

EMOTIONAL TENSION AND THE MODERN NOVEL.

It was my privilege to ask a question in the January number of this review and to answer it in my own way to the best of my ability. What is a novel? That was the question. Now the answer was: A novel is a pocket-theatre. In the course of an attempt to demonstrate the truth of this definition the words "romance" and "realism" could hardly fail to escape the modern writer's pen; for there is much talk in our day of the realistic school of fiction, and the romantic school, though not often mentioned, is understood to be opposed to it. Of course, it is easy to enter into a long discussion about the exact meanings of the two words; but, on the whole, it seems to be true that if the people who talk about schools of fiction mean anything or wish to mean anything, which sometimes seems doubtful, they mean this: the realist proposes to show men what they are; the romantist tries to show men what they should be. It is very unlikely that mankind will ever agree as to the relative merits of these two, and the discussion which was practically begun in Plato's time is not likely to end so long as people care what they read or what they think. The most any one can do is to give a personal opinion, and that means, of course, that he who expresses it commits himself and publicly takes either the one side or the other. For my part, I believe that more good can be done by showing men what they may be, ought to be, or can be than by describing their greatest weaknesses with the highest art. We all know how bad we are; but it needs much encouragement to persuade some of us to believe that we can really be any better. To create genuine interest and afford rest and legitimate amusement without losing sight of that part, and to do so in a more or less traditional way, seems to be the profession of the novelist who belongs to the romantic persuasion.

That novel-writing is a business I am credibly informed by my publishers. And since that is the case, it must be taken for granted that it is a business which to some extent must be practised like any other and which will succeed or fail in the hands of any particular man according as he is more or less fitted to carry it on. The qualifi-

cations for any business are three: native talent, education, and industry. Where there is success of the right kind the talent and power of application must be taken for granted. The education is and always must be a question of circumstance. With regard to novel-writing, when I speak of education I am not referring to it in the ordinary sense. Some people take a great deal of interest in concrete things, while others care more for humanity. The education of a novelist is the experience of men and women which he has got at first hand in the course of his own life, for he is of that class to whom humanity offers a higher interest than inanimate nature. He can use nature and art only as a scene and background upon which and before which his personages move and have their being. It is his business to present his readers with something which I have called the pocket-theatre, something which every man may carry in his pocket, believing that he has only to open it in order to look in upon the theatre of the living world. To produce it, to prepare it, to put it into a portable and serviceable shape, the writer must know what that living world is, what the men in it do and what the women think, why women shed tears and children laugh and young men make love and old men repeat themselves. While he is writing his book his human beings must be with him, before him, moving before the eye of his mind and talking into the ear of his heart. He must have lived himself: he must have loved, fought, suffered, and struggled in the human battle. I would almost say that to describe another's death he must himself have died.

All this accounts perhaps for the fact that readers are many and writers few. The reader knows one side of life, his own, better than the writer possibly can, and he reads with the greatest interest those books which treat of lives like his own. But the writer must have seen and known many phases of existence, and this is what the education of the novelist means: to know and understand, so far as he is able, men and women who have been placed in unusual circumstances. And this need not and should not lead him into creating altogether imaginary characters, nor men and women whose circumstances are not only unusual, but altogether impossible. We see grotesque pieces given at the theatre—too grotesque and too often given—which make us laugh, but never make us think. They would not make good novels. The novel must amuse, indeed, but should amuse reasonably, from an intellectual point of view, rather than as a piece of good fun. Its object is to make one see men and women who might really live,

talk, and act as they do in the book, and some of whom one would perhaps like to imitate. Its intention is to amuse and please, and certainly not to teach or preach; but in order to amuse well it must be a finely-balanced creation, neither hysterical with tears nor convulsed with perpetual laughter. The one is as tiring as the other and, in the long run, as unnatural.

