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ADAM BEDE and FELIX HOLT, the RADICAL

as WORKS of ART and as SOCIAL DOCUMENTS

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Abstract

Adam Bede and Felix Holt as works of art and as social documents.

The thesis is a comparison of these two books, with a view to determining first, the value of each as a work of art, and secondly, the effectiveness of each as a social document. I propose to show that when the author writes directly to a theme, as she does in Felix Holt, she is much less convincing than she in Adam Bede, where her point is made indirectly.

As a work of art, I conclude that Adam Bede is a superior achievement, and this conclusion is based upon a study of the story, the plot, the characters, and the background. The plot, if we are to consider that a plot in the usual meaning of the term is a requisite of a good novel, is much better constructed than that of Felix Holt. The events follow one another naturally, that is, each event is caused by a preceding one and is its normal outgrowth. Of course, as in most novels, there are loose ends to be tucked in at the end of the work, and in the case of Adam Bede the end seems one of the weakest parts of the work.

In Felix Holt, on the other hand, the plot leaves something to be desired. The double plot, a common device, is used, but whereas in Adam Bede the two plots are so closely interwoven that it is impossible to separate them, in Felix Holt there is almost complete separation. Each plot has its set of characters, and they come into contact only rarely: Felix meets Harold only once, and then to

discuss electoral procedure, whereas he has nothing to do with Mrs. Transome.

The two books resemble each other in one special point: the characters that the author intended to be the principal ones prove to be secondary both in importance and vitality. The really vital ones are the so-called secondary personages. Thus in Adam Bede, both Dinah Morris and Adam must yield first place to Mrs. Poyser, Hetty and Arthur, Mr. Irwine and Bartle Massey. In Felix Holt the same is true for Felix, who is unconvincing, compared to Mrs. Transome and her maid Denner, Harold and Jermy. All in all, the author's insight and power of characterisation are much greater in Adam Bede.

As a social document, Felix Holt is the inferior book. Here the author is mostly concerned with town life, and is no longer writing of the quiet, full country life she was familiar with in her youth. In Adam Bede, however, we have a vivid picture of the countryfolk and their every-day life; we visit them at home, in the fields, go to church with them, and join in their simple pleasures. It is true that the picture we get is a far cry from the wretched conditions prevailing in most of the factory towns, but this proves that the old England of green fields and hedges and men who had the homely virtues had not completely disappeared, and this background of peace and calm and contentment adds considerably to the charm of the book.

I should like, first of all, to discuss the structure of the two novels, Adam Bede and Felix Holt, and the development of the plot and the effect upon the of the way the incidents of the story are strung together.

In Felix Holt, the story starts out with a description of the home of the Transomes, where imperious, tragic Mrs. Transome is awaiting her long-absent son's return from Turkey with love and dread; love, for he was her favourite child for whom she had sacrificed much, including honor and self-respect; dread, for she was uneasy that people might notice the striking resemblance he bore to her agent, Jermyrn, and thus possibly guess his paternity. Harold arrives with his son and his foreign servant and proceeds to air views which upset his mother and fill her with dire presentiment, and in addition hurt deeply, for she realises he does not love her as she wanted to be loved, nor would he accept her own love for him because it was so possessive. And it is precisely at this point when the stage has been set for something important to happen that the scene changes and we are transported to the home of the Lyons, and introduced to the pastor and his supposed daughter, Esther, to Mrs. Holt, and finally to Felix himself. This abrupt change, it seems to me, comes at an inopportune moment and can have no other effect than a loss of interest on the part of

the reader, not only on account of the break, but from the fact that the two stories may very well have been independent; the ties between them are very flimsy; Felix comes into contact with Harold only incidentally, and because the latter, as later develops, has an interest in the elections; the subsequent events, the rioting at the elections, the death of the constable due to a tussle with Felix, and the latter's trial and sentence do not touch the Transomes very closely. In the story we have, therefore, a series of jumps from one group of characters to the other, the only thread binding them together being the very weak one of a lawsuit and legal technicalities that tend to bore the reader more than they interest him.

The two stories of the Transomes, Jermyn, and the question of the inheritance, and the story of Felix and Miss Lyon and Felix's interest in reform are parallel, but the method used to bring them together is forced. Again we come to the question of the lawsuit with its highly technical points, the explanation of which the reader is expected to accept with any verification, although it may be taken as correct, for the author asked legal counsel before developing the theme. Thus, to secure the estate for himself, Harold proposes marriage to Miss Lyon, who, for love of Felix, rejects his offer and is quite willing to live on a pittance with man she loves.

In my opinion, Adam Bede is much better developed as a plot. From the very beginning the events move along naturally and fit into one another nicely so that the transition is hardly felt. There is no abrupt break, but each succeeding transition is a natural development of what has gone before. There is however, the incident of Arthur's last-minute arrival and his attempt to secure a reprieve. This is an over-worked mechanical device.

In the opening chapter we are introduced to Adam and his brother Seth, and are shown them at work, and given revealing glimpses into their characters. We are then prepared for the appearance of Dinah, and accompany the young men to her preaching, which Seth heartily approves of, as he is in love with the lady preacher. When Adam returns home, he finds that his father has not done the work he had contracted for, and as the work must be finished the next morning, Adam stays up all night to complete it. When Adam's father is found drowned there is a normal reason for Dinah to visit the Bedes and comfort the widow. The reader is then introduced to the clergyman, Mr. Irwine, whose talk with his mostly about Dinah, who is the Poysers' niece, and then the action moves naturally to the Hall Farm, with its delightful tenants, the Poysers, old and young, along with Hetty, a central figure in the tragedy which concerns all the principal characters,

directly or indirectly. The relationship between Hetty, Arthur, and Adam, with its repercussions on each of them is logically developed, from the first meeting of the unfortunate lovers, Hetty and Arthur, then of Hetty and Adam, culminating in Hetty's trial and sentence for child-murder and Arthur's attempt to make amends for his faults. It is almost at the very end that the smooth flow of action is interrupted, and interest directed into another channel. A jarring note is Adam's love for Dinah after his passionate interest in Hetty, whom he has, perhaps, too easily forgotten.

Although Bullett states that the creation of character is not the whole of the novelist's art, I believe that a study of character delineation is profitable as an indication of the novelist's ability as an artist, and the measure of his insight and perspicacity.

"In novels of the central tradition,---characterisation is of first importance. The quality of characterisation is determined in part by many intermediate things: by choice of method, technical skill, narrative tempo, tone of voice, style, and the degree in which the author possesses an eye for significant features and an ear for idiosyncrasies of speech, especially the last. But behind and beyond all these, as the animating principle of the whole enterprise, is something of which not even

the novelist himself (or herself) is always fully aware, namely his own attitude to the creatures of his imagination. That it must be one of sympathy is self-evident, in so far as sympathy, imaginative sympathy, is a prerequisite of understanding;---But sympathy, though necessary, is not enough: sympathy unmixed with detachment is likely to result in a self-identification of author with creature in which the outlines of character are lost and characterisation, properly so-called, gives place to mere subjectiveness and a species of special pleading. ---George Eliot comes very near to falling into this trap in Adam Bede; and she does so again in later novels,---" (1)

To begin with the character who gives his name to the book: to modern critics, Adam is not a wholly satisfying character. Although appreciate his qualities to a limited extent, many more dwell upon his shortcomings and refuse to accept him as life-like.

"He is a prig in homespun and a mere bundle of moral qualities," says Bullett, and a little later calls him "sententious." (2)

Furthermore, "He is painstakingly characteristic. There are no vitalizing inconsistencies in his behaviour." (3) and again "Adam's part is passive." (4)

Elton declares, "Adam Bede is a made-up woman's hero." (5)

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1. Bullett, George Eliot, p. 180
 2. " " " p. 172
 3. " " " p. 173
 4. " " " p. 174
 5. Elton, A Survey of English Literature, 1830-1880, p.262

In general, I agree with critics who find that Adam is not entirely convincing, but I also believe that that they have overlooked, or at least depreciated, some points which are in his favor. It is true that he talks sententiously, but from what we know of Adam, this seems entirely in character.

As evidence that there are "vitalizing inconsistencies" in Adam's behaviour, we may take the opinion of his neighbours who admire him for certain qualities, but still can find something for which to criticize him unfavorably. "Ay, sir, that's Adam Bede, that is, I'll be bound---Thias Bede's son---everybody knows him hereabouts. He's an uncommon clever, stiddy fellow, an' wonderful strong. Lord bless you, sir---if you'll excuse me for saying so---he can walk forty miles a day, an' lift a matter o' sisty stone. He's an uncommon favourite wi' the gentry, sir: Captain Donnithorne and Parson Irwine maks a fine fuss wi' him. But he's a little lifted up and peppery-like." (1) whereas Dinah finds Adam "like the patriarch Joseph, for his great skill and knowledge, and the kindness he shows to his brother and his parents," (2) and "And she has been telling me what Adam has done, these many years, to help his father and his brother; it's wonderful what a spirit of wisdom and knowledge he has, and how he's ready to use it all in behalf of them that

1. Adam Bede, Ch. II, p. 13
 2. " " Ch. VIII, p. 68
 3. " " Ch. XIV, p. 105

are feeble. And I'm sure he has a loving spirit too .
 I've noticed it often among my own people around Snowfield,
 that the strong, skilful men are often the gentlest to the
 women and children; and it's pretty to see 'em carrying the
 little babies as if they were no heavier than little birds.
 And the babies always seem to like the strong arm best.
 I feel sure it would be so with Adam Bede. Don't you
 think so, Hetty?" (1)

Adam himself admits that he has what Captain
 Donnithorne calls an "iron will, as well as an iron arm." (2)
 "But it isn't my way to be see-sawing about anything; I
 think my fault lies th' other way. When I've said a thing,
 if it's only to myself, it's hard for me to go back." (3)

The author, however, is not content simply to
 enumerate Adam's qualities; she also shews a few of his
 weaknesses, some of which I have just described. She tries
 to explain how it is that such a strong, upright person can
 can fall in love with a pretty attractive, but vain little
 thing like Hetty. "There are various types of beauty,
 causing men to make fools of themselves in various styles,
 from the desperate to the sheepish; but there is one order
 of beauty which seems made to turn the heads not only of
 men, but of all intelligent mammals, even of women. It is a
 beauty like that of kittens, or very small downy ducks making
 gentle rippling noises with their soft bills, or babies just
 beginning to toddle and to engage in conscious mischief---

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1. Adam Bede, Ch. XIV, p. 105
 2. " ~~Ch~~ p. 123, Ch. XVI
 3. " Ch. XVI, p. 123

a beauty with which you can never be angry, but that you feel ready to crush for inability to comprehend the state of mind into which it throws you. Hetty Sorrel's was that kind of beauty." (1) and Adam, for whom this was first love, found he was utterly incapable of resisting such charms.

And so it goes on with Adam: the author, by adding little touches here and there remarks about Adam's thoughts and actions, and sometimes lets us perceive Adam through the eyes of other characters in the book; little by little she builds up a ~~man~~ portrait of her hero, who, although he has little weaknesses, is presented "for our unqualified approval," (2) which Bullett believes is a great weakness of George Eliot's books. Adam still manages to portray the better type of country workman; he contributes not only to our knowledge of country life, but also adds to our understanding and appreciation of the background.

Adam is a strong, self-respecting, serious man who is not subject to the frailties of ordinary men. He is physically a fine figure of a man, tall, dark, and broad-shouldered, one who "would make a good soldier," (3) and morally there is no nonsense about him. But "If you are a character in a George Eliot novel the chief thing you have to fear is your author's unqualified moral approval. If that cannot destroy your pretension to reality, nothing can. Not only by commentary, but in the subtler process of characterisation, by the very speeches she puts into your mouth and your mind, she will do her best to expose you for what you are, or what you would be but for her own

1. Adam Bede, Ch. VII, p. 62

2. Bullett, p. 171

2. Adam Bede, Ch. II, p. 12

imaginative power, a walking shadow, a garrulous embodiment of qualities she is resolved to admire. Thus Adam." (1)

This is going too far. Perhaps we may get other ideas from what Adam says and does, and what others say about him.

