S GRAVE," IN CHILVERS COTON CHURCHYARD.

WHERE can one get a more attractive idea of rural life than in a day's drive through what has been called "The Elizabethan side of Warwickshire?" We go along quiet roads beneath overshadowing elms, meeting here and there a heavy-wheeled wagon with its four massive horses,—the load piled up so high that the boughs snatch a passing toll of sweet new-made hay or golden wheat-ears. Then we come to a village clustering round its olive-green sandstone church, with square tower and rows of clerestory windows. The rectory with its bright garden, the staring new red-brick school, a substantial farmhouse or two with well-filled rick-yard and long-roofed out-buildings, speaking of solid ease and prosperity. And all about these more important dwellings, the homes of the poorer neighbors, old cottages black-timbered and white-paneled, or of ancient red brick that weather and time have toned with exquisite gradations of color — gray, pink, purple, yellow — streaked and splashed with green and brown lichen; their roofs of dark tiles or warm thatch, a study in themselves for a painter, cushioned with rich moss that glows like lumps of emerald in the sun. To quote the words of our great Warwickshire novelist, whose connection with this county it is my object to trace:

> "There was the pleasant tinkle of the blacksmith's anvil, the patient cart-horses waiting at his door; the basket-maker peeling his willow wands in the sunshine; the wheelwright putting the last touch to a blue cart with red wheels; here and there a cottage with bright, transparent windows showing pots full of blooming balsams or geraniums, and little gardens in front all double daisies or dark wallflowers; at the well, clean and comely women carrying yoked buckets, and towards the free-school small Britons dawdling on, and handling their marbles in the pockets of unpatched corduroys adorned with brass buttons." *(Felix Holt.)*

Then on again we go through deep lanes where the red sandstone peeps out below the high hedge; past wide-stretching woods where the ring of the woodman's axe hardly disturbs the "choir invisible" singing thanksgivings for sun and summer in the tree-tops above. The soft brown winter carpet of leaves gives place in spring to beds of pale primroses, or a May snowstorm of white-starred anemones; or where the tree-shadows lie deep, a cloud of heaven's own blue rests on the sprouting fern — a sheet of wild hyacinths.

Then we turn into one of the great high-roads, with its generous strip of green turf on either side, that tells of a hunting county and thought for horses' feet. And it leads us past the old posting inns, with small-paned bay-windows, and signs hanging from curiously wrought-iron supports; past sunny country houses where we catch a glimpse of young men and maidens playing tennis on the well-kept lawns; past noble parks where nodding antlers rise from the bracken, and the spotted deer bound away towards the great Elizabethan house,

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that, like Charlecote, or Compton Winyates, or Broughton Castle, lies behind guardian avenues of elm and oak and lime. And then we see the Avon winding through its flat meadows, with "long lines of bushy willows marking the water-courses"; while over the far-away woods rises tower or spire of Warwick, or Coventry, or Stratford.

If our journey takes us away from these well-known spots, we travel along through wide-stretching pasture lands, where the white-faced Hereford cattle graze lazily, fattening themselves on the rich rank grass. They are kept from straying by enormous bull-finches — not birds, gentle reader, with glossy black heads and piping voices, but hawthorn hedge-rows twelve or fourteen feet high and half a dozen feet through. As we read in that exquisite introductory chapter to "Felix Holt":

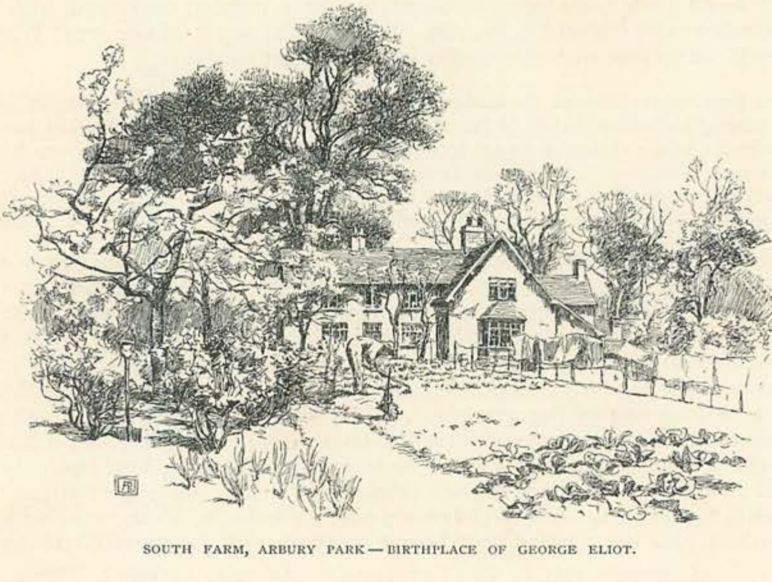
> "It was worth the journey only to see those hedgerows, the liberal homes of unmarketable beauty, of the purple-blossomed ruby-berried nightshade, of the wild convolvulus climbing and spreading in tendrilled strength till it made a great curtain of pale-green hearts and white trumpets; of the many-tubed honeysuckle which, in its most delicate fragrance, hid a charm more subtle and penetrating than beauty. Even if it were winter the hedgerows showed their coral, the scarlet haws, the deep crimson hips, with lingering brown leaves to make a resting-place for the jewels of the hoar-frost."

And so we climb one of the isolated hills which rise out of the central plain — the Folden — like church-crowned islands in a green sea. We rest in a quiet vicarage, and look out of the windows across the garden gay with flowers, over the great pastures dotted with sheep and cattle, down to the canal that makes a long bend round the spinney where a fox is always found, the silver water gleaming against the black-green foliage of the wood. And then the eye is carried away and away over endless interlacing lines of green tree-tops dividing the broad grass fields till they melt into one soft, harmonious, formless whole in the plain of Warwickshire, and the plain melts into the Malvern Hills, forty miles off, and the hills melt into the hazy sky.

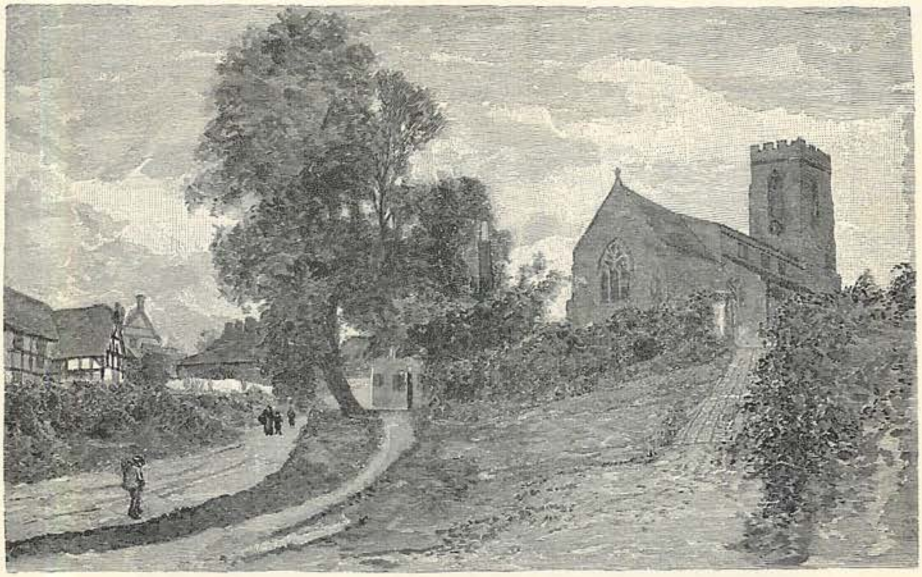
It is a fair and peaceful scene as cloud-shadows flicker across the broad vale — one that you could find nowhere save in the heart "of what we are pleased to call Merry England." No wonder that Warwickshire is a little disposed to think itself the center of the universe. No wonder that its inhabitants are content to live on in it from one year's end to another, despite cold clay soils, piercing winds, and cloudy skies, not caring much what becomes of the rest of the world, provided they may go on in the same groove! A harmless failing, on which one looks leniently, for certainly it is a pleasant land, with kindly people in it.

