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A LETTER FROM GEORGE

A serialised reading by Hannah Gordon - BBC CWR, Spring 1990.

BBC CWR is a new local radio station launched at the beginning of the year to cover Coventry and Warwickshire. It became clear very early on that the station wished to show an interest in and pay tribute to George Eliot. A Letter from George was their first attempt and from the success of this I feel we can look forward to a long period of co-operation between the Fellowship and the BBC in Warwickshire in relation to George Eliot.

In choosing eight episodes of about ten minutes each it was inevitable that the life of the novelist would be fragmentary. By also deciding to let her tell her own story, some parts of her life were very well covered and others hardly mentioned at all. The purist had to accept this while wishing that more time had been given for some episodes to be further developed. The 'letter' was to John Cross, to be read by him during an illness after their marriage. There were a few basic and regrettable errors which, if facts had been checked, could have been avoided. Robert Evans' place of work was given as the village of Ansty instead of Astley. I suspect that the villagers would have been a little surprised - Ansty to have gained him and Astley to have lost him! 'George Eliot' spoke of some of her stories and novels as Scenes from Clerical Life (instead of 'of') Mill on the Floss instead of The Mill on the Floss, Janet's Remembrance instead of Janet's Repentance, and Romola was mispronounced. The real George Eliot would have been scrupulous in getting them right and all of these were so easy to check. Some incidents in her life were misplaced; again, the novelist would not have made the mistake and more care should have been exercised in the writing. Having criticised the errors, however, one must give praise where it is due - the tone of the writing by Jock Gallagher was just right. In some instances he had used George Eliot's own words, but when he wrote for her, so to speak, he caught the tone and the words which I am sure she would have used, thus making the narrative totally convincing.

Hannah Gordon's reading was just right. Her own low and beautifully modulated voice perfectly matched the description of George Eliot's. Miss Gordon told Mr. Gallagher that she much enjoyed reading the part and is now much more sympathetic to George Eliot; I think this showed, and that is why she made such a very good job of it.

A Letter from George is planned to be broadcast at some future date on BBC Radio 4, although exactly what form the material will then take has yet to be decided. I shall be interested to see what the national network does with it, but I hope that the facts will be checked before they go on air. I feel the BBC owes it to George Eliot to be as meticulous in their editing as she would have been with hers.

Kathleen Adams