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George Sand
, by Justin McCarthy**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GEORGE SAND ***

**GEORGE SAND.
By
JUSTIN M'CARTHY.**

[Pg 1]

Reprinted from "The Galaxy" for May, 1870.

We are all of us probably inclined, now and then, to waste a little time in vaguely speculating on what might have happened if this or that particular event had not given a special direction to the career of some great man or woman. If there had been an inch of difference in the size of Cleopatra's nose; if Hannibal had not lingered at Capua; if Cromwell had carried out his idea of emigration; if Napoleon Bonaparte had taken service under the Turk,—and so on through all the old familiar illustrations dear to the minor essayist and the debating society. I have sometimes felt tempted thus to lose myself in speculating on what might have happened if the woman whom all the world knows as George Sand had been happily married in her youth to the husband of her choice. Would she ever have taken to literature at all? Would she, loving as she does, and as Frenchwomen so rarely do, the changing face of inanimate nature,—the fields, the flowers and the brooks,—have lived a peaceful and obscure life in some happy country place, and been content with home, and family, and love, and never thought of fame? Or if, thus happily married, she still had allowed her genius to find an expression in literature, would she have written books with no passionate purpose in them,—books which might have seemed like those of a good Miss Mulock made perfect,—books which Podsnap might have read with approval, and put without a scruple into the hands of that modest young person, his daughter? Certainly one cannot but think that a different kind of early life would have given a quite different complexion to the literary individuality of George Sand.

[Pg 2]

Bulwer Lytton, in one of his novels, insists that true genius is always quite independent of the individual sufferings or joys of its possessor, and describes some inspired youth in the novel as sitting down, while sorrow is in his heart, and hunger gnawing at his vitals, to throw off a sparkling and gladsome little fairy tale. Now this is undoubtedly true, in general, of any high order of genius; but there are at least some great and striking exceptions. Rousseau and Byron are, in modern days, remarkable illustrations of genius, admittedly of a very high rank, governed and guided almost wholly by the individual fortunes of the men themselves. So, too, must we speak of the genius of George Sand. Not Rousseau, not even Byron, was in this sense more egotistic than the woman who broke the chains of her ill-assorted marriage with a crash that made its echoes heard at last in every civilized country in the world. Just as people are constantly quoting *nous avons changé tout cela* who never read a page of Molière, or *pour encourager les autres* without even being aware that there is a story of Voltaire's called "Candide," so there have been thousands of passionate protests uttered in America and Europe, for the last twenty years, by people who never saw a volume of George Sand, and yet are only echoing her sentiments and even repeating her words.

[Pg 3]

In a former number of *The Galaxy*, I expressed casually the opinion that George Sand is probably the most influential writer of our day. I am still, and deliberately, of the same opinion. It must be remembered that very few English or American authors have any wide or deep influence over peoples who do not speak English. Even of the very greatest authors this is true. Compare, for example, the literary dominion of Shakespeare with that of Cervantes. All nations who read Shakespeare read Cervantes: in Stratford-upon-Avon itself Don Quixote is probably as familiar a figure in people's minds as Falstaff; but Shakespeare is little known indeed to the vast majority of readers in the country of Cervantes, in the land of Dante, or in that of Racine and Victor Hugo. In something of the same way we may compare the influence of George Sand with that of even the greatest living authors of England and America. What influence has Charles Dickens or George Eliot outside the range of the English tongue? But George Sand's genius has been felt as a power in every country of the world where people read any manner of books. It has been felt almost as Rousseau's once was felt; it has aroused anger, terror, pity, or wild and rapturous excitement and admiration; it has rallied around it every instinct in man or woman which is revolutionary; it has ranged against it all that is conservative. It is not so much a literary influence as a great disorganizing force, riving the rocks of custom, resolving into their original elements the social combination which tradition and convention would declare to be indissoluble. I am not now speaking merely of the sentiments which George Sand does or did entertain on the subject of marriage. Divested of all startling effects and thrilling dramatic illustrations, these sentiments probably amounted to nothing more dreadful than the belief that an unwedded union between two people who love and are true to each other is less immoral than the legal marriage of two uncongenial creatures who do not love and probably are not true to each other. But the grand, revolutionary idea which George Sand announced was that of the social independence and equality of woman,—the principle that woman is not made for man in any other sense than as man is made for woman. For the first time in the history of the world woman spoke out for herself with a voice as powerful as that of man. For the first time in the history of the world woman spoke out as woman, not as the servant, the satellite, the pupil, the plaything, or the goddess of man.