Carping critics have said that our Warwickshire horizon is circumscribed — that the perpetual undulations of field and woodland preclude all breadth and distance in our views, that we have no water in the landscape, that our round-topped elms are monotonous, and last but not least, that we have no hills.

It is true that we have no hills, if by hills our critics mean mountains. It is true that in many parts of the county we cannot see beyond the big wood two or three miles ahead. But who can deny the beauty of those rich woods, remnants of the Forest of Arden — a beauty almost as great in winter as in summer? It is true we have no vast lakes



SOUTH FARM, ARBURY PARK — BIRTHPLACE OF GEORGE ELIOT.



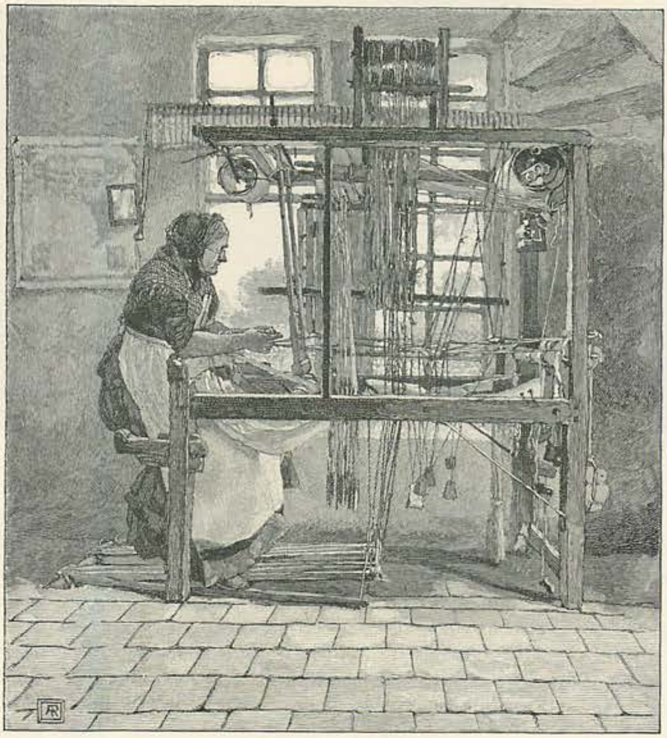
A WARWICKSHIRE VILLAGE.

and few rivers. But if the Avon was enough for Shakspere, should not its tranquil windings between the golden willow-globes satisfy us, the common herd? Our elms are round-headed. But then what elms they are—great forest trees growing in every hedge-row, softening and enriching every line in the landscape with a delicious succession of curves. And where can one find a district so full of sweet repose alike to eye and mind as ours—a perfect type of solid, settled English comfort?

It is true we have nothing magnificent, sublime, or awful in our midlands. But what scenery could one find better calculated to encourage a contemplative, introspective spirit? If George Eliot had been born and bred among lofty mountains, or by the shore of the cliff-girt sea, should we ever have made acquaintance with "the inimitable party in the 'Rainbow' parlour"—or listened to Mrs. Poyser's quaint wisdom—or cried over the red slippers in Mr. Gilfil's locked-up room—or watched Tom and Maggie catching tench in the Round Pool? We might have had pictures as graphic—as acute—as truthful. We should have had what one critic calls her "breadth of touch." But I venture to think some of "the large-minded, equable spirit of contemplative thought" might have been wanting, had that great genius been trained in more exciting and grander surroundings.

As it is, the freshness, the sparkling brilliancy, the light touch of her earlier books seem to diminish in proportion as she drifts farther from the pure fresh influences and impressions of early country life. And as she is drawn more and more into the maelstrom of modern thought, and the great, hurrying, restless outside world, in those "future years when"—to use her own words—"Adam Bede and all that concerns it may have become a dim portion of the past," we see what one writer calls "the growing tendency to substitute elaborate analysis for direct representation." It is not my intention to venture upon any criticism of the writings of this great author. Far abler hands than mine have undertaken that task. My object is simply to point out what she has done for her own county; and how, as long as the name of George Eliot is remembered, "Loamshire"—its scenery, its people, its ways, its speech—will be identified with all that is noblest, purest, most wholesome, and most beautiful in her writings.

The phases of country life she represents so vividly, so truthfully, are rapidly becoming "a dim portion of the past." As the great factories of Coventry are sweeping away the hand-looms of "Milby," so are board-schools and certificated school-masters sweeping away the rough Warwickshire dialect. But are they not sweeping away more than mere quaintness of speech? It seems to me that among the younger generation we shall look long before we find a Dolly Winthrop, a Mrs. Poyser, a Bartle Massey. We are too hurried nowadays, in the struggle for life that drives us before it like a relentless fate, to venture to be original, or to cultivate that quiet, God-fearing spirit which makes us content with what the English Church catechism calls "that station of life to which it shall please God to call us." Now every one must be as good as his neighbor, "and better too." And this too often leads men not upward to the mountain heights whence a clearer, nobler view is gained, but into the dead-level plain of a hard, sordid struggle after mere wealth, and vulgar envy of all whose success, or culture, or position is greater than their own.



A RIBBON-WEAVER.

Among the elder generation, thank God, some of the old spirit still exists. I know many a farmer's wife who, though proud of her position and at her ease with the finest lady in the land, is not ashamed to be found molding the golden butter with her own hands into half-pound pats for market, or to send savory pork pies and sausages of her own making to the rector's wife at pig-killing time,— when the village resounds with Piggy's dying wail, and small boys with round eyes full of anticipated joys, in the shape of "fry and trotters," indulge their love of the horrible by gloating over the "lovely carkiss." As you sit in one of those cozy farm-house parlors, with the old oak chairs in the chimney-corner, the bright geraniums in the window, that always grow so much better than any raised in a greenhouse, the cackle of geese, and cluck of hens outside scratching amongst the straw of the farm-yard, the low of the cows as they wander slowly into their hovel to be milked, the stamp of the great cart-horses stalking home from plow on the rich red fallows, with a small boy perched proudly on the leader's back — you feel as if you were just reading a living chapter of George Eliot.

You can fancy yourself in good Mrs. Hackit's farm at Shepperton, and imagine the joy of Dickey Barton, the "stocky boy," and "the enlargement of his experience," under her hospitable roof-tree.

