

GEORGE SAND

BY

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Reprinted from
NOTES ON NOVELISTS
NEW YORK: CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS, 1914



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2014

CONTENTS

[George Sand, 1897](#)

[George Sand, 1899](#)

[George Sand, 1914](#)

GEORGE SAND

1897

I HAVE been reading in the *Revue de Paris* for November 1st, 1896, some fifty pages, of an extraordinary interest, which have had in respect to an old admiration a remarkable effect. Undoubtedly for other admirers too who have come to fifty years—admirers, I mean, once eager, of the distinguished woman involved—the perusal of the letters addressed by George Sand to Alfred de Musset in the course of a famous friendship will have stirred in an odd fashion the ashes of an early ardour. I speak of ashes because early ardours for the most part burn themselves out, while the place they hold in our lives varies, I think, mainly according to the degree of tenderness with which we gather up and preserve their dust; and I speak of oddity because in the present case it is difficult to say whether the agitation of the embers results at last in a returning glow or in a yet more sensible chill. That indeed is perhaps a small question compared with the simple pleasure of the reviving emotion. One reads and wonders and enjoys again, just for the sake of the renewal. The small fry of the hour submit to further shrinkage, and we revert with a sigh of relief to the free genius and large life of one of the greatest of all masters of expression. Do people still handle the works of this master—people other than young ladies studying French with “*La Mare au Diable*” and a dictionary? Are there persons who still read “*Valentine*?” Are there others capable of losing themselves in “*Mauprat*?” Has “*André*,” the exquisite, dropped out of knowledge, and is any one left who remembers “*Teverino*?” I ask these questions for the mere sweet sound of them, without the least expectation of an answer. I remember asking them twenty years ago, after Madame Sand’s death, and not then being hopeful of the answer of the future. But the only response that matters to us perhaps is our own, even if it be after all somewhat ambiguous. “*André*” and “*Valentine*” then are rather on our shelves than in our hands, but in the light of what is given us in the “*Revue de Paris*” who shall say that we do not, and with avidity, “read” George Sand? She died in 1876, but she lives again intensely in these singular pages, both as to what in her spirit was most attaching and what most disconcerting. We are vague as to what they may represent for the generation that has come to the front since her death; nothing, I dare say, very imposing or even very pleasing. But they give out a great deal to a reader for whom thirty years ago—the best time to have taken her as a whole—she was a high clear figure, a great familiar magician. This impression is a strange mixture, but perhaps not quite incommunicable; and we are steeped as we receive it in one of the most curious episodes in the annals of the literary race.

I

IT is the great interest of such an episode that, apart from its proportionate place in the unfolding of a personal life it has a wonderful deal to say on the relation between experience and art at large. It constitutes an eminent special case, in which the workings of that relation are more or less uncovered; a case too of which one of the most striking notes is that we are in possession of it almost exclusively by the act of one of the persons concerned. Madame Sand at least, as we see to-day, was eager to leave nothing undone that could make us further acquainted than we were before with one of the liveliest chapters of her personal history. We cannot, doubtless, be sure that her conscious purpose in the production of "Elle et Lui" was to show us the process by which private ecstasies and pains find themselves transmuted in the artist's workshop into promising literary material—any more than we can be certain of her motive for making toward the end of her life earnest and complete arrangements for the ultimate publication of the letters in which the passion is recorded and in which we can remount to the origin of the volume. If "Elle et Lui" had been the inevitable picture, postponed and retouched, of the great adventure of her youth, so the letters show us the crude primary stuff from which the moral detachment of the book was distilled. Were they to be given to the world for the encouragement of the artist-nature—as a contribution to the view that no suffering is great enough, no emotion tragic enough to exclude the hope that such pangs may sooner or later be esthetically assimilated? Was the whole proceeding, in intention, a frank plea for the intellectual and in some degree even the commercial profit, to a robust organism, of a store of erotic reminiscence? Whatever the reasons behind the matter, that is to a certain extent the moral of the strange story.

It may be objected that this moral is qualified to come home to us only when the relation between art and experience really proves a happier one than it may be held to have proved in the combination before us. The element in danger of being most absent from the process is the element of dignity, and its presence, so far as that may ever at all be hoped for in an appeal from a personal quarrel, is assured only in proportion as the esthetic event, standing on its own feet, represents a noble gift. It was vain, the objector may say, for our author to pretend to justify by so slight a performance as "Elle et Lui" that sacrifice of all delicacy which has culminated in this supreme surrender. "If you sacrifice all delicacy," I hear such a critic contend, "show at least that you were right by giving us a masterpiece. The novel in question is no more a masterpiece," I even hear him proceed, "than any other of the loose liquid lucid works of its

GEORGE SAND

author. By your supposition of a great intention you give much too fine an account on the one hand of a personal habit of incontinence and on the other of a literary habit of egotism. Madame Sand, in writing her tale and in publishing her love-letters, obeyed no prompting more exalted than that of exhibiting her personal (in which I include her verbal) facility, and of doing so at the cost of whatever other persons might be concerned; and you are therefore—and you might as well immediately confess it—thrown back for the element of interest on the attraction of her general eloquence, the plausibility of her general manner and the great number of her particular confidences. You are thrown back on your mere curiosity or sympathy—thrown back from any question of service rendered to ‘art.’” One might be thrown back doubtless still further even than such remarks would represent if one were not quite prepared with the confession they propose. It is only because such a figure is interesting—in every manifestation—that its course is marked for us by vivid footprints and possible lessons. And to enable us to find these it scarcely need have aimed after all so extravagantly high. George Sand lived her remarkable life and drove her perpetual pen, but the illustration that I began by speaking of is for ourselves to gather—if we can.

I remember hearing many years ago in Paris an anecdote for the truth of which I am far from vouching, though it professed to come direct—an anecdote that has recurred to me more than once in turning over the revelations of the *Revue de Paris*, and without the need of the special reminder (in the shape of an allusion to her intimacy with the hero of the story) contained in those letters to Sainte-Beuve which are published in the number of November 15th. Prosper Mérimée was said to have related—in a reprehensible spirit—that during a term of association with the author of “*Lélia*” he once opened his eyes, in the raw winter dawn, to see his companion, in a dressing-gown, on her knees before the domestic hearth, a candlestick beside her and a red madras round her head, making bravely, with her own hands, the fire that was to enable her to sit down betimes to urgent pen and paper. The story represents him as having felt that the spectacle chilled his ardour and tried his taste; her appearance was unfortunate, her occupation an inconsequence and her industry a reproof—the result of all of which was a lively irritation and an early rupture. To the firm admirer of Madame Sand’s prose the little sketch has a very different value, for it presents her in an attitude which is the very key to the enigma, the answer to most of the questions with which her character confronts us. She rose early because she was pressed to write, and she was pressed to write because she had the greatest instinct of expression ever conferred on a woman; a faculty that put a premium on all passion, on all pain, on all experience and all exposure, on the greatest variety of ties and

the smallest reserve about them. The really interesting thing in these posthumous *laideurs* is the way the gift, the voice, carries its possessor through them and lifts her on the whole above them. It gave her, it may be confessed at the outset and in spite of all magnanimities in the use of it, an unfair advantage in every connection. So at least we must continue to feel till—for our appreciation of this particular one—we have Alfred de Musset's share of the correspondence. For we shall have it at last, in whatever faded fury or beauty it may still possess—to that we may make up our minds. Let the galled jade wince, it is only a question of time. The greatest of literary quarrels will in short, on the general ground, once more come up—the quarrel beside which all others are mild and arrangeable, the eternal dispute between the public and the private, between curiosity and delicacy.

This discussion is precisely all the sharper because it takes place for each of us within as well as without. When we wish to know at all we wish to know everything; yet there happen to be certain things of which no better description can be given than that they are simply none of our business. “What *is* then forsooth of our business?” the genuine analyst may always ask; and he may easily challenge us to produce any rule of general application by which we shall know when to push in and when to back out. “In the first place,” he may continue, “half the ‘interesting’ people in the world have at one time or another set themselves to drag us in with all their might; and what in the world in such a relation is the observer that he should absurdly pretend to be in more of a flutter than the object observed? The mannikin, in all schools, is at an early stage of study of the human form inexorably superseded by the man. Say that we are to give up the attempt to understand: it might certainly be better so, and there would be a delightful side to the new arrangement. But in the name of common-sense don't say that the continuity of life is not to have some equivalent in the continuity of pursuit, the renewal of phenomena in the renewal of notation. There is not a door you can lock here against the critic or the painter, not a cry you can raise or a long face you can pull at him, that are not quite arbitrary things. The only thing that makes the observer competent is that he is neither afraid nor ashamed; the only thing that makes him decent—just think!—is that he is not superficial.” All this is very well, but somehow we all equally feel that there is clean linen and soiled and that life would be intolerable without some acknowledgment even by the pushing of such a thing as forbidden ground. M. Émile Zola, at the moment I write, gives to the world his reasons for rejoicing in the publication of the physiological enquête of Dr. Toulouse—a marvellous catalogue or handbook of M. Zola's outward and inward parts, which leaves him not an inch of privacy, so to speak, to stand on, leaves him nothing about himself that is for himself, for his friends, his rel-

GEORGE SAND

atives, his intimates, his lovers, for discovery, for emulation, for fond conjecture or flattering deluded envy. It is enough for M. Zola that everything is for the public and no sacrifice worth thinking of when it is a question of presenting to the open mouth of that apparently gorged but still gaping monster the smallest spoonful of truth. The truth, to his view, is never either ridiculous or unclean, and the way to a better life lies through telling it, so far as possible, about everything and about every one.

There would probably be no difficulty in agreeing to this if it didn't seem on the part of the speaker the result of a rare confusion between give and take, between "truth" and information. The true thing that most matters to us is the true thing we have most use for, and there are surely many occasions on which the truest thing of all is the necessity of the mind, its simple necessity of feeling. Whether it feels in order to learn or learns in order to feel, the event is the same: the side on which it shall most feel will be the side to which it will most incline. If it feels more about a Zola functionally undeciphered it will be governed more by that particular truth than by the truth about his digestive idiosyncrasies, or even about his "olfactive perceptions" and his "arithmomania or impulse to count." An affirmation of our "mere taste" may very supposedly be our individual contribution to the general clearing up. Nothing often is less superficial than to ignore and overlook, or more constructive (for living and feeling at all) than to want impatiently to choose. If we are aware that in the same way as about a Zola undeciphered we should have felt more about a George Sand unexposed, the true thing we have gained becomes a poor substitute for the one we have lost; and I scarce see what difference it makes that the view of the elder novelist appears in this matter quite to march with that of the younger. I hasten to add that as to being of course asked why in the world with such a leaning we have given time either to M. Zola's physician or to Musset's correspondent, this is only another illustration of the bewildering state of the subject.

When we meet on the broad highway the rueful denuded figure we need some presence of mind to decide whether to cut it dead or to lead it gently home, and meanwhile the fatal complication easily occurs. We have seen, in a flash of our own wit, and mystery has fled with a shriek. These encounters are indeed accidents which may at any time take place, and the general guarantee in a noisy world lies, I judge, not so much in any hope of really averting them as in a regular organisation of the struggle. The reporter and the reported have duly and equally to understand that they carry their life in their hands. There are secrets for privacy and silence; let them only be cultivated on the part of the hunted creature with even half the method with which the love of sport—or call it the historic

GEORGE SAND

sense—is cultivated on the part of the investigator. They have been left too much to the natural, the instinctive man; but they will be twice as effective after it begins to be observed that they may take their place among the triumphs of civilisation. Then at last the game will be fair and the two forces face to face; it will be “pull devil, pull tailor,” and the hardest pull will doubtless provide the happiest result. Then the cunning of the inquirer, envenomed with resistance, will exceed in subtlety and ferocity anything we to-day conceive, and the pale forewarned victim, with every track covered, every paper burnt and every letter unanswered, will, in the tower of art, the invulnerable granite, stand, without a sally, the siege of all the years.

II

It was not in the tower of art that George Sand ever shut herself up; but I come back to a point already made in saying that it is in the citadel of style that, notwithstanding rash *sorties*, she continues to hold out. The outline of the complicated story that was to cause so much ink to flow gives, even with the omission of a hundred features, a direct measure of the strain to which her astonishing faculty was exposed. In the summer of 1833, as a woman of nearly thirty, she encountered Alfred de Musset, who was six years her junior. In spite of their youth they were already somewhat bowed by the weight of a troubled past. Musset, at twenty-three, had that of his confirmed libertinism—so Madame Arvède Barine, who has had access to materials, tells us in the admirable short biography of the poet contributed to the rather markedly unequal but very interesting series of Hachette’s *Grands Ecrivains Français*. Madame Sand had a husband, a son and a daughter, and the impress of that succession of lovers—Jules Sandeau had been one, Prosper Mérimée another—to which she so freely alludes in the letters to Sainte-Beuve, a friend more disinterested than these and qualified to give much counsel in exchange for much confidence. It cannot be said that the situation of either of our young persons was of good omen for a happy relation, but they appear to have burnt their ships with much promptitude and a great blaze, and in the December of that year they started together for Italy. The following month saw them settled, on a frail basis, in Venice, where the elder companion remained till late in the summer of 1834 and where she wrote, in part, “Jacques” and the “Lettres d’un Voyageur,” as well as “André” and “Leone-Leoni,” and gathered the impressions to be embodied later in half-a-dozen stories with Italian titles—notably in the delightful “Consuelo.” The journey, the Italian climate, the Venetian winter at first agreed with neither of the friends; they were both taken ill—the young man very gravely—and after a stay of three months Musset returned, alone and much ravaged, to Paris.

