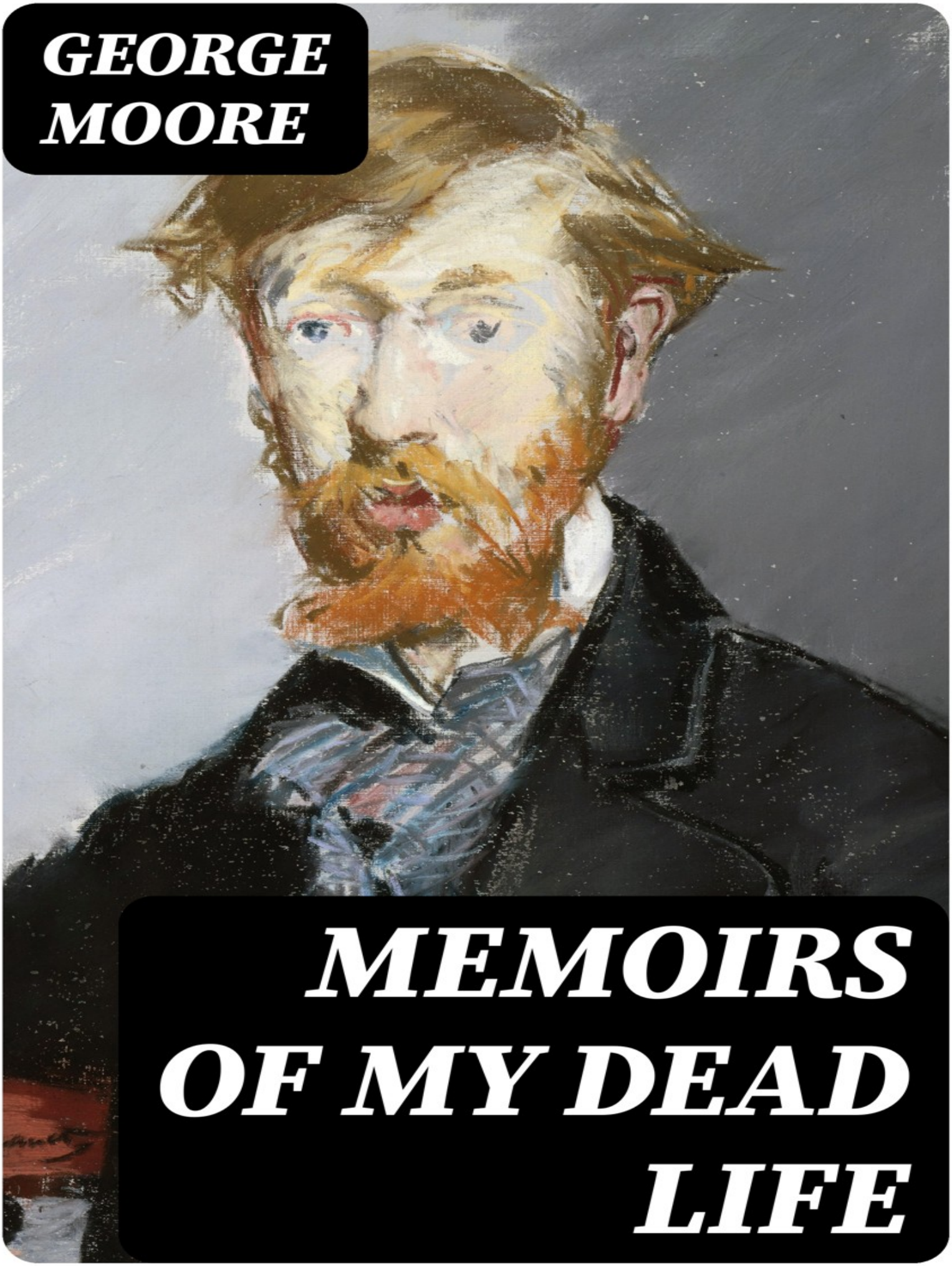
GEORGE MOORE



MEMOIRS OF MY DEAD LIFE

George Moore

Memoirs of My Dead Life

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info

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CHAPTER XIII
RESURGAM

APOLOGIA PRO SCRIPTIS MEIS

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[*The* APOLOGIA *which follows needs, perhaps, a word of explanation, not to clear up Mr. Moore's text--that is as delightful, as irrelevantly definite, as paradoxically clear as anything this present wearer of the Ermine of English Literature has ever written--but to explain why it was written and why it is published. When the present publisher, who is hereinafter, in the words of Schopenhauer, "flattened against the wall of the Wisdom of the East," first read and signified his pride in being able to publish these "Memoirs," the passages now consigned to "the late Lord ----'s library" were not in the manuscript. On the arrival of the final copy they were discovered, and thereby hangs an amusing tale, consisting of a series of letters which, in so far as they were written with a certain caustic, humorous Irish pen, have taken their high place among the "Curiosities of Literature." The upshot of the matter was that the publisher, entangled in the "weeds" brought over by his* Mayflower *ancestors, found himself as against the author in the position of Mr. Coote as against Shakespeare; that is, the matter was so beautifully written that he had not the heart to decline it, and yet in parts so--what shall we say?--so full of the "Wisdom of the East" that he did not dare to publish it in the West. Whereupon he adopted the policy of Mr. Henry Clay, which is, no doubt, always a mistake. And the author, bearing in mind the make-up of that race of Man called publishers, gave way on condition that this* APOLOGIA *should appear without change. Here it is, without so much*