> "Every morning he was allowed — being well wrapt up as to his chest by Mrs. Hackit's own hands, but very bare and red as to his legs — to run loose in the cow and poultry yard, to persecute the turkey-cock by satirical imitations of his gobble-gobble, and to put difficult questions to the groom as to the reasons why horses had four legs, and other transcendental matters. Then Mr. Hackit would take Dickey up on horseback when he rode round his farm, and Mrs. Hackit had a large plum cake in cut, ready to meet incidental attacks of hunger." *(Amos Barton.)*

Strolling into the village wood-yard, we almost expect Adam Bede, with gray-headed Gyp at his heels, to come out of the workshop to meet us. And its master, a single-hearted, high-minded man as ever lived, has a capacity for suffering in his square-jawed, "roughly-hewn" face, that makes us fancy he might bear and forbear as did his prototype in Hayslope eighty years ago.

One phase, however, of "Loamshire" life which is found in George Eliot's earlier works, has already vanished from Warwickshire. It was in the natural course of things that it should die out, and a very tender memorial has she raised to what has become a thing of the past forever. Such a man as Mr. Gilfil is an impossibility in this latter half of the nineteenth century. In out-of-the-way parts of our county he may have lingered as long as anywhere. But few corners even of Warwickshire are now deprived of their daily paper, or are ten miles from a telegraph office. And where newspapers and telegrams can penetrate, there Mr. Gilfil, or Mr. Irwine, or even old Mr. Crewe in the brown Brutus wig, cannot long exist. They were a part, and not a wholly desirable part, of the old order of things. They are gone to their rest, and let us leave them in peace. But they did their work in their day; and one can afford now to think with a smile and a sigh of the dear old vicar and

> "his large heap of short sermons rather yellow and worn at the edges, from which he took two every Sunday, securing perfect impartiality by taking them as they came, without reference to topics; and having preached one of these sermons at Shepperton in the morning, he mounted his horse and rode hastily with the other to Knebley, where he officiated in a wonderful little church, . . . with coats of arms in clusters on the lofty roof . . . and the twelve apostles, with their heads very much on one side, holding didactic ribbons, painted in fresco on the walls. . . . Here, in absence of mind to which he was prone, Mr. Gilfil would sometimes forget to take off his spurs before putting on his surplice, and only become aware of the omission by feeling something mysteriously pulling at the skirts of that garment as he stepped into the reading-desk."

Yes! this sort of thing cannot exist nowadays, and one hears people say, "Wretched old pluralist! I cannot take any interest in a man who could lead such a low life — with his gin and water, and his talk like a common farmer."

Ah! be merciful, and be just. Look a little closer at the picture, and you will see that "his slipshod chat and homely manners were but like the weather-stains on a fine old block of marble, allowing you still to see here and there the fineness of the grain and the delicacy of the original tint." For Mr. Gilfil was a gentleman born and bred, as well as a good man and true; and it was only in his later years that the weather-stains of sorrow and solitude partially obscured the fair surface of the marble. But his people — as are all English country folk — were quick to recognize that the Vicar was their superior in birth and breeding. When Mr. Gilfil died, thirty years ago, there was "general sorrow in Shepperton." So his love-story begins — and there is the key-note of the whole picture. Whatever were his failings and shortcomings, he made his people not only love but respect him. Little Corduroys and Bessie Parrot, the flaxen-haired two-shoes, have

> "a well-founded belief in the advantages of diving into the Vicar's pocket. Mr. Gilfil called it his wonderful pocket, because, as he delighted to tell the 'young shavers' and 'two-shoes,'— so he called all little boys and girls,— whenever he put pennies into it, they turned into sugar-plums or gingerbread or some other nice thing. . . . The farmers relished his society particularly, for he could not only smoke his pipe, and season the details of parish affairs with abundance of caustic jokes and proverbs, but, as Mr. Bond often said, no man knew more than the Vicar about the breed of cows and horses. . . . To hear him discussing the respective merits of the Devonshire breed and the short-horns, or the last foolish decision of the magistrates about a pauper, a superficial observer might have seen little difference, beyond his superior shrewdness, between the Vicar and his bucolic parishioners; for it was his habit to approximate his accent and mode of speech to theirs, doubtless because he thought it a mere frustration of the purposes of language to talk of 'shear-hogs' and 'ewes' to men who habitually said 'sharrags' and 'yowes.' Nevertheless, the farmers were perfectly aware of the distinction between them and the parson, and had not at all the less belief in him as a gentleman and a clergyman for his easy speech and familiar manners. . . . And in the most gossiping colloquies with Mr. Gilfil you might have observed that both men and women 'minded their words,' and never became indifferent to his approbation." *(Mr. Gilfil's Love-Story.)*

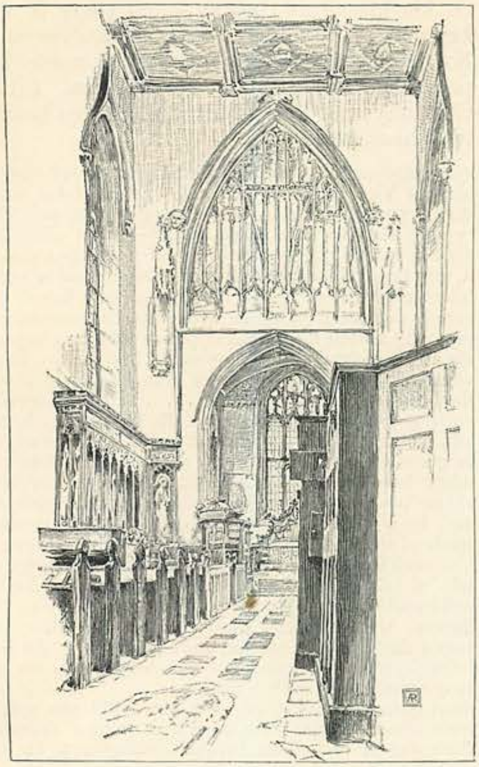
We may be glad that the reality is gone from among us. Yet surely we may look with kindly interest on the figure so tenderly drawn by the light and skillful hand of the great artist,— a part of those unrivaled *genre* pictures which we owe to the genius of George Eliot.

Let us now turn from her books to Warwickshire itself again, and see what were the early influences and surroundings from which our great authoress gained so deep an insight into country life.

Most travelers by the Scotch express only know Nuneaton merely as a stopping-place where, for an exorbitant sum, a cup of scalding and almost undrinkable tea or coffee, and other less hot and more potent refreshments, may be obtained. If business or pleasure led them outside the limits of the station, they would find

> "a dingy town, surrounded by flat fields, lopped elms, and sprawling manufacturing villages, which crept on with their weaving-shops, till they threatened to graft themselves on the town."

That any business of importance could be conducted in the sleepy market-place seems beyond belief. Orchards appear unexpectedly in what one supposes to be the heart of the town; and nearly every street ends in a vista of green fields through which a tiny river crawls sluggishly, having caught the general

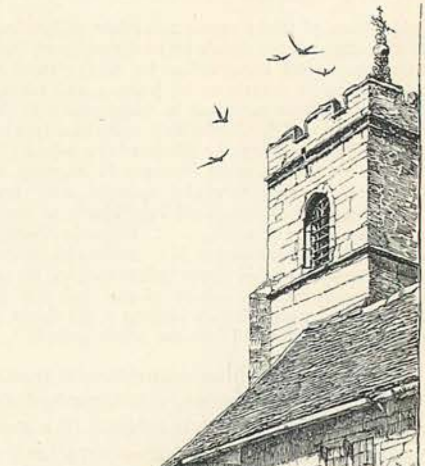


ASTLEY CHURCH, "THE LANTERN OF ARDEN," DESCRIBED IN "MR. GILFIL'S LOVE-STORY."

