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Talks on Criticism

IV.

"There are more things in heaven and earth . . ."

IN the heroic romance the hero judges his opponent by his eyes. If they flinch he will flinch. If they grow tender, so will he. Books are like that also. Judge them by what has happened to the author; and then by what happens to the reader when he reads.

A good book shows that some chemical change in the writer has preceded the writing. He has been excited, he has been moved, he has been angered, he has been amused, he has been touched, he has been depressed, or he has been exalted. A crude test of a book's excellence is the state of the author before and after composing. A mind's pressure has been raised and then discharged. What is the difference in tension worth? If this is crude, it is not because it is a difficult test to apply. To discover why a book has been written, or to measure the discharge of emotions, great or little, is not difficult. The hard thing is to distinguish between gusty explosions of cheap gases and the quiet intensity of high temperatures—between the staccato emotions of melodrama, underlined, relayed, megaphoned, and the power of sharp irony or the quiet of the really tragic. Temperature is a bad figure to use in writing of literature. Light is a better one, for the best light is light without undue heat.

And here, to return to the value of science in criticism, is something new in an old art. The science of criticism, until the eighteenth century, was rhetoric, but rhetoric concerns itself chiefly with literary effects not literary causes; it is the reader not the writer who is analyzed. When, in the Augustan age, critics became moral philosophers, the mind of the writer began to be actively discussed. His philosophy, his ethics, his prejudices were somewhat tediously dissected by all the eighteenth century critics. Tediously, because usually they did not care so much for what the writer was and felt as whether he conformed to Homer's principles or God's and the deist knew him. Thus Addison on Milton, and Pope on his enemies and friends.

But experimental science has given critics a new weapon and a new point of view—also new opportunities to make fools of themselves. The mysterious change in potential before a good book begins to be written, the state of the swan before the golden egg was laid, begins to seem less mysterious. There are psychological tests for the emotions and psychological names for mind states which define even when they do not explain. Opium and alcohol are betrayed in the choice of words, realism is sometimes a complex, fearful imagination may be a form of paranoia, and mediocrity a matter of inhibition.

The economists, too, have begun to scrutinize the writer. They explain his liberal passions by the rise of a new industrial class, expound his interest in very common men in terms of democracy, explain the change in his attitude toward women by her economic emancipation. Criticism of Dickens, George Eliot, Mark Twain, Henry James, Hardy, Masfield is shot through with economics, sociology, or psychology.

In short, thanks to the new sciences, what happens to the writer of a good book has become an important question because new and interesting answers are ready. Rhetoric has given place to a kind of psycho-analysis.

By this new method of critical analysis far more concrete results are arrived at than the Sublime, the Ridiculous, the Meritorious, and the Moral of

Fable

By GEORGE O'NEIL

ILED him on into the frosted wood;
Stamping our feet, beneath a larch we stood,
Breathing white edifices on the air;
And nothing else was moving there.

The branches hung as if they had not known
A day when any little wind had blown.
The snow above our heads wrought wondrously
A thousand gargoyles on a tree.

Freezing, we waited by the frozen brook. . . .
"Listen" I said, and hardly dared to look.
A drift slid suddenly across the ice,
A frigid hawthorne trembled twice.

Then, slowly, through the branches, marble-veined,
A hoof, a haunch, a heavy shoulder, strained;
A head swung down into a glassy heap
And smashed it with a sideward sweep.

I could not hold my tongue: "You see the horn!
That twisted golden bone . . . the Unicorn!"
I could not hold it back. And as I spoke
A splintered universe awoke.

The thing was gone. "You saw" I spun around
To read his eyes. He kicked a knotted mound,
And all the gargoyles tumbled on his head.
"I'm numb, I'm going home," he said.

This Week

"Annals of the New York Stage."
Reviewed by *George Pierce Baker.*

"Marquise" and "Fallen Angels."
Reviewed by *Oliver M. Saylor.*

"Whatever We Do." Reviewed by
Robert B. Macdougall.

"Him." Reviewed by *John Hyde Preston.*

"Dominion Over Experience." By
Christopher Morley.

Next Week, or Later

Europe's Present Cultural Product.
By *Maxim Gorki.*

the earlier critics. That is the danger of the process. Write a book to prove that Poe was frustrate, Tennyson a portomaniac, Hawthorne a suppressed sexualist, etc., etc., and you have given your public facts they can readily understand. The pathology of drugs or the behavior of abnormal individuals is much more comprehensible than esthetics. Unfortunately there is a false simplicity in scientific theories applied by men not themselves scientists which must irritate real scientists as it certainly de-

(Continued on next page)

Cambridge on the Caboodle

By FORD MADOX FORD

ALL the world is said to love a lover and I am sure that the greater proportion of it loves Mr. E. M. Forster. I do myself—Mr. Forster as novelist. He has for so long occupied so peculiar a position in Hampstead which is a suburb of London singularly like Beacon Hill; I have for so many years gone in awe of him that I approach this,* his exegesis of the products of his art, with the feelings of a naughty schoolboy about to rob his headmaster's apple trees.