GEORGE SAND

In the meantime a great deal had happened, for their union had been stormy and their security small. Madame Sand had nursed her companion in illness (a matter-of-course office, it must be owned) and her companion had railed at his nurse in health. A young physician, called in, had become a close friend of both parties, but more particularly a close friend of the lady, and it was to his tender care that on quitting the scene Musset solemnly committed her. She took up life with Pietro Pagello—the transition is startling—for the rest of her stay, and on her journey back to France he was no inconsiderable part of her luggage. He was simple, robust and kind—not a man of genius. He remained, however, but a short time in Paris; in the autumn of 1834 he returned to Italy, to live on till our own day but never again, so far as we know, to meet his illustrious mistress. Her intercourse with her poet was, in all its intensity, one may almost say its ferocity, promptly renewed, and was sustained in that key for several months more. The effect of this strange and tormented passion on the mere student of its records is simply to make him ask himself what on earth is the matter with the subjects of it. Nothing is more easy than to say, as I have intimated, that it has no need of records and no need of students; but this leaves out of account the thick medium of genius in which it was foredoomed to disport itself. It was self-registering, as the phrase is, for the genius on both sides happened to be the genius of eloquence. It is all rapture and all rage and all literature. The “*Lettres d’un Voyageur*” spring from the thick of the fight; “*La Confession d’un Enfant du Siècle*” and “*Les Nuits*” are immediate echoes of the concert. The lovers are naked in the market-place and perform for the benefit of society. The matter with them, to the perception of the stupefied spectator, is that they entertained for each other every feeling in life but the feeling of respect. What the absence of that article may do for the passion of hate is apparently nothing to what it may do for the passion of love.

By our unhappy pair at any rate the luxury in question—the little luxury of plainer folk—was not to be purchased, and in the comedy of their despair and the tragedy of their recovery nothing is more striking than their convulsive effort either to reach up to it or to do without it. They would have given for it all else they possessed, but they only meet in their struggle the inexorable never. They strain and pant and gasp, they beat the air in vain for the cup of cold water of their hell. They missed it in a way for which none of their superiorities could make up. Their great affliction was that each found in the life of the other an armoury of weapons to wound. Young as they were, young as Musset was in particular, they appeared to have afforded each other in that direction the most extraordinary facilities; and nothing in the matter of the mutual consideration that failed them is more sad and strange than that even in later years,

GEORGE SAND

when their rage, very quickly, had cooled, they never arrived at simple silence. For Madame Sand, in her so much longer life, there was no hush, no letting alone; though it would be difficult indeed to exaggerate the depth of relative indifference from which, a few years after Musset's death, such a production as "Elle et Lui" could spring. Of course there had been floods of tenderness, of forgiveness; but those, for all their beauty of expression, are quite another matter. It is just the fact of our sense of the ugliness of so much of the episode that makes a wonder and a force of the fine style, all round, in which it is offered us. That force is in its turn a sort of clue to guide, or perhaps rather a sign to stay, our feet in paths after all not the most edifying. It gives a degree of importance to the somewhat squalid and the somewhat ridiculous story, and, for the old George-Sandist at least, lends a positive spell to the smeared and yellowed paper, the blotted and faded ink. In this twilight of association we seem to find a reply to our own challenge and to be able to tell ourselves why we meddle with such old dead squabbles and waste our time with such grimacing ghosts. If we were superior to the weakness, moreover, how should we make our point (which we must really make at any cost) as to the so valuable vivid proof that a great talent is the best guarantee—that it may really carry off almost anything?

The rather sorry ghost that beckons us on furthest is the rare personality of Madame Sand. Under its influence—or that of old memories from which it is indistinguishable—we pick our steps among the *laideurs* aforesaid: the misery, the levity, the brevity of it all, the greatest ugliness in particular that this life shows us, the way the devotions and passions that we see heaven and earth called to witness are over before we can turn round. It may be said that, for what it was, the intercourse of these unfortunates surely lasted long enough; but the answer to that is that if it had only lasted longer it wouldn't have been what it was. It was not only preceded and followed by intimacies, on one side and the other, as unadorned by the stouter sincerity, but was mixed up with them in a manner that would seem to us dreadful if it didn't still more seem to us droll, or rather perhaps if it didn't refuse altogether to come home to us with the crudity of contemporary things. It is antediluvian history, a queer vanished world—another Venice from the actually, the deplorably familiarised, a Paris of greater bonhomie, an inconceivable impossible Nohant. This relegates it to an order agreeable somehow to the imagination of the fond quinquagenarian, the reader with a fund of reminiscence. The vanished world, the Venice unrestored, the Paris unextended, is a bribe to his judgment; he has even a glance of complacency for the lady's liberal *foyer*. Liszt, one lovely year at Nohant, "jouait du piano au rez-de-chaussée, et les rossignols, ivres de musique et de soleil, s'égosillaient avec rage sur les lilas environnants." The beautiful manner confounds itself with the conditions in

which it was exercised, the large liberty and variety overflow into admirable prose, and the whole thing makes a charming faded medium in which Chopin gives a hand to Consuelo and the small Fafette has her elbows on the table of Flaubert.

There is a terrible letter of the autumn of 1834 in which our heroine has recourse to Alfred Tattet on a dispute with the bewildered Pagello—a disagreeable matter that involved a question of money. “À Venise il comprenait,” she somewhere says, “à Paris il ne comprend plus.” It was a proof of remarkable intelligence that he did understand in Venice, where he had become a lover in the presence and with the exalted approval of an immediate predecessor—an alternate representative of the part, whose turn had now, on the removal to Paris, come round again and in whose resumption of office it was looked to him to concur. This attachment—to Pagello—had lasted but a few months; yet already it was the prey of complication and change, and its sun appears to have set in no very graceful fashion. We are not here in truth among very graceful things, in spite of superhuman attitudes and great romantic flights. As to these forced notes Madame Arvède Barine judiciously says that the picture of them contained in the letters to which she had had access, and some of which are before us, “presents an example extraordinary and unmatched of what the romantic spirit could do with beings who had become its prey.” She adds that she regards the records in question, “in which we follow step by step the ravages of the monster,” as “one of the most precious psychological documents of the first half of the century.” That puts the story on its true footing, though we may regret that it should not divide these documentary honours more equally with some other story in which the monster has not quite so much the best of it. But it is the misfortune of the comparatively short and simple annals of conduct and character that they should ever seem to us somehow to cut less deep. Scarce—to quote again his best biographer—had Musset, at Venice, begun to recover from his illness than the two lovers were seized afresh by *le vertige du sublime et de l'impossible*. “Ils imaginèrent les deviations de sentiment les plus bizarres, et leur interieur fut le théâtre de scenes qui égalaient en étrangeté les fantaisies les plus audacieuses de la litterature contemporaine;” that is of the literature of their own day. The register of virtue contains no such lively items—save indeed in so far as these contortions and convulsions were a conscious tribute to virtue.

Ten weeks after Musset has left her in Venice his relinquished but not dissevered mistress writes to him in Paris: “God keep you, my friend, in your present disposition of heart and mind. Love is a temple built by the lover to an object more or less worthy of his worship, and what is grand in the thing is not so much the god as the altar. Why should you be afraid of the risk?”—of a new mistress she

GEORGE SAND

means. There would seem to be reasons enough why he should have been afraid, but nothing is more characteristic than her eagerness to push him into the arms of another woman—more characteristic either of her whole philosophy in these matters or of their tremendous, though somewhat conflicting, effort to be good. She is to be good by showing herself so superior to jealousy as to stir up in him a new appetite for a new object, and he is to be so by satisfying it to the full. It appears not to occur to either one that in such an arrangement his own honesty is rather sacrificed. Or is it indeed because he has scruples—or even a sense of humour—that she insists with such ingenuity and such eloquence? “Let the idol stand long or let it soon break, you will in either case have built a beautiful shrine. Your soul will have lived in it, have filled it with divine incense, and a soul like yours must produce great works. The god will change perhaps, the temple will last as long as yourself.” “Perhaps,” under the circumstances, was charming. The letter goes on with the ample flow that was always at the author’s command—an ease of suggestion and generosity, of beautiful melancholy acceptance, in which we foresee, on her own horizon, the dawn of new suns. Her simplifications are delightful—they remained so to the end; her touch is a wondrous sleight-of-hand. The whole of this letter in short is a splendid utterance and a masterpiece of the shade of sympathy, not perhaps the clearest, which consists of wishing another to feel as you feel yourself. To feel as George Sand felt, however, one had to be, like George Sand, of the true male inwardness; which poor Musset was far from being. This, we surmise, was the case with most of her lovers, and the truth that makes the idea of her liaison with Mérimée, who was of a consistent virility, sound almost like a union against nature. She repeats to her correspondent, on grounds admirably stated, the injunction that he is to give himself up, to let himself go, to take his chance. That he took it we all know—he followed her advice only too well. It is indeed not long before his manner of doing so draws from her a cry of distress. “*Ta conduite est déplorable, impossible. Mon Dieu, à quelle vie vais-je te laisser? l’ivresse, le vin, les filles, et encore et toujours!*” But apprehensions were now too late; they would have been too late at the very earliest stage of this celebrated connection.

III

The great difficulty was that, though they were sublime, the couple were really not serious. But on the other hand if on a lady’s part in such a relation the want of sincerity or of constancy is a grave reproach the matter is a good deal modified when the lady, as I have mentioned, happens to be—I may not go so far as to say a gentleman. That George Sand just fell short of this character was the

GEORGE SAND

greatest difficulty of all; because if a woman, in a love affair, may be—for all she is to gain or to lose—what she likes, there is only one thing that, to carry it off with any degree of credit, a man may be. Madame Sand forgot this on the day she published “Elle et Lui;” she forgot it again more gravely when she bequeathed to the great snickering public these present shreds and relics of unutterably personal things. The aberration refers itself to the strange lapses of still other occasions—notably to the extraordinary absence of scruples with which she in the delightful “*Histoire de ma Vie*” gives away, as we say, the character of her remarkable mother. The picture is admirable for vividness, for breadth of touch; it would be perfect from any hand not a daughter’s, and we ask ourselves wonderingly how through all the years, to make her capable of it, a long perversion must have worked and the filial fibre—or rather the general flower of sensibility—have been battered. Not this particular anomaly, however, but many another, yields to the reflection that as just after her death a very perceptive person who had known her well put it to the author of these remarks, she was a woman quite by accident. Her immense plausibility was almost the only sign of her sex. She needed always to prove that she had been in the right; as how indeed could a person fail to who, thanks to the special equipment I have named, might prove it so brilliantly? It is not too much to say of her gift of expression—and I have already in effect said so—that from beginning to end it floated her over the real as a high tide floats a ship over the bar. She was never left awkwardly straddling on the sandbank of fact.

For the rest, in any case, with her free experience and her free use of it, her literary style, her love of ideas and questions, of science and philosophy, her comradeship, her boundless tolerance, her intellectual patience, her personal good-humour and perpetual tobacco (she smoked long before women at large felt the cruel obligation), with all these things and many I don’t mention she had more of the inward and outward of the other sex than of her own. She had above all the mark that, to speak at this time of day with a freedom for which her action in the matter of publicity gives us warrant, the history of her personal passions reads singularly like a chronicle of the ravages of some male celebrity. Her relations with men closely resembled those relations with women that, from the age of Pericles or that of Petrarch, have been complacently commemorated as stages in the unfolding of the great statesman and the great poet. It is very much the same large list, the same story of free appropriation and consumption. She appeared in short to have lived through a succession of such ties exactly in the manner of a Goethe, a Byron or a Napoleon; and if millions of women, of course, of every condition, had had more lovers, it was probable that no woman independently so occupied and so diligent had had, as might be said, more

GEORGE SAND

unions. Her fashion was quite her own of extracting from this sort of experience all that it had to give her and being withal only the more just and bright and true, the more sane and superior, improved and improving. She strikes us as in the benignity of such an intercourse even more than maternal: not so much the mere fond mother as the supersensuous grandmother of the wonderful affair. Is not that practically the character in which Thérèse Jacques studies to present herself to Laurent de Fauvel? the light in which "Lucrezia Floriani" (a memento of a friendship for Chopin, for Liszt) shows the heroine as affected toward Prince Karol and his friend? George Sand is too inveterately moral, too preoccupied with that need to do good which is in art often the enemy of doing well; but in all her work the story-part, as children call it, has the freshness and good faith of a monastic legend. It is just possible indeed that the moral idea was the real mainspring of her course—I mean a sense of the duty of avenging on the unscrupulous race of men their immemorial selfish success with the plastic race of women. Did she wish above all to turn the tables—to show how the sex that had always ground the other in the volitional mill was on occasion capable of being ground?

However this may be, nothing is more striking than the inward impunity with which she gave herself to conditions that are usually held to denote or to involve a state of demoralisation. This impunity (to speak only of consequences or features that concern us) was not, I admit, complete, but it was sufficiently so to warrant us in saying that no one was ever less demoralised. She presents a case prodigiously discouraging to the usual view—the view that there is no surrender to "unconsecrated" passion that we escape paying for in one way or another. It is frankly difficult to see where this eminent woman conspicuously paid. She positively got off from paying—and in a cloud of fluency and dignity, benevolence, competence, intelligence. She sacrificed, it is true, a handful of minor coin—suffered by failing wholly to grasp in her picture of life certain shades and certain delicacies. What she paid was this irrecoverable loss of her touch for them. That is undoubtedly one of the reasons why to-day the picture in question has perceptibly faded, why there are persons who would perhaps even go so far as to say that it has really a comic side. She doesn't know, according to such persons, her right hand from her left, the crooked from the straight and the clean from the unclean: it was a sense she lacked or a tact she had rubbed off, and her great work is by the fatal twist quite as lopsided a monument as the leaning tower of Pisa. Some readers may charge her with a graver confusion still—the incapacity to distinguish between fiction and fact, the truth straight from the well and the truth curling in steam from the kettle and preparing the comfortable tea. There is no word oftener on her pen, they will remind us, than the verb to "arrange." She arranged constantly, she arranged beautifully; but from this point of

GEORGE SAND

view, that of a general suspicion of arrangements, she always proved too much. Turned over in the light of it the story of "Elle et Lui" for instance is an attempt to prove that the mistress of Laurent de Fauvel was little less than a prodigy of virtue. What is there not, the intemperate admirer may be challenged to tell us, an attempt to prove in "L'Histoire de ma Vie?"—a work from which we gather every delightful impression but the impression of an impeccable veracity.