[Pg 4]

Now, I intend at present to write of George Sand rather as an individual, or an influence, than as the author of certain works of fiction. Criticism would now be superfluously bestowed on the literary merits and peculiarities of the great woman whose astonishing intellectual activity has never ceased to produce, during the last thirty years, works which take already a classical place in French literature. If any reputation of our day may be looked upon as established, we may thus regard the reputation of George Sand. She is, beyond comparison, the greatest living novelist of France. She has won this position by the most legitimate application of the gifts of an artist. With all her marvellous fecundity, she has hardly ever given to the world any work which does not seem, at least, to have been the subject of the most elaborate and patient care. The greatest temptation which tries a story-teller is perhaps the temptation to rely on the attractiveness of story-telling, and to pay little or no attention to style. Walter Scott's prose, for example, if regarded as mere prose, is rambling, irregular, and almost worthless. Dickens's prose is as bad a model for imitation as a musical performance which is out of tune. Of course, I need hardly say that attention to style is almost as characteristic of French authors in general, as the lack of it is characteristic of English authors; but, even in France, the prose of George Sand stands out conspicuous for its wonderful expressiveness and force, its almost perfect beauty. Then, of all modern French authors,—I might, perhaps, say of all modern novelists of any country,—George Sand has added to fiction, has annexed from the worlds of reality and of imagination the greatest number of original characters,—of what Emerson calls new organic creations. Moreover, George Sand is, after Rousseau, the one only great French author who has looked directly and lovingly into the face of Nature, and learned the secrets which skies and waters, fields and lanes, can teach to the heart that loves them. Gifts such as these have won her the almost unrivalled place which she holds in living literature; and she has conquered at last even the public opinion which once detested and proscribed her. I could therefore hope to add nothing to what has been already said by criticism in regard to her merits as a novelist. Indeed, I think it probable that the majority of readers in this country know more of George Sand through the interpretation of the critics than through the pages of her books. And in her case criticism is so nearly unanimous as to her literary merits, that I may safely assume the public in general to have in their minds a just recognition of her position as a novelist. My object is rather to say something about the place which George Sand has taken as a social revolutionist, about the influence she has so long exercised over the world, and about the woman herself. For she is assuredly the greatest champion of woman's rights, in one sense, that the world has ever seen; and she is, on the other hand, the one woman out of all the world who has been most commonly pointed to as the appalling example to scare doubtful and fluttering womanhood back into its sheepfold of submissiveness and conventionality. There is hardly a woman's heart anywhere in the civilized world which has not felt the vibration of George Sand's thrilling voice. Women who never saw one of her books,—nay, who never heard even her *nom de plume*, have been stirred by emotions of doubt or fear, or repining or ambition, which they never would have known but for George Sand, and perhaps but for George Sand's uncongenial marriage. For, indeed, there is not now, and has not been for twenty years, I venture to think, a single "revolutionary" idea, as slow and steady-going people would call it, afloat anywhere in Europe or America, on the subject of woman's relations to man, society, and destiny, which is not due immediately to the influence of George Sand, and to the influence of George Sand's unhappy marriage upon George Sand herself.

[Pg 5]

[Pg 6]

The world has of late years grown used to this extraordinary woman, and has lost much of the