Bullett quotes the following as an example of Adam's sententiousness and moralising:

"Nay, Seth, lad; I'm not for laughing at no man's religion. Let 'em follow their consciences, that's all. Only I think it 'ud be better if their consciences 'd let 'em stay quiet i' the church---there's a deal to be learnt there. And there's such a thing as being over-speritual; we must do something beside Gospel i' this world. Look at the canals and the aqueducts, an' th'coal-pit engines, and Arkwright's mills there at Cromford; a man must learn summat beside Gospel to make them things, I reckon. But to hear some o' them pre chers, you'd think as a man must be doing nothing all's life but shutting eyes and looking what's agoing on inside him. I know a man must have the love of God in his soul, and the Bible's God's word. But what does the Bible say? Why, it says as God put his spirit into the workmen as b'uilt the tabernacle, to make him do all the carved work and things as wanted a nice hand. And this is my way of looking at it: there's the sperrit o' God in all things and all times---weekday as well as Sunday---and i' the figuring and mathematics.

And God help us with our headpieces and our hands as well as with our souls; and if a man does bits o' jobs out o' work-

1. Bullett, p. 171

ing hours---builds a oven for's wife to save her from going to the bakehouse or scrats at his bit o' garden and makes two potatoes grow instead o' one, he's doing more good, and he's just as near to God, as if he was running after some preacher and a-praying and a-groaning." (1)

Although Bullett himself recognises the fact that Adam is sententious, he asks if he "must be sententious and nothing else," and admits that is the author's conception of him. This characteristic makes Adam less likable as a person, but it is in keeping with what we know of him, and thus adds to the convincingness of the portrait, despite the fact that Bullett finds there are no "vitalizing inconsistencies in his behaviour." (2)

Adam is perfectly awar of his own qualities, both as a man and as a workman. After he had been offered the position of agent by Arthur Donnithorne and had accepted, and was being congratulated by his neighbors and friends gathered to celebrate Arthur's coming of age, he declared, "It'd be nonsense for me to be saying, I don't at all deserve the opinion you have of me; that 'ud be poor thanks to you, to say you've known me all these years, and yet haven't sense enough to find out a good deal of the truth about me. You think, if I undertake to do a bit o' work I'll do it well, be my pay big or little---and that's true." (3)

1. Adam Bede, Ch. I, p. 8

2. Bullett, p. 173

This is an indication of Adam's competence and integrity in his work, although the same sentiments might have been more felicitously expressed. Adam has a very poor opinion of slovenly workmen; not how he berates his fellow-workers in the first chapter when they wish to knock off because time is up though their work is unfinished. Later on he states, "I wouldn't give a penny for a man as 'ud drive a nail in slack because he didn't get extra pay for it." (1) Adam, like the excellent workman he is, is also very careful of the tools of his trade. Even after the heated meeting with Arthur ending in the fight, he is still thoughtful of his responsibility and says, "I must pick up the tools, sir. They're my brother's. I doubt they'll be rusted. If you'll please to wait a minute." (2)

Bullett declares that Adam cannot lose his temper convincingly. We may accept this to a limited degree if we remember that Lewes advised the author to bring Arthur and Adam into direct conflict, and George Eliot chose this piece of plot mechanism to do so. We recall, however, that on previous occasions Adam had lost his temper. Once at the beginning of the, when the workmen were mocking Seth, he seized Wiry Ben and said, "Let it alone, will you? Let it alone, or I'll shake the soul out o' your body." (3) This shows his quick temper and while

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1. Adam Bede, Ch. XVI, p. 121
 2. " Ch. XXVIII, p. 226
 3. " Ch. I, p. 7

not exactly a lack of humor, at least an unwillingness to let things go too far. Again, we recall Adam's anger with his father, who had failed to complete a job contracted for. To Adam, love was a very serious thing, and as his was first love, could say, "I'm none of them men as can go making love first to one woman and then t'other, and don't think it much odds which of 'em I take," (1)

In Adam's relations with Hetty, we are confronted with a strong, virtuous man who is deceived by outward appearances, in his case by a pretty, doll-like face which Mr. Poyser states will attract men much more than Dinah's pale beauty. As the author says, "Possibly you think Adam was not at all sagacious in his interpretations, and that it was altogether extremely unbecoming in a sensible man to behave as he did---falling in love with a girl who really had nothing more than her beauty to recommend her, attributing imaginary virtues to her, and even condescending to cleave to her after she had fallen in love with another man, waiting for her kind looks as a patient trembling dog waits for his master's eye to be turned upon him. But in so complex a thing as human nature, we must consider, it is hard to find rules without exceptions---and my friend Adam was one. For my part, however, I respect him nonethe less: nay, I think the deep love he has for that sweet, rounded, blossom-like, dark-eyed Hetty, of whose inward self he was really ignorant, came out of the very strength of his nature, and not out of

any consistent weakness." (1) After Hetty's downfall, Adam, who heretofore had been too hard, says, It's a sore fault in me as I'm so hot and out o' patience with people when they do wrong, and my heart gets shut up against 'em. I see clear enough there's more pride nor love in my soul---" (2) has a change of heart.

"I thought she was loving and tender-hearted and wouldn't tell a lie, or act deceitful. How could I think any other way? And if he'd never come near her, and I'd married her, and been loving to her, and took care of her she might never ha' done anything bad. What would it ha' signified ---my having a bit of trouble with her? It 'ud ha' been nothing to this." (1) He loses his sternness and severity towards sinners and says to the Poysers, "I hope you won't look harshly on her if she comes back, as she may do if she finds it hard to get on away from home," (2) and to Hetty in prison, in answer to her question if he has forgiven her, says, "Yes, I forgive thee, Hetty; I forgave thee long ago." (3)

While in the main I agree with the critics regarding Adam's character, I believe that what I have considered allows for certain defects which are inherent in this type of character, but are not defects in the portrayal

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1. Adam Bede, Ch. XLVI, pp. 332-333
 2. ~~Ex~~ " Ch. XXXVIII, p. 292
 3. " Ch. XLVI, p. 334

Seeing that it was the author's intention to make Dinah Morris the central character in the novel, I believe she has failed. Dinah appears only occasionally and flits in and out of the story. Of course she is needed as a binding force for "She represents an important feature of that broad vision of human life, that conception of the mystery and diversity of human nature, which, over and above any explicit didacticism, the book as a whole seeks to convey." (1) But I think that the statement "There are no vitalizing inconsistencies in his behaviour" could more fittingly be applied to Dinah than to Adam. Dinah is all sweetness and light, but with a sanctimoniousness that becomes repellent, and her unworldliness is carried too far.

I very much appreciated her sermon at the beginning of the book commencing with "Saviour of Sinners;---" (2) and the touching scene in the prison with Hetty, but in her small talk with her aunt Poyser and others she becomes rather unattractive, and I do not believe that the author intended her to be that at all. Rather our sympathy is directed to the poor "sinners," as she calls them, Hetty and Arthur. Perhaps the author had her own aunt too much in mind.

After Thias Bede's death, Dinah visits his widow, an admirably-drawn character, to comfort her in her bereavement although she had never met her previously, but towards who her heart had prompted her, and proves eminently tactful

1. Bullett, p. 175
2. Adam Bede, Ch. II

and understanding. It is through her silence and work about the house that she wins the confidence and approval of the whining, complaining Mrs. Bede and brings back comparative peace to the stricken household.

Bullett quotes the following as a proof of sanctimonious in Dinah:

"How do you do, Adam Bede?" said Dinah in her calm treble, pausing from her sweeping, and fixing her mild grave eyes upon him. "I trust you feel rested and strengthened again to bear the burden and heat of the day."

This perhaps to us seems an affected way of speaking, but to the Methodists it was not so. To them the language of the Bible was eminently fitted for everyday use and thus they saw no reason why it should not be so used, just as the Quakers do now. It seems to me that this is perfectly in character with regard to Dinah, but while it enhances the truth of the portrait, it adds nothing to make Dinah more appealing.

"It is true, I think, though perhaps lamentable, that perfect characters in fiction have a tendency to be insipid. One wants some little touch of frailty to convince one that they are really human." (1)

"Undoubtedly, Dinah Morris is not only an elaborate but a most skilful and loving portrait of a beautiful soul. Reading the book carefully, one must admit that she performs her part admirably. She shows unerring delicacy

1. Stephen, pp. 70-71

and nobility of feeling; and her sermons are expositions of that side of her creed which clearly ought to appeal to one's better nature." (2) But Stephen goes on to say that they do not.

"Hetty moves us to the core. Dinah Morris, on the other hand, instead of forming the real centre of interest, is a most charming person, who looks in occasionally, and acts as an edifying and eloquent chorus to comment upon the behaviour of the people in whom we are really interested." (2)

As is the case with Adam, sanctimoniousness and sententiousness become irritating and it seems to me that Dinah suffers more from this than Adam does.

"George Eliot's failures in characterization are never to be found among her chorus parts: there is no novelist who can more dexterously suggest the human environment of a story, by peopling her background with small, significant, representative figures who have nothing to do with the main action; her failures are those among her chief characters whose virtues she too urgently and tediously insists upon. They are the victims of their author's partiality." (3)

This perhaps suggests why Eliot has not entirely succeeded in her portrayal of the two characters who were intended to dominate the book; it also tells us why she succeeded when she turned her hand and mind to the so-called "minor characters," for "The narrative strength of Adam Bede is in the Hall Farm scenes on the one hand, and in Broxton Vicarage and the Squire's household on the other. The main dramatic interest is provided by the simple story of Hetty

and Arthur." (1) These characters are so warm, human, and vital that Adam and Dinah become themselves more believable through the radiated vigor and appeal which is reflected upon them through their relationships and intercourse with them.

"Mrs. Poyser is a masterpiece of comic realism, and the emphasis is on the realism; she is a natterer, and incidentally a shrew, as well as a good wife and fond mother and the immortal embodiment of rustic, racy, common sense. ... In fine, she is not an idealized character." (2)

In Dinah, a selfless, dedicated spirit, and Mrs. Poyser, with her head full of housewifely details and her mouth of homely proverbs we have a pair of contrasted figures. After we have wearied of Dinah's perfection, we welcome Mrs. Poyser's garrulity, which incidentally hides a warm heart, and her downright common sense; her warmth is shown, among other scenes, in her treatment of Hetty when the latter arrives home late and her aunt loses her temper, but not enough to prevent her from wanting Hetty to go to bed supperless. (3)

She is as ready to find an excuse for her own faults as she is to deprecate these faults in others, as witness the scene with the servant Molly who, while fetching some cider, allows the pitcher to fall, for which she is soundly berated; when Mrs. Poyser does the same, however, it is the pitcher's fault for jumping out of her hand. (4)

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1. Bullett, p. 174
 2. " p. 174
 3. Adam Bede, Ch. XIV
 4. " Ch. XX

She has no compunction about speaking her mind under any circumstances. Her quarrel with the squire is a case in point. As she says, "Well, sir, when I want to say anything, I can mostly find words to say it in, thank God." After which her sharp tongue puts the squire to flight. Altogether a fine contrast with Dinah; either of them without the other would lose much of her appeal.