as the alteration of an Ibsen comma, and if the Mayflower *"weeds" mere instrumental in calling it forth, then it is, after all, well that they grew*.--THE PUBLISHER.]

Last month the post brought me two interesting letters, and the reader will understand how interesting they were to me when I tell him that one was from Mr. Sears, of the firm of Appleton, who not knowing me personally had written to Messrs. Heinemann to tell them that the firm he represented could not publish the "Memoirs" unless two stories were omitted; "The Lovers of Orelay," and "In the Luxembourg Gardens,"--Messrs. Heinemann had forwarded the letter to me; my interest in the other letter was less direct, but the reader will understand that it was not less interesting when I tell that it came from the secretary of a certain charitable institution who had been reading the book in question, and now wrote to consult me on many points of life and conduct. He had been compelled to do so, for the reading of the "Memoirs" had disturbed his mind. The reader will agree with me that disturbed is probably the right word to use. To say that the book had undermined his convictions or altered his outlook on life would be an exaggeration. "Outlook on life" and "standard of conduct" are phrases from his own vocabulary, and they depict him.

"Your outlook on life is so different from mine that I can hardly imagine you being built of the same stuff as myself. Yet I venture to put my difficulty before you. It is, of course, no question of mental grasp or capacity or artistic endowment. I am, so far as these are concerned, merely the man in the street, the averagely endowed and the ordinarily educated. I call myself a Puritan and a Christian. I run

continually against walls of convention, of morals, of taste, which may be all wrong, but which I should feel it wrong to climb over. You range over fields where my make-up forbids me to wander.

"Such frankness as yours is repulsive, forbidding, demoniac! You speak of woman as being the noblest subject of contemplation for man, but interpreted by your book and your experiences this seems in the last analysis to lead you right into sensuality, and what I should call illicit connections. Look at your story of Doris! I *do* want to know what you feel about that story in relation to right and wrong. Do you consider that all that Orelay adventure was put right, atoned, explained by the fact that Doris, by her mind and body, helped you to cultivate your artistic sense? Was Goethe right in looking upon all women merely as subjects for experiment, as a means of training his aesthetic sensibilities? Does it not justify the seduction of any girl by any man? And does not that take us straight back to the dissolution of Society? The degradation of woman (and of man) seems to be inextricably involved. Can you regard imperturbedly a thought of your own sister or wife passing through Doris' Orelay experience?"

The address of the charitable institution and his name are printed on the notepaper, and I experience an odd feeling of surprise whenever this printed matter catches my eye, or when I think of it; not so much a sense of surprise as a sense of incongruity, and while trying to think how I might fling myself into some mental attitude which he would understand I could not help feeling that we were very far

apart, nearly as far apart as the bird in the air and the fish in the sea. "And he seems to feel toward me as I feel toward him, for does he not say in his letter that it is difficult for him to imagine me built of the same stuff as himself?" On looking into his letter again I imagined my correspondent as a young man in doubt as to which road he shall take, the free road of his instincts up the mountainside with nothing but the sky line in front of him or the puddled track along which the shepherd drives the meek sheep; and I went to my writing table asking myself if my correspondent's spiritual welfare was my real object, for I might be writing to him in order to exercise myself in a private debate before committing the article to paper, or if I was writing for his views to make use of them. One asks oneself these questions but receives no answer. He would supply me with a point of view opposed to my own, this would be an advantage; so feeling rather like a spy within the enemy's lines on the eve of the battle I began my letter. "My Dear Sir: Let me assure you that we are 'built of the same stuff.' Were it not so you would have put my book aside. I even suspect we are of the same kin; were it otherwise you would not have written to me and put your difficulties so plainly before me." Laying the pen aside I meditated quite a long while if I should tell him that I imagined him as a young man standing at the branching of the roads, deciding eventually that it would not be wise for me to let him see that reading between the lines I had guessed his difficulty to be a personal one. "We must proceed cautiously," I said, "there may be a woman in the background.... The literary compliments he pays me and the interest that my book has