wonder and terror with which it once regarded her. I can quite remember,—younger people than I can remember,—the time when all good and proper personages in England regarded the authoress of "Indiana" as a sort of feminine fiend, endowed with a hideous power for the destruction of souls, and an inextinguishable thirst for the slaughter of virtuous beliefs. I fancy a good deal of this sentiment was due to the fearful reports wafted across the seas, that this terrible woman had not merely repudiated the marriage bond, but had actually put off the garments sacred to womanhood. That George Sand appeared in men's clothes was an outrage upon consecrated proprieties far more astonishing than any theoretical onslaught upon old opinions could be. Reformers, indeed, should always, if they are wise in their generation, have a care of the proprieties. Many worthy people can listen with comparative fortitude when sacred and eternal truths are assailed, who are stricken with horror when the ark of propriety is never so lightly touched. George Sand's pantaloons were, therefore, regarded as the most appalling illustration of George Sand's wickedness. I well remember what excitement, scandal, and horror were created in the provincial town where I lived, some twenty years ago, when the editor of a local Panjandrum (to borrow Mr. Trollope's word) insulted the feelings and the morals of his constituents and subscribers by polluting his pages with a translation from one of George Sand's shorter novels. Ah me! the little novel might, so far as morality was concerned, have been written every word by Miss Phelps, or the authoress of the "Heir of Redcliff"; it had not a word, from beginning to end, which might not have been read out to a Sunday-school of girls; the translation was made by a woman of the purest soul, and, in her own locality, of the highest name; and yet how virtue did shriek out against the publication! The editor persevered in the publishing of the novel, spurred on to boldness by some of his very young and therefore fearless coadjutors, who thought it delightful to confront public opinion, and liked the notion of the stars in their courses fighting against Sisera, and Sisera not being dismayed. That charming, tender, touching little story! I would submit it to-day cheerfully to the verdict of a jury of matrons, confident that it would be declared a fit and proper publication. But at that time it was enough that the story bore the odious name of George Sand; public opinion condemned it, and sent the magazine which ventured to translate it to an early and dishonored grave. I remember reading, about that time, a short notice of George Sand by an English authoress of some talent and culture, in which the Frenchwoman's novels were described as so abominably filthy that even the denizens of the Paris brothels were ashamed to be caught reading them. Now, this declaration was made all in good faith, in the simple good faith of that class of persons who will pass wholesale and emphatic judgment upon works of which they have never read a single page. For I need hardly tell any intelligent person of to-day that, whatever may be said of George Sand's doctrines, she is no more open to the charge of indelicacy than the authoress of "Romola." I cannot, myself, remember any passage in George Sand's novels which can be called indelicate; and, indeed, her severest and most hostile critics are fond of saying, not without a certain justice, that one of the worst characteristics of her works is the delicacy and beauty of her style, which thus commends to pure and innocent minds certain doctrines that, broadly stated, would repel and shock them. Were I one of George Sand's inveterate opponents, this, or something like it, is the ground I would take up. I would say: "The welfare of the human family demands that a marriage, legally made, shall never be questioned or undone. Marriage is not a union depending on love or congeniality, or any such condition. It is just as sacred when made for money, or for ambition, or for lust of the flesh, or for any other purpose, however ignoble and base, as when contracted in the spirit of the purest mutual love. Here is a woman of great power and daring genius, who says that the essential condition of marriage is love and natural fitness; that a legal union of man and woman without this is no marriage at all, but a detestable and disgusting sin. Now, the more delicately, modestly, plausibly she can put this revolutionary and pernicious doctrine, the more dangerous she becomes, and the more earnestly we ought to denounce her." This was, in fact, what a great many persons did say; and the protest was at least consistent and logical.

[Pg 7]

[Pg 8]

[Pg 9]

But horror is an emotion which cannot long live on the old fuel, and even the world of English Philistinism soon ceased to regard George Sand as a mere monster. Any one now taking up "Indiana," for example, would perhaps find it not quite easy to understand how the book produced such an effect. Our novel-writing women of to-day commonly feed us on more fiery stuff than this. Not to speak of such accomplished artists in impurity as the lady who calls herself Ouida, and one or two others of the same school, we have young women, only just promoted from pantallettes, who can throw you off such glowing chapters of passion and young desire as would make the rhapsodies of "Indiana" seem very feeble milk-and-water brewage by comparison. Indeed, except for some of the descriptions in the opening chapters, I fail to see any extraordinary merit in "Indiana"; and toward the end it seems to me to grow verbose, weak, and tiresome. "Leone Leoni" opens with one of the finest dramatic outbursts of emotion known to the literature of modern fiction; but it soon wanders away into discursive weakness, and only just toward the close brightens up into a burst of lurid splendor. It is not those which I may call the questionable novels of George Sand,—the novels which were believed to illustrate in naked and appalling simplicity her doctrines and her life,—that will bear up her fame through succeeding generations. If every one of the novels which thus in their time drew down the thunders of Society's denunciation were to be swept into the wallet wherein Time, according to Shakespeare, carries scraps for oblivion, George Sand would still remain where she now is,—at the head of the French fiction of her day. It is true, as Goethe says, that "miracle-working pictures are rarely works of art." The books which make the hair of the respectable public stand on end are not often the works by which the fame of the author is preserved for posterity.