These reservations may, however, all be sufficiently just without affecting our author's peculiar air of having eaten her cake and had it, been equally initiated in directions the most opposed. Of how much cake she partook the letters to Musset and Sainte-Beuve well show us, and yet they fall in at the same time, on other sides, with all that was noble in her mind, all that is beautiful in the books just mentioned and in the six volumes of the general "Correspondance: 1812-1876," out of which Madame Sand comes so immensely to her advantage. She had, as liberty, all the adventures of which the dots are so put on the i's by the documents lately published, and then she had, as law, as honour and serenity, all her fine reflections on them and all her splendid busy literary use of them. Nothing perhaps gives more relief to her masculine stamp than the rare art and success with which she cultivated an equilibrium. She made from beginning to end a masterly study of composure, absolutely refusing to be upset, closing her door at last against the very approach of irritation and surprise. She had arrived at her quiet elastic synthesis—a good-humour, an indulgence that were an armour of proof. The great felicity of all this was that it was neither indifference nor renunciation, but on the contrary an intense partaking; imagination, affection, sympathy and life, the way she had found for herself of living most and living longest. However well it all agreed with her happiness and her manners, it agrees still better with her style, as to which we come back with her to the sense that this was really her *point d'appui* or sustaining force. Most people have to say, especially about themselves, only what they can; but she said—and we nowhere see it better than in the letters to Musset—everything in life that she wanted. We can well imagine the effect of that consciousness on the nerves of this particular correspondent, his own poor gift of occasional song (to be so early spent) reduced to nothing by so unequalled a command of the last word. We feel it, I hasten to add, this last word, in all her letters: the occasion, no matter which, gathers it from her as the breeze gathers the scent from the garden. It is always the last word of sympathy and sense, and we meet it on every page of the voluminous "Correspondance." These pages are not so "clever" as those, in the same order, of some other famous hands—the writer always denied, justly enough, that she had either wit or presence of mind—and they are not a product of high spirits or of a marked avidity for gossip. But they have admirable ease,

GEORGE SAND

breadth and generosity; they are the clear quiet overflow of a very full cup. They speak above all for the author's great gift, her eye for the inward drama. Her hand is always on the fiddle-string, her ear is always at the heart. It was in the soul, in a word, that she saw the drama begin, and to the soul that, after whatever outward flourishes, she saw it confidently come back. She herself lived with all her perceptions and in all her chambers—not merely in the showroom of the shop. This brings us once more to the question of the instrument and the tone, and to our idea that the tone, when you are so lucky as to possess it, may be of itself a solution.

By a solution I mean a secret for saving not only your reputation but your life—that of your soul; an antidote to dangers which the unendowed can hope to escape by no process less uncomfortable or less inglorious than that of prudence and precautions. The unendowed must go round about, the others may go straight through the wood. Their weaknesses, those of the others, shall be as well redeemed as their books shall be well preserved; it may almost indeed be said that they are made wise in spite of themselves. If you have never in all your days *had* a weakness worth mentioning, you can be after all no more, at the very most, than large and cheerful and imperturbable. All these things Madame Sand managed to be on just the terms she had found, as we see, most convenient. So much, I repeat, does there appear to be in a tone. But if the perfect possession of one made her, as it well might, an optimist, the action of it is perhaps more consistently happy in her letters and her personal records than in her “creative” work. Her novels to-day have turned rather pale and faint, as if the image projected—not intense, not absolutely concrete—failed to reach completely the mind's eye. And the odd point is that the wonderful charm of expression is not really a remedy for this lack of intensity, but rather an aggravation of it through a sort of suffusion of the whole thing by the voice and speech of the author. These things set the subject, whatever it be, afloat in the upper air, where it takes a happy bath of brightness and vagueness or swims like a soap-bubble kept up by blowing. This is no drawback when she is on the ground of her own life, to which she is tied by a certain number of tangible threads; but to embark on one of her confessed fictions is to have—after all that has come and gone, in our time, in the trick of persuasion—a little too much the feeling of going up in a balloon. We are borne by a fresh cool current and the car delightfully dangles; but as we peep over the sides we see things—as we usually know them—at a dreadful drop beneath. Or perhaps a better way to express the sensation is to say what I have just been struck with in the re-perusal of “*Elle et Lui*,” namely that this book, like others by the same hand, affects the reader—and the impression is of the oddest—not as a first but as a second echo or edition of the immediate real, or in other words of the subject.

GEORGE SAND

The tale may in this particular be taken as typical of the author's manner; beautifully told, but told, as if on a last remove from the facts, by some one repeating what he has read or what he has had from another and thereby inevitably becoming more general and superficial, missing or forgetting the "hard" parts and slurring them over and making them up. Of everything but feelings the presentation is dim. We recognise that we shall never know the original narrator and that the actual introducer is the only one we can deal with. But we sigh perhaps as we reflect that we may never confront her with her own informant.

To that, however, we must resign ourselves; for I remember in time that the volume from which I take occasion to speak with this levity is the work that I began by pronouncing a precious illustration. With the aid of the disclosures of the *Revue de Paris* it was, as I hinted, to show us that no mistakes and no pains are too great to be, in the air of art, triumphantly convertible. Has it really performed this function? I thumb again my copy of the limp little novel and wonder what, alas, I shall reply. The case is extreme, for it was the case of a suggestive experience particularly dire, and the literary flower that has bloomed upon it is not quite the full-blown rose. "Oeuvre de rancune" Arvède Barine pronounces it, and if we take it as that we admit that the artist's distinctness from her material was not ideally complete. Shall I not better the question by saying that it strikes me less as a work of rancour than—in a peculiar degree—as a work of egotism? It becomes in that light at any rate a sufficiently happy affirmation of the author's infallible form. This form was never a more successful vehicle for the conveyance of sweet reasonableness. It is all superlatively calm and clear; there never was a kinder, balmier last word. Whatever the measure of justice of the particular representation, moreover, the picture has only to be put beside the recent documents, the "study," as I may call them, to illustrate the general phenomenon. Even if "Elle et Lui" is not the full-blown rose we have enough here to place in due relief an irrepressible tendency to bloom. In fact I seem already to discern that tendency in the very midst of the storm; the "tone" in the letters too has its own way and performs on its own account—which is but another manner of saying that the literary instinct, in the worst shipwreck, is never out of its depth. The worker observed at the fire by Mérimée could be drowned but in an ocean of ink. Is that a sufficient account of what I have called the laying bare of the relation between experience and art? With the two elements, the life and the genius, face to face—the smutches and quarrels at one end of the chain and the high luminosity at the other—does some essential link still appear to be missing? How do the graceless facts after all confound themselves with the beautiful spirit? They do so, incontestably, before our eyes, and the mystification remains. We try to trace the process,

GEORGE SAND

but before we break down we had better perhaps hasten to grant that—so far at least as George Sand is concerned—some of its steps are impenetrable secrets of the grand manner.

GEORGE SAND

1899

THOSE among us comfortably conscious of our different usage—aware, some would say, of our better conscience—may well have remarked the general absence from French practice of biographic commemoration of extinct worthies. The Life as we understand it, the prompt pious spacious record and mirror of the eminent career, rarely follows the death. The ghost of the great man, when he happens to have been a Frenchman, “sits” for such portraiture, we gather, with a confidence much less assured than among ourselves, and with fewer relatives and friends to surround the chair. The manner in which even for persons of highest mark among our neighbours biography either almost endlessly hangs back or altogether fails, suggests that the approach is even when authorised too often difficult. This general attitude toward the question, it would thus appear, implies for such retrospects the predominance of doors bolted and barred. Hesitation is therefore fairly logical, for it rests on the assumption that men and women of great gifts will have lived with commensurate intensity, and that as regards some of the forms of this intensity the discretion of the inquirer may well be the better part of his enthusiasm. The critic can therefore only note with regret so much absent opportunity for the play of perception and the art of composition. The race that produced Balzac—to say nothing of Sainte-Beuve—would surely have produced a Boswell, a Lockhart and a Trevelyan if the fashion had not set so strongly against it. We have lately had a capital example of the encounter of an admirable English portraitist and an admirable English subject. It is not irrelevant to cite such a book as Mr. Mackail’s “Life of William Morris” as our high-water mark—a reminder of how we may be blessed on both faces of the question. Each term of the combination appears supposable in France, but only as distinct from the other term. The artist, we gather, would there have lost his chance and the sitter his ease.

It completes in an interesting way these observations, which would bear much expansion, to perceive that when we at last have a Life of George Sand—a celebrity living with the imputed intensity, if ever a celebrity did—we are indebted for it to the hand of a stranger. No fact could more exactly point the moral of my few remarks. Madame Sand’s genius and renown would have long ago made her a

GEORGE SAND

subject at home if alacrity in such a connection had been to be dreamed of. There is no more significant sign of the general ban under which alacrity rests. Everything about this extraordinary woman is interesting, and we can easily imagine the posthumous honours we ourselves would have hastened to assure to a part taken, in literature and life, with such brilliancy and sincerity. These demonstrations, where we should most look for them, have been none the less as naught—save indeed, to be exact, for the publication of a number of volumes of letters. It is just Madame Sand's letters, however—letters interesting and admirable, peculiarly qualified to dispose the reader in her favour—that in England or in America would have quickened the need for the rest of the evidence. But now that, as befalls, we do at last have the rest of the evidence as we never have had it before, we are of course sufficiently enlightened as to the reasons for a special application of the law of reserves and delays. It is not in fact easy to see how a full study of our heroine could have been produced earlier; and even at present there is a sensible comfort in its being produced at such a distance as practically assigns the act to a detached posterity. Contemporaneously it was wise to forbear; but today, and in Russia, by good luck, it is permitted to plunge.

Mme. Wladimir Karénine's extraordinarily diffuse, but scarcely less valuable, biography, of which the first instalment,¹ in two large volumes, brings the story but to the year 1838, reaches us in a French version, apparently from the author's own hand, of chapters patiently contributed to Russian periodicals. Were it not superficially ungrateful to begin with reserves about a book so rich and full, there might be some complaint to make of this wonderful tribute on grounds of form and taste. Ponderous and prolix, the author moves in a mass, escorted by all the penalties of her indifference to selection and compression. She insists and repeats, she wanders wide; her subject spreads about her, in places, as rather a pathless waste. Above all she has produced a book which manages to be at once remarkably expert and singularly provincial. Our innocence is perhaps at fault, but we are moved to take the mixture for characteristically Russian. Would indeed any but that admirable "Slav" superiority to prejudice of which we have lately heard so much have availed to handle the particular facts in this large free way? Nothing is at all events more curious than the union, on the part of our biographer, of psychological intelligence and a lame esthetic. The writer's literary appreciations lag in other words half a century behind her human and social. She treats us to endless disquisitions on pages of her author to which we are no longer in any manageable relation at all—disquisitions pathetic, almost grotesque, in their misplaced good faith. But her attitude to her subject is admirable, her thoroughness exemplary, the spirit of service in her of the sort that builds the mo-

GEORGE SAND

nument stone by stone. When we see it reared to the summit, as we are clearly to do, we shall feel the structure to be solid if not shapely. Nothing is more possible meanwhile than that a culture more homogeneous—a French hand or a German—could not have engaged in the work with anything like the same sincerity. An English hand—and the fact, for our culture, means much—would have been incapable of touching it. The present scale of it at all events is certainly an exotic misconception. But we can take of it what concerns us.

The whole thing of course, we promptly reflect, concerns at the best only those of us who can remount a little the stream of time. The author of “L’Histoire de ma Vie” died in 1876, and the light of actuality rests to-day on very different heads. It may seem to belittle her to say that to care for her at all one must have cared for her from far back, for such is not in general the proviso we need to make on behalf of the greatest figures. It describes Madame Sand with breadth, but not with extravagance, to speak of her as a sister to Goethe, and we feel that for Goethe it can never be too late to care. But the case exemplifies perhaps precisely the difference even in the most brilliant families between sisters and brothers. She was to have the family spirit, but she was to receive from the fairies who attended at her cradle the silver cup, not the gold. She was to write a hundred books but she was not to write “Faust.” She was to have all the distinction but not all the perfection; and there could be no better instance of the degree in which a woman may achieve the one and still fail of the other. When it is a question of the rare originals who have either she confirms us, masculine as she is, in believing that it takes a still greater masculinity to have both. What she had, however, she had in profusion; she was one of the deepest voices of that great mid-century concert against the last fine strains of which we are more and more banging the doors. Her work, beautiful, plentiful and fluid, has floated itself out to sea even as the melting snows of the high places are floated. To feel how she has passed away as a “creator” is to feel anew the immense waste involved in the general ferment of an age, and how much genius and beauty, let alone the baser parts of the mixture, it takes to produce a moderate quantity of literature. Smaller people have conceivably ceased to count; but it is strange for a member of the generation immediately succeeding her own that she should have had the same fate as smaller people: all the more that such a mourner may be ruefully conscious of contributing not a little himself to the mishap. Does he still read, re-read, can he to-day at all deal with, this wonderful lady’s novels? It only half cheers him up that on the occasion of such a publication as I here speak of he finds himself as much interested as ever.