"They (Dinah and Mrs. Poyser) are both good women in their ways, and each gains from their juxtaposition. No two human souls could be outwardly more different; but they appreciate each other, and their author equally appreciates them both, and we are conscious, on reflection, that what they have in common, their simple kindly humanity, is more radical and enduring than the differences that divide them. Moreover, the reader who grows weary of Dinah's somewhat stilted perfection finds relish and relief in hearing Mrs. Poyser give voice to his own impatience." (1) Thus we follow Mrs. Poyser, who scolds Hetty because Hetty has no mother to scold her, to her conversations with Adam, Captain Donnithorne, her routing of the squire when he comes to suggest they leave their farm, her attendance at the coming-of-age party and celebrations, and finally her great sorrow for Hetty's tragedy. "Why is she so charming? The answer is, I suppose, in a general way to be found in the delicious contrast between Mrs. Poyser's intense shrewdness and strong affections, with the quick temper and the vivacity with which she snatches at the most preposterous flights of fancy which will bewilder and discomfit her antagonists for the moment.---

1. Bullett, pp. 176-177

Meanwhile her love for her husband and the irrepressible Totty---one of the portraits which, without being sentimental, shows George Eliot's most feminine appreciation of the charms of childhood---and even her kindness to Hetty, though she does see through Hetty's weaknesses, entitles her to the regard felt for her by all readers." (1)

The author appreciated her characters and felt she had not made the most of their capacities. In a letter to Blackwood, Eliot wrote, "I am delighted that you like my Mrs. Poyser. I'm very sorry to part with her and some of my other characters-- there seems to be so much more to be done with them. Mr. Lewes says she gets better and better as the book goes on; and I was certainly conscious of writing her dialogue with heightening gusto." (2)

Thus the author manages to create a vital, convincing character by depicting her, not as a faultless saint, as Dinah tells her listeners to think of herself, but as a hearty, vigorous, quick-tempered, warm-hearted person, and this not by telling us how we are to think of her, but by allowing us to judge her value both by her words and deeds. This definitely adds to the convincingness of the character.

1. Cross, Vol. II, p. 60
2. Adam Bede, Ch. II

The main dramatic interest, as Bullett points out, is provided by the simple story of Hetty and Arthur. The young squire is essentially a kindly but selfish young man. "Arthur's, as you know, was a loving nature. Deeds of kindness were as easy to him as a bad habit; they were the common issue of his weakness and good qualities, of his egoism and his sympathy. He didn't like to witness pain, and he liked to have grateful eyes beaming on him as the giver of pleasure." (1) It is precisely this weakness that precipitated the tragedy. Arthur is not a vicious youth. When he realizes he is falling in love he decides to break with Hetty, but is too weak to do so; he consults Mr. Irwine, but even then he cannot bring himself to act decisively until after his fight with Adam, and then it is too late, and he leaves in ignorance of the state Hetty is in. He is a liberal-minded young man and intends to do his best to improve the condition of his estate and tenants, basing his actions on love and respect. "I don't believe there is anything you can't prevail on people to do with love. For my part, I couldn't live in a neighbourhood where I was not loved and respected." (2) When he considers he has lost this love and respect, he leaves for other parts, after doing what he could for his tenants, and the people whom he had hurt most, the Poyzers, so that they might stay on at the farm they had accupied for years.

1. Adam Bede, Ch. IXIX, p. 227
 2. " " Ch. XVI, p. 125

We have only pity for Hetty, the poor shallow, conceited girl who is dazzled by the love and attentions of the squire's grandson and has visions of wonderful things to come when she marries, becomes a fine lady, and resides at the Hall. George Eliot here gives us "an idyll of first love, presented with delicacy and understanding." (1) We share Hetty's fears as her condition from day to day becomes graver and more fraught with peril, we accompany her in her frantic search for Arthur, we understand her feelings as she is tried for child-murder, and her confession is extremely touching. I must admit that, to me, most of what makes the prison scene as effective as it is, is Hetty's expression of her remorse and fear.

"Arthur Donnithorne, a very average specimen of good-natured erring humanity, and Hetty herself, the pretty victim of her own shallowness and far from vicious passion, have ten times as much life and artistic truth in them as those labouriously studied 'principal characters.' " (2)

Bartle Massey, the schoolmaster, is a man who always speaks his mind, a person sometimes sarcastic and bitter, whose bitterness might have been caused by some tragedy in his past life of which he never speaks but which we may guess the nature of as he speaks so disparagingly of women. He has a quick temper, but is also capable of warmth and kindheartedness, as he proves during Hetty's trial and -----

1. Bullett, p. 175
 2. " p. 174

and his attitude towards Adam in his sorrow and pain. He is kind and considerate in his relations with men who come to his night school to study, but he cannot stand carelessness. His philosophy of education may be summed up in his own words: "But the long and short of it is---I'll have nobody in my night school that doesn't strive to learn what he comes to learn, as hard as if he was striving to get out of a dark hole into broad daylight. I'll send no man away because he's stupid: if Billy Taft, the idiot, wanted to learn anything, I'd not refuse to teach him. But I'll not throw away good knowledge on people who think they can get it by the sixpenn'orth, and carry it away with 'em as they would an ounce of snuff. So never come to me again, if you can't show that you've been working with your own heads, instead of thinking you can pay for mine to work for you. That's the last word I've got to say to you." (1)

1. Adam Bede, Ch. XXI, p. 173

Felix Holt

As was the case in Adam Bede, it seemed to me that the co-called principal characters presented less interest and were less well-drawn than the subsidiary characters, and my sympathy went out not to Felix and his watered-down type of Radicalism, nor to Esther with her vanity and desire for a lady-like life of ease, but rather, in the first place, to Mrs. Transome in her misery, Pastor Lyon in his struggles with types such as Mrs. Holt, and between his conscience and his duty regarding Esther whom he had brought up to believe was his daughter.

"Felix, in whom there is no fault, remains something of a stick, at worst the mere mouthpiece for unexceptional opinions." (1)

Felix is meant to be a Radical; he is interested in politics and devotes himself wholeheartedly to it, as is shown in a conversation with Parson Lyon: "Then you have a strong interest in the great political movements of these times?" said Mr. Lyon, with a perceptible flashing of the eyes.

"I should think so. I despise every man who has not---or having it, doesn't try to rouse it in other men." (2)

His Radicalism, however, goes back to 1832 about which Eliot learned from newspaper accounts where he is shown as violent and revolutionary. But Felix is much too sensible for that. He refuses to be hoodwinked by zealous

1. Bullett, p. 196
2. Felix Holt, Ch. V, p. 58

orators who have demanded universal suffrage; this he classes as an engine: the force that is to work it must come from men's passions. No scheme will do good, therefore, unless the power behind it takes a right direction. The steam that is to work the engines is public opinion, that is, "the ruling belief in society about what is right and what is wrong, what is honorable and what is shameful." (1) He refuses to condone dishonest practices and corruption, even in his own party.

It may be said to his advantage that he refused to live on the proceeds from the sale of a quack medicine, because it was useless in itself, and though taking it may have given sufferers confidence and faith enough to fight effectively against disease, yet it was downright harmful in many cases. As he says of himself: "It is just because I'm a very ambitious fellow, with very hungry passions, wanting a great deal to satisfy me, that I have chosen to give up what people call worldly good. At least that has been one determining reason. It all depends on what a man gets into his consciousness--what life thrusts into his mind, so that it becomes present to him as remorse is present to the guilty, or a mechanical problem to an inventive genius." (2) On the other hand, he has a somewhat saving sense of humour; he is able to laugh at himself if necessary, and accepts just rebukes. As Mr. Lyon said, "Yes, yes, my friend; you have that mark of grace within you, that you are ready to acknowledge the justice of a rebuke." (3)

1. Stephen, pp. 153-154

2. Felix Holt, Ch. XXVII, p. 235

3. " " Ch. XIII, p. 139

Felix is rude to people, especially to Esther when he first meets her, and this seems so very light a side of his character that it discounts a great deal from his appeal. An over-all picture of Felix leaves us cold, and we regard him as an echo of the author's opinions, in this case political.

We are likely to consider Felix a boor because of his treatment of Esther when they first meet and for some time after. He first begins by criticising her taste in poetry: "Byron's Poems," he said in a tone of disgust,--- A misanthropic debauchee,---whose notions of a hero was that he should disorder his stomach and despise mankind. His corsairs and renegades, his Alps and Manfreds, are the most paltry puppets that were ever pulled by the strings of lust and pride." (1) This is hardly the way to win a romantic young lady's esteem, a young woman who had aspirations to become a fine lady. "A fine lady is a squirrel-headed thing, with small airs, and small notions, about as applicable to the business of life as a pair of tweezers to the clearing of a forest." Esther is almost but not quite as angry with him as he with her.

There are some things to be admired in Felix: his frankness to Esther and her father whom he distresses; his frankness with Transome regarding his agents' corruption; his frankness in a speech to the electors shortly before the voting, in which he denounces this corruption in the agents of his own party. We may consider it a

1. Felix Holt, Ch. V, p. 62

refusal on his part to abandon a principle, or on the other hand, as political foolhardiness. We admire the way in which he attempts to save a man's life during the riot and are disturbed by the fatal accident, but he comes very close to injuring his own case during the trial by elaborating his ideas of what is right and wrong and a man's duty to fight against authority when it is used harmfully. "I plead 'not guilty' to the charge of manslaughter, because I know that word may carry a meaning which would fairly apply to my act. When I threw Tucker down, I did not see the possibility that he would die from a sort of attack which ordinarily occurs in fighting without any fatal effect. As to my assaulting a constable, it was a quick choice between two evils: I should else have been disabled. And he attacked me under a mistake about my intentions. I'm not prepared to say I never would assault a constable where I had more chance of deliberation. I should certainly assault him if I saw him doing anything that made my blood boil: I reverence the law, but not where it is a pretext for wrong, which it should be the object of law to hinder. I consider that I should be making an unworthy defence, if I let the court infer from what I say myself, or from what is said by my witnesses, that because I am a man who hates drunken motiveless disorder, or any wanton harm, therefore I am a man who would never fight against authority: I hold it blasphemy to say that a man ought not to fight against authority; there is no great religion and no great freedom that has not done it, in the beginning." (1)

1. Felix Holt, Ch. XLVI, p. 396

These are admirable words, and true to Felix's character; however he remains a type precisely for the reason that he is used almost exclusively to give the author's own opinions, and as such is so much the less vital. "To him" (the modern reader) "it will seem that the one conspicuous (and not fatal) failure in Felix Holt is the earnest honest young man who gives his name to the book, and whose 'Radicalism,' so deeply tinged with his author's conservative moderation, must have struck even contemporary readers as very mild medicine for the prevailing social ills." (1)

"Here once again,---we have trivial selfishness and high moral endeavour isolated and dramatized in two persons. Holt begins by despising Esther Lyon, who, much against her will, falls in love with him. He talks to her, as she aptly says, like an angry pedagogue; but her reluctant admiration of him, and---her 'need for someone to lean on' work a moral revolution in her." (2)

In Esther Lyon we have a young lady who is introduced as being vain and too much preoccupied with what interests her directly. As a child she had been sent to a French Protestant school where "it was understood that Esther would contract no Papistical superstitions; and this was perfectly true; but she contracted, as we see, a good deal of non-Papistical vanity." (3)

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1. Bullett, p. 195
 2. " p. 195-196
 3. Felix Holt, pp. 81-82

She had little knowledge of politics, but in this she was later influenced by Felix, who had from their first meeting treated her as being incapable of understanding the issues. "But it was quite clear that, instead of feeling any disadvantage on his side, he held himself to be immeasurably her superior; and what was worse, Esther had a secret consciousness that he was her superior. She was all the more vexed at the suspicion that he thought slightly of her," (1) and this feeling of his continues to almost the end of the novel, or until Esther discovers she is in love with him. "You mean you did think me contemptible then. But it was very narrow of you to judge me in that way, when my life has been so different from yours. I have great faults. I know I am selfish, and think too much of my own small tastes and too little of what affects others. But I am not stupid. I am not unfeeling. I can see what is better." (2) Thus she tries to justify herself to Felix and this becomes a turning-point in their relations. And this admirable but not very plausible girl changes to become worthy of a not very interesting man. She changes so completely that she is willing to give up the fulfilment of her dream of becoming a fine lady, and live on a meager income with Felix.