[Pg 10]

It is a curious fact that, at the early time to which I have been alluding, little or nothing was known in England (or, I presume, in America) of the real life of Aurora Amandine Dupin, who had

been pleased to call herself George Sand. People knew, or had heard, that she had separated from her husband, that she had written novels which depreciated the sanctity of legal marriage, and that she sometimes wore male costume in the streets. This was enough. In England, at least, we were ready to infer any enormity regarding a woman who was unsound on the legal marriage question, and who did not wear petticoats. What would have been said had people then commonly known half the stories which were circulated in Paris,—half the extravagances into which a passionate soul, and the stimulus of sudden emancipation from restraint, had hurried the authoress of "Indiana" and "Lucrezia Floriani"? For it must be owned that the life of that woman was, in its earlier years, a strange and wild phenomenon, hardly to be comprehended, perhaps, by American or English natures. I have heard George Sand bitterly arraigned even by persons who protested that they were at one with her as regards the early sentiments which used to excite such odium. I have heard her described by such as a sort of Lamia of literature and passion,—a creature who could seize some noble, generous, youthful heart, drain it of its love, its aspirations, its profoundest emotions, and then fling it, squeezed and lifeless, away. I have heard it declared that George Sand made "copy" of the fierce and passionate loves which she knew so well how to awaken and to foster; that she distilled the life-blood of youth to obtain the mixture out of which she derived her inspiration. The charge so commonly (I think unjustly) made against Goethe, that he played with the girlish love of Bettina and of others in order to obtain a subject for literary dissection, is vehemently and deliberately urged in an aggravated form,—in many aggravated forms,—against George Sand. Where, such accusers ask, is that young poet, endowed with a lyrical genius rare indeed in the France of later days,—that young poet whose imagination was at once so daring and so subtle,—who might have been Béranger and Heine in one, and have risen to an atmosphere in which neither Béranger nor Heine ever floated? Where is he, and what evil influence was it which sapped the strength of his nature, corrupted his genius, and prepared for him a premature and shameful grave? Where is that young musician, whose pure, tender, and lofty strains sound sweetly and sadly in the ears, as the very hymn and music of the Might-Have-Been,—where is he now, and what was the seductive power which made a plaything of him and then flung him away? Here and there some man of stronger mould is pointed out as one who was at the first conquered, and then deceived and trifled with, but who ordered his stout heart to bear, and rose superior to the hour, and lived to retrieve his nature and make himself a name of respect; but the others, of more sensitive and perhaps finer organizations, are only the more to be pitied because they were so terribly in earnest. Seldom, even in the literary history of modern France, has there been a more strange and shocking episode than the publication by George Sand of the little book called "Elle et Lui," and the rejoinder to it by Paul de Musset, called "Lui et Elle." I can hardly be accused of straying into the regions of private scandal when I speak of two books which had a wide circulation, are still being read, and may be had, I presume, in any New York book-store where French literature is sold. The former of the two books, "She and He," was a story, or something which purported to be a story, by George Sand, telling of two ill-assorted beings whom fate had thrown together for awhile, and of whom the woman was all tenderness, love, patience, the man all egotism, selfishness, sensuousness, and eccentricity. The point of the whole business was to show how sublimely the woman suffered, and how wantonly the man flung happiness away. Had it been merely a piece of fiction, it must have been regarded by any healthy mind as a morbid, unwholesome, disagreeable production,—a sin of the highest æsthetic kind against true art, which must always, even in its pathos and its tragedy, leave on the mind exalted and delightful impressions. But every one in Paris at once hailed the story as a chapter of autobiography, as the author's vindication of one episode in her own career,—a vindication at the expense of a man who had gone down, ruined and lost, to an early grave. Therefore the brother of the dead man flung into literature a little book called "He and She," in which a story, substantially the same in its outlines, is so told as exactly to reverse the conditions under which the verdict of public opinion was sought. Very curious indeed was the manner in which the same substance of facts was made to present the two principal figures with complexions and characters so strangely altered. In the woman's book the woman was made the patient, loving, suffering victim; in the man's reply this same woman was depicted as the most utterly selfish and depraved creature the human imagination could conceive. Even if one had no other means whatever of forming an estimate of the character of George Sand, it would be hardly possible to accept as her likeness the hideous picture sketched by Paul de Musset. No woman, I am glad to believe, ever existed in real life so utterly selfish, base, and wicked as his bitter pen has drawn. I must say that the thing is very cleverly done. The picture is at least consistent with itself. As a character in romance it might be pronounced original, bold, brilliant, and, in an artistic sense, quite natural. There is something thoroughly French in the easy and delicate force of the final touch with which de Musset dismisses his hideous subject. Having sketched this woman in tints that seem to flame across the eyes of the reader,—having described with wonderful realism and power her affectation, her deceit, her reckless caprices, her base and cruel coquetries, her devouring wantonness, her soul-destroying arts, her unutterable selfishness and egotism,—having, to use a vulgar phrase, "turned her inside out," and told her story backwards,—the author calmly explains that the hero of the narrative in his dying hour called his brother to his bedside, and enjoined him, if occasion should ever arise, if the partner of his sin should ever calumniate him in his grave, to vindicate his memory, and avenge the treason practised upon him. "Of course," adds the narrator, "the brother made the promise,—and I have since heard that he has kept his word." I can hardly hope to convey to the reader any adequate idea of the effect produced on the mind by these few simple words of compressed, whispered hatred and triumph, closing a philippic, or a revelation, or a libel of such extraordinary bitterness and ferocity. The whole episode is, I believe and earnestly hope, without precedent or imitation in literary controversy. Never, that I know of, has a living woman been publicly exhibited to the world in a portraiture so hideous as that which Paul de Musset drew of George Sand. Never, that I know of,