Hampstead to the north of London is a very singular place. It is Beacon Hill—but you could tuck Beacon Hill away in the corner of it and never find it again. It is with its rarefied atmosphere, its cold breezes coming from the north, its frosty inaccessibility, the Mecca of our intelligentsia. And, for many years Mr. E. M. Forster has been its prophet. Before him it was Mr. Henry James. In my young youth I was browbeaten into detesting Shelley by its inhabitants; just after adolescence I was nearly browbeaten into never reading James and my young manhood balked at the mention of Mr. E. M. Forster as the pony I used to have in those days balked at the sight of a perambulator.

So that, when "The Room With a View" was published, or a year or so after, happening to be shut up alone with it, and no other book, I took it up with trepidation. I remained, if not to pray, then at least to read all of Mr. Forster's earlier work. And, since then, I have ranged myself amongst his warmest admirers. He has retained for me, nevertheless, his aspect of aloofness, awfulness, chaste reason, tenuity, sobriety. I have tiptoed past his windows as the true believer used to do outside the tent of the Prophet—for fear of disturbing his reveries. I even printed him in the *English Review*.

Alas, what was my bewilderment as I read through the pages of "Aspects of the Novel" to find that Mr. Forster's attitude towards the art and craft that has given him honor and fame is practically that of the periodical called *Punch* towards the graver problems of life. He admires virtue, all the virtues, "O dear yes," but how he pokes fun at them! He cites an immense number of second class English novelists and jests over them for all the world like a contributor to *Punch* making fun of his own children for the benefit of the public. Thus childhood with all its beauty is for the English eternally sullied—and thus for Mr. Forster's hearers is the novel kept in its place.

This volume is made up of the Clark lectures delivered for Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1927. I have no means of knowing what Mr. Forster's audience was like. I have no doubt that it was young, sober, intellectual, chaste. . . . Or it may have been old and all that too. But it cannot have contained one novelist who was also an artist. Otherwise Mr. Forster would not now be alive.

I hesitated to arrive at this conclusion. I remained incredulous until halfway through the book. I find the language in which it is written extremely difficult to understand. I have had to read sentence after sentence two or three times over. I suppose I am too Americanized—but I dare say I never could have understood the persiflage of the Cambridge don when speaking of serious subjects—religion, love, poverty, or the arts. What the English call Things! You mustn't talk seriously about Things in good English society.

*Aspects of the Novel. By E. M. Forster. New York. Harcourt, Brace & Company. 1927. \$2.50.

But a university—at any rate an English one—exists to have the aspect at least of talking about Things. Yet it mustn't. The English youth goes to his university with the mentality of a Continental child of fourteen and the province of the university is to maintain him in the same mental status. Because, if the Englishman ever passed the stage of mental puberty the Empire would break up and there could be no more tea parties, club smoking rooms, Ranelaghs, Colonies, Anglican clergy, or Cabinet ministers. We could not keep on carrying the white man's burden if some god or some don conferred upon us the gift of the seeing eye.

So Mr. Forster deserves infinitely well of his college, his university, his country, and his Empire. As I have said, it was only when halfway through the book that I arrived at this, to me, amazing conclusion. Our present day national anthem runs:

Land of hope and glory, mother of the free,
How can we extol thee, who are born of thee?

And I can assure you that when, in foreign lands with Sir Edward Elgar's music I hear that modest query, tears of nostalgia bedew my lids. We are all right. We really are. But when the same question is addressed by a novelist to his art it becomes quite a different matter. It is no doubt the reason why Mr. Forster has to begin his lectures with the assertion that there is no first-class English novelist and, presumably, that a first-class novel never has and never will be written in England, at any rate by an Englishman—for all the first-class novels that were written in England during the last quarter of a century were the products of one sort of dago or another. So at least says Mr. Forster, premising in the mouths of the English reader the immortal words of my great Aunt Eliza—"Sooner than be idle I'd take a book and read."

This cry from the soul—this whole cry from the soul—was wrung from me by the following words which occur on page 146 of Mr. Forster's book: "*He (M. André Gide) is a little more solemn than an author should be about the whole caboodle.*" And there you have the whole attitude of the British don-critic towards our art. The novel, novel writing, form, language, construction, ancestry—all these things which are the object of serious study outside England in places from which come the first-class novels—all these things are "the whole caboodle" which, if you take seriously, you will never make fun of your children in the pages of *Punch*. You will be un-English.

