



Gratia A. Countryman and Family Papers.

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ADAM BEDE

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During the fall the Minneapolis Public Library broadcasted
a review of Romola by George Eliot. We now review another
book by the same author, Adam Bede. We would like to
introduce this famous author again. *at the cost of repeating ourselves*

George Eliot is the pen name of England's most
famous ^{woman} ~~English~~ novelist. Her maiden name was Marian Evans,
later becoming Mrs. Lewes, and then Mrs. Cross, but she is
known to the literary world as George Eliot. She wrote about
seventy years ago in the time of Queen Victoria. The times
were very different from our own: the horse had no rival
in the streets, women wore trailing skirts and crinoline.
They were not admitted to the Universities, the day of
woman suffrage societies had not dawned. Nevertheless,
George Eliot was an independent thinker and a wonderful
scholar of the classic languages as well as modern languages.
Probably no other novelist has had a tithe of her scientific
knowledge. She was an accomplished musician and a brilliant
talker. She had most of all an understanding of human
beings, a rare intuition and sympathy.

She began her literary career on the Westminster
Review where she became intimately acquainted with Spencer,
Carlyle, Newman, and others. She had the mind of a

philosopher and her earlier writings were along this line.

No one would have dreamed from her early writings that

she would ever have been a successful novelist. She had *indeed*

reached middle life before she made the attempt to write

fiction *through* ~~under~~ her husband's persuasion.

Her first attempt was *a short story* Amos Barton, drawn from experiences and memories of her early home. Her husband felt that it was an unusual piece of work. It found a ready publisher and she went on. *with fiction writing* During these four years or so, she turned out Adam Bede, Mill on the Floss, and Silas Marner, a wealth of fine workmanship, every one a masterpiece.

Adam Bede was her first long novel and perhaps her fame will always rest on this book more than on any other one of her works. When it was partially finished her publishers offered her £800, which she accepted. Its sale was so rapid that they voluntarily gave her another £800 the second year. It went into five editions in six months which was most exceptional for that period. Naturally the author was much gratified. When she had finished the work which took her about a year ~~she~~ wrote in her journal, "I love it very much and *am* ~~am~~ deeply grateful to have written it, whatever the public may say to it." And the public bought the 4th edition of 5,000 in two weeks, not yet knowing who the author was.

George Eliot was brought up in the countryside. Her father, Robert Evans, was a carpenter, and later

became steward for a large estate. Evidently he was a man of great integrity and honor and was deeply respected by the neighborhood. When her mother died ^{the daughter} Marian Evans ^{whom we know as George Eliot} had the oversight of the butter and cheese making of her father's dairy. She rode about the country with him on his trips, listening to the talk of the villagers by the roadsides, at the farms, and inns. She knew the problems of farm life and the ways of farm households. She observed too the scenery, the roads, the churches all about this locality. She was acquainted with the religious sects, especially the Methodists through a dear aunt, who was a Methodist preacher and a most sweet and lovable woman.

Out of all these memories and early experiences George Eliot wrote Adam Bede. Most of the places,-the houses, the villages and inns which she mentions have been identified ^{with her own home + surroundings} and are now pointed out to the tourist traveling through this part of England.

Adam Bede, the hero of the story, ^{after} is a portrait of her ^{father} father. Her aunt appears as the gentle, young Methodist preacher, -Maidan, ^{the heroine of the story} Dinah Morris, of whom Sidney Lanier wrote,- "That beautiful Dinah Morris, solemn, fragile, strong, the woman preacher, whom I find haunting my imagination."

George Eliot's aunt once told her a story of a young woman who was sentenced to death for child murder. The Aunt had ^{had} permission to visit her in prison, and there staying with her through ^{days +} the night, before her execution, she won a confession from the poor girl and, with her Christian ministrations, prepared her soul for its departure. This ^{true the experience of her aunt} story was the germ of the plot woven around pretty fascinating little Hetty Sorrel, the niece ^{living} of Mr. Poyser.