excited are accidental, circumstantial. Life comes before literature, for certain he stands at the branching of the roads, and the best way I can serve him is by drawing his attention to the fallacy, which till now he has accepted as a truth, that there is one immutable standard of conduct for all men and all women." But the difficulty of writing a sufficient letter on a subject so large and so intricate puzzled me and I sat smiling, for an odd thought had dropped suddenly into my mind. My correspondent was a Bible reader, no doubt, and it would be amusing to refer him to the chapter in Genesis where God is angry with our first parents because they had eaten of the tree of good and evil. "This passage" I said to myself, "has never been properly understood. Why was God angry? For no other reason except that they had set up a moral standard and could be happy no longer, even in Paradise. According to this chapter the moral standard is the origin of all our woe. God himself summoned our first parents before him, and in what plight did they appear? We know how ridiculous the diminutive fig leaf makes a statue seem in our museums; think of the poor man and woman attired in fig leaves just plucked from the trees! I experienced a thrill of satisfaction that I should have been the first to understand a text that men have been studying for thousands of years, turning each word over and over, worrying over it, all in vain, yet through no fault of the scribe who certainly underlined his intention. Could he have done it better than by exhibiting our first parents covering themselves with fig leaves, and telling how after getting a severe talking to from the Almighty they escaped from Paradise pursued by an angel? The story can have no other

meaning, and that I am the first to expound it is due to no superiority of intelligence, but because my mind is free. But I must not appear to my correspondent as an exegetist. Turning to his letter again I read:

"I am sorely puzzled. Is your life all of a piece? Are your 'Memoirs' a pose? I can't think the latter, for you seem sincere and frank to the verge of brutality (or over). But what is your standard of conduct? Is there a right and a wrong? Is everything open to any man? Can you refer me now to any other book of yours in which you view life steadily and view it whole from our standpoint? Forgive my intrusion. You see I don't set myself as a judge, but you sweep away apparently all my standards. And you take your reader so quietly and closely into your confidence that you tempt a response. I see your many admirable points, but your center of living is not mine, and I do want to know as a matter of enormous human interest what your subsumptions are. I cannot analyze or express myself with literary point as you do, but you may see what I aim at. It is a bigger question to me than the value or force of your book. It goes right to the core of the big things, and I approach you as one man of limited outlook to another of wider range."

The reader will not suspect me of vanity for indulging in these quotations; he will see readily that my desire is to let the young man paint his own portrait, and I hope he will catch glimpses as I seem to do of an earnest spirit, a sort of protestant Father Gogarty, hesitating on the brink of his lake. "There is a lake in every man's heart"--but I must not quote my own writings. If I misinterpret him ... the reader

will be able to judge, having the letter before him. But if my view of him is right, my task is a more subtle one than merely to point out that he will seek in vain for a moral standard whether he seeks it in the book of Nature or in the book of God. I should not move him by pointing out that in the Old Testament we are told an eye for an eye is our due, and in the New the rede is to turn the left cheek after receiving a blow on the right. Nor would he be moved by referring him to the history of mankind, to the Boer War, for instance, or the massacres which occur daily in Russia; everybody knows more or less the history of mankind, and to know it at all is to know that every virtue has at some time or other been a vice. But man cannot live by negation alone, and to persuade my correspondent over to our side it might be well to tell him that if there be no moral standard he will nevertheless find a moral idea if he looks for it in Nature. I reflected how I would tell him that he must not be disappointed because the idea changes and adapts itself to circumstance, and sometimes leaves us for long intervals; if he would make progress he must learn to understand that the moral world only becomes beautiful when we relinquish our ridiculous standards of what is right and wrong, just as the firmament became a thousand times more wonderful and beautiful when Galileo discovered that the earth moved. Had Kant lived before the astronomer he would have been a great metaphysician, but he would not have written the celebrated passage "Two things fill the soul with undying and ever-increasing admiration, the night with its heaven of stars above us and in our hearts the moral law." The only fault I find with this passage is that I read the word "law"

where I expected to read the word "idea," for the word "law" seems to imply a Standard, and Kant knew there is none. Is the fault with the translator or with Kant, who did not pick his words carefully? The metaphysician spent ten years thinking out the "Critique of Pure Reason" and only six months writing it; no doubt his text might be emendated with advantage. If there was a moral standard the world within us would be as insignificant as the firmament was when the earth was the center of the universe and all the stars were little candles and Jehovah sat above them, a God who changed his mind and repented, a whimsical, fanciful God who ordered the waters to rise so that his creatures might be overwhelmed in the flood, all except one family (I need not repeat here the story of Noah's Ark and the doctrine of the Atonement) if there was one fixed standard of right and wrong, applicable to everybody, black, white, yellow, and red men alike, an eternal standard that circumstance could not change. Those who believe in spite of every proof to the contrary that there is a moral standard cannot appreciate the beautiful analogy which Kant drew, the moral idea within the heart and the night with its heaven of stars above us. "It is strange," I reflected, "how men can go on worrying themselves about Rome and Canterbury four hundred years after the discovery that the earth moved, and involuntarily a comparison rose up in my mind of a squabble between two departments in an office after the firm has gone bankrupt.... But how to get all these vagrant thoughts into a sheet of paper? St. Paul himself could not proselytize within such limitations, and apparently what I wrote was not sufficient to lead my correspondent out

of the narrow lanes of conventions and prejudices into the open field of inquiry. Turning to his letter, I read it again, misjudging him, perhaps ... but the reader shall form his own estimate.

