

am willing to grant Professor Phelps his conclusion if only he will not disturb mine!

BY W. L. GEORGE

I do not disagree with Professor Phelps as to "What is a Novel," providing we mean the same thing by "good" story. If he means something entertaining and no more, such as *The Cardinal's Snuffbox*, he means too little, but I suspect that a "good" story is for him a story revealing the personality of the writer, concerned with people who are real and living, with an actual environment or a common problem.

But for my part I want more and should say that a good novel is "A truthful story well told." I mean by this that for a novel to be worth while the characters must be entirely revealed, their fineness and their hatefulness; that they must not be idealised; that the questions which preoccupy them must not be hidden away because sympathy might be obliterated for them. I have no use for novels when the hero resembles the average subject of a biography, where he is peerless and inhuman. Just as in a biography, say of Lincoln, I want to be told he drank or beat his wife *if he did* (which I do not know) quite as much as that he saved his country. I want the truth about the fictional people.

Please believe that because I like *Anna Karénina* I do not want all heroines to be unfaithful or hysterical. No, but I do object to the flower-like heroine who never used a swear word or envied her sister's hat.

I ask of the novelist that he shall see his people pass every side, *Bel Ami* dashing and unscrupulous. Becky Sharp, tender and cruel; I have no use for brave little Queed, too perfect to be true, or for the painfully chaste heroes of Mr. Jack London and the bounding broncho on the trail, or the strong, silent man of English fiction. I want true people, with their mixture of good and evil, true towns, which are neither *all East Side* or *all Fifth Avenue*. I

want the novelist to sit on Olympus like a god and without passion to judge little humanity—while managing to love it still.

BY ELLEN GLASGOW

What is a good story? My neighbour confides to me that she could not finish *The Old Wives' Tale* because "there is no story in it"; but, to my judgment, this novel without a story is the most interesting work of prose fiction written in our generation. To my neighbour, who, by the way, is a very intelligent person, only the unusual is worthy of print, while to my simpler taste, a sincere transcript of ordinary life is more exciting than melodrama. *Treasure Island* is a good story well told, but it is not really a novel; *Anna Karénina*—the greatest novel ever written in any language—is scarcely a good story; and it is just here, I think, that the crisp definition of Dr. Phelps crumbles to pieces.

That master of realism, Henry Fielding, was far more than a gifted spinner of tales; he was the greatest imaginative historian, not only of his age, but of English literature. The plots in his books are buried beneath his vital criticism of life; and it is this criticism of life that makes his work an immortal heritage of English letters. For great fiction is great truth telling, and the true novel is not merely "a good story well told"—it is history illumined by imagination.

BY ROBERT GRANT

Professor Phelps's definition is certainly true to this extent, that a novel must be first of all "a good story well told." If his implication be that when it is more than this, it ceases to be a novel, I should take issue with him. Yet I doubt if we should disagree. A novel with a purpose becomes a tract when the purpose is so obtruded that the reader dwells on the theme rather than on the characters, and the novelist who blends sociology with fiction must create flesh and blood or fail as an ar-

tist. If Professor Phelps's definition be a caveat to philosophy in disguise (a red rag to the sensibilities of some critics), it would crown *Treasure Island*, that entrancing mere story of adventure which I never weary of reading, and taboo *Middlemarch*, that masterly excursion in soul anatomy. I select *Middlemarch* because I am aware that some people are bored by it. Yet to me the tap, tap of blind Pew's walking stick and the engaging villainy of long John Silver are no more consonant with Simon Pure fiction than the prolix domestic troubles of Lydgate and Rosamond Vincy or the moral obliquities of Bulstrode. I should quarrel with a definition which would extol a mere story to the exclusion of one that aims also to be a medium for ideas. Unquestionably the pre-requisite of any novel is that it should divert and beguile; but with this assured, the term "novel" applies equally well to a romance or to a cross section from real life which stimulates opinion. And so I have no doubt Professor Phelps intended.

BY WILL N. HARBEN

Professor Phelps in his admirable paper says: "I should define a high-class novel in five words—a *good story well told*." No fault, as I see it, can be found with this definition, for it very compactly covers the ground taken by Professor Phelps. However, it strikes me that he would have given us more to dispute over if he had gone further. A high-class bale of hay might be defined in five words as *some good hay well packed*, but it would still be only a high-class bale of hay, and there might be hungry horses and ambitious farmers who would like to see a bale of hay choice enough to take the "blue ribbon" at a State fair. So I am wondering how Professor Phelps, or any other authority in such matters, would define a novel of the very highest imaginable class, or, in other words, an ideally perfect novel. Tolstoy's thought-compelling idea of what literary art should be leads one to hope that some future genius, more skil-

ful even than this master himself, may write a novel that will be more to art and humanity than merely "*a good story well told*."

BY ANTHONY HOPE HAWKINS

With respect to Professor Phelps's definition, it is both too narrow and too broad. Too narrow because a bad story ill told may none the less be a novel—who will deny that? Too broad because not every story, even though good and well told, is a novel. "Short Stories" are not novels, and I don't think that "Animal Stories" are. I suggest—"A fictitious narrative comprising a number of interrelated situations, by means of which human life, manners and feelings are exhibited."

BY ROBERT HERRICK

The definition of a novel as "a good story well told" seems to me too futile for profitable discussion. Definitions usually are playthings for schoolmasters, but this one is peculiarly meaningless. What is "good"? What is a "story"? What is a "Good story"? What is "well told"? One could get as many answers to all these queries as there are types of minds and temperaments in the world. Personally I don't care what a piece of literature is called as long as it gives me a heightened sense of life, which Professor Phelps's definition certainly does not. Anything further that I might have to say on the subject would run into a general discussion of the novel, which I should prefer to make quite independently of the proposed definition.

BY RUPERT HUGHES

It is a fine thing to have scholarship and get over it. The people who never got over it are those who never quite get it. It strikes in and festers like a measles unable to break out.

I know that Professor William Lyon Phelps has had higher scholarship, for I was with him in the graduate department at Yale when he was exposed to it. Just when he recovered I don't know,