The grounds of the interest are difficult to give—they presuppose so much of the old impression. If the old impression therefore re-

GEORGE SAND

quires some art to sustain and justify itself we must be content, so far as we are still under the charm, to pass, though only at the worst, for eccentric. The work, whether we still hold fast to it or not, has twenty qualities and would still have an immense one if it had only its style; but what I suppose it has paid for in the long-run is its want of plastic intensity. Does any work of representation, of imitation, live long that is predominantly loose? It may live in spite of looseness; but that, we make out, is only because closeness has somewhere, where it has most mattered, played a part. It is hard to say of George Sand's productions, I think, that they show closeness anywhere; the sense of that fluidity which is more than fluency is what, in speaking of them, constantly comes back to us, and the sense of fluidity is fundamentally fatal to the sense of particular truth. The thing presented by intention is never the stream of the artist's inspiration; it is the deposit of the stream. For the things presented by George Sand, for the general picture, we must look elsewhere, look at her life and her nature, and find them in the copious documents in which these matters and many others are now reflected. All this mass of evidence it is that constitutes the "intensity" we demand. The mass has little by little become large, and our obligation to Madame Karénine is that she makes it still larger. She sets our face, and without intending to, more and more in the right direction. Her injudicious analyses of forgotten fictions only confirm our discrimination. We feel ourselves in the presence of the extraordinary author of the hundred tales, and yet also feel it to be not by reason of them that she now presents herself as one of the most remarkable of human creatures. By reason then of what? Of everything that determined, accompanied, surrounded their appearance. They formed all together a great feature in a career and a character, but the career and the character are the real thing.

Such is far from usually the case, I hasten to recognise, with the complete and consistent artist. Poor is the art, a thing positively to be ashamed of, that, generally speaking, is not far more pressing for this servant of the altar than anything else, anything outside the church, can possibly be. To have been the tempered and directed hammer that makes the metal hard: if that be not good enough for such a ministrant, we may know him by whatever he has found better—we shall not know him by the great name. The immense anomaly in Madame Sand was that she freely took the form of being, with most zest, quite another sort of hammer. It testifies sufficiently to her large endowment that, given the wide range of the rest of her appetite, she should seem to us to-day to have sacrificed even superficially to any form of objective expression. She had in spite of herself an imagination almost of the first order, which overflowed and irrigated, turning by its mere swift current, without effort, almost without direction, every mill it encountered, and launching as it went

GEORGE SAND

alike the lightest skiff and the stateliest ship. She had in especial the gift of speech, speech supreme and inspired, to which we particularly owe the high value of the "case" she presents. For the case was definitely a bold and direct experiment, not at all in "art," not at all in literature, but conspicuously and repeatedly in the business of living; so that our profit of it is before anything else that it was conscious, articulate, vivid—recorded, reflected, imaged. The subject of the experiment became also at first hand the journalist—much of her work being simply splendid journalism—commissioned to bring it up to date. She interviewed nobody else, but she admirably interviewed herself, and this is exactly our good fortune. Her autobiography, her letters, her innumerable prefaces, all her expansive parentheses and excursions, make up the generous report. We have in this form accordingly a literary title for her far superseding any derived from her creative work. But that is the result of a mere betrayal, not the result of an intention. Her masterpiece, by a perversity of fate, is the thing she least sat down to. It consists—since she is a case—in the mere notation of her symptoms, in help given to the study of them. To this has the author of "Consuelo" come.

But how in the world indeed was the point so indicated not to be the particular cross-road at which the critic should lie in wait for a poor child of the age whom preceding ages and generations had almost infernally conspired to trap for him, to give up, candidly astray, to his hands? If the element of romance for which our heroine's name stands is best represented by her personal sequences and solutions, it is sufficiently visible that her heredity left her a scant alternative. Space fails me for the story of this heredity, queer and complicated, the very stuff that stories are made of—a chain of generations succeeding each other in confidence and joy and with no aid asked of legal or other artificial sanctions. The facts are, moreover, sufficiently familiar, though here as elsewhere Madame Karénine adds to our knowledge. Presented, foreshortened, stretching back from the quiet Nohant funeral of 1876 to the steps of the throne of King Augustus the Strong of Poland, father of Maurice de Saxe, great-great-grandfather of Aurore Dupin, it all hangs together as a cluster of components more provocative than any the great novelist herself ever handled. Her pre-natal past was so peopled with *dramatis personae* that her future was really called on to supply them in such numbers as would preserve the balance. The tide of illegitimacy sets straight through the series. No one to speak of—Aurore's father is an exception—seems to have had a "regular" paternity. Aurore herself squared with regularity but by a month or two; the marriage of her parents gave her a bare escape. She was brought up by her paternal grandmother between a son of her father and a daughter of her mother born out of wedlock. It all moves before us as a vivid younger world, a world on the whole more amused and more amus-

GEORGE SAND

ing than ours. The period from the Restoration to the events of 1848 is the stretch of time in which, for more reasons than we can now go into, French life gives out to those to whom its appeal never fails most of its charm—most, at all events, of its ancient sociability. Happy is our sense of the picturesque Paris unconscious of a future all “avenues” and exhibitions; happy our sense of these middle years of a great generation, easy and lusty despite the ensanguined spring that had gone before. They live again, piecing themselves ever so pleasantly and strangely together, in Madame Sand’s records and references; almost as much as the conscious close of the old regime so vaunted by Talleyrand they strike us as a season it would have been indispensable to know for the measure of what intercourse could richly be.

The time was at any rate unable to withhold from the wonderful young person growing up at Nohant the conditions she was so freely to use as measures of her own. Though the motto of her autobiography is *Wahrheit und Dichtung* quite as much as it had been that of Goethe’s, there is a truth beyond any projected by her more regular compositions in her evocation of the influences of her youth. Upon these influences Madame Karénine, who has enjoyed access through her heroine’s actual representatives to much evidence hitherto unpublished, throws a hundred interesting lights. Madame Dupin de Francueil and Madame Dupin the younger survive and perform for us, “convince” us as we say, better than any Lélia or any Consuelo. Our author’s whole treatment of her remarkable mother’s figure and history conveniently gives the critic the pitch of the great fact about her—the formation apparently at a given moment, yet in very truth, we may be sure, from far back, of the capacity and the determination to live with high consistency for herself. What she made of this resolve to allow her nature all its chances and how she carried on the process—these things are, thanks to the immense illustration her genius enabled her to lend them, the essence of her story; of which the full adumbration is in the detached pictorial way she causes her mother to live for us. Motherhood, daughterhood, childhood, embarrassed maturity, were phenomena she early encountered in her great adventure, and nothing is more typical of her energy and sincerity than the short work we can scarce help feeling she makes of them. It is not that she for a moment blinks or dodges them; she weaves them straight in—embarks with them indeed as her principal baggage. We know to-day from the pages before us everything we need to know about her marriage and the troubled years that followed; about M. Casimir Dudevant and his possible points of view, about her separation, her sharp secession, rather, as it first presents itself, and her discovery, at a turn of the road as it can only be called, of her genius.

GEORGE SAND

She stumbled on this principle, we see, quite by accident and as a consequence of the attempt to do the very humblest labour, to support herself from day to day. It would be difficult to put one's finger more exactly upon a case of genius unaided and unprompted. She embarked, as I have called it, on her great voyage with no grounds of confidence whatever; she had obscurely, unwittingly the spirit of Columbus, but not so much even as his exiguous outfit. She found her gift of improvisation, found her tropic wealth, by leaping—a surprised *conquistador* of “style”—straight upon the coral strand. No awakened instinct, probably, was ever such a blessing to a writer so much in need. This instinct was for a long time all her initiation, practically all her equipment. The curious thing is that she never really arrived at the fruit of it as the result of a process, but that she started with the whole thing as a Patti or a Mario starts with a voice which *is* a method, which *is* music, and that it was simply the train in which she travelled. It was to render her as great a service as any supreme faculty ever rendered its possessor, quite the same service as the strategic eye renders a commander in the field or instant courage the attacking soldier: it was to carry her through life still more inimitably than through the career of authorship. Her books are all rich and resonant with it, but they profit by it meagrely compared with her character. She walks from first to last in music, that is in literary harmonies, of her own making, and it is in truth sometimes only, with her present biographer to elbow us a little the way, that these triumphant sounds permit us a near enough approach to the procession to make out quite exactly its course.

No part of her career is to my sense so curious as this particular sudden bound into the arena. Nothing but the indescribable heredity I have spoken of appears traceably to have prepared it. We have on one side the mere poverty and provinciality of her marriage and her early contacts, the crudity of her youth and her ignorance (which included so small a view of herself that she had begun by looking for a future in the bedaubing, for fancy-shops, of little boxes and fans); and on the other, at a stride, the full-blown distinction of “Valentine” and “Jacques,” which had had nothing to lead up to it, we seem to make out, but the very rough sketch of a love-affair with M. Jules Sandeau. I spoke just now of the possible points of view of poor M. Dudevant; at which, had we space, it might be of no small amusement to glance—of an amusement indeed large and suggestive. We see him, surely, in the light of these records, as the most “sold” husband in literature, and not at all, one feels, by his wife's assertion of her freedom, but simply by her assertion of her mind. He appears to have married her for a nobody approved and guaranteed, and he found her, on his hands, a sister, as we have seen, of Goethe—unless it be but a figure to say that he ever “found” her anything. He appears to have lived to an advanced age without having

GEORGE SAND

really—in spite of the lawsuits he lost—comprehended his case; not the least singular feature of which had in fact positively been the deceptive delay of his fate. It was not till after several years of false calm that it presented itself in its special form. We see him and his so ruthlessly superseded name, never to be gilded by the brilliant event, we see him reduced, like a leaf in a whirlwind, to a mere vanishing-point.

We deal here, I think, with something very different from the usual tittle-tattle about “private” relations, for the simple reason that we deal with relations foredoomed to publicity by the strange economy involved in the play of genius itself. Nothing was ever less wasted, from beginning to end, than all this amorous experience and all this luxury of woe. The parties to it were to make an inveterate use of it, the principal party most of all; and what therefore on that marked ground concerns the critic is to see what they were appreciably to get out of it. The principal party, the constant one through all mutations, was alone qualified to produce the extract that affects us as final. It was by the publication four years since of her letters to Alfred de Musset and to Sainte-Beuve, by the appearance also of Madame Arvède Barine’s clear compact biography of Musset, that we began to find her personal history brought nearer to us than her own communications had in her lifetime already brought it. The story of her relations with Musset is accordingly so known that I need only glance at the fact of her having—shortly after the highest degree of intimacy between them had, in the summer of 1833, established itself in Paris—travelled with him to Italy, settled with him briefly in Venice, and there passionately quarrelled and parted with him—only, however, several months later, on their return to France, to renew again, to quarrel and to part again, all more passionately, if possible, even than before. Madame Karénine, besides supplying us with all added light on this episode, keeps us abreast of others that were to follow, leaves us no more in the dark about Michel de Bourges, Félicien Mallefille and Chopin than we had already been left about their several predecessors. She is commendably lucid on the subject of Franz Liszt, impartially examines the case and authoritatively dismisses it. Her second volume brings her heroine to the eve of the historic departure with Chopin for Majorca. We have thus in a convenient form enough for one mouthful of entertainment, as well as for superabundant reflection.

We have indeed the whole essence of what most touches us, for this consists not at all of the quantity of the facts, nor even of their oddity: they are practically all there from the moment the heroine’s general attitude defines itself. That is the solid element—the details to-day are smoke. Yet I hasten to add that it was in particular by taking her place of an autumn evening in the southward-moving dili-

GEORGE SAND

gence with Alfred de Musset, it was on this special occasion that she gave most the measure of her choice of the consistent, even though it so little meant the consequent, life. She had reached toward such a life obviously in quitting the conjugal roof in 1831—had attacked the experiment clumsily, but according to her light, by throwing herself on such material support as faculties yet untested might furnish, and on such moral as several months of the *intimité* of Jules Sandeau and a briefer taste of that of Prosper Mérimée might further contribute. She had done, in other words, what she could; subsequent lights show it as not her fault that she had not done better. With Musset her future took a long stride; emotionally speaking it “looked up.” Nothing was wanting in this case—independently of what might then have appeared her friend’s equal genius—quite ideally to qualify it. He was several years her junior, and as she had her husband and her children, he had, in the high degree of most young Frenchmen of sensibility, his mother. It is recorded that with this lady on the eve of the celebrated step she quite had the situation, as the phrase is, out; which is a note the more in the general, the intellectual lucidity. The only other note in fact to be added is that of the absence of funds for the undertaking. Neither partner had a penny to spare; the plan was wholly to “make money,” on a scale, as they went. A great deal was in the event, exactly speaking, to be made—but the event was at the time far from clear to them. The enterprise was in consequence purely and simply, with a rounded perfection that gives it its value for the critic, an affair of the heart. That the heart, taking it as a fully representative organ, should fail of no good occasion completely and consistently to engage itself was the definite and, as appeared, the promising assumption on which everything rested. The heart was real life, frank, fearless, intelligent and even, so far as might be, intelligible life; everything else was stupid as well as poor, muddle as well as misery. The heart of course might be misery, for nothing was more possible than that life predominantly was; but it was at all events the misery that is least ignoble.

This was the basis of Madame Sand’s personal evolution, of her immense moral energy, for many a year; it was a practical system, applied and reapplied, and no “inquiry” concerning her has much point save as settling what, for our enlightenment and our esteem, she made of it. The answer meets us, I think, after we have taken in the facts, promptly enough and with great clearness, so long as we consider that it is not, that it cannot be in the conditions, a simple one. She made of it then intellectually a splendid living, but she was able to do this only because she was an altogether exceptional example of our human stuff. It is here that her famous heredity comes in: we see what a race-accumulation of “toughness” had been required to build her up. Monstrous monarchs and bastards of kings,

GEORGE SAND

great generals and bastards of bastards, courtesans, dancers supple and hard, accomplished men and women of the old dead great world, seasoned young soldiers of the Imperial epic, grisettes of the *pavé de Paris*, Parisian to the core; the mixture was not quite the blood of people in general, and obviously such a final flower of such a stem might well fix the attention and appeal to the vigilance of those qualified to watch its development. These persons would, doubtless, however, as a result of their observation, have acquired betimes a sense of the high vitality of their young friend. Formed essentially for independence and constructed for resistance and survival she was to be trusted, as I have hinted, to take care of herself: this was always the residuary fact when a passion was spent. She took care of Musset, she took care of Chopin, took care, in short, through her career, of a whole series of nurslings, but never failed, under the worst ingratitude, to be by her own elasticity still better taken care of. This is why we call her anomalous and deprecate any view of her success that loses sight of the anomaly. The success was so great that but *for* the remainder she would be too encouraging. She was one in a myriad, and the cluster of circumstances is too unlikely to recur.

