

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,

but it took me a long time to recuperate.

I still suffer from a dark and secret addiction to scholarly things and cherish a little private altar where I pay worship to the classics and the more abstruse themes of the moderns. But I try to keep my fiction hand from finding what books my left hand pulls from the shelf.

In spite of all I can do, however, learning will creep into my stories. At times my face pulls long and college words and sophomoric solemnities corrupt the text. But I try, I honestly try, to quell the craving, and I incessantly remind myself, "Remember the cap and bells. Pick up the bauble, and be human for the humans."

As Professor Phelps says, there is a pathetic demand for entertainment, and the novelists keep feeding textbooks to people who cry for storybooks.

But there is also a pitiful snobbery among the more serious critics and it needs a man of awe-inspiring knowledge like Phelps to emphasize the dignity of the story-teller.

It is so much easier to be solemn than to be tender; it is much easier to trace photographs than to paint portraits; it is so much easier to report the details of existence than to wreathe them into garlands of festival or funeral beauty; it is so much easier to be garrulous than to be interesting; it is so much easier to wield trite Latinities than vivid monosyllables; to be obscure or stupid than luminous and entertaining! But few of the critics realise it and because the best artist agonises to conceal his art, they think he lacks it.

There are countless ways of exploiting humanity through fiction. One is that of the scientist, another that of the lecturer, another that of the doctrinaire, another that of the critic of life; the rarest and hardest is that of the artist. To be any of these effectively is fine, but to be an artist of life is more—more—well it is at least more artistic than any of the others.

One man will come home from the

battle of Neuve Chappelle and moralise everybody to sleep with his infernal statistics and his dull details. Another will come home from a prayer meeting and bring with him humour and pathos and well-observed gestures that give the recital thrill and importance.

I am now trying to read a highly recommended novel full of beautiful pages, significant details, deep realities, vivifying touches, the meditations of a fine soul. Every bit of it wins my homage, yet when I lay it down, nothing drags me back to it. I forget its existence till I happen on the book itself again.

The author has put in everything but the story. It is a poor story greatly told. It is an excellent analysis of a few imaginary people. It is hardly a novel at all.

Novels exist of every variety from the "poor story poorly told," through the "good story well told," to the "great story greatly told." This last is the rarity of rarities. Hardly anybody, even among the great, has attained it more than once.

Meanwhile, it is fine to see a man of learning warning the writers and the readers that entertainment is a prime function of the novel. Many of the more dismal reviewers regard it as an almost unpardonable vice though it is eternally made evident that posterity chooses from each generation its charm-ers and lets its preachers die.

BY BASIL KING

Among the many efforts to define the novel—which is, to some extent, the attempt to formulate the volatile or catch the elusive—I find that of your distinguished essayist as good as any other, as far as it goes. A novel is certainly a good story well told. And yet the definition itself needs definition, since it brings one promptly to the questions: "When is a good story well told?" and "What is a good story?" For answers to these natural inquiries Professor Phelps leaves one entirely to implication.