It is easy, comparatively speaking, to appeal to the emotions, but it is hard to appeal to the heart. This may sound somewhat contradictory at first, but there is truth in it nevertheless. The outward emotions are in real life much more the expressions of the temperament than of what we call the heart. We all know that there are men and women who laugh and cry more easily than others, and we are rather inclined to believe that these are not they who feel most deeply. A very difficult question here presents itself. Bacon says somewhere that we are apt to extol the powers of the human intellect without invoking its aid as often as we might. This extolling of humanity has been a fashion of late years, and it has not yet disappeared, though its popularity is waning fast. In England Sir Andrew Clarke, M.D., has recently talked learnedly of "the religion of the body" and Lord Coleridge with eloquence of "the religion of the mind." These things are good enough, no doubt, but what of the religion of the heart, which is after all the only religion there is—if the heart is the earthly representative of the soul? There are some people—fewer than is generally supposed—who really do not believe in the existence of the soul. Let me tell them that they are very near to denying the existence of the heart. Perhaps some of them do, and they may live to repent of their unbelief in this world, if not in the next. What is the heart, or, rather, what do we in common conversation and writing understand by that word? It looks a great deal like attempting to define belief, but belief has received an excellent definition, for belief is knowledge and nothing else, so far as the individual who holds it is concerned. What we call the heart in each man and woman seems to mean the whole body of innate and inherited instincts, impulses, and beliefs, taken together, and in that relation to one another in which they stand after they have been acted upon throughout the individual's life by the inward vicissitudes and the outward circumstances to which he has been exposed. When all this is quiescent I think we call it Self. When roused to emotional activity we call it the Heart. But whatever we call it, it is to this Self or Heart that everything which is ethic and therefore permanent must appeal.

The foundation of good fiction and good poetry seems to be ethic rather than æsthetic. Everything in either which appeals to the taste, that is, to the æsthetic side, may ultimately perish as a mere matter of fashion; but that which speaks to man as man, independently of his fashions, his habits, and his tastes, must live and find a hearing with humanity so long as humanity is human. The right understanding of men and women leads to the right relations of men and women, and in this way, if in any, a novel may do good; when written to attain this end it may live; when addressed to the constant element in human nature, it has as good a right and as good a chance of pleasing the men and women of the world in our day as it had to appeal to the intellect of Pericles or to thrill the delicate sensibilities of Aspasia. Their novels were plays in outward effect, as ours should be in inward substance, and we must needs confess that the form in which their intellectual artistic luxuries were presented to them was superior to that of the modern effort included in four hundred pages at one dollar and twenty-five cents. Possibly, even probably, it is unfair to us to compare ourselves with Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes; yet the comparison suggests itself if the definition be true and if our novels really aspire to be plays.

We have indeed something in our favor which the genuine playwright has not. We appeal entirely to the imagination and, unless we introduce algebraic *formulæ* or scientific discussion, we give no standard measure in our books by which to judge the whole. We can call up surroundings which never were and never can be possible in the world, and if we are able to do it well enough we can put impossible characters upon our stage and make them do impossible things, and the whole, acting upon a predisposed imagination, create for the moment something almost like belief in the mind of the reader. We can conceive a tale fantastic beyond the bounds of probability, and if there is a touch of nature in it we may for a while transport our readers into Fairyland. We can clothe all of this in poetic language if our command of the English tongue is equal to the occasion, and we can lend pathos to a monster and heroism to a burlesque man. But the writer of plays for the real theatre cannot do this; if he does he makes that which in theatrical language is called a "burlesque" or a "spectacle"; or, if he be a member of the "decadent school," he may produce what he has decided to call by a new name—a production not always conducive to a high belief in human nature.

The writer of plays, if he write them for actual performance, has living interpreters, and they and he are judged by the standard of real life. He is to a great extent dependent upon his actors for the effect he hopes to produce, and they are dependent not only upon him, upon their individual education, depth of feeling, and power of expression, but also upon the material conditions and surroundings in which they have to do their work. The most dramatic scene of real life, if it actually took place on the stage of a theatre, would seem a very dull and tame affair to any one who chanced to find himself in the body of the house. The fundamental lack of interest, until it has been artificially aroused, is a gulf not to be bridged by such simple means as being really "natural." The art of the actor lies in knowing the precise degree of exaggeration necessary to produce the impression that he is not exaggerating at all, but exaggeration there must be. Without it, neither the words nor the actions can speak or appeal to the intelligence of the spectator.