Now I wonder how seriously Mr. Forster takes his own novels and with how much passion—how much *saeva indignatio*—he writes them. For, for a novelist to be great in the sense that Turgeniev, or Stendhal, or Flaubert, or Conrad were formally and stylistically great, or in the sense that Dostoevsky was great epilepto-romantically, or even Balzac, pantingly, spouting like a whale, fountains of fairy tales disguised as a *comédie humaine* . . . Or even Tolstoy, or Chekhov, or Maupassant, or Daudet . . . Or great as were undoubtedly Thackeray, Dickens, Smollett, Richardson, and Defoe . . . or great as was Henry James and are, if you will, Mr. Joyce and Theodore Dreiser—for the production of each of these forms of greatness there is necessary a fierce indignation, if not of necessity against external oppositions or institutions, then at least against that nature of things that will not let one write better than one does. A novelist must know despair, bitterness, passion, and must wear upon his forehead the sweat of agony that distinguishes his Craft and Mystery. It is out of those depths that he must call. Hang it all, this world that has known a million million thinking souls has produced, let us say, twenty great novelists from the day when the first word of "The Golden Ass" was penned, down to the last word of "Ulysses." And is this terrific immortality of twenty over a million million to be earned by the facile or lethargically optimistic inhabitant of Cambridge common rooms?

Mind, I am not suggesting that that is what Mr. Forster is; I am merely complaining that instead of telling us how "A Passage to India" was conceived, touched in, retouched, smoothed down, or here and there, heightened, he gives us these tea cup clattering disquisitions upon the Sir Willoughby Patterne of George Meredith. I would bet my hat that Mr. Forster's novels were not written out of his complacencies but during sedulous and rather dreadful days. Why is it not those that he has given us rather than these heartless disquisitions upon English amateurs with which any one of the readers of his novels could just as well have pro-

vided him? It is probably because Mr. Forster is too modest to write about himself. English gentlemen do not do this but modesty and novelists have nothing to do with each other and it is impossible for a novelist to be an English gentleman. No can do.

Heaven knows I would not fall foul of Professor Forster if he were not also the author of "A Passage to India" and certainly I would never fall foul of any novel of Mr. Forster's. Dog ought not to eat dog and the lowest of all crimes is the crabbing of another fellow's benefit. But, in as much as Mr. Forster is a novelist he is a priest and in this work it is as if with the one hand he elevated the Host whilst with the other he writes donnish witticisms about how the sacred wafers are baked. So I shed these tears.

Starting out and finishing with a half-true assertion and ending with the same, Mr. Forster includes between those statements a vast number of ingenious tropes, metaphors, similes, figures, quips, and pawkinesses that as I have said make me have to read most of his sentences twice—as one has to read French verse twice, once for the sense and once for the rhythm. But it is no more than a half-truth to say that there are no first-class English novelists when by that you mean that we have no novelists as great as Dostoevsky, and Tolstoy. We have Defoe, Smollett, Dickens, Thackeray, each one as amateurishly great a story teller and moralist as either of the Russians who are in no sense artists. For it is merely quarrelling with a man's temperament or subject matter to say that "Vanity Fair" is not as great as "War and Peace" or "Humphrey Clinker" as great as "Crime and Punishment." But the Continental, not English, sense of the word "greatness" connotes, along with a great seriousness of approach to life, a certain consummate mastery over form, phrase, and inevitable progression, and it is perfectly true to say that Anglo-Saxondom has no first-rate novelist in the sense that Turgeniev, Chekhov, Stendhal, and Flaubert were first rate. One may make a reservation in favor of Conrad and Henry James to whom we are too near to judge with any certainty. But I am pretty certain that if we ever do prove to have any first-class novelists it is those two writers and their lineage that will produce them. Mr. Forster, very symptomatically, does not mention Conrad at all in his list of main references though he does mention Mr. Asquith. But neither does he mention Stendhal, Flaubert, Turgeniev, or Chekhov. He devotes, however, some rather patronizing attention, as we have seen, to M. André Gide, and though he does not mention Anatole France he cites M. Abel Chevalley. These omissions and inclusions are not queer; they are merely characteristic of Cambridge *intelligentsia* to whom Mr. Asquith must be more important than Joseph Conrad and Mr. Max Beerbohm than, let us say, Gogol. And so, introducing himself with a half-truth, the Cambridge professor must set out from an impossible projection. He insists that you must think of all the novelists in the world, from Apuleius to Miss Elizabeth Madox Roberts, seated together under a vast dome, all writing away simultaneously whilst you are to peer over their shoulders and perceive that they all write much in the same way, or with not such great differences as all that.

