GEORGE MOORE: A Cloistered Genius.

By GERALD BULLETT.

The late George Moore.

THE death of George Moore, at the age of eighty-one, brings to an end a long and brilliant chapter in English literary history, and takes from us one who dedicated himself to his art with a devotion unique in our times. Passages in his autobiographical works have provided conventional moralists with ample occasion for disapproving of him as a man, but no one with a sense of literature could ever doubt that in George Moore there lived an artist for whom no personal sacrifice was too great and no discipline too arduous. Art was at once his passion and his religion. It is true to say of him that in respect of his work he lived the life of a cloistered saint: a life narrow, if you will, but intense, and intensely significant, and bringing a reward by which not he alone, but the world at large, was incomparably enriched.

His master purpose.

Most other great writers, and perhaps the greatest of all, have been lovers of life for its own sake, and have been as remarkable for the diversity of their interests as for their powers of literary expression. Hardy, a religious and rebellious spirit, inverting Milton's avowed purpose (in "Paradise Lost") of justifying the ways of God to men, could not refrain from occasionally shaking his fist at heaven, and twisting his fictions (sometimes with a violence that damaged them) into shapes conformable with his private philosophy. Meredith, a lesser man but a man of genius none the less, was too often the victim of a kind of intellectual dandyism. And Mr. H. G. Wells, that miracle of energy, perhaps the most abundantly creative writer of this century, has spent many years endeavouring (never with complete success) not to be the artist that he is. With the single exception of Henry James, who resembles George Moore in nothing else, one can think of no other figure in English literature who pursued art with so single a mind. For George Moore the spectacle of life was chiefly to be valued in so far as it offered the raw material of art. All other interests were subordinated to this master purpose.

French influences.

He was born on February 24th, 1852, the eldest son of George Henry Moore, who was at one time member of Parliament for Mayo. Art claimed him early, and on the death of his father, in 1870, he left Ireland and went to Paris with the intention of becoming a painter. Lively reminiscences of these early days are to be found in his "Confessions of a Young Man," which first appeared in 1886. But he soon discovered that his true vocation was for literature, and after a little inevitable dallying with verse he began to write fiction, and became, ultimately, a story teller of genius. Being responsive, as every young man must be, to the prevailing influences of his time, it was as a disciple of French naturalism ("The Mummer's Wife," 1884) that he first made his mark. Having his full share of vanity, endowed with a humour that did not lack a spice of malice, and irreverent of much that his fellows held sacred, he nevertheless had humility as well as ambition, that profound humility of the artist which will never let him waver in the pursuit of artistic perfection. Some twenty years ago, at an age when most novelists are content to rest on whatever laurels they have won, and to turn out tired imitations of their former successes, George Moore set about the heroic task of re-writing his early novels, or such of them as he cared to preserve from final oblivion.

The quality of reverie.

With his autobiographical trilogy, "Hail and Farewell" (1914), he found the manner and method which were to serve him triumphantly to the end, and introduced into our prose literature a new and lovely quality, the quality of reverie. In that book it is as if he sits musing by his fireside. We listen to his voice, gentle, urbane, untroubled, flowing and winding on like a golden river. The same voice is heard in "The Brook Kerith," the most surely immortal of his works; for though the story is of far away and long ago, a story of Syria and of how Jesus of Nazareth was rescued from the Cross and lived in obscurity to a ripe age, to be finally confronted by Paul of Tarsus preaching Christ Crucified (one of the most audacious and majestic scenes in literature), this, too, seems wrought of the very substance of an intimate memory. Here, as in all his subsequent books, Moore is revealed as the greatest master of pure narrative in English—perhaps, indeed, its only practitioner. By pure narrative I mean narrative which imposes, without effort, a serene and luminous unity on events discontinuous in time and space, narrative in which the moments of drama, the crises of action, instead of being sharpened into prominence as they are in the ordinary modern novel, are subdued to an even flow, a lovely monotone. Moore's virtue as a stylist—and some readers are puzzled to know why critics have so loudly acclaimed his style—resides not primarily in his powers of description, or in a capacity for high flights of eloquence, but rather in his command of rhythm and cadence, his purity of diction and his gift of colour, and above all his perfect adaptation of means to ends—his chief end being the achievement of what he himself termed the melodic line, that is, a continuing and musical pattern of images, whether visual, aural, or tactual. Almost any passage from any one of the books of his last and best period will serve to illustrate my point. Let us listen, then, to a fragment of Alec Trusselby's story (in "A Story-Teller's Holiday") of Curithir and Liadin, the greatest poet and the greatest poetess in Ireland, at a remote time when all poets were wandering minstrels.

Lovers' parting.

The two have met in a wood. They fall into deep love, and wed each other, their servants being withdrawn out of sight. Then comes the moment of parting:—

> My Brigit and your Lomna Druth, she said, will come this way searching for us; it would be as well that we should go to them instead. It would be as well indeed, he replied angrily, but I wish all the same that the warning had not come from you, and without saying any more they went back in search of their servants. Curithir, guessing Liadin's thoughts, said: From this day our life will be lonesome for us two, and not one of us knows how we lived our life up to this day, and we not seeing each other every day and every night; so hazy is it all that I do believe it was but a dream that a reality broke last night. I'm feeling like that myself, she said, but I would have you make your meaning plainer to me. Says he: Is it not plain enough what I say that you are the greatest poetess that Ireland has ever

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