1. Felix Holt, p. 109.
 2. " " p. 236.

Pastor Lyon, says Bullett, (1) is not many miles removed from Dinah Morris. In both we find an intense fervour and a dedication to what they think is the way of life most pleasing to God. Lyon's enthusiasm becomes slightly tiresome in the long run. But what I admire him for is his sincerity, and preoccupation with the good of others, his willingness to act as confessor and advisor to souls in trouble, as for example his meeting with the whimpering, complaining Mrs. Holt who is unable to understand her son's refusal to exploit a quack medicine. I also sympathized with him in his struggle to decide what the correct thing to do would be; to conceal the fact that he was not Esther's father, or to risk losing her and her love by revealing the secret of her birth and thus allowing her to inherit the transome fortune.

As for Mrs. Holt, it seems she is a watered-down version of Mrs. Poyser. Perhaps as the author drew more often on her early memories, her characters, such as Mrs. Holt, lost some, if not most of their vitality and became shadows of the real thing. Mrs. Holt is well drawn, but a far cry from Mrs. Poyser, the community ladies in Scenes from Clerical Life, or Mrs. Garth in Middlemarch.

"The strength of the book (Felix Holt) lies in the living warmth and fidelity of the midlandshire back-

 1. Bullett, p. 196.

ground, of which the superb introductory chapter gives us a comprehensive panorama, and in the firm, sensitive, acute characterisation of Mrs. Transome, her husband, her son Harold, her maid Denner, her brother the Reverend John Lingon, and Jermyn the sleek lawyer." (1)

Mrs. Transome alone, the bitter, pathetic old woman, whose "knowledge and accomplishments had become as old fashioned as stucco ornaments, of which the substance is no longer worth anything, while the form is no longer to the taste of any living mortal" is alive,---(2)

This is the lady who has been living under a cloud for years with her bitter secret, and whose aged husband has not the full use of his wits, who has been disappointed in and cheated and insulted by her former lover, and whose hopes lie entirely in her long-absent and recently-retuned son. "It had come to pass now---this meeting with the son who had been the object of so much longing; whom she had longed for before he was born, for whom she had sinned, from whom she had wrenched herself with pain at their parting, and whose coming again had been the great hope of her years." (3) She is torn between her son and the desire to keep her secret, to prevent an open clash between Harold and Jermyn, in which eventually the latter threatens to disclose every-

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1. Bulliett, p. 196
 2. Fremantle, p. 119
 3. Felix Holt, p. 19

thing. And this imperious woman whose "tongue could be a whip upon occasion" (1) finds herself powerless to avert a catastrophe.

"But the really strongest part of the novel is old Mrs. Fransome, brooding over her sorrows, and dwelling remorsefully upon her error in the past," (2) and furthermore living in mortal dread that someone might notice the resemblance between Harold and Jermyn, her son and her former lover. Imagine her reaction when Jermyn, to save himself, suggests she should tell Harold the truth about his birth. She suffers, all through her story, between her son who has regard for her feelings, and Jermyn who ignores the former relationship between them. The best happiness for her will be to escape the worst misery. She does not escape that, and "it is her story and Harold's, not Felix Holt's, that gives life and depth to the book." (3)

Mrs. Fransome's life has been burdened with a worthless son at whose death she was glad, a helpless husband, and now she is disappointed in the son in whom she had placed all her hopes and who unwittingly hurts her, and a former lover who has neglected, and who now exploits, her.

1. Felix Holt, p. 17
2. Stephen, p. 186
3. Bullett, p. 199

Harold, her one hope, comes back from Turkey greatly changed, accompanied by his son and a foreign servant, a fortune, and exotic habits he has acquired overseas. "Harold disliked all quarreling as an unpleasant expenditure of energy that could have no good practical result. He was at once active and luxurious; fond of mastery, and good-natured enough to wish that everyone about him should like his mastery; not caring greatly to know other people's thoughts, and ready to despise them as blockheads if their thoughts differed from his, and yet solicitous they should have no colourable reason for slight thoughts about him. The blockheads must be forced to respect him." (1)

"In fact, Harold Transome was a clever, frank, good-natured egoist; not stringently consistent, but without any disposition to falsity; proud, but with a pride that was moulded in an individual rather than hereditary form; un-speculative, unsentimental, unsympathetic; fond of sensual pleasures, but disinclined to all vice, and attached as a healthy, clean-sighted person, to all conventional morality, construed with a certain freedom, like doctrinal articles to which the public order may require subscription." (2)

This is the man who was too proud to allow any familiarity from Jermyn; so much of an egoist that he could

1. Felix Holt, Ch. II, p. 30

2. " Ch. VIII, pp. 100-101

not perceive he was causing his mother unnecessary pain; capable of fits of anger, as in his quarrel with Jeramyn, and who for his own purposes is willing to shock and alienate the neighbouring gentry.

Jeramyn, who has caused so much pain to Mrs. Transome and was now confronted by Harold by a demand for an accounting; the Rev. Lingon's opinion was: "A fat-handed glib-tongued fellow, with a scented cambric handkerchief, one of your educated low-bred fellows; a foundling who got his Latin for nothing at Christ's Hospital, one of your middle-class upstarts who wants to rank with gentlemen, and thinks they'll do it with kid gloves and new furniture." (1)

But the author has this to say: "He was anything but stupid; yet he always blundered when he wanted to be delicate or magnanimous; he constantly sought to soothe others by praising himself. Moral vulgarity cleaved to him like an hereditary odour." (2) And a little farther on; "He was far from liking that ugly abstraction rascality, but he had liked other things in law and in daily life which, in the abstract, he would have condemned; and indeed he had never been tempted by them in the abstract. Here, in fact, was the inconvenience; he had sinned for the sake of particular concrete things, and particular concrete things were likely to follow." (3)

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1. Felix Holt, Ch. II, p. 28
 2. " Ch. I, p. 10
 3. " Ch. IX, p. 107

"But he was a man of resolution, who, having made out what was the best course to take under a difficulty, went straight to his work." (1)

We can understand the foundling's desire to rise in the world, but we cannot condone his actions, either in his management of the Transome estate, or his subsequent treatment of Mrs. Transome. Little touches are frequently added to show some side of his character. The author dwells upon the punctilious way he is dressed, his irritating habit of rubbing his fat hands, his unctious voice and oily manner. But there are men upon whom others' feelings have little or no effect, and Jermyn is a well-portrayed character.

Of her personal appearance and mannerisms, the author says: "When Mr. Jermyn was ushered into the breakfast room the next morning, Harold found him surprisingly little altered by the fifteen years. He was grey, but still remarkably handsome; fat, but tall enough to bear that trial to man's dignity. There was as strong a suggestion of toilette about him as if he had been five and twenty instead of nearly sixty. He chose always to dress in black, and was especially addicted to black satin waist-coats, which carried out the general sleekness of his appearance; and this, together with his white, fat, but beautifully-shaped hands, which he was in the habit of rubbing gently on his entrance into a room,

1. Felix Holt, Ch. IX, p. 107

gave him very much the air of a lady's physician. Harold remembered with some amusement his uncle's dislike of those conspicuous hands; but as his own were soft and dimpled, and as he too was given to the innocent practice of rubbing these members, his suspicions were not yet deepened." (1)

In his relations with Harold, Jermy is sometimes respectful and at other times rough, and is not above stooping to blackmail when he finds he is in a tight corner and this may be the only way out. But it is in his moments with Mrs. Transome that he is most disagreeable and therefore, I think, best drawn. He imputes the condition of the estate to her bad management, although he is responsible (2) and his "kindness and love-making are more exasperating, more humiliating than others' derision; but the pitiable woman who has made herself secretly dependent on a man beneath her in feeling, must bear that humiliation for fear of worse. Coarse kindness at least better than coarse anger; and in all private quarrels the duller nature is triumphant by reason of its dulness." (3)

As he was unwilling to give up any of the things for which he had "nibbled" he had to fight on to the end, and the end comes when he bursts out that he is Harold's father.

As a foil to Mrs. Transome, we have her companion and servant, Denner, a faithful, close-mouthed creature who

1. Felix Holt, Ch. II, p. 31
2. " Ch. IX, p. 104
3. " Ch. IX, p. 105

is devoted to her mistress. "There was a tacit understanding that Denner knew all her mistress's secrets, and her speech was plain and unflattering; yet with wonderful subtlety of instinct she never said anything Mrs. Transome could feel humiliated by, as by a familiarity from a servant who knew too much. Denner identified her own dignity with that of her mistress. She was a hard-headed godless little woman, but with a character to be reckoned on as you reckon on the qualities of iron." (1)

A woman who wants things to be done in the best possible way with all the care one can lavish on them, and who does not believe in luck. She has self-confidence, and a poor opinion of many about her.

"What are your pleasures, Denner - besides being a slave to me?"

"Oh, there's pleasure in knowing one's not a fool, like half the people one sees about. And managing one's husband is some pleasure; and doing all one's business well. Why, if I've only got some orange flowers to candy, I shouldn't like to die till I see them all right. Then there's the sunshine now and then; I like that as the cats do. As I look upon it, life is like our game at whist, when Banks and wife come to the still-room of an evening. I don't enjoy the game much but I like to play my cards well, and see what will be the end of it; and I want to see you make the best

1. Felix Holt, Ch. I, p. 23

of your hand, madam, for your luck has been mine these forty years now." (1)

Her common-sense is further exemplified in the following:

"Things don't happen because they're bad or good, else all eggs would be addled or none at all, and at the most it is but six to the dozen. There's good chances and bad chances, and nobody's luck is pulled only by one string." (2)

It is in the portrayal of these characters, many of which may be termed minor characters, that there is life and verisimilitude, and it is these who furnish the greater interest in the story.

If we compare, therefore, Felix Holt and Adam Bede, using as our basis the points I have discussed, we conclude that the latter is a much better book, from the point of view of the plot and the characters, if we are to separate the two.

From the point of view of the plot: I consider that what purports to be the main intrigue in Felix Holt in reality takes second place behind the Transome story. The more interesting one is that of Mrs. Transome and those intimately connected with her; the story of Felix and his

1. Felix Holt, Ch. I, p. 24
 2. " Ch. I, p. 24

political ideas is more often than not flat and pale; his political diatribes are mostly unconvincing. All his fiery words are ineffectual when he announces that he has no use for force, and that even suffrage itself may become a tool in the hands of the unscrupulous.

Alton Locke, in the book of the same name, seems to me a more convincing person than Felix. It is true he is devoted to the cause (with a capital C) but he has his moments of weakness, which makes him all the more human, and comes to realise, through his contacts with them, that all aristocrats are not monsters. He finds among them men who have the tenants' interests at heart, even one who is capable of selling half of a large estate so that the proceeds might be used to improve the other half. He enjoys the cultured company of others, and is helped to a fuller, richer appreciation of art and literature. Although Alton Locke is presumably the young man's autobiography, the youth includes the miserable with the good. His account of the sufferings of the poor, which may be somewhat exaggerated, is convincing, and one is impressed much more by it than by the vague, abstract outpourings of Felix Holt. It seems to me that the background is much more evident in Alton Locke than it is in Felix Holt, much more obtrusively so than in Adam Bede, where it is not pushed into the foreground but is all-pervading. Perhaps this is so because Eliot in

Felix Holt was no longer writing entirely from memory, but was more or less trying to recreate an atmosphere, her basis being partly what she remembered, as is shown by her characters of Mrs. Holt and Parson Lyon, and partly her research and study of a period more than twenty years before. And finally, the number of "flat" characters in Felix Holt is greater than in Adam Bede. A flat character may have its uses, as in Dickens, where most of the characters are caricatures and humours, but a really satisfying book will have a minimum of them; in Adam Bede they are few. For these reasons I believe that Adam Bede is artistically a much better book than Felix Holt.

How did the readers greet the appearance of Adam Bede? It seems to have impressed them very much judging from their letters to the author and the publisher. In a letter to a friend, Mrs. Bray, George Eliot announces: "I must tell you, in confidence, that Dickens has written to me the noblest, most touching words about Adam - not hyperbolic compliments, but expressions of deep feeling. He says the reading made an epoch in his life." (1) Mrs. Carlyle also declared she had enjoyed the book very much and was going to try to persuade Mr. Carlyle to read it, while Sir E. Bulwer-Lytton, himself a successful novelist, has

1. Cross, Vol. II, p. 100

this to say: "I owe the author much gratitude for some very pleasing hours. The book indeed is worthy of great admiration. There are touches of beauty in the conception of human character that are exquisite, and much wit and much poetry embedded in the 'dialect', which nevertheless the author over-uses."