The action takes place in a simple English village. Adam Bede is one of nature's gentlemen in the garb of a skillful craftsman, - a carpenter. He is pictured as broad chested, strong, but gentle in his ways with women, simple in his loves and hates, honorable and trustworthy, - a man to lean upon. He and his brother Seth live with a querulous old mother and drunken father, who is drowned one evening in the little brook by their home. Adam had ^{with its burdens} been tempted to leave home but his character is shown as he says; (P. 45)

The brother Seth, a gentle and loving spirit, but ^{and in strong contrast to Adam both in his home & in his work} impractical, is devotedly in love with the lovely young preacher, Dinah Morris, who ^{is staying} lives at her aunt's, Mrs.

Poyser's. But Dinah, consecrated to her work of evangelical

preaching, Dinah with her whole nature irradiated with the serenest light of spiritual enthusiasm, with her love and compassion for all of Christ's poor who need her message, refuses to marry Seth. As Mrs. Poyser said: "You might as well beckon to the flying swallow as ask Dinah to come and live here comfortable like other folks," for Dinah, though only a country girl is gifted with a persuasive voice and a rare ability in her sincere, simple unself-conscious religious fervor to move people to whom she preached. Mrs. Poyser described her when she went away: "She's one of them things as looks the brightest on a rainy day and loves you the best when your most ¹ need on 't." We are first introduced to her preaching in the evening twilight on the village green to a group of simple villagers. When the village rector later asked her just how she had happened to begin, she related to him simply--

(P. 86)

Adam Bede loves Hetty Sorrel, the very beautiful, but vain and shallow country girl who is a niece of Martin Poyser and has been brought up on the Hall Farm. She is the strongest contrast to the unselfish Dinah Morris, hiding such a hard little heart under a soft dimpling beauty. But in spite of all the glow of her beauty and

personal attractiveness, we constantly are aware, to use Mrs. Poyser's description, that Hetty is "no better nor a cherry wi a hard stone inside of it." And as to her empty headed vanity, Mrs. Poyser says, "She's no better nor a peacock as 'ud strut about on the wall and spread its tail where the sun shone if all the folks in the parish were dying." Hetty encourages Adam but she secretely hopes to make a much loftier marriage.

Arthur Donnithorne is the son and heir of the village squire. He is a warm friend of the fine well-bred country rector. He is liked by all the tenantry, and has great plans for improving the estate when he shall inherit it. His coming of age is celebrated by a grand festival at which the Poyser and Hetty and all the other tenants and villagers are present.

He has always been a good friend of Adam Bede and secures his appointment as steward of the estate, a great lift for Adam who is hoping to prepare a home for his beloved Hetty.

The character of Arthur is most skillfully drawn,-- charming, light-hearted, a typical well-bred well educated young English squire,-- captain in the army, liked by everybody. But not very stable. A conversation with Adam beings out their contrasting characters. (Page 160)

Arthur has noticed Hetty. He frequently visits the Hall Farm where Hetty lives with the Poyzers. On one occasion he finds Hetty making butter in the dairy,-- Hetty's cheek looking like a rose petal, soft roguishness under her long eyelashes, Hetty's soft arms gracefully tossing the butter pats. He makes arrangements to meet her again and then again and again, and her silly vain little head is turned with his attentions and with his gifts. Her ambitions are stirred as he gradually becomes infatuated with her, and she dreams of being a fine lady.

Arthur is really kind hearted. He knows he cannot marry Hetty, and he tries to resist his infatuation for her. He leaves her for a few days in his determination, only to feverishly rush back to her. He is like Tito Melema in Romola,-- not naturally bad, but gradually, through a weak will, deteriorating bit by bit until he betrays the shallow but trusting Hetty.

Adam seems to have been unconscious of Hetty's defections until one day he discovers them together in the woods. There is a stormy scene between the two men. Adam in his just wrath, knowing that the gentleman-born Arthur has no honorable intentions toward Hetty, thrashes him soundly. Arthur agrees to tell Hetty that

he can never marry her and after writing to her leaves to join his regiment.