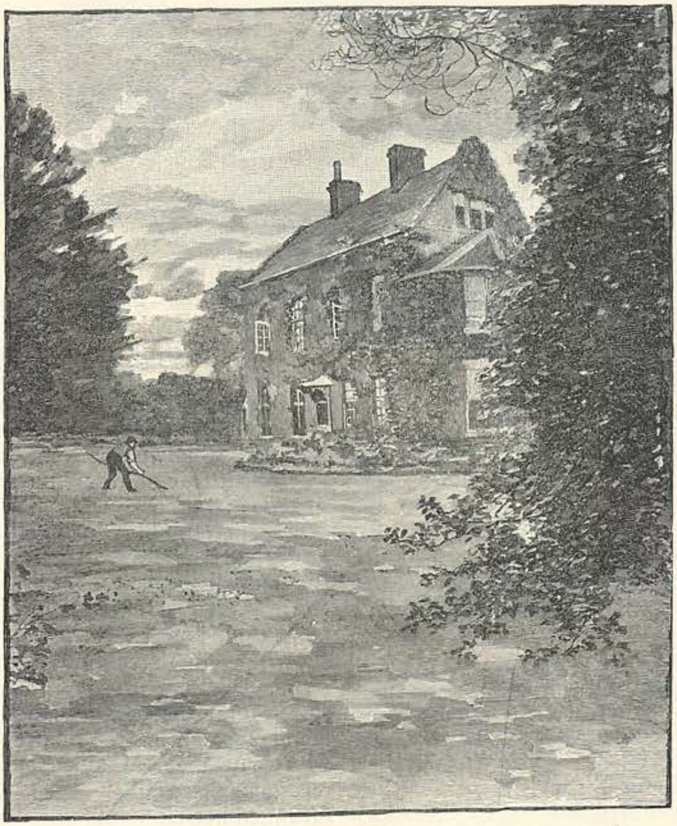
tone of slowness that pervades the whole place. The grand old church, with its magnificent carved oak roof, and the pleasant rectory beside it, stand aloof in dignified seclusion at the end of Church street. Even the "hands" from the great factories, whose rows of wide windows and tall, red-brick chimneys look modern and business-like enough, have little of the dash and vigor of northern factory girls, and move quietly along the street with their red-checked shawls drawn over their heads.

Yet this dingy little town has become immortal! For it is none other than the "Milby," whose history, social, political, and theological, all readers of the "Scenes of Clerical Life" know as well as if they had lived in one of those quiet streets for years. In the great church old Mr. Crewe, the curate, preached his "inaudible sermons"; and at the parsonage hard by, Janet Dempster helped his wife to prepare the famous collation for the Bishop. Half-way up Church street — the Orchard street of the book — stands the house, its door and windows now painted white instead of green, out of which poor Janet was thrust by her drunken husband into the cold night. A few yards below we may see the passage up an archway which led to good Mrs. Pettifer's, where she took refuge. The Bull Inn in the Bridge Way is supposed to be the original of the "Red Lion," where we are introduced to Mr. Dempster "mixing his third glass of brandy and water." And if we follow the street westwards we find ourselves at Stockingford, "a dismal district where you hear the rattle of the hand-loom, and breathe the smoke of coal-pits" — the "Paddiford Common" where Mr. Tryon worked himself to death.

About a mile from the market-place, along a scrambling street of small red-brick houses, broken up here and there by a railway bridge, or an orchard that in May glorifies the town with a cloud of white and pink blossoms, stands Chilvers Coton Church. Here we can easily recognize the substantial stone tower of "Shepperton Church, which looks at you through its intelligent eye, the clock." "The little flight of steps with their wooden rail running up the outer wall and leading to the school-children's gallery" is still intact. The school-children were sliding down the wooden rail when we saw it, as did their parents before them, to the no small detriment of their best clothes. For "Shepperton" when we visited



CHILVERS COTON CHURCH. THE STAIR TO THE CHILDREN'S GALLERY.

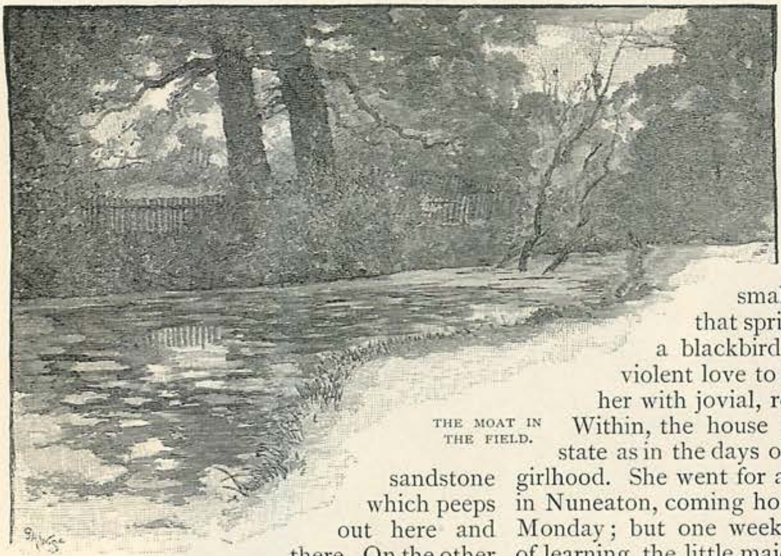


GRIFF HOUSE.

it was "*en fête*." The singing-gallery with its inscriptions had gone the way of such structures; and a goodly congregation was streaming from all the neighborhood to witness the opening of a fine new organ — successor to that one, "not very much out of repair," which in its time had played the requiem of the bassoon and key-bugles of earlier days. The escutcheons still adorn the chancel walls, with "their blood-red hands, their death-heads and cross-bones, their leopard's paws and Maltese crosses." But all traces of the high pews, in which little Mary Anne Evans had to be bribed into quietness by slices of bread and butter, have vanished. In the quiet churchyard outside, one is shown poor "Milly's" grave. Over the wall stands the pretty parsonage where Mr. Gilfil sat in his solitary parlor with its horsehair-covered chairs, with his old setter Ponto. And one can fancy Martha once a quarter, drawing aside the blinds and thick curtains of the oriel-window that overhangs the garden, and letting light and air into "the locked-up chamber in Mr. Gilfil's house."

It was in a hamlet of Chilvers Coton, a green and rural oasis between the looms and factories of Nuneaton and the coal-pits of Bedworth, that "George Eliot" was born. Her father, Mr. Evans, the well-known and highly respected land-agent, moved just before her birth from Staffordshire to South Farm, and six months after to Griff House, in which his son, Mr. Isaac Evans, now lives.

The road to Griff from Chilvers Coton leads up a long hill, over the railroad which has worked such magic changes in "Milby" and its neighborhood since the days of Mr. Gilfil. By the time the crest of the hill is reached, one forgets that looms exist, or that tall chimneys, belching forth evil black smoke, lie within a couple of miles. It is absolute country. Down in the hollow—"Griff Hollows"—made by the unused workings of an old stone quarry, stands an ancient house, now used as Mr. Evans's dairy beside the canal. The gentle cows press round the milking-shed, while an old turkey-gobbler struts with stiffly drooping wings and tail outspread among the humbler barn-door fowls, who seem quite unmoved by his impotent rage. On one side soft green turf and golden furze have half clothed the rugged red



THE MOAT IN THE FIELD.

sandstone which peeps out here and there. On the other the walls of the quarry are crowned with a thick wood, beyond the canal where little Mary Anne and her brother wandered with rod and line, and watched

> "The wide-arched bridge, the scented elder-flowers,
> The wondrous watery rings that died too soon,
> The echoes of the quarry, the still hours
> With white robe sweeping on the shadeless noon."
> (*Brother and Sister.* Poems.)