"I honestly felt and feel a big difficulty in reading and thinking over your 'Memoirs' for you are a propagandist whether you recognize that as a conscious mission or not. There is in your book a challenging standard of life which will not wave placidly by the side of the standard which is generally looked up to as his regimental colors by the average man. One must go down. And it was because I felt the necessity of choosing that I wrote to you.

"'Memoirs' is clearly to me a sincere book. You have built your life on the lines there indicated. And there is a charm not merely in that sincerity but in the freedom of the life so built. I could not, for instance, follow my thoughts as you do. I do not call myself a coward for these limitations. I believe it to be a bit of my build; you say that limitation has no other sanction than convention--race inheritance, at least so I gather. Moral is derived from mos. Be it so. Does not that then fortify the common conviction that the moral is the best? Men have been hunting the best all their history long by a process of trial and error. Surely the build of things condemns the murderer, the liar, the sensualist, and the coward! and how do you come by 'natural goodness' if your moral is merely your customary? No, with all respect for your immense ability and your cultured outlook, I do not recognize the lawless variability of the right and the wrong standard which you posit. How get you your evidence? From human actions? But it is the most familiar of facts that men

do things they feel to be wrong. I have known a thief who stole every time in pangs of conscience; not merely in the fear of detection. There is a higher and a lower in morals, but the lower is recognized as a lower, and does not appeal to a surface reading of the code of an aboriginal in discussing morals. That, I think is only fair. Your artistic sense is finely developed, but it is none the less firmly based, although there are Victorian back parlors and paper roses.

"You see you are a preacher, not merely an artist. Every glimpse of the beautiful urges the beholder to imitation and *vice versa*. And that is why your 'Memoirs' are not merely 'an exhibition' of the immoral; they are 'an incitement' to the immoral. Don't you think so? And thinking so would you not honestly admit, that society (in the wide sense, of course--civilization) would relapse, go down, deliquesce, if all of us were George Moores as depicted in your book?"

His letter dropped from my hand, and I sat muttering, "How superficially men think!" How little they trouble themselves to discover the truth! While declaring that truth is all important, they accept any prejudice and convention they happen to meet, fastening on to it like barnacles. How disappointing is that passage about the murderer, the sensualist, the liar, and the coward; but of what use would it be to remind my correspondent of Judith who went into the tent of Holofernes to lie with him, and after the love feast drove a nail into the forehead of the sleeping man. She is in Scripture held up to our admiration as a heroine, the saviour of our nation. Charlotte Corday stabbed Marat in his bath, yet who regards Charlotte Corday as anything else but a

heroine? In Russia men know that the fugitives lie hidden in the cave, yet they tell the Cossack soldiers they have taken the path across the hill--would my correspondent reprove them and call them liars? I am afraid he has a lot of leeway to make up, and it is beyond my power to help him.

Picking up his letter I glanced through it for some mention of "Esther Waters," for in answer to the question if I could recommend him to any book of mine in which I viewed life--I cannot bring myself to transcribe that tag from Matthew Arnold--I referred him to "Esther Waters," saying that a critic had spoken of it as a beautiful amplification of the beatitudes. Of the book he makes no mention in his letter, but he writes: "There is a challenging standard of life in your book which will not wave placidly by the side of the standard which is generally looked up to as his regimental colors by the average man." The idea besets him, and he refers to it again in the last paragraph; he says: "You see, you are a preacher, not merely an artist." And very likely he is right; there is a messianic aspect in my writings, and I fell to thinking over "Esther Waters"; and reading between the lines for the first time, I understood that it was that desire to standardize morality that had caused the poor girl to be treated so shamefully. Once Catholicism took upon itself to torture and then to burn all those it could lay hands upon who refused to believe with its doctrines, and now in the twentieth century Protestantism persecutes those who act or think in opposition to its moralities. Even the saintly Mrs. Barfield did not dare to keep Esther; but if she sent her servant away, she spoke kindly, giving her enough money to see her through her trouble; there are good people among

Christians. The usual Christian attitude would be to tell Esther that she must go into a reformatory after the birth of her child, for the idea of punishment is never long out of the Christian's thoughts. It is not necessary to recapitulate here how Esther, escaping from the network of snares spread for her destruction, takes refuge in a workhouse, and lives there till her child is reared; how she works fifteen hours a day in a lodging house, sleeping in corners of garrets, living upon insufficient food; or how, after years of struggle, she meets William, now separated from his wife, and consents to live with him that her child may have a father. For this second "transgression," so said a clergyman in a review of the book, Esther could not be regarded as a moral woman. His moral sense, dwarfed by doctrine, did not enable him to see that the whole evil came out of standard morality and the whole good out of the instinct incarnate in her; and he must have read the book without perceiving its theme, the revelation in the life of an outcast servant girl of the instinct on which the whole world rests.