"The style is remarkably good whenever it is English and not provincial - racy, original, and nervous.

"I congratulate you on having found an author of such promise, and published one of the very ablest works of fiction I have read for years." (1)

As George Eliot herself says, "Laudatory reviews of 'Adam Bede' in the 'Athenæum', 'Saturday' and 'Literary Gazette.' The 'Saturday' criticism is characteristic: Dinah is not mentioned!" (2)

The last statement shows the author's disappointment at the neglect of the character whom she intended for the chief personage in her book, but at least she is pleased at the praise given the work as a whole.

In addition to such praise from prominent writers and people of the time, a remark made by a member of an entirely different class has its weight. "A cabinet-maker

1. Cross, Vol. II, pp. 82-83

2. Cross, Vol. II, p. 72 (from G. Eliot's Journal)

(brother to Blackwood's managing clerk) had read the sheets, and declared that the writer must have been brought up to the business, or at least had listened to the workmen in their workshop." (1)

Eliot herself seems eminently satisfied with Adam. "Shall I ever write another book as true as "Adam Bede"? The weight of the future presses on me, and makes itself felt even more than the deep satisfaction of the past and present." (2)

That the author is successful in imparting her feelings to others is shown by the following: "Will you tell her" (Mrs. Carlyle) "that the sort of effect she declared herself to have felt from "Adam Bede" is just what I desire to produce, - gentle thoughts and happy remembrances; ---" (3)

In the general opinion of her time, she succeeded masterfully, and present-day critics as a whole, although they find fault with minor defects in the book, seem to agree.

"Adam Bede" represents an immense advance on its predecessor. It is a book which, taken as a whole, cannot be spoken of except in terms of high respect. The warm rural colouring, the shrewd humour, the diversity of characters, the deep human feeling, the power and the amplitude and the

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1. Cross, Vol. II, p. 66
 2. " Vol. II, p. 81
 3. " Vol. II, p. 71

patient workmanship, these things can hardly be praised too much. England is most English in these midland shires,---"(1)

Prof. Elton says: ---(Adam Bede) "saves for us a piece of that old, vanished England, with its scents of the dairy and of the flowery copes at evening, and with its pristine housewives and labourers." (2) and continues, "George Eliot's canvas was broad, her ideas were broader still; her people were alive and real, and innumerable; and the play of motive in her tales, the course itself of the action, revealed the spiritual issues that shape even the humblest fates." (3)

Although critics regard George Eliot very highly and her work as a whole of great importance, and respect her as a craftsman and appreciate her great powers of characterisation, they seem to agree on one thing: she is not at her best as a writer when she assumes the role of a teacher.

"George Eliot's chief minor fault as a novelist is in her insistence on pointing the moral, her failure at times to let her imagination speak for itself." (4) and again, "Often in her treatment, and sometimes in her general plan, we find the thinker in George Eliot at odds with the artist." (5)

1. Bullett, p. 170
3. Elton, p. 259
5. Bullett, p. 163

2. Elton, p. 262
4. Bullett, p. 162

"George Eliot is a very curious instance of the danger of self-cultivation. No writer was ever more anxious to improve herself and conquer an absolute mastery over her material. But she did not observe, as she entertained the laborious process, that she was losing those natural accomplishments which infinitely outshone the philosophy and science which she so painfully acquired. She was born to please, but unhappily she persuaded herself, or was persuaded, that her mission was to teach the world, to lift its moral tone, and, in consequence, an agreeable rustic writer, with a charming humour and very fine sympathetic nature, found herself gradually uplifted until, about 1875, she sat enthroned on an educational tripod, an almost ludicrous pythonesse. From the very first she had been weak in that quality which more than any other is needed by a novelist, imaginative invention. So long as she was humble, and was content to reproduce, with the skilful maturity of her art, what she had personally heard and seen, her work had delightful merit." (1)

To show the difference in treatment and viewpoint, I should like not to compare two scenes, one in Felix Holt and the other in Alton Locke, which treat of a similar subject, a riot.

1. Gosse, English Literature, Vol. IV, pp. 314-315

In Felix's case, the people whom he had to deal with are drunk, whereas Alton has before him a crowd who are hungry and desperate; their only concern is to get bread, for themselves and their hungry children. They are desperate because of their inability to change anything in their way of life. Felix is moved by more abstract motives. He wishes for reform but he wishes it to take place without violence. He desires the force of public opinion to influence the authorities. Thus when the drunken crowd asks for a fellow they particularly disliked who at the time was in a public house, Felix decides to do something to save "both assailers and assaulted from the worst consequences."⁽¹⁾ He attempts to influence the mob, and the mob follows him. He has the fellow bound to a post and then tries to divert the crowd, but unsuccessfully, from the Debarry manor. In the meantime he has had the clash with a constable and unintentionally kills him. Felix is wounded as he stands on the terrace with the bare sabre in his hand, looking for all the world like the ring-leader, and is captured.

Alton, on the other hand, who has come down to the country as a representative of the London Chartists, is moved by other motives. Before the riot starts he listens to a long list of grievances: the landlords who are letting

1. Felix Holt, Ch. XXXIII, p. 285

the cottages with the farms, thus putting the poor man in the power of the landlord; the ill-treatment meted out to the farm workers by the farmer; unemployment with its attendant evils; the poor widow's complaint that she finds it impossible to earn enough for herself and her starving children; the blind old man's explanation of their plight as a punishment from God for their sins. Alton, sensing trouble, tries to soothe the angry crowd by speaking of the election of qualified men to represent them in Parliament, but the crowd will have none of it, and Alton, carried away by his feelings, tells them that the bread belongs to them because they raised the corn, and no man is bound to starve. This is what the reader expects of a Chartist, and Alton's words are perfectly in character. Alton himself takes no part in the plundering; in fact he is knocked unconscious as he tries to prevent a man from carrying off a writing-desk which contained money. George Eliot must have Felix make a speech at his trial, a speech in which he explains his ideas of liberty, but Kingsley has his hero warned by his cousin George not to make a speech. "I warn you, as a friend, if you try to speechify, and play the martyr, and let out who you are, the respectable people who have been patronising you will find it necessary for their own sakes to clap a stopper on you for good and all, to make you out an imposter and a swindler, and get you out of the way for life; ---" (1)

1. Alton Locke, Ch. XXIX, p. 215

Although Kingsley is inferior to George Eliot in some respects, I believe his Alton Locke is superior to Felix Holt. "He (Kingsley) is more able to rise to heights of impassioned ardour than to show acuteness, depth, or psychological penetration." (1)

"In choosing the framework of the stories Kingsley does not depart from the traditional rules of precedence; despite his rather bitter Radicalism, he shows respect for established moral authorities; that of the nobility, if it does not shirk its duties; that of the clergy, if it rises to the height of its task. Where he touches upon new ground is in those pages in which he fearlessly sets out to describe the decaying state of the country districts; the dark ignorance which enshrouds the Puritan lower middle class of the towns; the painful ugliness of the slums, the contagious vice, lawlessness, and disease which radiate from them and are a menace to the happy and the rich; the slavery of the workers whom the sweater fattens upon. The destiny of Alton Locke, whose development was hindered by the inferiority of his birth, symbolizes the cruellest aspect of social evil, the unequal chances of culture and full human development offered to the various classes." (2)

Basically the same problem is discussed in Adam Bede, but not in Kingsley's vehement style.

1. Legouis & Cazamian, p. 1146
 2. " " " p. 1144

Two other episodes may be compared Hetty's confession in Adam Bede, and Effie Dean's trial in "The Heart of Midlothian". In the former, Hetty has already been tried and sentence passed, and Dinah comes to her to extract a confession. We know that the confession or lack of it can have no further effect on the story; whether Hetty confesses or not, she is to be hanged the following morning. We know that if Hetty confesses it will ease her conscience and make her last hours more serene, but from the point of view of the story, it will have absolutely no effect. It is true the prison scene is a moving and touching one: Dinah's faith and Hetty's terror and helplessness are well described, but nothing depends on the outcome of Dinah's efforts, nor on Hetty's avowal.

In the case of Jeanie Deans, however, the situation is completely different. Jeanie's sister is accused of the crime of child-murder, as Hetty has been, but in Effie's case, if it could be proved there was no concealment, Effie would not have to pay the death penalty. The whole thing depends therefore on Jeanie's testifying that her sister has discussed her condition with her before the birth of the child. When the mysterious young man explains this to Jeanie and tries to persuade her to say that Effie has informed her, Jeanie cannot bring herself to promise she would. "I can promise nothing which is unlawful for a

Christian" (1) and again, "I may not do evil, even that good may come of it." (2) She is horrified to find that her stern, unbending father suggests she say Effie has told her of her condition; she gently blames her sister for not having told her; she refuses her sister's plea; "But that word is a grievous sin, and it's a deeper offence when it's a sin wilfully and presumptuously committed." (3) And so we are kept in suspense until the time of the trial; perhaps Jeanie might change her mind. Our interest is sustained until Jeanie denies she had any previous knowledge of her sister's condition. All who had hoped she would testify otherwise, the defence, even the prosecution are dumbfounded because of the sympathy they feel for the young, beautiful, spirited creature whose life, literally, hung upon a word.

1. The Heart of Midlothian, Ch. XV, p. 162
 2. " " " " Ch. XV, p. 166
 3. " " " " p. 221

Adam Bede and Felix Holt as Social Documents.

Adam Bede is set at the turn of the eighteenth century, and begins in 1799 to be exact, whereas Felix Holt speaks of the time following the first Reform Bill; we therefore have a treatment of two distinct periods in English history, between which came the profound changes due to the influence of the Industrial Revolution and the profound changes in English social life it caused.

In Adam Bede, these changes were negligible. The factory system had not yet spread so widely that it affected the country people to any great extent; consequently the picture presented to us is more that of the calm, quiet, peaceful life we associate with agricultural England.

According to Trevelyan, the Napoleonic wars had quite some influence on English life and violently disturbed economic life. The modern English slum grew up to meet the needs of the new type of employer; the slums grew unchecked because of lack of governmental and municipal control, and so town-planning and sanitation were little thought of and workers lived and worked in abominable physical surroundings. To make matters worse, business became a gamble because of the blockade and counter-blockade, and the sufferings of the English working class were increased by these violent fluctuations of demand

and unemployment. (1)

In Adam Bede, however, the war is not mentioned at all, and the only references to military life are the statement of the magistrate as he rides by and sees Adam's stalwart figure striding down the road and observes that he would make a good soldier, and the other is to Captain Arthur Donnithorne and his departure for Ireland where English troops were regularly stationed. It seems that at that comparatively early period in the struggle with Napoleon, the war had not yet made itself felt in country life. However, there was hardship caused by the high price of corn, and the dole was instituted, this dole to be paid by the parish. This had a double effect: it raised the poor rates to agree with the rise in the price of bread, and it relieved the large employing farmer from the necessity of giving a living wage to his workpeople.

Although the factory system had been instituted for some years, the only reference to it in Adam Bede is when Dinah states she works in a cotton mill when she is at home.

As regards education, it was in a poor state at the turn of the century. Although there were the National schools, the type of education given was poor compared

1. Trevelyan: British History in the 19th Century and After, Ch. IX.

with modern methods and subject matter; besides the development of such schools was hindered by the lack of state funds, the Church claiming that such funds should be spent under its own direction, whereas the Dissenters would not

agree to accept funds on these terms. Different denominations therefore collected money to be spent on their own schools.