[Pg 11]

[Pg 12]

[Pg 13]

[Pg 14]

has any woman gone so near to deserving and justifying such a measure of retaliation.

For if it be assumed,—and I suppose it never has been disputed,—that in writing "Elle et Lui" George Sand meant to describe herself and Alfred de Musset, it is hard to conceive of any sin against taste and feeling,—against art and morals,—more flagrant than such a publication. The practice, to which French writers are so much addicted, of making "copy" of the private lives, characters, and relationships of themselves and their friends, seems to me in all cases utterly detestable. Lamartine's sins of this kind were grievous and glaring; but were they red as scarlet, they would seem whiter than snow when compared with the lurid monstrosity of George Sand's assault on the memory of the dead poet who was once her favorite. The whole affair, indeed, is so unlike anything which could occur in America or in England, that we can hardly find any canons by which to try it, or any standard of punishment by which to regulate its censure. I allude to it now because it is the only substantial evidence I know of which does fairly seem to justify the worst of the accusations brought against George Sand; and I do not think it right, when writing for grown men and women, who are supposed to have sense and judgment, to affect not to know that such accusations are made, or to pretend to think that it would be proper not to allude to them. They have been put forward, replied to, urged again, made the theme of all manner of controversy in scores of French and in some English publications. Pray let it be distinctly understood that I am not entering into any criticism of the morality of any part of George Sand's private life. With that we have nothing here to do. I am now dealing with the question, fairly belonging to public controversy, whether the great artist did not deliberately deal with human hearts as the painter of old is said to have done with a purchased slave,—inflicting torture in order the better to learn how to depict the struggles and contortions of mortal agony. In answer to such a question I can only point to "Lucrezia Floriani" and to "Elle et Lui," and say that unless the universal opinion of qualified critics be wrong, these books, and others too, owe their piquancy and their dramatic force to the anatomization of dead passions and discarded lovers. We have all laughed over the pedantic surgeon in Molière's "Malade Imaginaire", who invites his *fiancée*, as a delightful treat, to see him dissect the body of a woman. I am afraid that George Sand did sometimes invite an admiring public to an exhibition yet more ghastly and revolting,—the dissection of the heart of a dead lover.

