

taking in its absurdity, and affirm my conviction that, by the side of George Eliot—and the comparison shouldn't be necessary, Meredith appears as a shallow exhibitionist (his famous 'intelligence' a laboured and vulgar brilliance) and Hardy, decent as he is, as a provincial manufacturer of gauche and heavy fictions that sometimes have corresponding virtues. For a positive indication of her place and quality I think of a Russian, not Turgènev, but a far greater, Tolstoy—who, we all know, is pre-eminent in getting 'the spirit of life itself'. George Eliot, of course, is not as transcendently great as Tolstoy, but she *is* great, and great in the same way. The extraordinary reality of *Anna Karenina* (his supreme masterpiece, I think) comes of an intense moral interest in human nature that provides the light and courage for a profound psychological analysis. This analysis is rendered in art (and *Anna Karenina*, *pace* Matthew Arnold, is wonderfully closely worked) by means that are like those used by George Eliot in *Gwendolen Harleth*—a proposition that will bear a great deal of considering in the presence of the texts. Of George Eliot it can in turn be said that her best work has a Tolstoyan depth and reality.

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[Concluded].

COMMENTS AND REVIEWS

HENRY JAMES AND THE ENGLISH ASSOCIATION.

Henry James, we know, had oddities that grew upon him in his later years. So, if we care to take it, we have an easy explanation to hand when we read the letter he wrote to John Bailey on November 11th, 1912, declining the offered chairmanship of the English Association:

'It is out of my power to meet your invitation with the least decency or grace. For me, frankly, my dear John, there is simply no question of these things: I am a mere stony, ugly monster of *Dissociation* and *Detachment*. I have never in all my life gone in for these other things, but have dodged and shirked and successfully evaded them—to the best of my power at least, and so far as they have in fact assaulted me: all my instincts and the very essence of any poor thing that I might, or even still may, trump up for the occasion as my "genius" have been against them, and are more against them at this day than ever, though two or three of them (meaning by "them" the collective and congregated bodies, the splendid organizations, aforesaid) have successfully got their teeth, in spite of all I could do, into my bewildered and badgered antiquity . . . I can't go into it

all much—but the rough sense of it is that I believe only in absolutely independent, individual and lonely virtue, and in the serenely unsociable (or if need be at a pinch sulky and sullen) practice of the same; the observation of a lifetime having convinced me that no fruit ripens but under that temporarily graceless rigour, and that the associational process for bringing it on is but a bright and hollow artifice, all vain and delusive. (I speak here for the Arts—or of my own poor attempt at one or two of them; the other matters must speak for themselves). Let me even while I am about it heap up the measure of my grossness: the mere dim vision of presiding or what is called, I believe, taking the chair, at a speechifying public dinner, fills me, and has filled me all my life, with such aversion and horror that I have in the most odious manner consistently refused for years to be present on such occasions even as a guest pre-assured of protection and effacement . . . I have at such times let them know in advance that I was utterly not to be counted on, and have indeed quite gloried in my shame; sitting at home the while and gloating over the fact that I wasn't present'.

How regrettable was this unnecessary scruple, or moroseness, or timidity, in James. Surely he could see that it was his duty to lend his prestige to the work of an Association whose explicit aims are 'To uphold the standards of English writing and speech' and 'To spread as widely as possible the knowledge and enjoyment of English Literature'. The advantages of associating the maintenance of the essential standards with the cultivation of others for which recognition is more readily got are surely plain: if social solidarity can't be promoted for good ends, what hope is there? Good-mixing has its uses.

But perhaps James offered himself the excuse that his backwardness was unlikely to set a dangerous example. And had he been able to project himself forward some decades and then look back he would no doubt have felt that his expectations had been justified. And in *News-Letter No. 2* of the English Association (September, 1946)—which might all the same have surprised him—he would have read the appreciative announcement of yet another willing President-elect:

'The recent publication of the two first volumes of Sir Osbert Sitwell's autobiography, *Left Hand, Right Hand* and *The Scarlet Tree*, besides being a literary event of the first magnitude has gone some way towards satisfying the interest felt by all lovers of wit, poetry, and "fine writing" in the personality of the head of the Sitwell family. Among members of the English Association this interest is naturally heightened by the knowledge that he will be next year's President.

'Eighth holder of a Baronetcy created on the eve of the Regency and scion of a house whose roots strike deep into the ancient earth of England, Sir Osbert's tastes and activities have never been those of the typical Derbyshire squire—though, to

be sure, one of his forbears *did* hunt a tiger in the woods about Renishaw. In the realm of letters our President Elect has left hardly any province uninvaded, and he has cultivated each separate field with characteristic energy, originality and distinction'.

We are told (in his own words) that 'he has conducted, in conjunction with his brother and sister, a series of skirmishes and hand-to-hand battles against the Philistine' and that he instituted '“Joy through Intelligence Campaign” (Inc.)'. And the *News-Letter* proceeds to cull for us the vivacities that stand against Sir Osbert's name in *Who's Who*: 'students of that instructive annual have long since perceived with delight that [his] recreations assume a different form every year'. 'Among his self-recorded activities perhaps the most fascinating is the Rememba Bomba League, "founded in 1924: reconstituted, 1927"'. But, alas, the badge of membership is not described'.

The English Association, it will be seen, goes ahead wholeheartedly, but without undue solemnity, with its work of upholding standards. The nature of those standards may be gathered from any number of *English*, the quarterly it publishes. The ethos of *English* is fairly suggested by the passages quoted above from the *News-Letter*. Some years ago we commented on the Association's official statement that it 'lived on the earnings' of *Poems of To-Day* (an educational work on which Mr. T. S. Eliot made some blunt remarks in *The Criterion*). The Association has been true to its traditions, as both the reviews and the verse in *English* bear witness. And it is all in keeping that the hundreds of teacher-members who have instructed their pupils in *Poems of To-Day* should now teach them to admire, not only Sir Osbert's prose and wit, but also Miss Edith Sitwell's poetry.

All those who have ever been concerned in any attempt to make university literary studies minister to life would find a file of *English* worth glancing through—for the evidence so abundantly exposed bears even more significantly upon universities than upon schools. It must suffice here to say that if such investigators looked up a 'Socio'logical Note' that appeared in *Scrutiny* (Vol. XII, No. 1), under the title 'The Discipline of Letters', they might agree that the analysis given in that Note was strikingly confirmed: in *English* the associational spirit prevails completely and complacently—prevails as a defence, certainly *not* of living literature, or of the kind of life of mind and spirit that makes literature a living influence.

'THE TIMES LITERARY SUPPLEMENT'.

It is pleasant, after the foregoing observations, to be able to comment to different effect. Perhaps not everyone who gave up the brightened and modernized *Times Literary Supplement* some years ago has become aware of the recent improvement. It is a marked one, and the *T.L.S.* is now, on the whole, a credit to English critical journalism. The first thing one notes is the dis-