

way your mother does." "Well, don't you think I'm right? Like all townies, think you're so superior, think you know what's good for us, better than we do ourselves." He worked himself up, shouting, wanting opposition from her that he could beat down with words of his own, and she, used for long now to sensible, rational discussion, was frightened at his violence, and she felt Virginia stiffen unhappily at her side. She looked down at the cloth, seeing his hand, veined and calloused; the hand that had for so many years worked for her.

SHE couldn't help being relieved when the last day came, they were unhappy, and so was she. They had wanted her so much, they had made such plans for her physical comfort; they were bitterly disappointed. Why did it have to be so? She asked herself that, passionately, in the train, when the last strained good-byes had been said. She saw the reproach in their eyes, she realised all at once how they had aged. "You've deserted us, you despise us, they seemed to say, and there was no way of explaining to them that they were seeing the problem too simply. As the train gathered speed she felt the usual pendulum swing, from the irritation and impatience which had for days possessed her so that there was no room for other feeling, to remorse and sorrowful wondering if she could have been different after all—

it must surely be her fault that everything had gone wrong. She had felt this before, but never so acutely. As she went further and further away from them she yearned over them, she felt again the old love there had been for them. She blamed herself, but she was aware all the time that she had done her best, and she was resentful. Of life. Other people didn't seem to have this trouble. Or did they? Had it always been so, for some? Were there always some who must suffer in the effort to progress, to raise the level of thought? And was it progress? She had seen the thought expressed somewhere—where was it? She couldn't remember. It had interested her when she read it, but it seemed now to have a deep significance for her that it hadn't had then. She wished she could remember—she felt so muddled and uncertain, she wanted the balm of understanding from another who had felt as she did.

HER pleasure at being with Grant again was dimmed. Understanding as he was, this wasn't his trouble, and she couldn't discuss it with him. He met them at the station, and laughed and joked with Virginia, delighted to be with him again. Alice prepared a meal, and put Virginia to bed, and sat down near a window where she could feel the cool of the evening. She didn't read. She thought instead of those two, returning

silently home, old and defeated. This moment of home-coming she herself had been longing for with so much intensity was spoiled. And yet how irrational that seemed. That she could be so moved by the unhappiness of two people who now oppressed her—oppressed—that was the word; George Eliot—

Grant came into the room and sat in his chair near her, happy to have his family with him again, yet knowing she was unhappy, wishing he could help her. She went to the book-case. "What was that bit I said I liked?" she asked him, "George Eliot—when your class had *The Mill on the Floss* you had the book open and I began to read it; something about one generation losing touch with the next. . . ."

"Eh?" Grant looked thoughtfully at her for a moment. "Yes. I know what you mean. It's a theme you find over and over again in her books; it was something she experienced herself, when she was Marian Evans; when she lived with her father in Coventry, before George Eliot was thought of."

The Mill on the Floss. She took the book from the shelf and turned over the pages for a while. Here it was. . . .

This oppressive narrowness . . . has acted on young natures in many generations that in the onward tendency of human things have risen above the mental level of the generation before them to which they have

nevertheless been tied by the strongest fibres of their hearts. . . .

The strongest fibres of their hearts—the words did bring a little solace. Another woman—a great woman—had known, had felt as she did. Grant came over to her and picked out another book.

"Find it?" he said, and she knew that he guessed what was troubling her. "You come across it again and again—in *Middlemarch*—but I haven't that here. It's expressed most vividly in *Adam Bede* I think. I'm just looking for it—here it is." He went back to his chair, leaving her to read. . . .

Family likeness has often a deep sadness in it. Nature, that great tragic dramatist, knits us together by bone and muscle, and divides us by the subtler web of our brains. Blends yearning and repulsion; and ties us by our heart-strings to the beings who jar us at every movement. We hear a voice with the very cadence of our own uttering the thoughts we despise; we see eyes—ah, so like our mother's—averted from us in cold alienation; and our last darling child startles us with the air and gestures of the sister we parted from in bitterness long years ago. The father to whom we owe our best heritage—the mechanical instinct, the keen sensibility to harmony, the unconscious skill of the modelling hand—galls us, and puts us to shame by his daily errors.

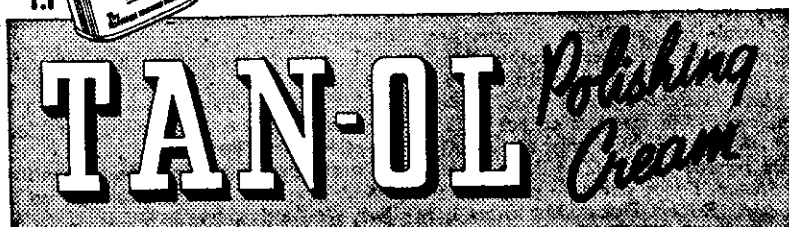


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