[Pg 15]

[Pg 16]

But, in truth, we shall never judge George Sand and her writings at all, if we insist on criticising them from any point of view set up by the proprieties or even the moralities of Old England or New England. When the passionate young woman,—in whose veins ran the wild blood of Marshal Saxe,—found herself surrendered by legality and prescription to a marriage bond against which her soul revolted, society seemed for her to have resolved itself into its original elements. Its conventionalities and traditions contained nothing which she held herself bound to respect. The world was not her friend, nor the world's law. By one great decisive step she sundered herself forever from the bonds of what we call "society". She had shaken the dust of convention from her feet; the world was all before her where to choose. No creature on earth is so absolutely free as the Frenchwoman who has broken with society: There, then, stood this daring young woman, on the threshold of a new, fresh, and illimitable world; a young woman gifted with genius such as our later years have rarely seen, and blessed or cursed with a nature so strangely uniting the most characteristic qualities of man and woman, as to be in itself quite unparalleled and unique. Just think of it,—try to think of it! Society and the world had no longer any laws which she recognized. Nothing was sacred; nothing was settled. She had to evolve from her own heart and brain her own law of life. What wonder if she made some sad mistakes? Nay, is it not rather a theme for wonder and admiration that she did somehow come right at last? I know of no one who seems to me to have been open at once to the temptations of woman's nature and man's nature, except this George Sand. Her soul,—her brain,—her style may be described, from one point of view, as exuberantly and splendidly feminine; yet no other woman has ever shown the same power of understanding, and entering into the nature of a man. If Balzac is the only man who has ever thoroughly mastered the mysteries of a woman's heart, George Sand is the only woman, so far as I know, who has ever shown that she could feel as a man can feel. I have read stray passages in her novels which I would confidently submit to the criticism of any intelligent men unacquainted with the text, convinced that they would declare that only a man could have thus analyzed the emotions of manhood. I have in my mind, just now especially, a passage in the novel "Piccinino" which, were the authorship unknown, would, I am satisfied, secure the decision of a jury of literary experts that the author must be a man. Now this gift of entire appreciation of the feelings of a different sex or race is, I take it, one of the rarest and highest dramatic qualities. Especially is it difficult for a woman, as our social life goes, to enter into the feelings of a man. While men and women alike admit the accuracy of certain pictures of women drawn by such artists as Cervantes, Molière, Balzac, and Thackeray, there are few women,—indeed, perhaps there are no women but one,—by whom a man has been so painted as to challenge and compel the recognition and acknowledgment of men. In "The Galaxy", some months ago, I wrote of a great Englishwoman, the authoress of "Romola", and I expressed my conviction that on the whole she is entitled to higher rank, as a novelist, than even the authoress of "Consuelo". Many, very many men and women, for whose judgment I have the highest respect, differed from me in this opinion. I still hold it, nevertheless; but I freely admit that George Eliot has nothing like the dramatic insight which enables George Sand to enter into the feelings and experiences of a man. I go so far as to say that, having some knowledge of the literature of fiction in most countries, I am not aware of the existence of any woman but this one, who could draw a real, living, straggling, passion-tortured man. All other novelists of George Sand's sex,—even including Charlotte Brontë,—draw only what I may call "women's men". If ever the two natures could be united in one form,—if ever a single human being could have the soul of man and the soul of

[Pg 17]