In Adam Bede there is a reference to education, and a great deal is said about Bartle Massey, the schoolmaster. He taught children during the day, and in the evenings he formed classes for adults, not simply for the sake of any extra money he might earn, but because of the pleasure he had in teaching big, awkward men how to read and write. Among his best students was Adam Bede who, Massey said, had an excellent head for mathematics. Here we realize the lack of opportunity for such as Adam to study, one of the major points in the novel.

The same point is brought out in Kingsley's Alton Locke. Young Alton was apprenticed to a tailor, but he had an over-powering desire to study and improve himself. Because of financial difficulties and lack of opportunity he, during his apprenticeship, had to do his studying stealthily, for his mother, narrowly pious, would have disapproved, as she later did, of such goings on. Alton, therefore, had to read by the light of a candle late at night, after his mother had gone to bed, in conditions of great physical discomfort. This and his long hours of labour affected his health and brought on tuberculosis which later caused his death. It was only after he met the kindly bookseller that his studies were organized. We may compare Alton's lot with that of his rich cousin who had gone to the better schools and was then attending the

university. Alton was bitter because his cousin was not more intelligent than he and did not, from Alton's point of view, make the best of his opportunities. We come to the conclusion that a person of the lower classes found it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get a higher education, or any education at all, and this there a tremendous waste of talent.

One of the charges directed against the Anglican church was that its clergy had lost much of their zeal and were content with outward show; that they were mostly interested in the incomes derived from their livings; that the church had little vitalising influence upon its faithful; and that the cathedral clergy especially were too rich. On the other hand, great missionary zeal was manifested by the non-conformist denominations; they organized and paid for the upkeep of their own schools; theirs was a soul-stirring message to the people; they carried their message to the poorer and humbler quarters of the cities, and formed a group called the slum persons. It cannot be denied that their clergy influenced the life of the people considerably, and while some were narrow and bigoted, others were warm and human.

In Felix Holt we have examples of both types. Rufus Lyon was a pious preacher of the Dissenting church, but he was neither of the bilious or the ecstatic type, a

simple man who strove mightily to serve his parishioners, who deprived himself of many things that his daughter might be well-educated. In him we have an example of the God-fearing righteous man. Mr. Lingon, on the other hand, is the type of sporting, gentlemanly clergyman of the Anglican Church, charming in his way. Though expected to be a conservative and uphold tradition, he is able to persuade himself to support his nephew, who is a candidate as a Radical, in the electoral fight for a seat in Parliament, on certain conditions, of course.

"But you'll not be attacking the church and the institutions of the country - you'll not be going those lengths; you'll keep up the bulwarks, and so on, eh?"

"No, I shan't attack the Church - only the incomes of the bishops, perhaps, to make them eke out the incomes of the poor clergy."

"Well, well, I have no objection to that. Nobody likes our Bishop; he's all Greek and greediness; too proud to dine with his own father. You may pepper the bishops a little. But you'll respect the constitution handed down, etc. - and you'll rally round the throne - and the King, God bless him, and the usual toasts, eh?"

"Of course, of course. I am a Radical only in rooting out abuses." (1)

1. Felix Holt, Ch. II, p. 38

He is satisfied with this and in self-justification says, "Confound it! I'm not bound to love Toryism better than my own flesh and blood, and the manor I shoot over. That's a heathenish, Brutus-like thing, as if Providence couldn't take care of the country without my quarrelling with my own sister's son!" (1)

As for Mr. Irwine, the Anglican clergyman in Adam Bede, I have nothing but admiration for that wise, kind, understanding gentleman who had gained his parishioners' love and respect, and whose good sense they appreciated along with his tolerance.

"Mester Irwine's got more sense nor to meddle wi' people's doing as they like in religion. That's between themselves and God, as he's said to me many a time." (2) Mrs. Poyser says, "Mr. Irwine was like a good meal o' victual, you were the better for him without thinking on it; ---" (3)

Kingsley, on the other hand, sternly criticizes the clergy for not taking a more active part in social and political affairs, and shirking their duty as leaders.

"Or after all, my working brothers, is it true of our promised land, even as of that Jewish one of old, that the priests' feet must first cross the mystic stream into

1. Felix Holt, Ch. II, p. 59
2. Adam Bede, Ch. I, p. 8
3. " " Ch. XVII, p. 184

the good land and large which God has prepared for us?

"Is it so indeed? Then in the name of the Lord of Hosts, ye priests of his, why will ye not awake, and arise, and go over Jordan, that the people of the Lord may follow you?" (1)

This is not to say that all Anglican clergymen lacked zeal or that all Dissenters were enthusiastic God-fearing preachers. Alton Locke has a brush with two clergymen, both Dissenters, one of whom was a kindly old man while the other was smug and hypocritical. The latter refuses to believe anything good about Alton because to him all reading outside the Bible, commentaries, and other religious books and tracts was not only a waste of time but also the road to perdition.

Kingsley may have good reason to direct his attack against the apathetic clergy, especially the bishops, of the Anglican church, in view of the life that the latter led. "It is said that it is dreary drudgery being a Bishop nowadays, but a Bishop's life was most agreeable in the early part of the last century. There were Bishops then who kept up the state of Dukes, grew fat on a great rent-roll, gave splendid entertainments in their palaces, drove out in their carriages and four - one of them, at least, in his carriage and eight. Such were not likely to take

1. Alton Locke, Ch. IV, p. 39

kindly to those among their flock whose goal in spreading the Gospel was a standing reproach to their own sluggish zeal." (1)

The Methodists formed a large and active non-conformist sect. The majority at that time were farm labourers and small farmers, working men and artisans in the towns, shopkeepers and tradesmen, and their wives. Cruikshank says that the Wesleyan revival was a rebirth of joy in a joyless time. The experience of conversion brought an excess and superflux of happiness transcending the power of words - how could it be expressed but by half-smothered cries, sighs, groans and by the pangs of a spirit struggling out of the clay. At the camp meeting of the Methodists, humble folk would spring to their feet, stand rigid as in a trance, their faces turned to the sky but with a brightness on their faces not shining from the sky, and then confess and cry out, as under torture, the particulars of their inner miracle. They had been born again. They bathed in the splendour of a "present free and full salvation". To them this intense religious experience was something real and they felt they had been cleansed from evil and consumed by glory. They forgot their humble stations in society and felt they were free from all sins, and thus they felt they had acquired a new

1. Cruikshank; Charles Dickens and Early Victorian England, p. 179.

dignity through their being the brothers of Prince Jesus and the heirs to the fields of Paradise. (1)

In Adam Bede, the author has shown this by her portrayal of the lowly artisans and country folk, for example, Seth Bede and his like, and especially her heroine, Dinah Morris, who herself is a picture of a humble, impassioned, lofty spirit.

In speaking of George Eliot as a reformer and teacher, Cruikshank says that of all the writers of that age none had a greater moral displacement and none was more deeply revered. He states that Eliot was as concerned as any theologian with the consequences of human action, and that the characters in her didactic novels are weighed down by a sense of duty and responsibility; her characters display introspection, constant examination of the conscience, and absorption in scruples. The weight of sin, the burden of obligation and the oppression of guilt overshadow all kindly and happy human relationships. (2)

When the rural folk, uprooted from the pieties and associations of the old rural life, had drifted to the new factories to find work, they had to be housed, if only for the private and temporary interest of the employer. Trevelyan says that consideration for the public and fore-

1. Cruikshank, p. 183
 2. " p. 187

thought for the future were absent from the planning of the new town. The man for the employer's purpose was the jerry-builder, who designed the outward aspect of the new civilisation. Street after street sprang up, each more ugly, narrow and unsanitary than the last. They were barracks for cheap labour, not homes for citizens. (1)

The new urban proletariat was swelled in numbers and depressed in standard of life by constant arrivals of fresh swarms of impoverished rustics, driven by stress of famine from the English and Irish countryside. (2)

The terrible working conditions of the poor are described in Alton Locke. Young Alton is taken by his mother to be apprenticed to a tailor, and this is what he saw: a dark, narrow, iron staircase led through a trap-door into a garret at the top of the house. There the lad is disgusted with what he sees, a low room stifling with the combined odours of human breath and perspiration, stale beer, the smell of gin, and the sour and disgusting one of new cloth. On the littered floor sat some haggard, untidy, shoeless men. The windows were tight closed to keep out the cold winter air, and the condensed breath ran in streams down the panes. (3)

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1. Trevelyan; British History in the 19th Century and After.
Ch. IX, p. 159
 2. Trevelyan; British History in the 19th Century and After.
Ch. IX, p. 158
 3. Alton Locke, Ch. II

The seater's den he visits to rescue Farmer Porter's son is not more attractive. It was a choking, fetid den, with just room in it for the seven or eight sallow, starved beings, who, coatless, shoeless, and ragged, sat stitching. (1)

The workers' housing was extremely poor and unsanitary. They were crowded into filthy, ill-ventilated houses, sometimes one family to a room. The women and children were dirty, the streets were littered with refuse and offal, and the people, walking along the pavements, picked up the dirt on their clothes and shoes and carried it into their homes. This is where the workers plied their trades and lodged - and died of privation and disease. Alton Locke is taken home by a half-crazed man whose wife and children have died of hunger. It was a miserable room without a single article of furniture; through the broad chinks they could see the reflections of the rushlights in the sewers just below the floor. This house was built near a foul ditch which gave off frightful odours that mingled with those from the sewers.

Rural misery has its place in Alton Locke.

Delegated by a Chartist committee to get in touch with village labourers, Alton attends an open-air meeting and listens to the people's complaints. As he pushed through the crowd, he was struck with the wan, haggard look of all

1. Alton Locke, Ch. XXI

their faces, their lack lustre eyes and drooping lids, stooping shoulders, heavy, dragging steps, and crushed, dogged air. The first speaker says: "The farmers make slaves on us. I can't bear no difference between a Christian and a nigger, except they flog the niggers and starves the Christians; and I don't know which I'd choose. I served Farmer ---- seven year, off and on, and after harvest he tells me he's no more work for me, nor my boy nether, because he's getting too big for him, so he gets a little 'un instead, and we does nothing; and my boy lies about, getting into bad ways, like hundreds more; and then we goes up next part to London. I couldn't get none; they'd enought to do, they said, to employ their own; and we begs our way home, and goes into the Union; and they turns us out again, and gives us two days' gravel picking, and then says they has no more for us; and we was sore pinched, and laid a-bed all day then next board-day we goes to 'em and they give us one day more - and that threw us off another week, and then next board-day we goes into the Union again for three days, and gets sent out again; and so I've been starving one-half of the time, and they putting us off and on o' purpose like that; and I'll bear it no longer, and that's what I says." (1)

1. Alton Locke, Ch. XIVII, p. 204

Another speaker complains that he can't get any land to till for himself. "Look you at this here down - If I had an acre on it, to make a garden on, I'd live well with my wages, off and on. Why, if this here was in garden, it 'ud be worth twenty, forty times o' that it be now. And last spring I lays out o' work from Christmas till barley-sowing, and I goes to the farmer and axes for a bit o' land to dig and plant a few potatoes - and he says, 'You be d---d! If you're minding your garden after hours, you'll not be fit to do a proper day's work for me in hours - and I shall want you by and by, when the weather breaks' - for it was frost most bitter, it was. 'And if you gets potatoes, you'll be getting a pig - and then you'll want straw, and meal to fat 'un - and then I'll not trust you in my barn, I can tell ye;' and so there it was." (1)

"In 1830 the agitation in the country was more economic than political. Economic misery, pauperism, starvation and class injustice had brought society to the verge of dissolution. Rick burning---kept the rural south in terror. In the industrial north the workmen were drilling and preparing for social war. The middle classes clamoured for Reform, equally to pacify the revolutionary spirit below, and to secure their own rights against an

1. Alton Locke, Ch. XIVIII, p. 205

aristocracy they had ceased to trust." (1)

In the midst of this turmoil, and in accordance with the national will, the Reform Bill was introduced in 1831. It was violently opposed by the Tories, was passed by one vote in the Commons, but was rejected by the Lords. A slightly modified form of the bill was introduced late in 1831 and was approved by both houses, when it became known that the King would create any number of peers necessary to carry the Bill. Among its other provisions, the Bill granted the franchise to all Ten Pound householders, and in the counties was extended to the tenant farmers.