But we novelists are in an easier position in our relations to our audience. We are granted many privileges and have many advantages which the playwright has not; for we can appeal to the heart almost directly without the conscious intervention of practiced eyes and ears, used to realities and eager to judge by real standards. We speak of Edwin's great height, broad shoulders, noble features, and silken mustache, and are not obliged to look out for an actor who shall fulfil these conditions of manly beauty before we can be heard without being ridiculous. Angelina's heavy hair is a fact on paper; on the stage it is a wig and must be a good one. Her liquid blue eyes are blue because we say they are; but it would annoy a playwright to find that his leading actress had light gray ones, when Edwin must compare them to the depths of the blackest night.

All this is rather frivolous, perhaps; but a little frivolity is to the point here, since there can be no amusement without a dash of it, and we profess to provide diversion to meet the public demand. With most men who have moulded, hacked, and chiselled the world into history, to think has been to act. With us novelists, so far as the world need know us, to think is to dream and perhaps to dream only little dreams of only passing significance. Few novelists are poets; only one or two have been statesmen; none have been conquerors. I suppose we are very insignificant figures compared with the great ones of this earth; but to our comfort we may dream, and if we need consolation we may console ourselves, as Montaigne puts it, with the

art which small souls have to interest great ones, "*L'art qu'ont les petites âmes d'intéresser les grandes.*"

Frivolity is not weakness, though in excess it may be a weakness. "*Carpe diem*" is a good motto for the morning, but in the evening "*Dulce desipere in loco*" is not to be despised as a piece of advice. The frivolities of great men and famous women have filled volumes of memoirs, and are not without interest to the little, as our little interests do not always seem dull to the great. The greater men are the more heart they have, good or bad, and the easier it is to affect them through it, through the multiform feelings which their varied lives have created within them, or through the few strong sentiments by which most of them are ruled, guided, or impelled according as they are conscientious, calculating, or impulsive, and to some extent according to their nationality, a matter which has almost as much to do with the author's dream as with the reader's subjective interpretation of it, and which largely determines the balance between sentiment and sentimentality.

Sentiment heightens the value of works of fiction as sentimentality lowers it. The distinction is not a fine one and has grown common enough in our day to be universally understood. We owe it, I think, to the international balance of sentiment and sentimentality that the novelists of the present day are the French, Anglo-Saxons, and Russians. With all due respect to the great German intelligence, it does not seem capable of producing what we call a novel. The German mind, measured by our standard, is sentimental, not romantic. Perhaps there is as much romance to be found in the history and traditions of Germany up to a date which I should place at about forty years ago as there is anywhere in the civilized world. Yet, for some reason or other, a modern German, as I have said, seems to be more sentimental than romantic in his habits of thought and feeling.

It is not possible in a paper of this length to inquire into the foundations of sentimentality and romance. Practically, however, what we call a romantic life is one full of dramatic incidents which come unsought as the natural consequence and result of a man's or a woman's character. It is therefore necessarily an exceptional life, and as such should have exceptional interest for the majority. When our lives are not filled with emotions they are too often crammed with insignificant details, too insignificant to bear recording in a novel, but yet making up for each of us all the significance life has. The great emotions are not every-day phenomena, and it is the desire to experi-

ence them vicariously which creates the demand for fiction and thereby and at the same time a demand for emotion. This is felt more particularly nowadays than formerly.

The French Revolution seems to have introduced an emotional phase into social history, and to it we must attribute directly or indirectly many of our present tastes and fashions. With it began the novel in France. With it the novel in the English language made a fresh start and assumed a new form. To take a very simple view of the question, I should like to hazard, as a guess, the theory that when the world had lived at a very high pressure during the French Revolution, the wars of Napoleon, and what has been called the "awakening of the peoples," it had acquired permanently "the emotional habit," just as a man who takes opium or morphia cannot do without it. There was a general desire felt to go on experiencing without dangerous consequences those varying conditions of hope, fear, disappointment, and triumph in which the whole world's nervous system had thrilled daily during so many years and at such fearful cost. The children of the women who had gone to the scaffold with Marie Antoinette, the sons of the men who had charged with Murat, who had stood by *La Tour d'Auvergne*, or who had fired their parting shot with Ney, were not satisfied to dwell in returning peace and reviving prosperity with nothing but insipid tales of shepherds and shepherdesses to amuse them. They wanted sterner, rougher stuff. They created a demand and it was forthwith supplied, and their children and children's children have followed their progenitors' footsteps in war and have adopted their tastes in peace.