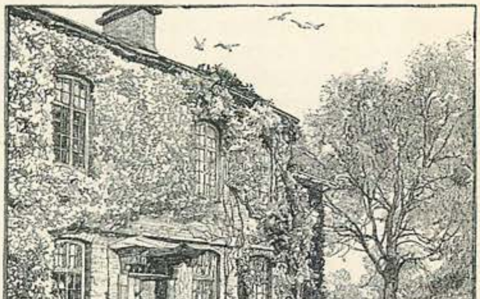
The road ascends through a deep cutting overhung by trees which cling to the rocky bank wherever they can find roothold, while festoons of ivy catch every ray of sunlight on their glossy leaves. Past the wood, green fields stretch away on the right of the road; and beyond them, through the branches of fir, elm, oak, and birch trees, a glint of red brick tells us we have reached our goal, for there stands Griff House. The gardener runs out from his cottage across the road, opens the gate of the drive, and in a few moments we turn round a magnificent yew-tree and stop at the front door.

It is a pleasant, substantial house, built of warm red brick, with old-fashioned, small-paned casement windows. The walls are almost hidden by creepers, a glorious old pear-tree, roses and jessamine, and over one end a tangle of luxuriant ivy. Across the smooth green lawn and its flower-beds an old stone vase covered with golden lichen made a point of color beneath the silver stems of a great birch-tree. Outside the light iron fence a group of sheep were bleating below a gnarled and twisted oak. Behind them rose the rich purple-brown wood we had come through, and beyond the wood we caught glimpses of far-away blue distance, swelling uplands and wide-stretching valleys, with here and there a huge chimney sending up a column of black smoke or white puff of steam. On the house-roof pigeons were cooing forth their satisfaction at the sunshine. From the yew-tree close by, a concert of small chirping voices told that spring was coming, while a blackbird in the bushes made violent love to his mate, and wooed her with jovial, rollicking song.

Within, the house is much in the same state as in the days of Mary Anne Evans's girlhood. She went for a short time to school in Nuneaton, coming home from Saturday till Monday; but one week, in spite of her love of learning, the little maiden's heart failed her, and when the time came to start for school she had disappeared. After hours of search she was at last discovered hiding under the great four-post mahogany bed, which was shown us in its original place in the spare room. Upstairs in the roof is a large attic store-room, through which runs the main chimney-stack of the house; and any one who remembers Maggie Tulliver will easily recognize this as the favorite retreat where she revenged herself on the much-enduring fetich,

> "grinding and beating the wooden head against the rough brick of the great chimneys that made two square pillows supporting the roof." (*Mill on the Floss.*)

The gardens, the fields, every spot seems familiar to one from some exquisite and tender touch scattered here and there throughout the writings of our great Warwickshire



CORNER OF GRIFF HOUSE.

novelist. Thanks to the exceeding kindness of the family, we were allowed to walk

"Across the homestead to the rookery elms,
Whose tall old trunks had each a grassy mound;
So rich for us, we counted them as realms
With varied products: here were earth-nuts found,

"And here the Lady-fingers in deep shade;
Here sloping toward the Moat the rushes grew,
The large to split for pith, the small to braid;
While over all the dark rooks cawing flew."

There were the elms, black with a parliament of rooks intent on building questions; and beneath them each year the earth-nuts still show their fernlike leaves.

The moat with its rushes, bounding one end of the field, formed part of the moat of Sudely Castle, which Cromwell razed to the ground with his cannon planted in the "Battery Field" the other side of The Hollow.

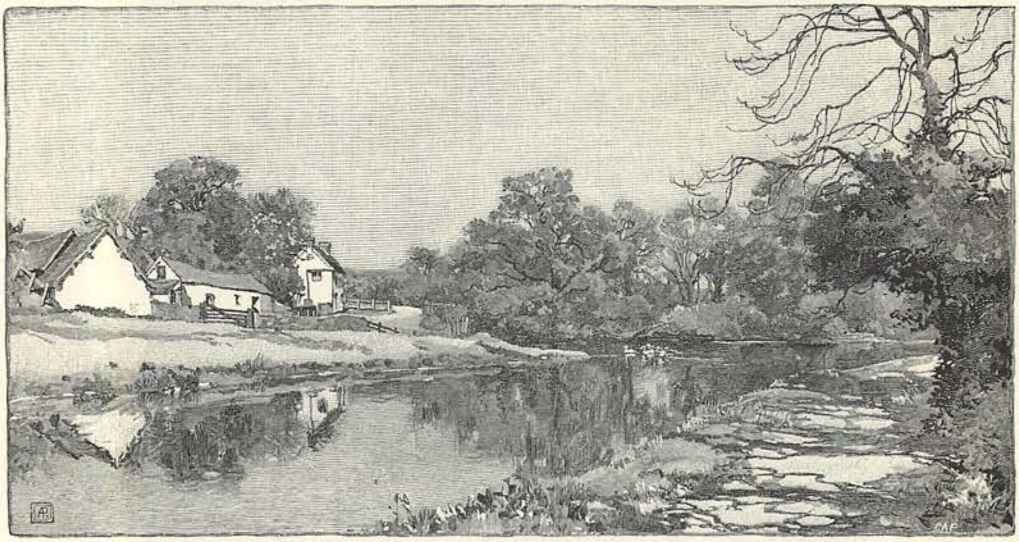
"Then came the copse where wild things rushed unseen,
And black-scathed grass betrayed the past abode
Of mystic gypsies, who still lurked between
Me and each hidden distance of the road."

Down the meadow-path in Griff Hollows, along the "brown canal,"

"Slowly the barges floated into view,
Rounding a grassy hill to me sublime."

And beyond the Hollows, on a green ridge, stands "The College"—the workhouse to which poor Amos Barton "walked forth in cape and boa, with the sleet driving in his face."

We wandered back across the rolling grass-clad ridge and furrows of the homestead—through a tiny paddock where three new-born lambs were bleating beside their mothers, and plump, glossy fowls bustled to and fro to the sweet, old-fashioned kitchen garden. A long nut-tree walk runs its whole length, ending in an old arbor, which with its stone table recalls to one's mind the summer-house at Lowick, where Dorothea found Mr. Casaubon sleeping his last sleep. The stone dial of little Mary Anne's childish days still stands on the grass plat, and from a couple of blocks of stone in one corner we looked over the tall, closely clipped garden hedge to the Arbury woods, a mile or two away, where little black-eyed Caterina found Anthony Wybrow lying dead in the rookery of "Cheverell Manor."



