

She and He: Recent Documents

By Henry James

I HAVE been reading in the *Revue de Paris* for November 1st 1896 some fifty pages, of an extraordinary interest, which have had, as regards an old admiration, a very singular effect. For many other admirers, doubtless, who have come to fifty year—admirers, I mean, once eager, of the distinguished woman in question—the perusal of the letters addressed by Madame 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, and 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, in fact, 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

ladies studying French with *La Mare au Diable* and a dictionary ? Are there persons who still read *Valentine* ? Are there others who resort to *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 remarkable pages, both as to what in her spirit was most interesting and what most disconcerting. We are vague as to what they may represent to the generation that has come to the front since her death ; nothing, I dare say, very imposing or even very becoming. 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 to us on the much larger matter of the relation between experience and art. It constitutes an eminent special

special case, in which the workings of that relation are more or less uncovered ; a case, too, of which one of the most remarkable features 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 æsthetically assimilated? Was the whole proceeding, in intention, a frank plea for the intellectual and in some degree even the commercial profit, for 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 æsthetic event, standing on its own feet, represents a solid gain. It was vain, the objector may say, for Madame Sand 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 author. By your supposition of a great intention you give much too fine an account on the one hand of a personal habit of laxity 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 complicated 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—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 recommend. It is only because such a figure is interesting—in every manifestation—that the line of its passage is marked for us by traces, suggestions, possible lessons. And to enable us to find them it scarcely need, after all, have aimed 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

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 15. Prosper Mérimée was said to have related—in a spirit I forbear to qualify—that during a close union 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. For 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 go 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 a greater 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 continuity of phenomena in the continuity of notation. There is not a door you can lock here against the critic or the painter

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not a cry you can raise or a long face you can pull at him that are not absolutely arbitrary. The only thing that makes the observer competent is that he is not 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 an element of mystery. M. Emile 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 relatives, 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 that no sacrifice is 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, or 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,
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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 "arithomania or impulse to count." An affirmation of our "mere taste" may very supposably be our individual contribution to the general clearing-up. Nothing, often, is less superficial than to skip or more constructive (for living and feeling at all) than 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 know 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 De Musset's correspondent, that 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 combat. The painter and the painted 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 sense—is cultivated on the part of the investigator. They have been left too much to
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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 constitute 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 Madame Sand ever shut herself up ; but I come back to a point already made in saying that it is, in a manner, in the citadel of style that, in spite of all 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

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 Madame Sand 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 De Musset returned, alone and much ravaged, to Paris.

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 doctor, called in, had become a close friend of both parties, but more particularly a close friend of Madame Sand, and it was to his tender care that, on withdrawing, De Musset solemnly committed the lady. She lived 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

with De Musset was, in all its intensity—one may almost say its ferocity—promptly renewed, and was sustained in this 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 humanity. 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

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, 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 presented to us. This force, in its turn, is 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) about the value of this 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
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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 unrestricted, but it 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, another Paris, an inextricable, inconceivable Nohant. This relegates it to an order agreeable somehow to the imagination of the fond quinquegenarian, the reader with a fund of reminiscence. The vanished world, the old Venice, the old Paris are 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 Fadette has her elbows on the table of Flaubert.

There is a terrible letter of the autumn of 1834, in which Madame Sand has recourse to Alfred Tattet in a dispute with the bewildered Pagello—a very disagreeable matter, hinging on a question of money. "A 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 approbation of an immediate predecessor—an alternate representative of the
part,

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 disagreement 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 unique 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 déviations de sentiment les plus bizarres, et leur intérieur fut le théâtre de scènes qui égalaient en étrangeté les fantaisies les plus audacieuses de la littérature 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 Madame Sand writes

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 means. There would seem to be reason 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 of 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 any one that in such an arrangement his own virtue 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 particular sympathy which consists of wishing another to feel as you feel yourself. To feel as Madame Sand felt, however, one had to be, like Madame Sand, a man; which poor Musset was far from

from being. This, we surmise, was the case with most of her lovers, and the verity that makes the idea of her *liaison* with Mérimée, who *was* one, 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 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 won’t go so far exactly as to say a gentleman. That George Sand just fell short of this character was the 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 delicate things. The aberration connects itself with the strange lapses of still other occasions—notably with the extraordinary absence of scruples with which, in the delightful

Histoire

Histoire de ma Vie, she gives away, as we say, the character of her remarkable mother. The picture is admirable for vividness, for 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 some others certainly, clear up more or less in the light of 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 easily? It is not too much to say of her gift of expression—and I have already in effect said it—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, at any rate, with her free experience and her free use of it, her literary style, her love of ideas and questions, of science and philosophy, her *camaraderie*, 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 morally more of the notes 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

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 ever had, as might be said, more 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, in the benignity of such an intercourse, as 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 often, in art, 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 intellectual mill was on occasion capable of being ground ?

However this may be, nothing is more striking than the impunity with which she gave herself to conditions that are usually held to denote or to involve a state of demoralisation. This
impunity

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, intelligence. She sacrificed, it is true, a handful of minor coin—met the loss by failing, in her picture of life, wholly to grasp certain shades and certain differences. What she paid was just this loss of her touch for them. That is one of the reasons, doubtless, 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 this 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 view—that of suspicion—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 a regular 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*?

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 agreed 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
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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 drollery—and they are not a product of high spirits or of a marked avidity for gossip. But they have admirable ease, 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 play 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 spirit; 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, 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, in truth, 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. 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

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 Madame Sand 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" Arvéde 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 picture, moreover, the picture has only to be put beside the recent documents, the "study," as I may call them, to illustrate the

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. Madame Sand 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, 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.