Not until writing these lines did I ever think of "Esther Waters" as a book of doctrine; but it is one, I see that now, and that there is a messianic aspect in my writings. My correspondent did well to point that out, and no blame attaches to him because he seems to fail to see that I may be an admirable moralist while depreciating Christian morality and advocating a return to Nature's. He belonged to the traditions yesterday, today he is among those who are seekers, and to-morrow I doubt not he will be among those prone to think that perhaps Christianity is, after all, retrograde. His lips will curl contemptuously to-morrow

when he hears the cruelty of the circus denounced by men who would, if they were allowed, relight the bon fires of the Inquisition; ... he is a Protestant, I had forgotten. Gladiators have begun to appear to us less cruel than monks, and everybody who can think has begun to think that some return to pagan morality is desirable. That is so; awaking out of the great slumber of Christianity, we are all asking if the qualities which once we deemed our exclusive possession have not been discovered among pagans--pride, courage, and heroism. Our contention has become that no superiority is claimed in any respect but one; it appears that it must be admitted that Christians are more chaste than pagans, at all events that chastity flourishes among Christian communities as it has never flourished among pagan. The Christian's boast is that all sexual indulgence outside of the marriage bed is looked upon as sinful, and he would seem to think that if he proclaims this opinion loudly, its proclamation makes amends for many transgressions of the ethical law. All he understands is the law; nothing of the subtler idea that the ethical impulse is always invading the ethical law finds a way into his mind. Women are hurried from Regent Street to Vine Street, and his conscience is soothed by these raids; the owners of the houses in which these women live are fined, and he congratulates himself that vice is not licensed in England, that, in fact, its existence is unrecognized. Prostitution thrives, nevertheless; but numbers do not discourage the moralist, and when he reads in the newspapers of degraded females, "unfortunates," he breathes a sigh; and if these reports

contain descriptions of miserable circumstance and human grief, he mutters "how very sad!"

But the assurance that the women are wretched and despised soothes his conscience, and he remembers if he has not been able to abolish prostitution, he has at all events divested it of all "glamour." It would appear that practical morality consists in making the meeting of men and women as casual as that of animals. "But what do you wish--you would not have vice respected, would you?" "What you call vice was once respected and honored, and the world was as beautiful then as now, and as noble men lived in it. In many ways the world was more moral than when your ideas began to prevail." He asks me to explain, and I tell him that with the degradation of the courtesan the moral standard has fallen, for as we degrade her we disgrace the act of love. We have come to speak of it as part of our lower nature, permissible, it is true, if certain conditions are complied with, but always looked upon askance; and continuing the same strain of argument, I tell him that the act of love was once deemed a sacred rite, and that I am filled with pride when I think of the noble and exalted world that must have existed before Christian doctrine caused men to look upon women with suspicion and bade them to think of angels instead. Pointing to some poor drab lurking in a shadowy corner he asks, "See! is she not a vile thing?" On this we must part; he is too old to change, and his mind has withered in prejudice and conventions; "a meager mind," I mutter to myself, "one incapable of the effort necessary to understand me if I were to tell him, for instance, that the desire of beauty is in itself

a morality." It was, perhaps, the only morality the Greeks knew, and upon the memory of Greece we have been living ever since. In becoming *hetairae*, Aspasia, Lais, Phryne, and Sappho became the distributors of that desire of beauty necessary in a state which had already begun to dream the temples of Minerva and Zeus.

The words of Blake come into my mind, "the daring of the lion or the submission of the ox." With these words I should have headed my letter to the secretary of the charitable institution, and I should have told him that many books which he would regard as licentious are looked upon by me as sacred. "Mademoiselle de Maupin," "the golden book of spirit and sense," Swinburne has called it, I have always looked upon as a sacred book from the very beginning of my life. It cleansed me of the belief that man has a lower nature, and I learned from it that the spirit and the flesh are equal, "that earth is as beautiful as heaven, and that perfection of form is virtue." "Mademoiselle de Maupin" was a great purifying influence, a lustral water dashed by a sacred hand, and the words are forever ringing in my ear, "by exaltation of the spirit and the flesh thou shalt live." This book would be regarded by my correspondent as he regards my "Memoirs," and its publication has been interdicted in England. How could it be permitted to circulate in a country in which the kingdom of heaven is (in theory) regarded as more important than the kingdom of earth? A few pages back the idea came up under my pen that the aim of practical morality was to render illicit love as unattractive as possible, and I suppose, though he has never thought the matter out, the Christian moralist would regard Gautier as