Modern civilization, too, has done what it could to stir the hearts of men. Evil communications corrupt good manners, and it is not a play upon words to say that the increased facility of actual communications has widened and deepened those channels of communication which are evil and increased at the same time the demand for all sorts of emotion, bad or good. Not that emotion of itself is bad. It is often the contrary. Even the momentary reflection of true love is a good thing in itself. It is good that men and women should realize that a great affection is, or can be, a reality to many as well as a convenient amusement or a heart-rending drama to a few.

Modern civilization has created modern vices, modern crimes, modern virtues, austerities, and generosities. The crimes of to-day were not dreamed of a hundred years ago, any more than the sublimity of the good deeds done in our time to remedy our time's mistakes.

And between the angel and the beast of this ending century lie great multitudes of ever-shifting, ever-changing lives, neither very bad nor very good, but in all cases very different from what lives used to be in the good old days when time meant time and not money. There, too, in that vast land of mediocrities, emotions play a part of which our grandfathers never heard, and being real, of the living, and of superior interest to those who feel them, reflect themselves in the novel of to-day, changing the course of true love into very tortuous channels and varying the tale that is ever young with features that are often new. Within a short few months I myself have lived in a land where modern means of communication are not, and I have come to live here where applied science is doing her best to eliminate distance as a factor from the equation of exchanges, financial and intellectual. The difference between the manifestations of human feeling in Southern Italy and North America is greater and wider than can be explained in intelligible terms. Yet I am convinced that it is but skin-deep. Sentiment, sentimentality, taste, fashion, daily speech, acquired science, and transmitted tradition cleanse, soil, model, or deface the changing shell of mutable mortality, and nothing which appeals to that shell alone can have permanent life; but the prime impulses of the heart are, broadly speaking, the same in all ages and almost in all races. The brave man's beats as strongly in battle to-day, the coward's stands as suddenly still in the face of danger, boys and girls still play with love, men and women still suffer for love, and the old still warn youth and manhood against love's snares—all that and much more comes from depths not reached by civilizations nor changed by fashions. Those deep waters the real novel must fathom, sounding the tide-stream of passion and bringing up such treasures as lie far below and out of sight—out of reach of the individual in most cases—until the art of the story-teller makes him feel that they are or might be his. Cæsar commanded his legionaries to strike at the face. Humanity, the novelist's master, bids him strike only at the heart.

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HOW TO PREVENT THE COMING OF CHOLERA.

THIS is the lesson which the modern physiologist has learned from his inoculations and his cultivation of micro-organisms: the seed, or the germ, may be either preserved or destroyed. If preserved, it may retain its latent life for many years. Then perhaps it may spring up, but may lack moisture and wither away, or it may fall among germicides and be choked; or, under favoring degrees of soil and temperature, it may fructify with amazing rapidity, pursuing its devastating course as it is carried onward from one favorable or unprotected circle to others, until its course is checked by natural decay or by the opposition of intelligent men who are striving to destroy all those terribly destructive enemies of the human race called zymotic diseases.

Before 1831 no such frightful disease as cholera had been known in England. It was quite new to our oldest and most experienced practitioners. But it had been expected. It had long been known in India. In 1817 it had been terribly fatal in the northeastern districts, not only among the native population, but with the English troops; and afterward it could be distinctly traced in a northwesterly course—first to Persia, then to Russia, through Poland to Germany, and then at Hamburg. Its arrival in England had been foretold, and (just as expected) it arrived on the northeastern coast of England, at Sunderland, for the first time in 1831. It extended over Great Britain and Ireland in a form quite new to the medical profession of the time. It then crossed the Atlantic, invaded the United States, turned to the southeast, attacked Spain, the north coast of Africa, France, and Italy. Such a course, overcoming all obstacles of winds and seasons and climates, mountains or the ocean, but following the track of travellers, at once pointed to the mode of spreading which has been observed in all subsequent epidemics. The cholera poison travels. In some way it is carried from person to person—sometimes by persons who have not themselves suffered from its effects. There is abundant evidence that in all the visitations of cholera it has been directly imported, has been taken to a place previously healthy by persons who have arrived from infected places, and has spread first to those who have had inter-