It is by her success, none the less, we must also remember, that we know her; it is this that makes her interesting and calls for study. She had all the illumination that sensibility, that curiosity, can give, and that so ingeniously induces surrender to it; but the too numerous weaknesses, vulgarities and penalties of adventure and surrender she had only in sufficient degree to complete the experience before they shaped themselves into the eloquence into which she could always reascend. Her eloquence—it is the simplest way to explain her—fairly *made* her success; and eloquence is superlatively rare. When passion can always depend upon it to vibrate passion becomes to that extent action, and success is nothing but action repeated and confirmed. In Madame Sand's particular case the constant recurrence of the malady of passion promoted in the most extraordinary way the superior appearance, the general expression, of health. It is of course not to be denied that there are in her work infirmities and disfigurements, odd smutches even, or unwitting drolleries, which show a sense on some sides enfeebled. The sense of her characters themselves for instance is constantly a confused one; they are too often at sea as to what is possible and what impossible for what we roughly call decent people. Her own categories, loose and liberal, are yet ever positive enough; when they err it is by excess of indulgence and by absence of the humorous vision, a nose for the ridiculous—the fatal want, this last almost always, we are reminded, the heel of Achilles, in the sentimental, the romantic estimate. The general validity of her novels, at any rate, I leave impugned, and the feature I have just noted in them is but one of the points at which they

GEORGE SAND

fail of reality. I stick to the history of her personal experiment, as the now so numerous documents show it; for it is here, and here only, that her felicity is amusing and confounding; amusing by the quaintness of some of the facts exposed, and yet confounding by reason of the beauty mixed with them.

The "affair" with Musset for example has come to figure, thanks to the talent of both parties, as one of the great affairs in the history of letters; and yet on the near view of it now enjoyed we learn that it dragged out scarce more than a year. Even this measure indeed is excessive, so far as any measure serves amid so much that is incoherent. It supposed itself to have dropped for upwards of six months, during which another connection, another imperious heart-history, reigned in its stead. The enumeration of these trifles is not, I insist, futile; so that while we are about it we shall find an interest in being clear. The events of Venice, with those that immediately preceded and followed them, distinctly repay inspection as an epitome, taken together, of the usual process. They appear to contain, as well as an intensity all their own, the essence of all that of other occasions. The young poet and the young novelist met then, appear to have met for the first time, toward the end of June 1833, and to have become finally intimate in the month of August of that year. They started together for Italy at the beginning of the winter and were settled—if settled be not too odd a word to use—by the end of January in Venice. I neglect the question of Musset's serious illness there, though it is not the least salient part of the adventure, and observe simply that by the end of March he had started to return to Paris, while his friend, remaining behind, had yielded to a new affection. This new affection, the connection with Pietro Pagello, dates unmistakably from before Musset's departure; and, with the completion of "Jacques" and the composition of the beautiful "André," the wonderful "Leone-Leoni" and some of the most interesting of the "Lettres d'un Voyageur," constituted the main support of our heroine during the spring and early summer. By midsummer she had left Italy with Pagello, and they arrive in Paris on August 14th. This arrival marks immediately the term of their relations, which had by that time lasted some six or seven months. Pagello returned to Italy, and if they ever met again it was the merest of meetings and after long years.

In October, meanwhile, the connection with Musset was renewed, and renewed—this is the great point—because the sentiments still entertained by each (in spite of Pagello, in spite of everything) are stronger even than any awkwardness of which either might have been conscious. The whole business really is one in which we lose our measure alike of awkwardness and of grace. The situation is in the hands of comedy—or *would* be, I should rather say, were it not

so distinctly predestined to fall, as I have noted, into those of the nobler form. It is prolonged till the following February, we make out, at furthest, and only after having been more than once in the interval threatened with violent extinction. It bequeaths us thus in a handful of dates a picture than which probably none other in the annals of "passion" was ever more suggestive. The passion is of the kind that is called "immortal"—and so called, wonderful to say, with infinite reason and justice. The poems, the letters, the diaries, the novels, the unextinguished accents and lingering echoes that commemorate it are among the treasures of the human imagination. The literature of the world is appreciably the richer for it. The noblest forms, in a word, on both sides, marked it for their own; it was born, according to the adage, with a silver spoon in its mouth. It was an affection in short transcendent and sublime, and yet the critic sees it come and go before he can positively turn round. The brief period of some seventeen or eighteen months not only affords it all its opportunity, but places comfortably in its lap a relation founded on the same elements and yet wholly distinct from it. Musset occupied in fact but two-thirds of his mistress's time. Pagello overlapped him because Pagello also appealed to the heart; but Pagello's appeal to the heart was disposed of as expeditiously. Musset, in the same way, succeeded Pagello at the voice of a similar appeal, and this claim, in its turn, was polished off in yet livelier fashion.

Liveliness is of course the tune of the "gay" career; it has always been supposed to relegate to comedy the things to which it puts its mark—so that as a series of sequences amenable mainly to satire the approximations I have made would fall neatly into place. The anomaly here, as on other occasions of the same sort depicted in Madame Karénine's volumes, is that the facts, as we are brought near to them, strike us as so out of relation to the beautiful tone. The effect and the achieved dignity are those of tragedy—tragedy rearranging, begetting afresh, in its own interest, all the elements of ecstasy and despair. How can it not be tragedy when this interest is just the interest, which I have touched on, of exemplary eloquence? There are lights in which the material, with its want of nobleness, want of temper, want even of manners, seems scarcely life at all, as the civilised conscience understands life; and yet it is as the most magnanimous of surrenders to life that the whole business is triumphantly reflected in the documents. It is not only that "La Nuit d'Octobre" is divine, that Madame Sand's letters are superb and that nothing can exceed, in particular, the high style of the passage that we now perceive Musset to have borrowed from one of them for insertion in "On ne Badine pas avec l'Amour"—to the extreme profit of the generation which was, for many years thereafter, to hear Delaunay exquisitely declaim it at the Théâtre Français; it is that, strange to say, almost the finest flower of the bouquet is the now-famous written "declara-

tion" addressed to Pagello one evening by the lady. Musset was ill in bed; he was the attendant doctor; and while, watching and ignorant of French, he twirled his thumbs or dipped into a book, his patient's companion, on the other side of the table and with the lamp between them, dashed off (it took time) a specimen of her finest prose, which she then folded and handed to him, and which, for perusal more at leisure, he carried off in his pocket. It proved neither more nor less than one of the pontoon bridges which a force engaged in an active campaign holds itself ready at any time to throw across a river, and was in fact of its kind a stout and beautiful structure. It happily spanned at all events the gulf of a short acquaintance.

The incident bears a family resemblance to another which our biographer finds in her path in the year 1837. Having to chronicle the close of the relation with Michel de Bourges, from which again her heroine had so much to suffer, she has also to mention that this catastrophe was precipitated, to all appearance, by the contemporaneous dawn of an affection "plus douce, moins enthousiaste, moins apre aussi, et j'espère plus durable." The object of this affection was none other than the young man then installed at Nohant as preceptor to Madame Sand's children—but as to whom in the event we ask ourselves what by this time her notion of measure or durability can have become. It is just this element that has positively least to do, we seem to make out, with "affection" as so practised. Affection in any sense worth speaking of is durability; and it is the repeated impermanence of those manifestations of it on behalf of which the high horse of "passion" is ridden so hard that makes us wonder whether such loves and such licences, in spite of the quality of free experience they represent, had really anything to do with it. It was surely the last thing they contained. Félicien Mallefille may be, to his heart's content, of 1837 and even of a portion of 1838; it is Chopin who is of the rest of the year and—let us hope our biographer will have occasion to show us—of at least the whole of the following. It is here that, as I have mentioned, she pauses.

One of the most interesting contributions to her subject is the long letter from Balzac to his future wife, Madame Hanska, now reproduced in the most substantial of the few volumes of his correspondence ("Lettres à l'Étrangère, 1833-1842," published 1899) and printed by Madame Karénine. The author, finding himself near Nohant in the spring of 1838, went over to pay his illustrious colleague a visit and spent more than a day in sustained conversation with her. He had the good fortune to find her alone, so that they could endlessly talk and smoke by the fire, and nothing can be all at once more vivid, more curious and more judicious than his immediate report of the occasion. It lets into the whole question of his hostess's character and relations—inevitably more or less misrepre-

sented by the party most involved—air and light and truth; it fixes points and re-establishes proportions. It shows appearances confronted, in a word, with Balzac's strong sense of the real and offers the grateful critic still another chance to testify for that precious gift. This same critic's mind, it must be added, rests with complacency on the vision thus evoked, the way that for three days, from five o'clock in the afternoon till five in the morning, the wonderful friends must have had things out. For once, we feel sure, fundamental questions were not shirked. As regards his comrade at any rate Balzac puts his finger again and again on the truth and the idiosyncrasy. "She is not *aimable* and in consequence will always find it difficult to be loved." He adds—and it is here that he comes nearest straightening the question—that she has in character all the leading marks of the man and as few as possible those of his counterpart. He implies that, though judged as a woman she may be puzzling enough, she hangs together perfectly if judged as a man. She is a man, he repeats, "and all the more that she wants to be, that she has sunk the woman, that she isn't one. Women attract, and she repels; and, as I am much of a man, if this is the effect she produces on me she must produce it on men who are like me—so that she will always be unhappy." He qualifies as justly, I may parenthesise, her artistic side, the limits of which, he moreover intimates, she had herself expressed to him. "She has neither intensity of conception, nor the constructive gift, nor the faculty of reaching the truth"—Balzac's own deep dye of the truth—"nor the art of the pathetic. But she holds that, without knowing the French language, she has *style*. And it's true."

The light of mere evidence, the light of such researches as Madame Karénine's, added to her so copious correspondence and autobiography, makes Madame Sand so much of a riddle that we grasp at Balzac's authoritative word as at an approach to a solution. It is, strange to say, by reading another complexity into her image that we finally simplify it. The riddle consists in the irreconcilability of her distinction and her vulgarity. Vulgar somehow in spite of everything is the record of so much taking and tasting and leaving, so much publicity and palpability of "heart," so much experience reduced only to the terms of so many more or less greasy males. And not only vulgar but in a manner grotesque—from the moment, that is, that the experience is presented to us with any emphasis in the name of terror and pity. It was not a passive but an active situation, that of a nature robust and not too fastidious, full at all times of resistance and recovery. No history gives us really more ground to protest against the new fashion, rife in France, of transporting "love," as there mainly represented, to the air of morals and of melancholy. The fashion betrays only the need to rejuvenate, at a considerable cost of falsity, an element in connection with which levity is

felt either to have exhausted itself or to look thin as a motive. It is in the light of levity that many of the facts presented by Madame Karénine are most intelligible, and that is the circumstance awkward for sensibility and for all the graces it is invited to show.

The scene quite changes when we cease to expect these graces. As a man Madame Sand was admirable—especially as a man of the dressing-gown and slippers order, easy of approach and of *tutoiement*, rubbing shoulders with queer company and not superstitiously haunted by the conception of the gentleman. There have been many men of genius, delightful, prodigal and even immortal, who squared but scantily with that conception, and it is a company to which our heroine is simply one of the most interesting of recruits. She has in it all her value and loses none of her charm. Above all she becomes in a manner comprehensible, as any frank Bohemian is comprehensible. We have only to imagine the Bohemian really endowed, the Bohemian, that is, both industrious and wise, to get almost all her formula. She keeps here and there a feminine streak—has at moments an excess of volubility and too great an insistence on having been in the right; but for the rest, as Balzac says, the character, confronted with the position, is an explanation. “Son mâle,” he tells Madame Hanska, “était rare”—than which nothing could have been more natural. Yet for this masculine counterpart—so difficult to find—she ingenuously spent much of her early life in looking. That the search was a mistake is what constitutes, in all the business of which the Musset episode is the type, the only, the real melancholy, the real moral tragedy.

For all such mistakes, none the less, the whole lesson of the picture is precisely in the disconcerting success of her system. Everything was at the start against that presumption; but everything at the end was to indicate that she was not to have been defeated. Others might well have been, and the banks of the stream of her career are marked, not invisibly, with mouldering traces of the less lucky or the less buoyant; but her attitude as life went on was more and more that of showing how she profited of all things for wisdom and sympathy, for a general expertness and nobleness. These forces, all clarified to an admirable judgment, kept her to the last day serene and superior, and they are one of the reasons why the monument before us is felt not to be misplaced. There should always be a monument to those who have achieved a prodigy. What greater prodigy than to have bequeathed in such mixed elements, to have principally made up of them, the affirmation of an unprecedented intensity of life? For though this intensity was one that broke down in each proposed exhibition the general example remains, incongruously, almost the best we can cite. And all we can say is that this brings us back once more to the large manner, the exceptional energy and well-nigh

GEORGE SAND

monstrous vitality, of the individual concerned. Nothing is so absurd as a half-disguise, and Madame Sand's abiding value will probably be in her having given her sex, for its new evolution and transformation, the real standard and measure of change. This evolution and this transformation are all round us unmistakable; the change is in the air; women are turned more and more to looking at life as men look at it and to getting from it what men get. In this direction their aim has been as yet comparatively modest and their emulation low; the challenge they have hitherto picked up is but the challenge of the "average" male. The approximation of the extraordinary woman has been practically, in other words, to the ordinary man. George Sand's service is that she planted the flag much higher—her own approximation at least was to the extraordinary. She reached him, she surpassed him, and she showed how, with native dispositions, the thing could be done. So far as we have come these new records will live as the precious text-book of the business.