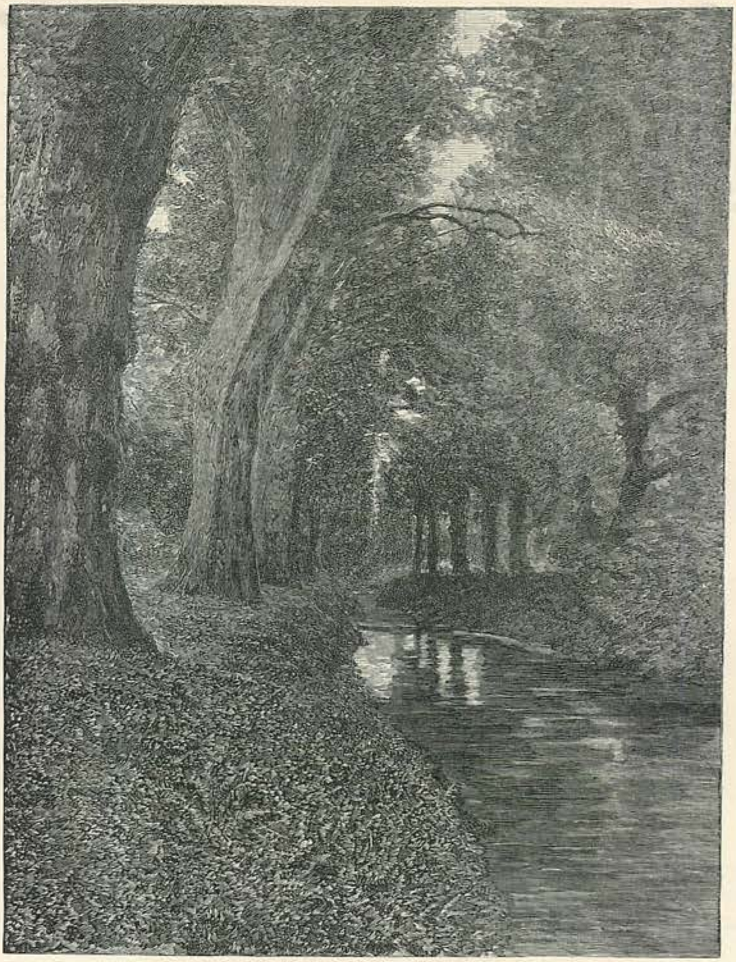
THE CANAL NEAR GRIFF HOUSE.

A pleasant garden truly at all seasons of the year, with its huge apple and pear trees from which we can picture the brother plucking

"The fruit that hung on high beyond my reach."

Even in that chill time, when winter has scarcely made up its mind to leave our cold midland counties, the snowdrops lift their heads as a hint it cannot stay much longer. There is a band of them a foot wide and some thirty paces long all the way up the nut-walk—tightly packed together as if they had not been disturbed for half a century. It would not be possible to find anything like these Griff snowdrops save in "one of those old-fashioned paradises which hardly exist any longer except as memories of our childhood."

It was in early spring that we first made acquaintance with George Eliot's home, but the apple-trees had budded and blossomed, and summer had put on all its glory of green leaves and sweet flowers, ere we found our way to "Cheverell Manor."

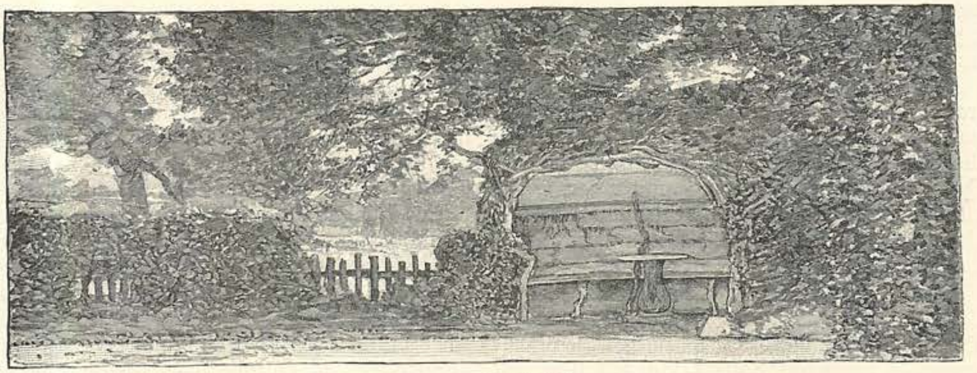


LIME AVENUE, WHERE ANTHONY WAS FOUND DEAD.

The gates of Arbury Park are only a quarter of a mile from Griff House; and as we drove through the fragrant woods, with a flash of sunshine lighting up feathery birch or sturdy oak, and penetrating into the dark hiding-places of spruce or pine boughs, we conjured up, with the help of our kind guides, visions of the grave little maiden roaming through these very plantations, and storing her busy brain with a thousand impressions which neither bricks and mortar, men, nor books in after life should be able to dim. The deer, feeding beside the lazy cows, scarcely moved as we drove through the herd beneath groups of stately trees in the park; and presently we came in full view of Cheverell Manor,

"the castellated house of grey-tinted stone, with the flickering sunbeams sending dashes of golden light across the many-shaped panes in the mullioned windows, and a great beech leaning athwart one of the flanking towers, and breaking, with its dark flattened boughs, the too formal symmetry of the front; the broad gravel-walk winding on the right, by a row of tall pines, alongside the pool — on the left branching out among swelling grassy mounds, surmounted by clumps of trees, where the red trunk of the Scotch fir glows in the descending sunlight against the bright green of limes and acacias; the great pool, where a pair of swans are swimming lazily with one leg tucked under a wing, and where the open water-lilies lie calmly accepting the kisses of the fluttering light-sparkles; the lawn, with its smooth emerald greenness, sloping down to the rougher and browner herbage of the park, from which it is invisibly fenced by a little stream that winds away from the pool, and disappears under a wooden bridge in the distant pleasure-ground."

It was all there, just as our great authoress had painted it with loving, lingering touch; and when we reached the house and, leaving the carriage, made our way with Mr. Bates's successor down to the garden, we half expected to see Lady Cheverell and Caterina carrying their cushions and embroidery across the swelling lawn, while the three gentlemen



ARBOR IN THE GARDEN.

sipped their claret within "the great Gothic windows of the dining-room."

To make the illusion more complete, a thunder-storm which had been gathering from all quarters of the heavens now approached with ominous growls and glitterings of lightning; and as the first drops of rain began to fall, we hurried down to "Mr. Bates's" cottage, under the same trees from which a smart shower fell on poor little Caterina when she ran down to Mosslands to find comfort in the companionship of the good old gardener. His successor, Mr. White, the courteous head-gardener of Arbury, gave us shelter from the storm. When the rain had abated, and he led us back over

> "the pretty arched wooden bridge which formed the only entrance to Mosslands for any but webbed feet, the sun had mastered the clouds and was shining through the boughs of the tall elms that made a deep nest for the gardener's cottage—turning the rain-drops into diamonds."

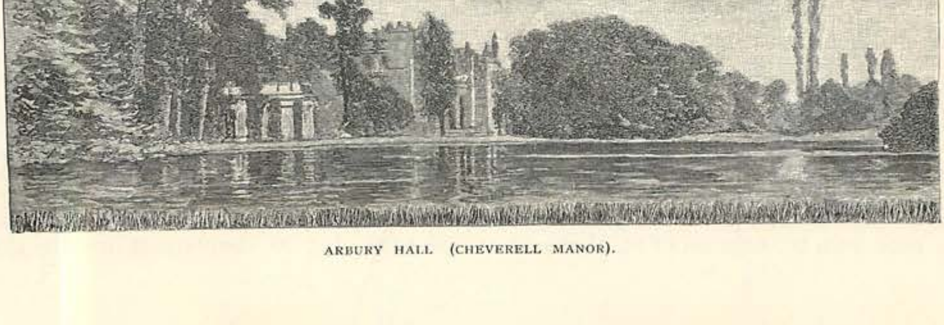
A lovelier effect I have seldom seen than as we looked up a noble avenue of limes from the little bridge, on either side of the smooth waterway, which was all flecked with light and shade from the overarching trees, and broken into a thousand golden lines by the drops that fell from the tender green leaves.