"No one could have criticised the enfranchisement of the tenant farmers, if it had been accompanied by the protection of the ballot. But under the system of open voting this new class of voter had no independence, and their enfranchisement only added to their landlord's hold over the county seats, which were at the same time increased in number. Since, also, the smaller boroughs, that had just managed to escape the melting-pot of the Bill, were much under the influence of neighbouring squires, the landlords as a class were still greatly over-represented even under the new scheme." (2)

1. Trevelyan, Ch. XIV, p. 230
 2. " Ch. XIV, p. 240

The open ballot led to the exertion of undue influence and bribery. It is against this electoral corruption that Felix Holt protests, even when it is practised for the benefit of his own party. He has not much liking for the ballot as such, but only for the way in which it is used. He places all his faith in the force of public opinion. Felix has no faith in the power of the vote as things stood in the country at that time. He does not want the people to exert ignorant power, which to him makes misery just as wicked power does. He believes that all the schemes about voting, and districts, and annual Parliaments, and the rest, are engines, and the water or steam - the force that is to work them - must come out of human nature - out of men's passions, feelings, and desires. Whether the engines will do good work or bad depends on these feelings. So the greatest power under heaven is public opinion - the ruling belief in society about what is right and what is wrong, what is honourable and what is shameful. (1)

Harold Transome was another kind of Radical who had been forged by circumstances. He was a younger son; his brother was a dolt whom he despised, but Harold soon saw that he had to carve out his own fortune. He did not attend a university but left home for the Orient where with his energetic will and muscle, the self-confidence, the quick

1. Felix Holt, Ch. XXX

perception, and the narrow imagination which make up the practical mind in the popular view, he had amassed a fortune. He had gone away determined to return some day and have his own estate, and all his actions were governed by this feeling; he therefore had the habit of considering all his conclusions with reference to English politics and English social conditions. "He meant to stand up for every change that the economical condition of the country required, and he had an angry contempt for men with coronets on their coaches, but too small a share of brains to see when they had better make a virtue of necessity. His respect was rather for men who had no coronets but who achieved a just influence by furthering all measures which the common sense of the country, and the increasing self-assertion of the majority, peremptorily demanded. He could be such a man himself." (1) On the other hand, he had enough sense of humour to calm his uncle's misgivings by stating that he was a Radical only in rooting out abuses, and would uphold the crown and the Church, attacking only the rich bishops.

As social documents, Adam Bede and Felix Holt differ widely in value. The canvas in the former is much broader and the background is all-pervading, so that without realising it, we are conscious of a way of life and a set of values which unfortunately ^{have} become all too rare.

1. Felix Holt, Ch. VIII, p. 100

In both books the natural setting, the rich, verdant, lush countryside of the midlands is described, although in Felix Holt the encroachments of the machine age and factory system are visible. In the introduction to the latter book, the author imagines a stagecoach ride through the countryside, giving both the pleasant and disagreeable aspects. She enumerates the things a passenger on the box would see; meadows with long lines of willows along the watercourses; golden corn-ricks clustered near a homestead, full-uddered cows driven from their pasture for the early milking; and the hedgerows in all their beauty, although according to her they wasted the land. There were also trim villages, where could be heard the pleasant tinkle of the blacksmith's anvil, where the basket-maker and the wheelwright were plying their trades, where comely women were carrying yoked buckets, and little children were dawdling along the roads. The land around was rich; the homesteads were those of rich farmers. Here was the land of content, where optimists were sure that England was the best of all possible countries. As the day wore on, however, the scene would change; the land would begin to be blackened with coal-pits, the rattle of handlooms to be heard in hamlets and villages. Here miners were returning wearily home; the women and children and the houses were dirty because the tired mothers gave their strength to the

loom. The gables of dissenting chapels now made a visible sign of religion. The breath of the manufacturing town, which made a cloudy day and a red gloom by night on the horizon, diffused itself over all the surrounding country, filling the ^{nation} country with eager unrest.

"In these midland districts the traveller passed rapidly from one phase of English life to another; after looking down on a village dingy with coal-dust, noisy with the shaking of looms, he might skirt a parish all of fields, high hedges, and deep-rutted lanes; after the coach rattled over the pavement of a manufacturing town, the scene of riots and trades-union meetings, it would take him in another ten minutes into a rural region, where the neighbourhood of the town was felt only in the advantages of a near market for corn, cheese, and hay..." (1) Thus we find that the extremely gloomy picture of rural misery was not that of all the country, and that even in the great manufacturing centres themselves there were villages practically untouched by the momentous changes wrought by the Industrial Revolution.

Although Adam Bede is set at the turn of the century, and George Eliot was born in 1819 we may say that in writing it she drew upon childhood memories, for as Bullett says, it was the era of cottage industry when in

1. Felix Holt, Introduction, p. 5

the midland shires nearly every humble household had its hand-loom and earned an arduous livelihood by piece-work. The rural scene blended squalor and beauty in perhaps equal proportions. The landscape was flat, with no rivers, or lakes or hills or valleys. At points the earth was blackened with coal-pits, and the rattle of the handloom was heard. There was, however, solace and charm, for those who could feel it, in the lush green fields, the trees, the wide sky. There were rural traditions that were older than politics; courage and gaiety and the primal human sanctities, as well as drudgery and drunkenness. (1)

Hayslope, in Adam Bede, gives us a picture of the better type of midland village. From the common the road branched off in two directions, one leading up a hill and the other winding down a valley. From the hill one had an unobstructed view of green meadows and wooded valley and dark masses of distant hill, and the writer compares this with the bleak grim outskirts of Stonyshire about thirty miles away. This was rural England before England became "the workshop of the world." Although ^{George} Eliot was too young to remember this, it must have affected her father by whom she was deeply influenced, but it is not improbable to suppose that she had first-hand knowledge of village life

1. Bullett, p. 16

and conditions, because, as has been said, this type of life had not completely disappeared.

A principal figure in rural life was the squire, who as a land-owner had considerable influence over the countryfolk, seeing that he often was a Justice of the Peace, and sometimes a magistrate. In Adam Bede there is Squire Donnithorne, of whom we see little, and his grandson, the young squire, a principal figure in the central tragedy. The old squire is mostly concerned with his old parchment deeds, and not enough with his estate. He shows little love for his heir, although to be deprived of him would be his greatest misfortune. It takes Arthur some time to convince him to improve his land and employ Adam as his agent. Nothing but the desire to get a tenant could account for the Squire's undertaking repairs. The Squire does not seem to command much respect among his tenants, particularly Mrs. Poyser, who gives him a piece of her mind when he proposes an exchange of farms, even hinting at a refusal to renew the lease when it runs out. His grandson, however, enjoys the liking and esteem of the tenants, and besides he cares a great deal for the goodwill of these people. At his coming of age celebrations, Martin Poyser, speaking for all, expresses their regard for him; they have known him since he was little, and they believe he speaks fair and acts fair, and they look forward joyfully to the time ^{when} he will be their

landlord. He in turn promises that he will encourage his tenants to improve their land and ^{will} try to bring about a better practice of husbandry, and he carries out his promise at the end when he leaves his estate to be managed by Mr. Irwine and Adam.

In Felix Holt we have Sir Maximus Debarry as a type of county ^rgentry ^{feiman}. He is an old-fashioned man who previously had applauded Pitt and the war for keeping up prices, and who now regrets having been drawn into the plan to make Treby Magna into a fashionable watering-place, a project which failed. Sir Maximus is a strong Tory and is astounded when he learns that Harold is a Radical and refuses to have anything further to do with him. However he does relent in his attitude toward him and is the first to support him when Jermyan reveals the terrible secret.

As for the farmers' dwellings, there is ^{in Adam Bede} a very good description of the Hall Farm, which we may consider to be typical of the better type of dwelling. It is ^a fine old place of red brick covered with lichen, and ornamented with limestone about the gables, windows, and door-place, with a solid, heavy, handsome door. In the ^{former} dining-room there are a large open fireplace, with rusty ^{fire-}irons in it, a bare boarded floor, with at one end fleeces of wool stacked up, and in the middle of the floor some empty corn-bags. It was once the Hall, the residence of a country squire, but is now

the Hall Farm. There is a great barn and a dairy which interests the reader because that is where Hetty is busy making-up the butter. "The dairy was certainly worth looking at; it was a scene to sicken for with a sort of calen- ture in hot and dusty streets - such coolness, such purity, such fresh fragrance of new-pressed cheese, of firm butter, of wooden vessels perpetually bathed in pure water; such soft colouring of red earthenware and creamy surfaces, brown wood and polished tin, grey limestone and rich orange-red rust on the iron weights and hoods and hinges." (1)

The reader goes to church with the village folk and shares their piety and their aversion to any kind of work on the Sabbath. The conversation of the parishioners was like that of most, local gossip and business, prices paid for their produce, servant problems, and other things that touched them personally, precisely the things that are dearest to the hearts of simple people.

At Arthur's coming-of-age party we have a glimpse of how the people sometimes amused themselves. They all came ready to have a good time and enjoy the Squire's generosity. They joined in the speech-making and had a rousing time when the drinks were poured. They drank abundantly, sang lustily and applauded heartily when the toasts were drunk. After

1. Adam Bede, Ch. VII, p. 61

dinner there were the games: greased poles to be climbed, races to be run by the old women, races to be run in sacks, and heavy weights to be lifted by the strong men, and above all, a donkey race, the winners in all events to be rewarded with prizes offered by the Squire's family. To round off the festivities there was the dance in which practically everybody took part, and all had a glorious time.

Then there is the harvest supper, which afforded the farm people an opportunity for celebration, for now the harvest was home. Poyser had invited the labourers to partake of this supper of excellent roast beef and plum-pudding washed down with great draughts of fresh-drawn ale. For them this was a special occasion and they made the most of it.

In addition to seeing the people amuse themselves, we also see them at work. We first meet Adam and his fellow-workers at the workshop; we see Mrs. Bede at home doing the housework as we see Dinah doing when she comes to visit the bereaved family; we watch as Mrs. Poyser does her chores and Hetty makes the butter; we follow Martin Poyser to the fields, and peek into the barn to see the saddlers at work, so that all in all we have a complete picture of how rural people lived and worked at that time.

From this point of view, Adam Bede is much more convincing as a social document than Felix Holt. The latter

was written to a thesis, an attack on electoral corruption. We have seen that from an artistic point of view it fails because it was written to a thesis; the character of Felix was not allowed to develop normally, but was limited by the needs of the story. Most often when we meet him Felix is expounding his views, principally religious and political, which might have impressed the people of the time, but not, I believe, to the extent the author hoped, for her reasoning, as expressed by Felix, is dry and rhetorical and not in keeping with the violent desire for reform which then the people shared. It must have sounded weak and insipid and unpractical. Because of the limitations, I believe that Felix Holt is not a very convincing picture of the society of the time.

In Adam Bede the author is not writing specifically to a thesis, although the thesis is there; certain retribution for sin, and how undesirable it is that a fine gifted man like Adam should not have the opportunity to make the most of his intelligence and integrity. The social picture comes in unobtrusively; it is not spoken of by itself, but always in connection with the characters and events in the story. The picture as a whole points out some values which were lost after the Industrial Revolution; pride in work well done, honesty and faithfulness, helpfulness in times of need, hard work as a character-building force, love for one's

family and neighbours, and the intimate personal relationships that are a strengthening bond in any society.