GEORGE SAND

1914

IT has much occurred to us, touching those further liberations of the subordinate sex which fill our ears just now with their multitudinous sound, that the promoters of the great cause make a good deal less than they might of one of their very first contentious "assets," if it may not indeed be looked at as quite the first; and thereby fail to pass about, to the general elation, a great vessel of truth. Is this because the life and example of George Sand are things unknown or obscure to the talkers and fighters of to-day—present and vivid as they were to those of the last mid-century, or because of some fear that to invoke victory in her name might, for particular, for even useful reasons, not be altogether a safe course? It is difficult to account otherwise for the fact that so ample and embossed a shield, and one that shines too at last with a strong and settled lustre, is rather left hanging on the wall than seen to cover advances or ward off attacks in the fray. Certain it is that if a lapse of tradition appeared at one time to have left a little in the lurch the figure of the greatest of all women of letters, of Letters in truth most exactly, as we hold her surely to have been, that explanation should have begun to fail, some fourteen years ago, with the publication of the first volume of Madame Wladimir Karénine's biography, and even in spite of the fact that this singularly interesting work was not till a twelvemonth ago to arrive at the dignity of a third,² which leaves it, for all its amplitude, still incomplete. The latest instalment, now before us, follows its predecessors after an interval that had alarmed us not a little for the proper consummation; and the story is even now carried but

GEORGE SAND

to the eve of the Revolution of 1848, after which its heroine (that of the Revolution, we may almost say, as well as of the narrative) was to have some twenty-seven years to live. Madame Karénine appears to be a Russian critic writing under a pseudonym; portions of her overbrimming study have appeared dispersedly, we gather, in Russian periodicals, but the harmonious French idiom, of which she is all-sufficient mistress, welds them effectively together, and the result may already be pronounced a commemorative monument of all but the first order. The first order in such attempts has for its sign a faculty of selection and synthesis, not to say a sense of composition and proportion, which neither the chronicler nor the critic in these too multiplied pages is able consistently to exhibit; though on the other hand they represent quite the high-water mark of patience and persistence, of the ideal biographic curiosity. They enjoy further the advantage of the documented state in a degree that was scarce to have been hoped for, every source of information that had remained in reserve—and these proved admirably numerous—having been opened to our inquirer by the confidence of the illustrious lady's two great-granddaughters, both alive at the time the work was begun. Add to this that there has grown up in France a copious George Sand literature, a vast body of illustrative odds and ends, relics and revelations, on which the would-be propagator of the last word is now free to draw—always with discrimination. Ideally, well-nigh overwhelmingly informed we may at present therefore hold ourselves; and were that state all that is in question for us nothing could exceed our advantage.

I

Just the beauty and the interest of the case are, however, that such a condition by no means exhausts our opportunity, since in no like connection could it be less said that to know most is most easily or most complacently to conclude. May we not decidedly feel the sense and the “lesson,” the suggestive spread, of a career as a thing scarce really to be measured when the effect of more and more acquaintance with it is simply to make the bounds of appreciation recede? This is why the figure now shown us, blazed upon to the last intensity by the lamplight of investigation, and with the rank oil consumed in the process fairly filling the air, declines to let us off from an hour of that contemplation which yet involves discomfiture for us so long as certain lucidities on our own part, certain serenities of assurance, fail correspondingly to play up. We feel ourselves so out-faced, as it were; we somehow want in any such case to meet and match the assurances with which the subject himself or herself immittigably bristles, and are nevertheless by no means certain that our bringing up premature forces or trying to reply with lights of our

GEORGE SAND

own may not check the current of communication, practically without sense for us unless flowing at its fullest. At our biographer's rate of progress we shall still have much to wait for; but it can meanwhile not be said that we have not plenty to go on with. To this may be added that the stretch of "life," apart from the more concrete exhibition, already accounted for by our three volumes (if one may discriminate between "production" and life to a degree that is in this connection exceptionally questionable), represents to all appearance the most violently and variously agitated face of the career. The establishment of the Second Empire ushered in for Madame Sand, we seem in course of preparation to make out, the long period already more or less known to fame, that is to criticism, as the period of her great placidity, her more or less notorious appeasement; a string of afternoon hours as hazily golden as so many reigns of Antonines, when her genius had mastered the high art of acting without waste, when a happy play of inspiration had all the air, so far as our spectatorship went, of filling her large capacity and her beautiful form to the brim, and when the gathered fruit of what she had dauntlessly done and been heaped itself upon her table as a rich feast for memory and philosophy. So she came in for the enjoyment of all the *sagesse* her contemporaries (with only such exceptions as M. Paul de Musset and Madame Louise Colet and the few discordant pleaders for poor Chopin) finally rejoiced on their side to acclaim; the sum of her aspects "composing," arranging themselves in relation to each other, with a felicity that nothing could exceed and that swept with great glosses and justifications every aspect of the past. To few has it been given to "pay" so little, according to our superstition of payment, in proportion to such enormities of ostensibly buying or borrowing—which fact, we have to recognise, left an existence as far removed either from moral, or intellectual, or even social bankruptcy as if it had proceeded from the first but on the most saving lines.

That is what remains on the whole most inimitable in the picture—the impression it conveys of an art of life by which the rough sense of the homely adage that we may not both eat our cake and have it was to be signally falsified; this wondrous mistress of the matter strikes us so as having consumed her refreshment, her vital supply, to the last crumb, so far as the provision meant at least freedom and ease, and yet having ever found on the shelf the luxury in question undiminished. Superlatively interesting the idea of how this result was, how it could be, achieved—given the world as we on our side of the water mainly know it; and it is as meeting the mystery that the monument before us has doubtless most significance. We shall presently see, in the light of our renewed occasion, how the question is solved; yet we may as well at once say that this will have had for its conclusion to present our heroine—mainly figuring as a novelist of the romantic or sentimental order once pre-eminent but now of

GEORGE SAND

shrunk credit—simply as a supreme case of the successful practice of life itself. We have to distinguish for this induction after a fashion in which neither Madame Sand nor her historian has seemed at all positively concerned to distinguish; the indifference on the historian's part sufficiently indicated, we feel, by the complacency with which, to be thorough, she explores even the most thankless tracts of her author's fictional activity, telling the tales over as she comes to them on much the same scale on which she unfolds the situations otherwise documented. The writer of "Consuelo" and "Claudie" and a hundred other things is to this view a literary genius whose output, as our current term so gracefully has it, the exercise of an inordinate personal energy happens to mark; whereas the exercise of personal energy is for ourselves what most reflects the genius—recorded though this again chances here to be through the inestimable fact of the possession of style. Of the action of that perfect, that only real preservative in face of other perils George Sand is a wondrous example; but her letters alone suffice to show it, and the style of her letters is no more than the breath of her nature, her so remarkable one, in which expression and aspiration were much the same function. That is what it is really to *have* style—when you set about performing the act of life. The forms taken by this latter impulse then cover everything; they serve for your adventures not less than they may serve at their most refined pitch for your *Lélias* and your *Mauprats*.

This means accordingly, we submit, that those of us who at the present hour "feel the change," as the phrase is, in the computation of the feminine range, with the fullest sense of what it may portend, shirk at once our opportunity and our obligation in not squeezing for its last drop of testimony such an exceptional body of illustration as we here possess. It has so much to say to any view—whether, in the light of old conventions, the brightest or the darkest—of what may either glitter or gloom in a conquest of every license by our contemporaries of the contending sex, that we scarce strain a point in judging it a provision of the watchful fates for this particular purpose and profit: its answers are so full to most of our uncertainties. It is to be noted of course that the creator of *Lélia* and of *Mauprat* was on the one hand a woman of an extraordinary gift and on the other a woman resignedly and triumphantly voteless—doing without that boon so beautifully, for free development and the acquisition and application of "rights," that we seem to see her sardonically smile, before our present tumults, as at a rumpus about nothing; as if women need set such preposterous machinery in motion for obtaining things which she had found it of the first facility, right and left, to stretch forth her hand and take. There it is that her precedent stands out—apparently to a blind generation; so that some little insistence on the method of her appropriations would seem to be pecu-

GEORGE SAND

liarily in place. It was a method that may be summed up indeed in a fairly simple, if comprehensive, statement: it consisted in her dealing with life exactly as if she had been a man—exactly not being too much to say. Nature certainly had contributed on her behalf to this success; it had given her a constitution and a temperament, the kind of health, the kind of mind, the kind of courage, that might most directly help—so that she had but to convert these strong matters into the kind of experience. The writer of these lines remembers how a distinguished and intimate friend of her later years, who was a very great admirer, said of her to him just after her death that her not having been born a man seemed, when one knew her, but an awkward accident: she had been to all intents and purposes so fine and frank a specimen of the sex. This anomalous native turn, it may be urged, can have no general application—women cannot be men by the mere trying or by calling themselves “as good;” they must have been provided with what we have just noted as the outfit. The force of George Sand’s exhibition consorts, we contend, none the less perfectly with the logic of the consummation awaiting us, if a multitude of signs are to be trusted, in a more or less near future: that effective repudiation of the *distinctive*, as to function and opportunity, as to working and playing activity, for which the definite removal of immemorial disabilities is but another name. We are in presence already of a practical shrinkage of the distinctive, at the rapidest rate, and that it must shrink till nothing of it worth mentioning be left, what is this but a war-cry (presenting itself also indeed as a plea for peace) with which our ears are familiar? Unless the suppression of the distinctive, however, is to work to the prejudice, as we may fairly call it, of men, drawing them over to the feminine type rather than drawing women over to theirs—which is not what seems most probable—the course of the business will be a virtual undertaking on the part of the half of humanity acting ostensibly for the first time in freedom to annex the male identity, that of the other half, so far as may be at all contrivable, to its own cluster of elements. Individuals are in great world and race movements negligible, and if that undertaking must inevitably appeal to different recruits with a differing cogency, its really enlisting its army or becoming reflected, to a perfectly conceivable vividness, in the mass, is all our demonstration requires. At that point begins the revolution, the shift of the emphasis from the idea of woman’s weakness to the idea of her strength—which is where the emphasis has lain, from far back, by his every tradition, on behalf of man; and George Sand’s great value, as we say, is that she gives us the vision, gives us the particular case, of the shift achieved, displayed with every assurance and working with every success.

The answer of her life to the question of what an effective annexation of the male identity may amount to, amount to in favouring

conditions certainly, but in conditions susceptible to the highest degree of encouragement and cultivation, leaves nothing to be desired for completeness. This is the moral of her tale, the beauty of what she does for us—that at no point whatever of her history or her character do their power thus to give satisfaction break down; so that what we in fact on the whole most recognise is not the extension she gives to the feminine nature, but the richness that she adds to the masculine. It is not simply that she could don a disguise that gaped at the seams, that she could figure as a man of the mere carnival or pantomime variety, but that she made so virile, so efficient and homogeneous a one. Admirable child of the old order as we find her, she was far from our late-coming theories and fevers—by the reason simply of her not being reduced to them; as to which nothing about her is more eloquent than her living at such ease with a conception of the main relevance of women that is viewed among ourselves as antiquated to “quaintness.” She could afford the traditional and sentimental, the old romantic and historic theory of the function most natural to them, since she entertained it exactly as a man would. It is not that she fails again and again to represent her heroines as doing the most unconventional things—upon these they freely embark; but they never in the least do them for themselves, themselves as the “sex,” they do them altogether for men. Nothing could well be more interesting thus than the extraordinary union of the pair of opposites in her philosophy of the relation of the sexes—than the manner in which her immense imagination, the imagination of a man for range and abundance, intervened in the whole matter for the benefit, absolutely, of the so-called stronger party, or to liberate her sisters up to the point at which men may most gain and least lose by the liberation. She read the relation essentially in the plural term—the relations, and her last word about these was as far as possible from being that they are of minor importance to women. Nothing in her view could exceed their importance to women—it left every other far behind it; and nothing that could make for authority in her, no pitch of tone, no range of personal inquiry nor wealth of experience, no acquaintance with the question that might derive light from free and repeated adventure, but belonged to the business of driving this argument home.