the most pernicious of writers, for his theme is always praise of the visible world, of all that we can touch and see; and in this book art and sex are not estranged. I have often wondered if the estrangement of the twain so noticeable in English literature is not the origin of this strange belief that bodily love is part of our lower nature. Our appreciation of the mauve flush dying in the west has been indefinitely heightened by descriptions seen in pictures and read in poems, and I cannot but think that if the lover's exaltation before the curve of his mistress's breast had not been forbidden, the ugly thought that the lover's ardor is inferior to the poet's would never have obtained credence. There is but one energy, and the vital fluid, whether expended in love or in a poem, is the same. The poet and the lover are creators, they participate and carry on the great work begun billions of years ago when the great Breath breathing out of chaos summoned the stars into being. But why do I address myself like this to the average moralist? How little will he understand me! In the Orelay adventure which horrified him there was an appreciation of beauty which he has, I am afraid, rendered himself incapable of. Myself and Doris were spiritual gainers by the Orelay adventure, Doris's rendering of "The Moonlight Sonata," till she went to Orelay, was merely brilliant and effective; and have not all the critics in England agreed that the story in which I relate her contains some of the best pages of prose I have written? But why talk of myself when there is Wagner's experience to speak about? Did he not write to Madame Wasendonck, "I owe you Tristan for all eternity"? She has not left any written record

of her debt to Wagner, perhaps because she could not find words to give the reader any idea how great it was.

Histories of human civilization there are in abundance, but I do not know of any history of the human intelligence. But when this comes to be written--if it ever should come to be written--the writer will hesitate, at least I can imagine him hesitating, how much of the genius of artists he would be justified in tracing back to sexual impulses. Goethe, as my correspondent informs me, looked upon love of woman as a means of increasing his aesthetic sensibilities, and my correspondent seems to think that he did them wrong thereby, whereas I think he honored them exceedingly. Balzac held the contrary belief, so Gautier tells us, maintaining that great spiritual elation could be gained by restraint, and when inquiry was made into his precise beliefs on this point he confessed that he could not allow an author more than half an hour once a year with his beloved; he placed no restriction, however, on correspondence, "for that helped to form a style." When Gautier mentioned the names of certain great men whose lives offered a striking refutation of this theory, Balzac answered they would have written better if they had lived chastely. Gautier seems to have left the question there, and so will we, remarking only that Balzac was prone to formulating laws out of his single experience. I remember having written, or having heard somebody say, "in other writers we discover this or that thing, but everything exists in Balzac." And in his conversation with Gautier we do not find him praising chastity as a virtue, but extolling the results that may be gotten from chastity as a Yogi might. It is said that English

missionaries in India sometimes drive out in their pony chaises to visit a holy man who has left his womenfolk, plentiful food, and a luxurious dwelling for a cave in some lonely ravine. The pony chaise only takes the parson to the mouth of the ravine, and leaving his wife and children in charge of his servant, the parson ascends the rocky way on foot, meeting, perchance, a fat peasant priest from Maynooth bent on the same mission as himself--the conversion of the Yogi. It is amusing for a moment to imagine these two Western barbarians sitting with the emaciated saint on the ledge in front of the cave. Thinking to win his sympathy, they tell him that on one point they are all agreed. The Brahman's eyes would dilate; how can this thing be? his eyes would seem to ask, and it is easy to imagine how contemptuously he would raise his eyes when he gathered gradually from their discourse that his visitors believed that chastity was incumbent upon all men. "But all men are not the same," he would answer, if he answered his visitors; "I dwell in solitude and in silence, and am chaste, and live upon the rice that the pious leave on the rocks for me, but I do not regard chastity and abstinence as possessed of any inherent merits; as virtues, they are but a means to an end. How would you impose chastity upon all men, since every man brings a different idea into the world with him? There are men who would die if forced to live chaste lives, and there are men who would choose death rather than live unchaste, and many a woman if she were forced to live with one husband would make him very unhappy, whereas if she lived with two men she would make them both supremely happy. But the news has reached me

even here that in the West you seek a moral standard, and this quest always fills me with wonder. There are priests among you, I can see that, and soldiers, and fishermen, and artists and princes and folk who labor in the fields--now do you expect all these men, living in different conditions of life, to live under the same rule? I am afraid that the East and the West will never understand each other. The sun is setting, my time for speech is over," and the wise man, rising from the stone on which he has been sitting, enters into the cave, leaving the priest and the parson to descend the rocks together in the twilight, their differences hushed for the moment, to break forth again the next day.

Schopenhauer has a fine phrase, one that has haunted my mind these many years, that the follies of the West flatten against the sublime wisdom of the East like bullets fired against a cliff.

How can it be otherwise? For when we were naked savages the Brahmans were learned philosophers, and had seen as far into every mystery as mortal eyes will ever see. We have progressed a little lately; our universities, it is true, are a few hundred years old, but in comparison with the East we are still savages; our culture is but rudimentary, and my correspondent's letter is proof of it. It is characteristic of the ideas that still flourish on the banks of the Thames, ideas that have changed only a little since the *Mayflower* sailed. It would have been better if Columbus had delayed his discovery for, let us say, a thousand years. I am afraid the *Mayflower* carried over a great many intellectual weeds which have caught root and flourished exceedingly in your States--Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Washington.