We made our way along the well-kept paths through the rookery,—now, alas! deserted by its cawing tenants,—and Mr. White led us to a long grave-shaped green bed covered with ferns, which marks, so says tradition, the spot where Caterina saw something "lying among the dank leaves on the path three yards before her"; and forgetting her deadly purpose, and sinking on her knees beside it, she cried:

"Anthony, Anthony! speak to me—it is Tina—speak to me! Oh God, he is dead!"

It may be that no Anthony ever lay there dead; that no Caterina ever broke her tender heart for the heartless, worthless fellow. But so living are those creations of George Eliot's brain, that none of us could stand quite unmoved beside the green bed; and it was a relief to escape from the spot and come out of the damp shade into a blaze of sunshine and azalea-flowers in the American garden hard by, while the thunder muttered away in the distance.

Such was the early home and such the surroundings of George Eliot's girlhood. No wonder that in after years the memory of that sweet country life surged up amid the feverish work of the great world; and that she reverted to those scenes of her childhood with a fresh-



ARBURY HALL (CHEVERELL MANOR).

ness and indescribable tenderness which give a peculiar charm to the descriptive touches in her later books.

What a change, one would think, from that tranquil homestead of Griff to the close neighborhood of Coventry. Yet when at nineteen the change took place, it was a welcome one. Quiet country life could no longer satisfy the intellect that had developed itself unaided—almost unnoticed. She needed and craved for a wider sphere; and at last it came.

If you go through the quaint old city of Coventry, with its glorious spires, its "Peeping Tom," its huge factories, its narrow, irregular streets of timbered houses, you reach at last the road leading to the village of Foleshill, a mile or so outside the limits of the borough. Dirty coal-wharves and smoke-grimed houses, last remnants of the town, gradually give place to scattered cottages, dropped here and there among fields and hedge-rows, smoke-grimed too, but still green in summer. Then on the right comes a little brook with a pathway through some posts beside it. Three tall poplars in a garden fence overshadow it; and, through the trees behind, you catch a glimpse of two unpretending brown-stone, semi-detached houses, regular suburban villas, with the same carriage-drive winding up among the trees to each, the same grass-lawn with its beds of evergreens, the same little strips of garden at the back,—a mournful attempt to combine town and country; as uninspiring a spot as one can well conceive. To the first of these houses in 1841 came Mr. Evans, when he left Griff; and with him his grave, soft-voiced daughter, Mary Anne, or, as she now called herself, Marian.

"How often have I seen that pale, thoughtful face wandering along the path by the little stream," said one of her early friends, as we turned into the gate.

Her coming created quite a little sensation. "How pleasant to have that nice, clever Miss Evans among us," was the feeling of some of the neighbors; for even then she was known as a girl of remarkable power. But to her the change of residence was new life. Here for the first time she found herself within reach of the culture she had so passionately longed for, and longed for in vain, in the old home at Griff. Here her real education began. She perfected her knowledge of Latin and Greek by lessons from the Rev. T. Sheepshanks, then head-master of the Coventry Grammar School. From Signor Brezzi she took lessons in French, German, and Italian; and soon knew so much as to lead her teacher, he said, in the two former languages. Hebrew she taught herself unaided. Music lessons she also took from the organist of St. Michael's at Coventry, although, as a critic says, who knew and loved her well, "it was her own fine musical taste which made her in after years an exquisite pianoforte player." Even as a girl she had been devoted to music; and an old farmer who married a relation of her mother's recalls with pride the fine times he had when "Mary Anne" accompanied his fiddle.

But here at Foleshill, more precious than all the Latin and Greek, French and German, sprang up a friendship which gave her the sympathy she had hitherto looked for in vain. When Marian Evans first entered Mr. Charles Bray's house, Rosehill, she found herself in an atmosphere of culture and liberal thought which at last satisfied the craving of her spirit, impatient of the narrow evangelicalism in which she had been bred. "In his family," to quote the same authority, "she found sympathy with her ardent love of knowledge, and with the more enlightened views that had begun to supplant those under which (as she described it) her spirit had been grievously burdened."

How perfectly could one realize the whole picture as loving lips described it. The walks across the fields, a short cut from Foleshill to Rosehill, now partially destroyed by railway and building lots, meeting half-way the quiet young lady in her bonnet and shawl and long dark ringlets; the gentle chiding for her extravagance in coming over the fields in silk stockings and thin shoes; the talks on the stile, her humor bubbling forth in that loving and genial companionship, grave and shy as she appeared at home and among strangers; or the walk up to Rosehill to meet on the bearskin, spread under the great acacia-tree, where men of mark gathered together to discuss all things in heaven and earth. If that bearskin could speak, what words of wit and wisdom might it not have repeated from Emerson, George Coombe, Robert Mackay, Thackeray, Herbert Spencer, and many more, who all

> "listened with marked attention when one gentle woman's voice was heard to utter what they were quite sure was well matured before the lips were opened. Few if any could feel themselves her superior in general intelligence, and it was amusing one day to see the amazement of a certain Dr. L., who, venturing on a quotation from Epictetus to an unassuming young lady, was, with modest politeness, corrected in his Greek by his feminine auditor. One rare characteristic belonged to her, which gave a peculiar charm to her conversation. She had no petty egotism, no spirit of contradiction; she never talked for effect. A happy thought well expressed filled her with delight; in a moment she would seize the point and improve upon it, so that common people began to feel themselves wise in her presence, and perhaps years after she would remind them, to their pride and surprise, of the good things they had said."

The brown house is now much altered and enlarged; but its counterpart over the stone balustrade is untouched and shows exactly what it was in Mr. Evans's day. Yet though the modest house has grown sideways and lengthways, the main building remains intact, and one is glad to know that its present occupants reverence the memory of those days of toil and thought. Mr. Evans's office is the only room which has been swallowed up by the new additions. It was close to the entrance, and in it his Saturday afternoons were spent, making up the accounts of his week's work. This fact was a source of some alarm to his daughter's young visitor, who told me he would often open the front door himself if she chanced to come on the last day of the week. His gruff welcome of "Come to see Mary Anne?" though kindly meant, never failed to make her quake in her shoes, from its grave, severe tone.

To the left were the dining-room and drawing-room, now thrown into one. In the former, over the sideboard, hung a print from Wilkie's famous picture of the "Distraint for Rent," a significant hint for a land-agent's house. In the little drawing-room Miss Evans sat in the corner by the fire to receive her visitors—the fire which she never allowed a maid to replenish. She always had a man-servant in to do it, for she could not bear, she said, to see a woman putting on coals.