II

Madame Karénine’s third volume is copiously devoted to the period of her heroine’s intimacy with Chopin and to the events surrounding this agitated friendship, which largely fill the ten years precedent to ’48. Our author is on all this ground overwhelmingly documented, and enlisted though she is in the service of the more successful party to the association—in the sense of Madame Sand’s

GEORGE SAND

having heartily outlived and survived, not to say professionally and brilliantly “used,” it—the great composer’s side of the story receives her conscientious attention. Curious and interesting in many ways, these reflections of George Sand’s middle life afford above all the most pointed illustration of the turn of her personal genius, her aptitude for dealing with men, in the intimate relation, exactly after the fashion in which numberless celebrated men have contributed to their reputation, not to say crowned their claim to superiority, by dealing with women. This being above all the note of her career, with its vivid show of what such dealing could mean for play of mind, for quickening of gift, for general experience and, as we say, intellectual development, for determination of philosophic bent and education of character and fertilisation of fancy, we seem to catch the whole process in the fact, under the light here supplied us, as we catch it nowhere else. It gives us in this application endlessly much to consider—it is in itself so replete and rounded a show; we at once recognise moreover how comparatively little it matters that such works as “Lucrezia Floriani” and “Un Hiver à Majorque” should have proceeded from it, cast into the shade as these are, on our biographer’s evidence, by a picture of concomitant energies still more attaching. It is not here by the force of her gift for rich improvisation, beautiful as this was, that the extraordinary woman holds us, but by the force of her ability to act herself out, given the astounding quantities concerned in this self. That energy too, we feel, was in a manner an improvisation—so closely allied somehow are both the currents, the flow of literary composition admirably instinctive and free, and the handling power, as we are constantly moved to call it, the flow of a splendid intelligence all the while at its fullest expressional ease, for the *actual* situations created by her, for whatever it might be that vitally confronted her. Of how to bring about, or at the least find one’s self “in for,” an inordinate number of situations, most of them of the last difficulty, and then deal with them on the spot, in the narrowest quarters as it were, with an eloquence and a plausibility that does them and one’s own nature at once a sort of ideal justice, the demonstration here is the fullest—as of what it was further to have her unflinching verbal as well as her unflinching moral inspiration. What predicament could have been more of an hourly strain for instance, as we cannot but suppose, than her finding herself inevitably accompanied by her two children during the stay at Majorca made by Chopin in ’38 under her protection? The victory of assurance and of the handling power strikes us as none the less never an instant in doubt, that being essentially but over the general *kind* of inconvenience or embarrassment involved for a mother and a friend in any real consistency of attempt to carry things off male fashion. We do not, it is true, see a man as a mother, any more than we easily see a woman as a gentleman—and least of all perhaps in either case as an awkwardly placed one; but we see Madame Sand as

GEORGE SAND

a sufficiently bustling, though rather a rough and ready, father, a father accepting his charge and doing the best possible under the circumstances; the truth being of course that the circumstances never *can* be, even at the worst, or still at the best, the best for parental fondness, so awkward for him as for a mother.

What call, again, upon every sort of presence of mind could have been livelier than the one made by the conditions attending and following the marriage of young Solange Dudevant to the sculptor Clésinger in 1846, when our heroine, summoned by the stress of events both to take responsible action and to rise to synthetic expression, in a situation, that is in presence of a series of demonstrations on her daughter's part, that we seem to find imaginable for a perfect dramatic adequacy only in that particular home circle, fairly surpassed herself by her capacity to "meet" everything, meet it much incommoded, yet undismayed, unabashed and unconfuted, and have on it all, to her great advantage, the always prodigious last word? The elements of this especial crisis claim the more attention through its having been, as a test of her powers, decidedly the most acute that she was in her whole course of life to have traversed, more acute even, because more complicated, than the great occasion of her rupture with Alfred de Musset, at Venice in '35, on which such a wealth of contemplation and of ink has been expended. Dramatic enough in their relation to each other certainly those immortal circumstances, immortal so far as immortalised on either side by genius and passion: Musset's return, ravaged and alone, to Paris; his companion's transfer of her favour to Pietro Pagello, whom she had called in to attend her friend medically in illness and whose intervention, so far from simplifying the juncture, complicated it in a fashion probably scarce paralleled in the history of the erotic relation; her retention of Pagello under her protection for the rest of her period in Venice; her marvellously domesticated state, in view of the literary baggage, the collection of social standards, even taking these but at what they were, and the general amplitude of personality, that she brought into residence with her; the conveyance of Pagello to Paris, on her own return, and the apparent signification to him at the very gate that her countenance was then and there withdrawn. This was a brilliant case for her—of coming off with flying colours; but it strikes us as a mere preliminary flourish of the bow or rough practice of scales compared to the high virtuosity which Madame Karénine's new material in respect to the latter imbroglio now enables us ever so gratefully to estimate. The protagonist's young children were in the Venetian crisis quite off the scene, and on occasions subsequent to the one we now glance at were old enough and, as we seem free to call it, initiated enough not to solicit our particular concern for them; whereas at the climax of the connection with Chopin they were of the perfect age (which was the

fresh marriageable in the case of Solange) to engage our best anxiety, let alone their being of a salience of sensibility and temper to leave no one of their aspects negligible. That their parent should not have found herself conclusively “upset,” sickened beyond repair, or otherwise morally bankrupt, on her having to recognise in her daughter’s hideous perversity and depravity, as we learn these things to have been, certain inevitabilities of consequence from the social air of the maternal circle, is really a monumental fact in respect to our great woman’s elasticity, her instinct for never abdicating by mere discouragement. Here in especial we get the broad male note—it being so exactly the manly part, and so very questionably the womanly, not to have to draw from such imputations of responsibility too crushing a self-consciousness. Of the extent and variety of danger to which the enjoyment of a moral tone could be exposed and yet superbly survive Madame Karénine’s pages give us the measure; they offer us in action the very ideal of an exemplary triumph of character and mind over one of the very highest tides of private embarrassment that it is well possible to conceive. And it is no case of that *passive* acceptance of deplorable matters which has abounded in the history of women, even distinguished ones, whether to the pathetic or to the merely scandalous effect; the acceptance is active, constructive, almost exhilarated by the resources of affirmation and argument that it has at its command. The whole instance is sublime in its sort, thanks to the acuteness of *all* its illustrative sides, the intense interest of which loses nothing in the hands of our chronicler; who perhaps, however, reaches off into the vast vague of Chopin’s native affiliations and references with an energy with which we find it a little difficult to keep step.

In speaking as we have done of George Sand’s “use” of each twist of her road as it came—a use which we now recognise as the very thriftiest—we touch on that principle of vital health in her which made nothing that might by the common measure have been called one of the graver dilemmas, that is one of the checks to the continuity of life, really matter. What this felicity most comes to in fact is that doing at any cost the work that lies to one’s hand shines out again and yet again as the saving secret of the soul. She affirmed her freedom right and left, but her most characteristic assertion of it throughout was just in the luxury of labour. The exhaustive account we at any rate now enjoy of the family life surrounding her during the years here treated of and as she had constituted it, the picture of all the queer conflicting sensibilities engaged, and of the endless ramifications and reflections provided for these, leaves us nothing to learn on that congested air, that obstructive medium for the range of the higher tone, which the lady of Nohant was so at her “objective” happiest, even if at her superficially, that is her nervously, most flurried and depressed, in bravely breasting. It is as if the conditions

there and in Paris during these several years had been consistently appointed by fate to throw into relief the applications of a huge facility, a sort of universal readiness, with a rare intelligence to back it. Absolutely nothing was absent, or with all the data could have been, that might have bewildered a weaker genius into some lapse of eloquence or of industry; everything that might have overwhelmed, or at least have disconcerted, the worker who could throw off the splendid "Lucrezia Floriani" in the thick of battle came upon her at once, inspiring her to show that on her system of health and cheer, of experiential economy, as we may call it, to be disconcerted was to be lost. To be lacerated and calumniated was in comparison a trifle; with a certain sanity of reaction these things became as naught, for the sanity of reaction was but the line of consistency, the theory and attitude of sincerity kept at the highest point. The artist in general, we need scarcely remind ourselves, is in a high degree liable to arrive at the sense of what he may have seen or felt, or said or suffered, by working it out as a subject, casting it into some form prescribed by his art; but even here he in general knows limits—unless perchance he be loose as Byron was loose, or possess such a power of disconnection, such a clear stand-off of the intelligence, as accompanied the experiments of Goethe. Our own experiments, we commonly feel, are comparatively timid, just as we can scarce be said, in the homely phrase, to serve our esthetic results of them hot and hot; we are too conscious of a restrictive instinct about the conditions we may, in like familiar language let ourselves in for, there being always the question of what we should be able "intellectually" to show for them. The life of the author of "Lucrezia Floriani" at its most active may fairly be described as an immunity from restrictive instincts more ably cultivated than any we know. Again and yet again we note the positive premium so put upon the surrender to sensibility, and how, since the latter was certain to spread to its maximum and to be admired in proportion to its spread, some surrender was always to have been worth while. "Lucrezia Floriani" ought to have been rather measurably bad—lucidity, harmony, maturity, definiteness of sense, being so likely to fail it in the troubled air in which it was born. Yet how can we do less than applaud a composition throwing off as it goes such a passage as the splendid group of pages cited by Madame Karénine from the incident of the heroine's causing herself to be rowed over to the island in her Italian lake on that summer afternoon when the sense of her situation had become sharp for her to anguish, in order to take stock of the same without interruption and see, as we should say to-day, where she is? The whole thing has the grand manner and the noblest eloquence, reaching out as it does on the spot to the lesson and the moral of the convulsions that have been prepared in the first instance with such complacency, and illustrating in perfection the author's faculty for the clear re-emergence and the prompt or, as we may call it, the pay-

GEORGE SAND

ing reaction. The case is put for her here as into its final nutshell: you may “live” exactly as you like, that is live in perfect security and fertility, when such breadth of rendering awaits your simply sitting down to it. Is it not true, we say, that without her breadth our wonderful woman would have been “nowhere?”—whereas with it she is effectively and indestructibly at any point of her field where she may care to pretend to stand.

This biographer, I must of course note, discriminates with delicacy among her heroine’s felicities and mistakes, recognising that some of the former, as a latent awkwardness in them developed, inevitably parted with the signs that distinguished them from the latter; but I think we feel, as the instances multiply, that no regret could have equalled for us that of our not having the display vivid and complete. Once all the elements of the scarce in advance imaginable were there it would have been a pity that they should not offer us the show of their full fruition. What more striking show, for example, than that, as recorded by Madame Karénine in a footnote, the afflicted parent of Solange should have lived to reproduce, or rather, as she would herself have said, to “arrange” the girlish character and conduct of that young person, so humiliating at the time to any near relation, let alone a mother, in the novel of “Mademoiselle Merquem,” where the truth to the original facts and the emulation of the graceless prime “effects” are such as our author can vouch for? The fiction we name followed indeed after long years, but during the lifetime of the displeasing daughter and with an ease of reference to the past that may fairly strike us as the last word of superiority to blighting association. It is quite as if the close and amused matching of the character and its play in the novel with the wretched old realities, those that had broken in their day upon the scared maternal vision, had been a work of ingenuity attended with no pang. The example is interesting as a measure of the possible victory of time in a case where we might have supposed the one escape to have been by forgetting. Madame Sand remembers to the point of gratefully—gratefully as an artist—reconstituting; we in fact feel her, as the irrepressible, the “healthy” artist, positively to enjoy so doing. Thus it clearly defined itself for her in the fulness of time that, humiliating, to use our expression, as the dreadful Solange might have been and have incessantly remained, she herself had never in the least consented to the stupidity or sterility of humiliation. So it could be that the free mind and the free hand were ever at her service. A beautiful indifferent agility, a power to cast out that was at least proportioned to the power to take in, hangs about all this and meets us in twenty connections. Who of her readers has forgotten the harmonious dedication—her inveterate dedications have always, like her clear light prefaces, the last grace—of “Jeanne,” so anciently, so romantically readable, to her faithful Berrichon servant who sits spinning by the

GEORGE SAND

fire? “Vous ne savez pas lire, ma paisible amie,” but that was not to prevent the association of her name with the book, since both her own daughter and the author’s are in happy possession of the art and will be able to pass the entertainment on to her. This in itself is no more than a sign of the writer’s fine democratic ease, which she carried at all times to all lengths, and of her charming habit of speech; but it somehow becomes further illustrational, testifying for the manner in which genius, if it be but great enough, lives its life at small cost, when we learn that after all, by a turn of the hand, the “paisible amie” was, under provocation, bundled out of the house as if the beautiful relation had not meant half of what appeared. Françoise and her presence were dispensed with, but the exquisite lines remain, which we would not be without for the world.

III

The various situations determined for the more eminent of George Sand’s intimate associates would always be independently interesting, thanks to the intrinsic appeal of these characters and even without the light reflected withal on the great agent herself; which is why poor Chopin’s figuration in the events of the year 1847, as Madame Karénine so fully reconstitutes them, is all that is wanted to point their almost nightmare quality. Without something of a close view of them we fail of a grasp of our heroine’s genius—her genius for keeping her head in deep seas morally and reflectively above water, though but a glance at them must suffice us for averting this loss. The old-world quality of drama, which throughout so thickens and tones the air around her, finds remarkable expression in the whole picture of the moment. Every connection involved bristles like a conscious consequence, tells for all it is worth, as we say, and the sinister complexity of reference—for all the golden clearings-up that awaited it on the ideal plane—leaves nothing to be desired. The great and odd sign of the complications and convulsions, the alarms and excursions recorded, is that these are all the more or less direct fruits of sensibility, which had primarily been indulged in, under the doom of a preparation of them which no preparation of anything else was to emulate, with a good faith fairly touching in presence of the eventual ugliness. Madame Sand’s wonderful mother, commemorated for us in “L’Histoire de ma Vie” with the truth surely attaching in a like degree to no mother in all the literature of so-called confession, had had for cousin a “fille entretenue” who had married a mechanic. This Adèle Brault had had in the course of her adventures a daughter in whom, as an unfortunate young relative, Madame Dupin had taken an interest, introducing her to the heiress of Nohant, who viewed her with favour—she appears to have been amiable and commendable—and eventually associated her with her