In Adam Bede, "The warm rural colouring, the shrewd humour, the diversity of characters, the deep human feelings, the power and the amplitude and the patient workmanship, these things can hardly be praised too much. England is most English in those midland shires, and George Eliot gives us the England she knew as a child, knew not by deliberate study but by unconscious innocent assimilation, the England that existed before the Industrial Revolution and the coming of the Machine Age. Her rural scenes, her pictures of life in farmhouse and field, remain unsurpassed, unless by Hardy himself, whose description of his own Under the Greenwood Tree can be fitly applied to much in Adam Bede; 'a rural painting of the Dutch school'." (1)

1. Bullett, p. 170-171

Appendix

Summaries of:

1. Felix Holt, the Medical
2. Adam Bede
3. Alton Locke

Felix Holt

Mrs. Transome was awaiting her son's arrival home after his long absence in the East, but she was not prepared for two things: to feel that her favourite had returned to her as a stranger, and a man who strongly resembled not Mr. Transome, but somebody else, and to learn from him that he intended to offer himself as a candidate for North Loamshire as a Radical in a strong Tory district; this was a distinct confirmation of the vague but strong feeling that her son was a stranger to her. Her son, Harold, also intimated that he was not at all satisfied with the way Jermyn, the family lawyer, was running the estate. Harold left his mother to her thoughts and despair: her feeling that she now counted for nothing in his life, and her fear that others besides herself might notice the resemblance, and her hope, not of happiness, but that she should escape the worst misery.

Harold had a meeting with Jermyn to whom he confided he intended to run as a Radical candidate in the coming Parliamentary election, news which upset the latter, but promised to act for Harold as his agent.

Mr. Lyon was the minister of the Independent Chapel, and to him came Mrs. Holt to complain of her son's refusal to carry on his father's business, that is, a quack doctor's. Her son Felix had returned home from Scotland with disturbing ideas. He refused to sell pills and elixirs because they were harmful. Thus Mrs. Holt

was deprived of a source of income. Mr. Lyon agreed to see Felix and reason with him, but Felix proved to be an unconventional fellow bent on sticking to his class and with no desire to improve his situation. Felix stayed to tea and made the acquaintance of Esther, the minister's daughter, but their first meeting was anything but cordial, and Felix sharply criticized Esther for having a copy of Byron's poems, and they parted with mutual dislike. Esther, however, was not really Mr. Lyon's daughter. Long before, he had chanced upon a young Frenchwoman and her child, and in pity for their destitution had taken them in. His love for Annette grew, and one day he asked her to marry him, but seeing her reaction he refused to speak of the matter further. He fell ill and was tenderly nursed by the young widow who herself proposed they should marry when he recovered. Their married life lasted for three years when Annette gradually grew weaker and died; Mr. Lyon was left with the little girl whom he brought up as his daughter. Who her real father was he did not know.

Harold's decision to run as a Radical caused a stir in county circles and antagonized the gentry.

Mrs. Transome had a conversation with Jermyn in the course of which she asked him to vow never to quarrel with Harold; Jermyn refused, knowing that unpleasantness was bound to arise if Harold became too inquisitive regarding Jermyn's management of the estate; he said that he would use Harold as the latter used him.

Election time was drawing near and agents came

to the towns and villages on behalf of their masters. Felix met one of them campaigning for Mr. Transome and was disgusted by the man's offer of bribes to the voters.

As Felix was going to Sproxton one day he found a pocket-book in the Debarry's park, took it to Mr. Lyon and asked him to write to the magistrate and try to find the owner. The pocket-book was opened by chance and Mr. Lyon saw something which disturbed his mind very much: a locket which contained a lock of hair, and on which was engraved his dead wife's name. He immediately had visions of losing his daughter.

In the course of a canvassing call on Mr. Lyon, Harold met Felix who informed him of his agent's practices.

Jermyn had made inquiries concerning Maurice Christian, a courier in the Debarry household, and found out his real name, and how he had exchanged identities with a Maurice Christian Byclliffe, Esther's father, who had married Annette in France, and who, to return to England as quickly as possible, had passed as Scaddon, and given Scaddon certain articles which proved his identity. Christian came and told all to Mr. Lyon who in his turn informed Esther of the possibility of an inheritance. The presence of an old man named Trounsem was announced in the neighbourhood. There were all indications that Esther, after Trounsem's death, would be the legal heir to the Transome estate. In the meantime Felix had met Esther and declared his love.

On the day of the hustings the crowd had been worked up and was noisy and disorderly. They had been offered much to drink and many were the worse for it. Practical jokes and rough play became more and more frequent as the day advanced. When the crowd saw a man they particularly disliked, they tried to treat him very roughly, and at the same time were headed for vaults where there was more gin. Felix could not stand idly by, and assuming the leadership of the mob diverted them. Spratt, the object of the mob's anger, was on the ground and Felix stood over him to protect him. When a constable attempted to collar Felix, the latter grappled with him and knocked him down. The constable did not rise. Felix led the crowd away and had them tie Spratt to a post and leave him there. The crowd rushed on to Treby Manor where they were followed by the soldiers who fired, and Felix was wounded and jailed to be tried for among other things manslaughter and leading a riotous onslaught on a dwelling-house.

Jernyn came to Harold and threatened that if he continued in his lawsuit against him, he would prove the existence of the real heir to the Transome estate, and an agreement was reached between the two. Later Christian came and in return for one thousand pounds divulged the heir's name, that is, Esther. Harold, to keep the estate, decided to marry Esther, and asked his mother to invite the young lady to their home for a visit. The two went to the Lyon's and discovered that Esther already

knew of the inheritance. They took her with them to Transome Court, where Esther enjoyed herself very much. On her visit to Mr. Lyon, she learned that during a call on Felix in jail, Mr. Lyon had heard the former prophesy that now she would marry Harold.

At Felix's trial, several witnesses spoke in Harold's favour and swore he had been trying to lead the mob towards the outskirts of the town and not toward the manor. Mr. Lyon put in a good word for him as did Esther. Felix was sentenced to imprisonment for four years.

A meeting had been called to discuss Felix's case and most of the well-known people of the district were present. There Harold met Jermyn who expressed a wish to speak to him in private. When Harold threatened him, Jermyn blurted out his secret: he was Harold's father. When Harold asked his mother whether this were true she tacitly admitted it. Harold then went to Esther and told her that because of circumstances he could not then disclose, he could no longer ask her to marry him. Esther gave up all claim to the Transome estate, and after Felix was released they married.

Adam Bede

Adam Bede, his brother Seth, and their fellow-workers are about to finish the day's work, and are discussing the Methodist lady preacher whom they were going to hear that evening. Seth seems to be in love with her but thinks she will never agree to marrying him because she is too spiritual. Adam has no leanings towards Methodism but is willing to listen to Dinah. Dinah that evening delivers an impassioned sermon calling on sinners to repent.

When Adam arrives home that evening he finds that his father is away and has not finished a coffin that was to be delivered the next morning, so he stays up all night to finish it; he then finds that his father has been drowned in the stream. Dinah comes to stay a short while with the Bedes and comfort them and their mother in their bereavement.

At the Poyser farm lives Hetty Sorrel, Mrs. Poyser's niece, a very pretty, vain young creature; Adam believes he is in love with her and wishes to marry her. Hetty, however, has been attracted by the young squire, Arthur, and she has visions of becoming a lady. What started out as an innocent flirtation, in Arthur's opinion, becomes serious, although Arthur resisted as well as he could, and when he goes to join his regiment he does so ignorant of Hetty's condition. Hetty then agrees to marry Adam. As her time approaches, she sets out on a desperate journey to find Arthur, only to learn that he has been sent to Ireland. On her way back she gives birth to a

baby and then abandons it; it is later found dead. Hetty is arrested and is about to be tried for child murder. The News causes consternation among her family, and Adam is especially affected. He refuses to believe it at first, and insists upon going to see her. Adam's friends, particularly Mr. Irwine, the vicar, and Barite Massey, the schoolmaster, rally round Adam to comfort him. Hetty at first refuses to admit the charges against her, but Dinah visits her in prison and persuades her to confess. As soon as Arthur returns he is informed of the facts of the case by Mr. Irwine's letter, and when the court pronounces the death sentence, Arthur arrives with a reprieve changing it to transportation. Arthur is conscience-stricken and wishes to do his best to atone for his mistake. He persuades Adam to talk to the Poysers and have stay on their farm instead of abandoning it, and informs Adam of his decision to leave his estates in the care of Mr. Irwine and Adam himself.

Some time has now passed. Adam has forgotten his infatuation for Hetty. Dinah and he marry and raise a family.

Alton Locke

Young Alton Locke was taken by his mother to a tailor's to work. His fellow-workers immediately initiate him into their way of life: ale, hard work, poor pay, appalling health conditions, and a prophecy that he would soon die of tuberculosis.

On his way home one evening, Alton stopped at a bookstore, was invited to enter by the proprietor, a Scotchman who "read his head," then promised to allow him to read books. Soon after, he made him a present of a Latin grammar and advised him to study by himself, which he did in secret until his mother found him out and called in two ministers who tried to persuade him to cease. They finally relented and consented to his keeping the books on condition that he see no more of Mr. Mackaye, the bookseller and Chartist. Later Alton argued with his mother over religion and she ordered him to leave her home, which in a fit of temper he does. As he was walking the streets he fell faint from hunger and over-exertion and was taken in tow by a policeman who delivered him into the care of two kindly students. Next day Alton went to Mackaye's. The old man took him in, and Alton again took up his studies. News of his cleverness reached his uncle and his cousin George who showed him kindness. George took him to a picture gallery where Alton met two young ladies. He was much attracted by the more beautiful of the two, and paid comparatively little attention to the other, unfortunately for him, as he said, and thus Alton fell in love.

Alton joined with some fellow-workers in a protest against their terrible working conditions and became a Chartist. He continued his studies and began to write poetry. Alton went to Cambridge to see his cousin; there he met a lord, a friend of his cousin's, who gave him some writing to do. He also met the dark lady who had spoken to him at the gallery in London, and she invited him to submit his poems to her uncle for criticism and possible publication. He visited her uncle, who turned out to be the dean he had met in the gallery, and found Lillian, the young beauty with whom he had fallen in love. The members of the group showed him every kindness and promised to help him as much as they could, and invited him to their home; thus for the first time Alton was brought into contact with a cultivated household and found the upper classes not so bad as they had been painted. The dean outlined a course of study for him, a course limited to science as a discipline for the mind. Alton agreed to the publication of his book after the deletion^{of} passages the dean thought objectionable.

When Alton's mother died, he had to think of his sister. He became a hack-writer for a workmen's weekly in order to live, but could not long bear the editor's views, violently disagreed, and left. Soon after, his cousin George visited him and announced that he was going to study for the ministry and be ordained as quickly as possible, and that he intended to marry Lillian, the girl Alton loved.

Alton was attacked by O'Flynn, the editor of the paper for which the former had worked, and was accused of being a traitor to his class because of his connections with the West End.

Alton volunteered to go to a district where there was to be a rising and try to get information to be relayed so that a committee might be organized. On the way, Alton and his guide came across two boys who were trying to work but could not because of the cold, and helped them for a short time. When Alton arrived at the place where the meeting was to be held he heard many complaints from the people about their working and living conditions. Carried away by what he had heard, Alton spoke to the mob and told them the bread was theirs and they should take it. Away went the mob leaving Alton with the feeling he had started something he could not stop. The mob stole ale and burned ricks and barns. At last the yeomanry arrived and put down the riot, while Alton, trying to stop a man from looting, received a blow that laid him out. He woke to find himself in goal. An unknown friend, whom Alton mistakenly thought to be Lillian, furnished money to engage lawyers to defend the prisoners. At the trial, Alton was defended by the father of the two boys Alton had helped on his way to the meeting. Alton, however, was sentenced to three years' imprisonment. When he was released, Alton, once again, took up with the Chartists and helped to organize the abortive Chartist rising. His benefactor, Sandy Mackaye, died, and Alton once again met

Eleanor, now a widow, and his cousin George who was advancing rapidly in the Church and was about to marry Lillian. Soon after, George, George caught typhus and died: his coat in the making had been used to cover the corpses of some poor workers and he had contracted the disease. Eleanor revealed that it was she who had been helping Alton all along, and he now realized it for the first time. Alton was sent by Eleanor to Texas, there to find himself and become a poet of the people, but *before reaching* there he died.

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