A letter arrived from Washington some two or three months ago. The writer was a lady who used to write to me on all subjects under the sun; about fifteen years ago we had ceased to write to each other, so she began her letter, not unnaturally, by speaking of the surprise she guessed her handwriting would cause me. She had broken the long silence, for she had been reading "The Lake," and had been much interested in the book. It would have been impolite to write to me without alluding to the aesthetic pleasure the book had given her, but her interest was mainly a religious one. About five years ago she had become a Roman Catholic, she was writing a book on the subject of her conversion, and would like to find out from me why I had made Father Gogarty's conversion turn upon his love of woman, "for it seems to me clear, unless I have misunderstood your book, that you intended to represent Gogarty as an intellectual man." It is difficult to trace one's motives back, but I remember the irritation her letter caused me, and how I felt it would not be dignified for me to explain; my book was there for her to interpret or misinterpret, as she pleased; added to which her "conversion" to Rome was an annoying piece of news. Fifteen years ago she was an intelligent woman and a beautiful woman, if photographs do not lie, and it was disagreeable for me to think of her going on her knees in a confessional, receiving the sacraments, wearing scapulars, trying to persuade herself that she believed in the Pope's indulgences. She must now be middle-aged, but the decay of physical beauty is not so sad a spectacle as the mind's declension. "She began to think," I said, "of another world

only when she found herself unable to enjoy this one any longer; weariness of this world produces what the theologians call 'faith.' How often have we heard the phrase 'You will believe when you are dying'? She would have had," I said, "Father Gogarty leave his church for doctrinal rather than natural reasons, believing scrolls to be more intellectual than the instincts; Father Gogarty poring over some early edition of the Scriptures in his little house on the hilltop, reading by the light of the lamp at midnight and deciding that he would go out of his parish because, according to recent exegesis, a certain verset in the Gospel had been added three hundred years after the death of Christ." I fell to thinking how dry, common, and uninteresting the tale would be had it been written on these doctrinal lines. Carlyle said that Cardinal Newman had the brain of a half-grown rabbit, and he was right; Newman never got further than a scroll, and man must think with his body, as well as with his brain. To think well the whole man must think, and it seems to me that Father Gogarty thought in this complete way. Rose Leicester revealed to him the enchantment and the grace of life, and his quest became life. Had it been Hose Leicester herself the story would have merely been a sensual incident. The instinct to go rose up within him, he could not tell how or whence it came, and he went as the bird goes, finding his way toward a country where he had never been, led as the bird is led by some nostalgic instinct. And I do not doubt that he found life, whether in the form of political or literary ambition or in some other woman who would remind him of the woman he had lost; perhaps he found it in all these things, perhaps in

none. Told as I told it the story seems to me a true and human one, and one that might easily occur in these modern days; much more easily than the story my correspondent would have had me write. The story of a priest abandoning his parish for theological reasons is not an improbable one, but I think such a story would be more typical of the sixteenth century, when men were more interested in the authenticity of the Biblical texts than they are in the twentieth. The Bible has been sifted again and again; its history is known, every word has been weighed, and it is difficult to imagine the most scrupulous exegetist throwing a search light into any unexplored corner. Even Catholic scholarship, if Loisy can be regarded as a Catholic, has abandoned the theory that the gospels were written by the Apostles. The earliest, that of Mark, was written sixty years after the death of Christ, and it is the only one for which any scholar claims the faintest historical value. With this knowledge of history in our possession belief has become in modern times merely a matter of temperament, entirely dissociated from the intellect. Some painter once said that Nature put him out. The theologian can say the same about the intellect--it puts him out. Out of a great deal of temperament and a minimum of intellect he gets a precipitate, if I may be permitted to drop into the parlance of the chemist, for dregs would be an impolite word to use, and the precipitate always delights in the fetich. There will always be men and women, the cleric has discovered, who will barter their souls for the sake of rosaries and scapulars and the Pope's indulgences. The two great enemies of religion, as the clerics know well, are the desire to live and