[Pg 18]

woman at once,—George Sand might be described as that physical and psychological phenomenon. Now the point to which I wish to direct attention, is the peculiarity of the temptation to which a nature such as this was necessarily exposed at every turn when, free of all restraint and a rebel against all conventionality, it confronted the world and the world's law, and stood up, itself alone, against the domination of custom and the majesty of tradition. I claim, then, that when we have taken all these considerations into account, we are bound to admit that Aurora Dudevant deserves the generous recognition of the world for the use which she made of her splendid gifts. Her influence on French literature has been, on the whole, a purifying and strengthening power. The cynicism, the recklessness, the wanton, licentious disregard of any manner of principle, the debasing parade of disbelief in any higher purpose or nobler restraint, which are the shame and curse of modern French fiction, find no sanction in the pages of George Sand. I remember no passage in her works which gives the slightest encouragement to the "nothing new, and nothing true, and it don't signify" code of ethics which has been so much in fashion of late years. I find nothing in George Sand which does not do homage to the existence of a principle and a law in everything. This daring woman, who broke with society so early and so conspicuously, has always insisted, through every illustration, character, and catastrophe in her books, that the one only reality, the one only thing that can endure, is the rule of right and of virtue. Nor has she ever, that I can recollect, fallen into the enfeebling and sentimental theory so commonly expressed in the works of Victor Hugo, that the vague abstraction society is always to bear the blame of the faults committed by the individual man or woman. Of all persons in the world, Aurora Dudevant might be supposed most likely to adopt this easy and complacent theory as her guiding principle. She had every excuse, every reason for endeavoring to preach up the doctrine that our errors are society's and our virtues our own. But I am not aware that she ever taught any lesson save the lesson that men and women must endeavor to be heroes and heroines for themselves, heroes and heroines though all the world else were craven, and weak, and selfish, and unprincipled. Even that wretched and lamentable "Elle et Lui" affair, utterly inexcusable as it is when we read between the lines its secret history, has, at least, the merit of being an earnest and powerful protest against the egotistical and debasing indulgence of moral weaknesses and eccentricities which mean and vulgar minds are apt to regard as the privilege of genius. "Stand upon your own ground; be your own ruler; look to yourself, not to your stars, for your failure or success; always make your standard a lofty ideal, and try persistently to reach it, though all the temptations of earth, and all the power of darkness strive against you"—this, and nothing else, if I have read her books rightly, is the moral taught by George Sand. She may be wrong in her principle sometimes, but, at least, she always has a principle. She has a profound and generous faith in the possibilities of human nature; in the capacity of man's heart for purity, self-sacrifice, and self-redemption. Indeed, so far is she from holding counsel with wilful weakness or sin, that I think she sometimes falls into the noble error of painting her heroes as too glorious in their triumph over temptation, in their subjugation of every passion and interest to the dictates of duty and of honor. Take, for instance, that extraordinary book which has just been given to the American public in Miss Virginia Vaughan's excellent translation, "Mauprat". If I understand that magnificent romance at all, its purport is to prove that no human nature is ever plunged into temptation beyond its own strength to resist, provided that it really wills resistance; that no character is irretrievable, no error inexpiable, where there is sincere resolve to expiate, and longing desire to retrieve. Take, again, that exquisite little story, "La Dernière Aldini"; I do not know where one could find a finer illustration of the entire sacrifice of man's natural impulse, passion, interest, to what might almost be called an abstract idea of honor and principle. I have never read this little story without wondering how many men one ever has known who, placed in the same situation as that of Nello, the hero, would have done the same thing; and yet so simply and naturally are the characters wrought out, and the incidents described, that the idea of pompous, dramatic self-sacrifice never enters the mind of the reader, and it seems to him that Nello could not do otherwise than as he is doing. I speak of these two stories particularly, because in both of them there is a good deal of the world and the flesh; that is, both are stories of strong human passion and temptation. Many of George Sand's novels, the shorter ones especially, are as absolutely pure in moral tone, as entirely free from even a taint or suggestion of impurity, as they are perfect in style. Now, if we cannot help knowing that much of this great woman's life was far from being irreproachable, are we not bound to give her all the fuller credit, because her genius, at least, kept so far the whiteness of its soul? Revolutions are not to be made with rose-water; you cannot have omelettes without breaking of eggs. I am afraid that great social revolutionists are not often creatures of the most pure and perfect nature. It is not to patient Griselda you must look for any protest against even the uttermost tyranny of social conventions. One thing I think may, at least, be admitted as part of George Sand's vindication,—that the marriage system in France is the most debased and debasing institution existing in civilized society, now that the buying and selling of slaves has ceased to be a tolerated system. I hold that the most ardent advocates of the irrevocable endurance of the marriage bond are bound, by their very principles, to admit that, in protesting against the so-called marriage system of France, George Sand stood on the side of purity and right. Assuredly, she often went into extravagances in the other direction. It seems to be the fate of all French reformers to rush suddenly to extremes; and we must remember that George Sand was not a Bristol Quakeress, or a Boston transcendentalist, but a passionate Frenchwoman, the descendant of one of the maddest votaries of love and war who ever stormed across the stage of European history.