Upstairs I was taken into a tiny room over the front door, with a plain square window. This was George Eliot's little study. Here to the left on entering was her desk; and upon a bracket, in the corner between it and the window, stood an exquisite statuette of Christ, looking towards her. Here she lived among her books, which covered the walls. Here she worked with ardor in the new fields of thought which her friendship with the Brays opened to her. And here, at the instigation of Mrs. Bray's brother, the late Charles Hennell, author of the "Inquiry concerning the Origin of Christianity," she undertook the translation of Strauss's "Leben Jesu." It was a tremendous task for a girl of twenty-five.

> "The labor of rendering Strauss's masterpiece into clear, idiomatic English was by no means light, and her intimate friends of that time well remember the strain it entailed upon her,"

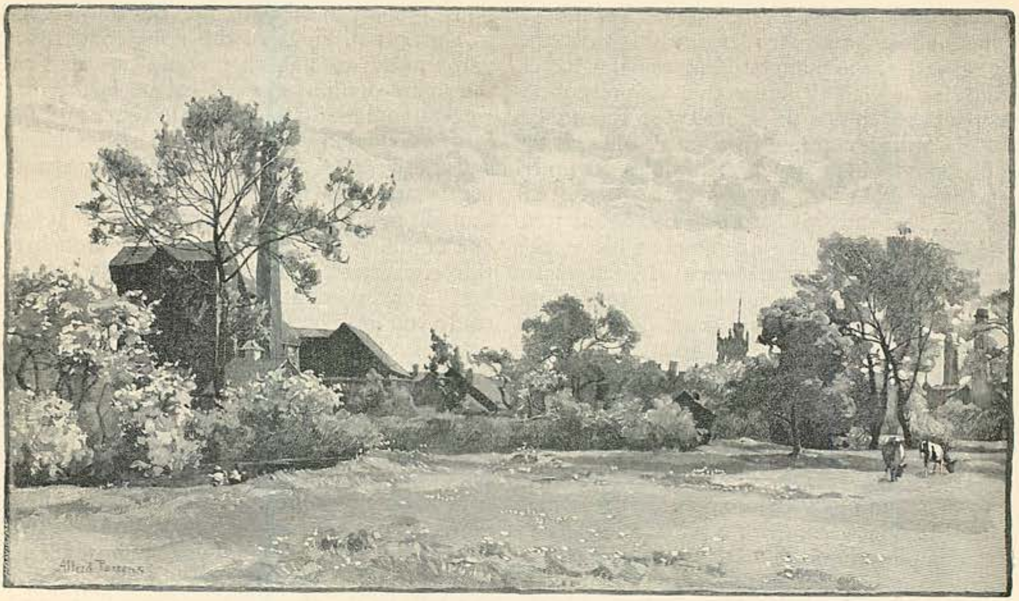
says the friend whom I have quoted before. But in scarcely more than a year the work was done. In 1846 the "Life of Jesus" appeared, and Strauss himself complimented the translator on her perfect success.

Out of the study opened her bedroom, looking over the little villa garden with its carriage-drive under the shady trees. But three of these trees remain—a weeping-lime, a venerable acacia, with the silvery sheen of a birch between them. In old days there were many more—so many, indeed, as to render the house gloomy in the extreme. But they served to shut off all sight of the noisy road thirty yards away, though they could not shut off the sound of the busy coal-wharf farther on, whence foul and cruel words to horse and fellow-man floated up through the still summer air, and jarred painfully on that highly strung organization, as Miss Evans sat plunged in thought and work beside her window. It was one of the penalties of a nearer approach to the civilization she had so ardently longed for in her old country life at Griff. From the study you look on the exquisite spires of Coventry, or through the tree-stems on gently swelling fields with their row of hedge-row elms against the sky. It is not a locality to kindle much enthusiasm for nature or anything else. But depend upon it, that penetrating eye and mind saw more in these uninteresting surroundings than many of the vulgar herd could see in Alps or the "eternal city" itself. Who can forget the tender poetry she manages to find in the "dreary prose" of Milby? how she tells us the sweet spring came there, notwithstanding its smoke and weaving-shops?

> "The elm-tops were red with buds; the church-yard was starred with daisies; the lark showered his love-music on the flat fields; the rainbows hung over the dingy town, clothing the very roofs and chimneys in a strange, transfiguring beauty. And so it was with the human life there, which at first seemed a dismal mixture of griping worldliness, vanity, ostrich feathers, and the fumes of brandy; looking closer, you found some purity, gentleness, and unselfishness, as you may have observed a scented geranium giving forth its wholesome odors amidst blasphemy and gin in a noisy pot-house."

Next to her own bedroom came her father's—the largest room in the house. And as we opened the door, all thought of the famous author seemed to be lost in the memory of the devoted daughter; for—as her friend said with loving pride—"she was the most devoted daughter for those nine years that it is possible to imagine." Her father always spent three days in the week away from home; and those three days were Miss Evans's holidays, given up to her work and her friends. But on the evenings he was at home, not the most tempting invitation in the world would induce her to leave him.

"If I am to keep my father's house, I am going to do it thoroughly," she would say. And thoroughly she did try to do her duty, even to the matter of cooking on certain occasions. A friend recalls a visit one afternoon, when she found Marian in comical distress over her failures. The cook was ill, and Miss Evans undertook to manufacture a batter-pudding. "And when it came to table, it broke. To think that the mistress could not even make a batter-pudding!"



NUNEATON.

Trying years those must have been, when duty and inclination drew her in directly opposite directions; and the strong soul was worn and chafed by this perpetual struggle. Her friends felt this for her, and rejoiced when one year she set off with Mr. and Mrs. Bray for a little tour in the west of Scotland. But even this holiday was doomed to be cut short; for the day after she started, her father slipped in getting into bed and broke his leg. Great were the lamentations at Marian's absence—"and to think we cannot even telegraph for her—and that no letter can reach her!" Her friends who knew how she needed rest and change were secretly glad, and blessed the tardy posts and want of telegraphic communication. But when at last the news reached her, she returned instantly, and devoted herself to her father with redoubled zeal.

"I can see her trunk open all ready packed to start for St. Leonards in 1849, and how she hated to go, poor dear," her friend said, as we stood in the little bedroom. This was soon before her father's death, which took place at St. Leonards after two or three months of severe and trying illness—a terrible strain on his daughter, who never left his side. But when the end at last came her grief was unbounded, and she would have given worlds to have him back again. During a tour on the continent she made after her father's death with her friends the Brays, she could take but little pleasure in anything, so deep was her sense of loss.

She spent some months at Geneva after Mr. and Mrs. Bray's return to England, and then came back to be an inmate of their home at Rosehill for twelve months. This year was the last she spent in her native county. In 1851 she went to London to help Dr. Chapman in the work of the "Westminster Review," and except for short visits Warwickshire saw her no more.

Though far away, all her novels show how ever-present in her mind was the midland scenery in which her youth had been passed. And what has she not done for us, the dwellers in "Loamshire"? Well might she take the lines from Drayton's "Polyolbion" as the motto for one of her books:

"Upon the midlands now the industrious muse doth fall,
The shires which we the heart of England well may call.

. . . . .

"My native country thou, which so brave spirits hast bred,
If there be virtues yet remaining in the earth,
Or any good of thine thou bred'st into my birth,
Accept it as thine own, whilst now I sing of thee,
Of all thy later brood the unworthiest though I be."

Our castles—our parks—were historical. Now our farm-houses—our "Rainbows"—our very cottages—have become immortal through the genius of George Eliot.

Rose G. Kingsley.