the desire to know. We find this in Genesis: God: i. e., the clerics, was angry because his creatures ate of these different fruits. God's comprehension of the danger of the tree of life is not wonderful, but his foreseeing of the danger of the tree of knowledge was extraordinary foreseeing, for very little of the fruit of this tree had been eaten at the time the text was written. All through the Middle Ages the clerics strove to keep men from it with tortures and burnings at the stake, and they were so anxiously striving for success in protecting their flocks from this tree that they allowed the sheep to wander, the rams to follow the ewes, and to gambol as they pleased. But the efforts of the clerics were vain. There were rams who renounced the ewes, and the succulent herbage that grows about the tree of life, for the sake of the fruit of the tree of knowledge; all the fences that the clerics had erected were broken down one by one; and during the nineteenth century a great feast was held under the tree. But after every feast there are always ailing stomachs; these denouncing the feast go about in great depression of spirit, surfeited feasters, saying the branches of the tree have been plucked bare; others complain they have eaten bitter fruit. This is the moment for the prowling cleric. Hell is remote, it has been going down in the world for some time, and biology, if no conclusions be drawn, serves the clerical purpose almost as well. "The origins of existence are humble enough, my son, but think of the glorious heritage," and the faint-hearted sheep is folded again.... The tree of life is more abundant; whenever a fruit is plucked another instantly takes its place, and all the efforts of the clerics are now directed to keep their flocks

from this tree. "Back to the tree of knowledge!" they cry. "Hu! Hu! Hu! Both trees," they mutter among themselves, "are accursed, but this one, from which sweet fruit may always be plucked, is the worser." And they collect together in groups to pass censure on their predecessors. "My predecessors were infallible fools," cries the Pope, "to have permitted praise of this fatal tree, wasting their energies on such men as Bruno, who said the earth was round, and Galileo, whom they forced to say he was mistaken when he said the earth moves. A pretty set of difficulties they have involved us in with their accursed astronomy. Boccaccio and the Troubadours should have been burned instead, and if this had been done all the abominable modern literature which would persuade the faithful that this world is not all sackcloth and ashes would never have been written. Away with him who says that the earth is as beautiful as heaven," and Gautier's phrase, *"Moi, je trouve la terre aussi belle que le ciel, et je pense que la correction de la forme est la vertu,"* has become the heresy more intolerable than any other to the modern cleric, and to me and to all the ardent and intellectual spirits of my generation a complete and perfect expression of doctrine. To some it will always seem absurd to look to Gautier rather than to a Bedouin for light. Nature produces certain attitudes of mind, and among these is an attitude which regards archbishops as more serious than pretty women. These will never be among my disciples. So leaving them in full possession of the sacraments, I pass on.

My generation was in sympathy with "Mademoiselle de Maupin" and it did more than to reveal and clarify the ideas

we were seeking. It would be vain for me, as for any other man, to attempt to follow the course of an idea and to try to determine its action upon life. Perhaps the part of the book which interested us the least was that very part which would be read aloud in court if a prosecution were attempted: I am alluding to the scene when Mademoiselle de Maupin comes into Albert's room. This scene was, however, inevitable, and could not be omitted, for does it not contain that vision of beauty which Albert had been seeking and which was vouchsafed to him for a little while? Never did he see Mademoiselle de Maupin afterwards, she was but a phantom of his own imagination made visible by some prodigy to him. For a still briefer space Rosette shared Albert's dream, and man and wife remained faithful to each other. It is easy to imagine the vileness which a prosecuting counsel could extract from these beautiful pages made entirely of vision and ecstasy. How false and shameful is the whole business. We are allowed to state that we prefer pagan morality to Christian, but are interdicted from illustrating our beliefs by incident. So long as we confine ourselves to theory we are unmolested. But these are subtleties which do not trouble the minds of the members of vigilance associations, the men and women who gather together in back parlors with lead pencils to mark out passages which they consider "un-Kur-istean" (a good strong accent on the second syllable). Their thoughts pursue beaten tracks. Books like "Mademoiselle de Maupin" they hold would act directly on the temperament, and we know that they do not do this, we know that the things of the intellect belong to the intellect and the things of the flesh to the flesh. Were it otherwise

Rose Leicester, the pretty school mistress, might have been left out of my story entitled "The Lake," and her place taken by a book. My lady correspondent, it will be remembered, was in favor of some doctrinal difficulty. My second correspondent, the secretary of the charitable institution, would have chosen as the cause of Father Oliver's flight a sensual book. His choice might have been Burton's "Arabian Nights"; better still Casanova's "Memoirs," for this is a book written almost entirely with the senses; the intellect hardly ever intrudes itself; and instead of an emaciated priest poring over a dusty folio we should have had an inflamed young man curled up in an armchair reading eagerly, walking up and down the room from time to time, unable to contain himself, and eventually throwing the book aside, he would find his way down to the lake.

These two versions of "The Lake," as it might have been written by my correspondents, will convince, I think, almost anyone, even them, that the desire of life which set Father Gogarty free could have been inspired only by a woman's personality. It was not necessary that he should go after the woman herself--but that point has already been explained. What concerns us now to understand is how the strange idea could have come into men's minds that literature is a more potent influence than life itself. The solving of this problem has beguiled many an hour, but the solution seems as far away as ever, and I have never got nearer than the supposition that perhaps this fear of literature is a survival of the very legitimate fear that prevailed in the Middle Ages against writing. In my childhood I remember hearing an old woman say that writing was an invention of the devil, and