GEORGE SAND

own children. She was thus the third member of that illegitimate progeny with which the Nohant scene was to have become familiar, George Sand's natural brother on her father's side and her natural sister on her mother's representing this element from the earlier time on. The young Augustine, fugitive from a circle still less edifying, was thus made a companion of the son and the daughter of the house, and was especially held to compare with the latter to her great advantage in the matter of character, docility and temper. These young persons formed, as it were, with his more distinguished friend, the virtual family of Chopin during those years of specifically qualified domestication which affect us as only less of a mystification to taste than that phase of the unrestricted which had immediately preceded them. Hence a tangled tissue of relations within the circle that became, as it strikes us, indescribable for difficulty and "delicacy," not to say for the perfection of their impracticability, and as to which the great point is that Madame Sand's having taken them so robustly for granted throws upon her temperamental genius a more direct light than any other. The whole case belongs doubtless even more to the hapless history of Chopin himself than to that of his terrible friend—terrible for her power to flourish in conditions sooner or later fatal to weaker vessels; but is in addition to this one of the most striking illustrations possible of that view or theory of social life handed over to the reactions of sensibility almost alone which, while ever so little the ideal of the Anglo-Saxon world, has largely governed the manners of its sister societies. It has been our view, very emphatically, in general, that the sane and active social body—or, for that matter, the sane and active individual, addressed to the natural business of life—goes wrongly about it to encourage sensibility, or to do anything on the whole but treat it as of no prime importance; the traps it may lay for us, however, being really of the fewest in a race to which the very imagination of it may be said, I think, to have been comparatively denied. The imagination of it sat irremovably, on the other hand, and as a matter of course, at the Nohant fireside; where indeed we find the play and the ravage chiefly interesting through our thus seeing the delicate Chopin, whose semi-smothered appeal remains peculiarly pathetic, all helpless and foredoomed at the centre of the whirl. Nothing again strikes us more in the connection than the familiar truth that interesting persons make everything that concerns them interesting, or seldom fail to redeem from what might in another air seem but meanness and vanity even their most compromised states and their greatest wastes of value. Every one in the particular Nohant drama here exposed loses by the exposure—so far as loss could be predicated of amounts which, in general, excepting the said sensibility, were so scant among them; every one, that is, save the ruling spirit of all, with the extraordinary mark in her of the practical defiance of waste and of her inevitable enrichment, for our measure, as by reflection from the surrounding shrinkage. One of

the oddest aspects of the scene is also one of the wretchedest, but the oddity makes it interesting, by the law I just glanced at, in spite of its vulgar side. How could it not be interesting, we ask as we read, to feel that Chopin, though far from the one man, was the one gentleman of the association, the finest set of nerves and scruples, and yet to see how little that availed him, in exasperated reactions, against mistakes of perverted sympathy? It is relevant in a high degree to our view of his great protectress as reducible at her best to male terms that she herself in this very light fell short, missed the ideal safeguard which for her friend had been preinvolved—as of course may be the peril, ever, with the creature so transmuted, and as is so strikingly exemplified, in the pages before us, when Madame Karénine ingenuously gives us chapter and verse for her heroine's so unqualified demolition of the person of Madame d'Agoult, devotee of Liszt, mother to be, by that token, of Richard Wagner's second wife, and sometime intimate of the author of "Isidora," in which fiction we are shown the parody perpetrated. If women rend each other on occasion with sharper talons than seem to belong on the whole to the male hand, however intendingly applied, we find ourselves reflect parenthetically that the loss of this advantage may well be a matter for them to consider when the new approximation is the issue.

The great sign of the Nohant circle on all this showing, at any rate, is the intense personalism, as we may call it, reigning there, or in other words the vivacity, the acuity and irritability of the personal relations—which flourished so largely, we at the same time feel, by reason of the general gift for expression, that gift to which we owe the general superiority of every letter, from it scarce matters whom, laid under contribution by our author. How could people not feel with acuity when they could, when they had to, write with such point and such specific intelligence?—just indeed as one asks how letters could fail to remain at such a level among them when they incessantly generated choice matter for expression. Madame Sand herself is of course on this ground easily the most admirable, as we have seen; but every one "knows how" to write, and does it well in proportion as the matter in hand most demands and most rewards proper saying. Much of all this stuff of history seems indeed to have been susceptible of any amount of force of statement; yet we note all the while how in the case of the great mistress of the pen at least some shade of intrinsic beauty attends even the presentation of quite abominable facts. We can only see it as abominable, at least, so long as we have Madame Sand's words—which are somehow a different thing from her word—for it, that Chopin had from the first "sided" with the atrocious Solange in that play of her genius which is characterised by our chronicler as wickedness for the sake of wickedness, as art for the sake of art, without other logic or other cause. "Once

married,” says Madame Karénine, “she made a double use of this wickedness. She had always hated Augustine; she wished, one doesn’t know why, to break off her marriage, and by calumnies and insinuations she succeeded. Then angry with her mother she avenged herself on her as well by further calumnies. Thereupon took place at Nohant such events that”—that in fine we stop before them with this preliminary shudder. The crosscurrents of violence among them would take more keeping apart than we have time for, the more that everything comes back, for interest, to the intrinsic weight of the tone of the principal sufferer from them—as we see her, as we wouldn’t for the world not see her, in spite of the fact that Chopin was to succumb scarce more than a year later to multiplied lacerations, and that she was to override and reproduce and pre-appointedly flourish for long years after. If it is interesting, as I have pronounced it, that Chopin, again, should have consented to be of the opinion of Solange that the relations between her brother Maurice and the hapless Augustine were of the last impropriety, I fear I can account no better for this than by our sense that the more the *genius loci* has to feed her full tone the more our faith in it, as such a fine thing in itself, is justified. Almost immediately after the precipitated marriage of the daughter of the house has taken place, the Clésinger couple, avid and insolent, of a breadth of old time impudence in fact of which our paler day has lost the pattern, are back on the mother’s hands, to the effect of a vividest picture of Maurice well-nigh in a death-grapple with his apparently quite monstrous “bounder” of a brother-in-law, a picture that further gives us Madame Sand herself smiting Clésinger in the face and receiving from him a blow in the breast, while Solange “coldly,” with an iciness indeed peculiarly her own, fans the rage and approves her husband’s assault, and while the divine composer, though for that moment much in the background, approves the wondrous approval. He still approves, to all appearance, the daughter’s interpretation of the mother’s wish to “get rid” of him as the result of an amorous design on the latter’s part in respect of a young man lately introduced to the circle as Maurice’s friend and for the intimate relation with whom it is thus desirable that the coast shall be made clear. How else than through no fewer consistencies of the unedifying on the part of these provokers of the expressional reaction should we have come by innumerable fine epistolary passages, passages constituting in themselves verily such adornments of the tale, such notes in the scale of all the damaged dignity redressed, that we should be morally the poorer without them? One of the vividest glimpses indeed is not in a letter but in a few lines from “L’Histoire de ma Vie,” the composition of which was begun toward the end of this period and while its shadow still hung about—early in life for a projected autobiography, inasmuch as the author had not then reached her forty-fifth year. Chopin at work, improvising and composing, was apt to become a

GEORGE SAND

prey to doubts and depressions, so that there were times when to break in upon these was to render him a service.

“But it was not always possible to induce him to leave the piano, often so much more his torment than his joy, and he began gradually to resent my proposing he should do so. I never ventured on these occasions to insist. Chopin in displeasure was appalling, and as with me he always controlled himself it was as if he might die of suffocation.”

It is a vision of the possibilities of vibration in such organisms that does in fact appal, and with the clash of vibrations, those both of genius and of the general less sanctioned sensibility, the air must have more than sufficiently resounded. Some eight years after the beginning of their friendship and the year after the final complete break in it she writes to Madame Pauline Viardot:

“Do you see Chopin? Tell me about his health. I have been unable to repay his fury and his hatred by hatred and fury. I think of him as of a sick, embittered, bewildered child. I saw much of Solange in Paris, the letter goes on, and made her my constant occupation, but without finding anything but a stone in the place of her heart. I have taken up my work again while waiting for the tide to carry me elsewhere.”

All the author’s “authority” is in these few words, and in none more than in the glance at the work and the tide. The work and the tide rose ever as high as she would to float her, and wherever we look there is always the authority. “I find Chopin *magnificent*,” she had already written from the thick of the fray, “to keep seeing, frequenting and approving Clésinger, who struck me because I snatched from his hands the hammer he had raised upon Maurice—Chopin whom every one talks of as my most faithful and devoted friend.” Well indeed may our biographer have put it that from a certain date in May 1847 “the two *Leitmotive* which might have been called in the terms of Wagner the *Leitmotif* of soreness and the *Leitmotif* of despair—Chopin, Solange—sound together now in fusion, now in a mutual grip, now simply side by side, in all Madame Sand’s unpublished letters and in the few (of the moment) that have been published. A little later a third joins in—Augustine Brault, a motive narrowly and tragically linked to the *basso obbligato* of Solange.” To meet such a passage as the following under our heroine’s hand again is to feel the whole temper of intercourse implied slip straight out of our analytic grasp. The allusion is to Chopin and to the “defection” of which he had been guilty, to her view, at the time when it had been most important that she might count on him. What we have first, as outsiders, to swallow down, as it were, is the state of things, the hysteric pitch of family life, in which any ideal of reticence, any principle, as we know it, of minding one’s business, for mere dignity’s sake if for none other, had undergone such collapse.

GEORGE SAND

“I grant you I am not sorry that he has withdrawn from me the government of his life, for which both he and his friends wanted to make me responsible in so much too absolute a fashion. His temper kept growing in asperity, so that it had come to his constantly blowing me up, from spite, ill-humour and jealousy, in presence of my friends and my children. Solange made use of it with the astuteness that belongs to her, while Maurice began to give way to indignation. Knowing and seeing *la chasteté de nos rapports*, he saw also that the poor sick soul took up, without wanting to and perhaps without being able to help it, the attitude of the lover, the husband, the proprietor of my thoughts and actions. He was on the point of breaking out and telling him to his face that he was making me play, at forty-three years of age, a ridiculous part, and that it was an abuse of my kindness, my patience, and my pity for his nervous morbid state. A few months more, a few days perhaps, of this situation, and an impossible frightful struggle would have broken out between them. Foreseeing the storm, I took advantage of Chopin’s predilection for Solange and left him to sulk, without an effort to bring him round. We have not for three months exchanged a word in writing, and I don’t know how such a cooling-off will end.”

She develops the picture of the extravagance of his sick irritability; she accepts with indifference the certainty that his friends will accuse her of having cast him out to take a lover; the one thing she “minds” is the force of evil in her daughter, who is the centre of all the treachery. “She will come back to me when she needs me, that I know. But her return will be neither tender nor consoling.” Therefore it is when at the beginning of the winter of this same dreadful year she throws off the free rich summary of what she has been through in the letter to M. Charles Poncy already published in her Correspondence we are swept into the current of sympathy and admiration. The preceding months had been the heaviest and most painful of her life.

“I all but broke down under them utterly, though I had for long seen them coming. But you know how one is not always overhung by the evil portent, however clear one may read it—there are days, weeks, even whole months, when one lives on illusion and fondly hopes to divert the blow that threatens. It is always at last the most probable ill that surprises us unarmed and unprepared. To this explosion of unhappy underground germs joined themselves sundry contributive matters, bitter things too and quite unexpected; so that I am broken by grief in body and soul. I believe my grief incurable, for I never succeed in throwing it off for a few hours without its coming upon me again during the next in greater force and gloom. I nevertheless struggle against it without respite, and if I don’t hope for a victory which would have to consist of not feeling at all, at least I have reached that of still bearing with life, of even scarcely feeling ill, of having recovered my taste for work and of not showing my distress. I have got back outside calm and cheer, which are so necessary for others, and everything in my life seems to go on well.”

We had already become aware, through commemorations previous to the present, of that first or innermost line of defence residing in George Sand’s splendid mastery of the letter, the gift that was always so to assure her, on every issue, the enjoyment of the first chance with posterity. The mere cerebral and manual activity

GEORGE SAND

represented by the quantity no less than the quality of her outflow through the post at a season when her engagements were most pressing and her anxieties of every sort most cruel is justly qualified by Madame Karénine as astounding; the new letters here given to the world heaping up the exhibition and testifying even beyond the finest of those gathered in after the writer's death—the mutilations, suppressions and other freedoms then used, for that matter, being now exposed. If no plot of her most bustling fiction ever thickened at the rate at which those agitations of her inner circle at which we have glanced multiplied upon her hands through the later 'forties, so we are tempted to find her rather less in possession of her great *moyens* when handling the artificial presentation than when handling what we may call the natural. It is not too much to say that the long letter addressed to the cynical Solange in April '52, and which these pages give us *in extenso*, would have made the fortune of any mere interesting "story" in which one of the characters might have been presented as writing it. It is a document of the highest psychological value and a practical summary of all the elements of the writer's genius, of all her indefeasible advantages; it is verily the gem of her biographer's collection. Taken in connection with a copious communication to her son, of the previous year, on the subject of his sister's character and vices, and of their common experience of these, it offers, in its ease of movement, its extraordinary frankness and lucidity, its splendid apprehension and interpretation of realities, its state, as it were, of saturation with these, exactly the kind of interest for which her novels were held remarkable, but in a degree even above their maximum. Such a letter is an effusion of the highest price; none of a weight so baffling to estimation was probably ever inspired in a mother by solicitude for a clever daughter's possibilities. Never surely had an accomplished daughter laid under such contribution a mother of high culture; never had such remarkable and pertinent things had to flow from such a source; never in fine was so urgent an occasion so admirably, so inimitably risen to. Marvellous through it all is the way in which, while a common recognition of the "facts of life," as between two perfectly intelligent men of the world, gives the whole diapason, the abdication of moral authority and of the rights of wisdom never takes place. The tone is a high implication of the moral advantages that Solange had inveterately enjoyed and had decided none the less to avail herself of so little; which advantages we absolutely believe in as we read—*there* is the prodigious part: such an education of the soul, and in fact of every faculty, such a claim for the irreproachable, it would fairly seem, do we feel any association with the great fluent artist, in whatever conditions taking place, inevitably, necessarily to have been. If we put ourselves questions we yet wave away doubts, and with whatever remnants of prejudice the writer's last word may often have to clash, our own is that there is nothing for grand final rightness like a sufficiently

GEORGE SAND

general humanity—when a particularly beautiful voice happens to serve it.

¹“George Sand, sa Vie et ses Oeuvres, 1804-1876.” Paris, 1899.

² George Sand, sa Vie et ses Oeuvres, vol. iii. (1838-1848). Par Wladimir Karénine. Paris, Plon, 1912.