This is to inculcate at once the English doctrine that all art is just a "caboodle." The novel, you are to believe, has neither form nor craftsmanship; in the past it has exhibited no development nor will it in the future in any way develop. It is the handmaiden of society and the arts and, unlike Topsy, it has never even grown. Now that doctrine is a profound necessity to the British Empire for, as I have said, if we ever took the arts seriously—which is synonymous with thinking—we could not continue to bear up the white man's burden. That I dare say would be a tragedy for the world. I really quite believe it.

But the novel has a perfectly definite history and has developed as traceably as the pterodactyl from the amoeba, or the Japanese child's flying toy of twisted rubber, into the Handley-Page. The modern novel began picaresquely with the contemporaries of Lope da Vega and passed to England with John Mabbé's translation of Hermann Allemano's "Guzman d'Alfarache," or "The History of a Rogue," a picaresque but horribly moralizing work. "Guzman d'Alfarache" begot Defoe; Defoe, Richardson; Richardson, Diderot; Diderot and the

Encyclopedists, Stendhal, Flaubert, and Turgeniev; those three begot Conrad and Henry James and Stephen Crane, and those three again the modern American novelist. During all that time the novel progressed from being the merely barbarous stringing together of piquant rogueries and hypocritical moralizing to be the tremendous social engine that, with its rendering of our times it is today. If the novel as teacher, counselor, and guide to life has replaced the priest, the historian, the newspaper, and even Dr. Sigmund Freud—for the newspaper never was much trusted and according to observers is today not trusted at all, at least in this country and Dr. Freud has become nearly as obsolete as Darwin—if the novel has taken the place of all those formidable coercers of the past it is, be sure, because it has developed in its rendering of the lives and emotions of humanity.

This the Cambridge don will have none of; should he utter such heresies to Anglicans he would be false to his pious founders and the donors of his stipend. He lets the legions thunder past, utters a few quips, and goes to sleep again till next spring brings its new Clarkian lecturer.

As I have attacked Mr. Forster—though only as a don—with a great deal of violence, I hope somebody will ask me to review his next novel so that I may handsomely redress the balance. His book, indeed, is a very good book if you wish to acquire the point of view of a don upon literature. It contains fewer slips of grammar than is usual in collections of lectures and several pleasant little jokes. I dare say that if I had been present at the Clarkian lecture of 1927, given Mr. Forster's pleasant voice, cultured appearance, and personal magnetism I might have giggled like any girl graduate, though after that pink pottage there might have come the exceeding bitter cry. But the moral of the whole thing as far as England is concerned, and Mr. Forster is only a symbol of England, is this:—

The blacksmith says: "By hammer and hand all art doth stand;" the baker thinks he is indispensable to society and so he learns his job. Yesterday I was having my shoes scientifically and industriously shined in the Grand Central railway station by some sort of perspiring dago. I said that shining a shoe seemed to be a skilled and complicated affair. He said it was and he added that he guessed New York could not go on without him and his fellows for no one would walk the street without shiny shoes. Well, the novelist—the great novelist—must have the same conviction with regard to his own art. Then to the measure of the light vouchsafed him he may shine in his place and be content. But Cambridge won't like him.

Talks on Criticism

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presses readers of strong literary feeling. Someone discovers that psychologically the sexes merge gradually one into the other, and that those born in this marginal physiology have certain definite reactions to their environment. Quick, says the new critic, rummage through literature to find evidence of homosexuality, and when you have found it throw a flood of light on literary problems never before solved. Light, yes, provided that the theory is correctly understood, and the evidence is sound, but light on only a corner of a corner of literary genius. A psychological peculiarity may explain all of a monicule but only part of a man.

And yet to the first great question of criticism, the nature of the author's mind at the moment of delivery, science has given some such interesting answers that we have all leaned expectantly in that direction and let equally important questions go without answer at all. Tell me what the man is and I'll tell you what his book is, reverse Buffon's proposal to place the man by the style he chose to write in. The first has the spotlight just now in criticism, and a psychological study of a great man of letters has ten times as many readers as a venture in esthetics. By 1950 we shall probably have a new and far clearer conception of the physics and chemistry of that human machine which conditions authorship. Yet now only one question is being effectively answered and that only in part, as if one should say, why did the man fail?, and he answered, because he was drunk. But why was he drunk, and does success come from not being drunken? Criticism cannot stop with psychology.