[Pg 19]

[Pg 20]

[Pg 21]

[Pg 22]

Regarding George Sand, then, as an influence in literature, and on society, I claim for her at least four great and special merits: First, she insisted on calling public attention to the true principle of marriage; that is to say, she put the question as it had not been put before. Of course, the fundamental principle she would have enforced is always being urged more or less feebly, more

or less sincerely; but she made it her own question, and illuminated it by the fervid, fierce rays of her genius and her passion. Secondly, her works are an exposition of the tremendous reality of the feelings which people who call themselves practical are apt to regard with indifference or contempt as mere sentiments. In the long run, the passions decide the life-question one way or the other. They are the tide which, as you know or do not know how to use it, will either turn your mill and float your boat, or drown your fields and sweep away your dwellings. Life and society receive no impulse and no direction from the influences out of which the novels of Dickens, or even of Thackeray, are made up. These are but pleasant or tender toying with the playthings and puppets of existence. George Sand constrains us to look at the realities through the medium of her fiction. Thirdly, she insists that man can and shall make his own career; not whine to the stars, and rail out against the powers above, when he has weakly or wantonly marred his own destiny. Fourthly,—and this ought not to be considered her least service to the literature of her country,—she has tried to teach people to look at Nature with their own eyes, and to invite the true love of her to flow into their hearts. The great service which Ruskin, with all his eccentricities and extravagances, has rendered to English-speaking peoples by teaching them to use their own eyes when they look at clouds, and waters, and grasses, and hills, George Sand has rendered to France.

[Pg 23]

I hold that these are virtues and services which ought to outweigh even very grave personal and artistic errors. We often hear that this or that great poet or romancist has painted men as they are; this other as they ought to be. I think George Sand paints men as they are, and also not merely as they ought to be, but as they can be. The sum of the lesson taught by her books is one of confidence in man's possibilities, and hope in his steady progress. At the same time she is entirely practical in her faith and her aspirations. She never expects that the trees are to grow up into the heavens, that men and women are to be other than men and women. She does not want them to be other; she finds the springs and sources of their social regeneration in the fact that they are just what they are, to begin with. I am afraid some of the ladies who seem to base their scheme of woman's emancipation and equality on the assumption that, by some development of time or process of schooling, a condition of things is to be brought about where difference of sex is no longer to be a disturbing power, will find small comfort or encouragement in the writings of George Sand. She deals in realities altogether; the realities of life, even when they are such as to shallow minds may seem mere sentiments and ecstasies; the realities of society, of suffering, of passion, of inanimate nature. There is in her nothing unmeaning, nothing untrue; there is in her much error, doubtless, but no sham.

[Pg 24]

I believe George Sand is growing into a quiet and beautiful old age. After a life of storm and stress, a life which, metaphorically at least, was "worn by war and passion", her closing years seem likely to be gilded with the calm glory of an autumnal sunset. One is glad to think of her thus happy and peaceful, accepting so tranquilly the reality of old age, still laboring with her unwearied pen, still delighting in books, and landscapes, and friends, and work. The world can well afford to forget as soon as possible her literary and other errors. Of the vast mass of romances, stories, plays, sketches, criticisms, pamphlets, political articles, even, it is said, ministerial manifestoes of republican days, which she poured out, only a few comparatively will perhaps be always treasured by posterity; but these will be enough to secure her a classic place. And she will not be remembered by her writings alone. Hers is probably the most powerful individuality displayed by any modern Frenchwoman. The influence of Madame Roland was but a glittering unreality, that of Madame de Staël only a boudoir and coterie success, when compared with the power exercised over literature, human feeling, and social law, by the energy, the courage, the genius, even the very errors and extravagances of George Sand.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK GEORGE SAND ***

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