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THE PLAIN MAN AND THE NOVEL

FOR some years Mr. E. M. Forster's *Aspects of the Novel* has been accepted as the classic modern estimate of the novel. Not only classic, but also human, not only scholarly, but neat, whimsical and graciously cultured, it reads less like a critical essay than the work of a brilliant talker.

To Mr. Forster the idea of talking to the Plain Man evidently, and not surprisingly did not occur; the qualities and qualifications of his listener were wisely unspecified; but it always seemed that he spoke largely, if not quite exclusively, for that type of person of whom one now hears it said that he lives on the margins of life—the type known as cultivated.

Stimulating, but incomplete

Mr. Roger Dattler, in *The Plain Man and The Novel* (Nelson, 2s. 6d.), boldly, and, I think, rather unwisely, names his audience thus severely restricting his scope to an examination of only a fraction of the novel's development. In this way he writes a pungent book that is at the same time nothing like comprehensive, which Mr. Dattler was quite capable of making it; a book that is more of a vigorous stimulant than a reliable guide to the general reader.

From the Detective Novel Mr. Dattler proceeds to examine in turn the Novel of Propaganda (emphasis on *The Jungle*, *Dem Souls*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*), the Historical Novel (Scott, *War and Peace*, *Jew Süß*), the Novel of Industrial Life (remarking, with complete justice, "the peculiar severance of Letters from Industry"), the Autobiographical Novel (*David Copperfield*, *The Way of All Flesh*, *Sons and Lovers*), the Sex Novel (Lawrence nicely run over with the tape measure), the Novel of the Sea ("The amazing feature of our sea-faring literature is that it has remained so limited in quantity"), the Rural Novel (Hardy, the school satirized in *Cold Comfort Farm*), the Social Novel (*The Forsyte Saga*, Arnold Bennett, Priestley, Romain Rolland, E. M. Forster).

It will be seen at once that there are, either from choice or necessity, many omissions from this departmental survey. The Satirical Novel (Swift, Jane Austen, *Cakes and Ale*, *The Way of All Flesh*) is given no special place; it shares a silent exclusion with the Psychological Novel (Henry James, Virginia Woolf, Dostoievsky, and a legion of others). There is no department for the Picaresque Novel, the Novel of War, the Novel of Action, the Novel of Retrospection (in which Proust is supreme), or the Comic Novel; most surprising of all, there is no department for the widest and most popular manifestation of the novel form has yet known, the Novel of Love. It would be unfortunate for the Plain Man if Mr. Dattler's survey were to cause us to place *Uncle Tom's Cabin* high in the ranks of the world's fiction, and at the same time accord no place to *Madame Bovary*, *Anna Karenina*, Turgenev, *Jane Eyre*, or even *Human Bondage*.

Maugham ignored

Of Maugham, together with Hemingway and most other American writers, Mr. Dataller makes no mention at all; Joyce is dismissed as responsible for a "sterile obscurantism," which is a libel on the author of at least the greatest short story in the language; and there is not a word on any other Irish writer (O'Connor, O'Flaherty, O'Faolain, George Moore).

These omissions are, I take it, part of the price paid for the title—which, having regard to the excellence of almost everything else, Mr. Dataller says (his chapters on Conrad, Lawrence and the Rural Novel are all good)—is a great pity. The discussion value of the book is not in question—the style is vigorous, meaty, argumentative, his conclusions the product of a well-read and independent mind. Indeed, I should go so far as to say that, within the limitations indicated, it is the best book of its kind since Forster's. Critic though I am of those limitations, I shall, in fact, keep it side by side with that hitherto unrivalled and indispensable work.

H. E. BATES