Poor, disillusioned Hetty, not capable of loving, is only disappointed in her ambition. She is only a heartless little human animal, beautiful but loving nothing; hating all the little creatures on the farm, hating even the little children who get in her way. Adam deeply resents the treatment of Arthur but he has only forgiveness for Hetty. She comforts her loneliness by the kind yearning tenderness of Adam who loves her so faithfully and patiently, and becomes engaged to this noble man, not knowing that she is to become a mother, and the day for the wedding is set, Adam blindly believing in her.

When at last she realizes her condition, she sets out in search of Arthur at Windsor with his regiment. Finding after a most painful journey that his regiment has moved to Ireland, forlornly she sets out to find her way back to Dinah. How she wanders in the woods miserably, how her child is born and left in the woods is told with all the profound tenderness toward weak and vain natures which is so characteristic of George Eliot's work. The shallow little farm girl, with her narrow outlook, her trivial ambitions, has reached a deeply tragic situation and

most pitifully we have to feel toward her.

At home she is supposed to have gone to Dinah's, but her long absence has aroused deep anxiety; a visit to Dinah's reveals that she has not been there, and the reader learns, with Adam, that she is in prison charged with the murder of her child. She is condemned to death. Dinah hastens to her and remains constantly at her side, an angel of mercy, ministering to her great need in prison, and supports her to the gallows. Adam, too, refusing to believe the truth also goes to her and with a last deep and tender kiss bids her the long farewell.

But at the last moment, a reprieve reaches her. Arthur has just at this time returned at the death of his grandfather to claim his estate and to enter happily upon his new duties. He is met with the news of Hetty's sentence and with deep remorse moves quickly to get her reprieve. He arrives in time and Hetty's sentence is commuted to transportation. Under these circumstances, Arthur cannot take up his long-looked inheritance; he cannot live here among his tenantry and develop his estate. His life is ruined and all his plans lost. Adam's words then revert to him with a bitter significance: "There's a sort o'wrong that can never be made up for."

As the years go by, Adam's heart is gradually relieved of its pain. Dinah learns to admire and love the stalwart, faithful man who has unconsciously been drawn to her from the first, and the story ends with the marriage of Adam and Dinah.

In spite, however, of the grim tragedy of Hetty Sorrel, Adam Bede is of all George Eliot's books the heartiest, the wittiest, and the most cheerful. Her own observations of nature and people and the conversations and homely doings of the farm folks are most natural and spontaneous.

It is high time indeed that we should introduce the most popular character in the book, the immortal Mrs.

Poyser. A most delightful character she is with a fund of droll remarks in the most unexpected places. Indeed, she expresses herself on almost every occasion. "There's no pleasure in livin'" says she "if you are to be corked up for iver and only dribble your mind out by the sly like a leaky barrel."

Perhaps a sample of her quality may best be tested in a passage at arms between her and the amiable but cynical schoolmaster, Bartle Massey, who ^{is} was a confirmed bachelor and looks upon women "as one of the evils of ^{this} ~~the~~ life, hoping to get quit of them in the next."

No one of George Eliot's novels has given us a larger number of memorable portraits drawn to true to life. The weakness and vanity of Hetty, the thoughtless profligacy of Arthur, the genial commonsense of Parson Irwin, the rapt and mystic yet most practical piety of Dinah Morris and the shrewd wit and caustic proverbs of Mrs. Poyser. But the dominant figure is Adam Bede, level headed, iron willed, morally uncompromising, of whom a bishop once said that he seemed to him one of the best human presentments in modern guise of the early surroundings of Christ as he toiled in the carpenter shop to supply his own mother's needs.

We part from them all with regret for we feel with the writer, "that by living a great deal among people who may be in some ways commonplace or even vulgar", she has come to the conclusion that human nature is lovable.