

case permit himself the effective use of a plot. But it is not to the ready-made plot nor to the natural dramatic unity of the theme that the story owes its strength. It is a theme with which it would be easy to fail completely. A religious impostor declares himself to be God and induces a large number of respectable people in the little Ohio community of Leatherwood to worship him. The man himself, though in a measure self-deceived, is by no means insane—he hasn't even the dignity of complete self-delusion. Still less is he of the stuff of which martyrs are made: on the contrary this man who pretended to be God—his real name was Dylks—is a great coward. One would suppose then that the story would simply be a picture of human degradation. But Mr. Howells rises above the absurdities, the vulgarities that are inherent in his theme. The grandiosity that associates itself with the large pretensions of Dylks gives occasion for humor almost Rabelaisian in bigness, though skilfully kept within the bounds of taste. The irony of the story is masterly; it somehow exalts rather than belittles human nature, while it shows how near the heart the greatest folly really lies. One sympathizes with the deluded worshipers and one's feeling is unalloyed with a trace of condescension. These hearty muscular men and hard-working natural-minded women—too healthy to be morbid, too impulsive and at the same time too conscientious to be merely absurd—one is not ashamed to acknowledge as kin.

*The Leatherwood God* is in its way a triumph. Perhaps Mr. Howells has never written a more vital story.

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MR. BRITLING SEES IT THROUGH. By H. G. WELLS. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916.

Mr. Wells has written a novel about the war that is infinitely the better as a war book because it begins by being a very personal sort of story and maintains the personal point of view throughout. *Mr. Britling Sees It Through* is a triumph for Mr. Wells's method as a novelist, a vindication of his way of looking at things. When one lays down the book one realizes quite clearly that man is a rather absurd and self-deluded creature; that the mind of the average man is a mass of contradictions; that a gaily domestic and philosophic kind of life does not by any means render one safe from the most fearful shocks; that the things we live by are for the most part not realities at all. The realities themselves we are afraid of, and we do not know how to grasp them. "That which is far off and exceeding deep, who shall find it out?" Yet the book really does give one courage, and it actually makes one glad to be a man and to be alive in the year 1916. Most remarkable of all, the story is amusing, and if it gradually ceases to be merry and becomes intensely grave, one does not feel that the change of mood involves a jarring reversal

of mental gears. Really, the story is as earnest at the beginning as at the end.

A part of the secret of Mr. Wells's method is, no doubt, simply that as a novelist he has little method. His novels are quite frankly disquisitional: the author has an air of not troubling himself to create an illusion, of simply telling what an intelligent listener would naturally want to know. His character-drawing seems to be done in rather an off-hand way; he appears to disregard niggling details that to a realist or to a conscientious romancer might seem important. Perhaps this is just one way of "lying like truth"—a trick of convincing by appearing not to realize the necessity of convincing. But the truth is that Mr. Wells has a much clearer conception of his meaning and far fewer prepossessions as to what the novel, as a form of art, should be, than have most of his fellow novelists.

But Mr. Wells's novels are something more than meaningful in the sense that they are disquisitional. Imaginative literature works, of course, as much through feeling as through thought. The interactions of thought and feeling in the thinking of any human being are not easy to analyze: to be guided by feeling is no doubt a mistake, and yet feeling of some sort seems to lead intelligence and to determine the purposes for which we think. In proportion as feeling becomes impersonal, it becomes exalted and purified, and it then asserts an authority over us. The impersonal note not only inspires; it convinces. But of course our feelings, in the rough, in the crude state, are preponderantly personal: they are alloyed with selfishness and fear; they are encrusted with customary ideas and with habits; they are veined with preferences formed Heaven knows how. What is the rationale of the quite sincere and unselfish passion that may inspire a man ardently to defend, for example, the English pronunciation of Greek?

One cannot begin to be impersonal all at once: one must clarify and refine. Mr. Wells does this. The first part of his story—the part that tells of Mr. Britling's family life, and of the impressions that this life made upon an American visitor—is an amusing and astonishingly complete revelation of personal character. Mr. Britling in the bosom of his family is the highly civilized, highly educated, very likable good fellow, who thinks and writes much about life, and doesn't half know either life or himself. He represents the personal life in its jolliest, most self-confident, and most purblind state.

Mr. Britling, however, like most of us, has his periods of suspecting that all is not well. On one occasion he lies awake in bed and reflects upon his own sins and upon the sins of the world. "The whole mental process had a likeness to some complex piece of orchestral music wherein the organ deplored the melancholy destinies of the race while the piccolo lamented the secret trouble of Mrs.

Harrowdean; the big drum thundered at the Irish politicians, and all the violins bewailed the intellectual laxity of the university system. Meanwhile the trumpets prophesied wars and disasters, the cymbals ever and again inserted a clashing jar about the fatal delay in automobile insurance, while the triangle broke into a plangent solo on the topic of a certain rotten gate-post he always forgot in the daytime, and how in consequence the cows from the glebe farm got into the garden and ate Mrs. Britling's carnations." The whole of Mr. Britling's soliloquy is a wonderful piece of work: there is so much of the bigness and the littleness, the absurdity and the earnestness of humanity in it.

War comes and brings its shocks, and its griefs, and its disillusionments to Mr. Britling and his circle. It seems to wreck everything; it makes intellectual and emotional havoc. Mr. Britling, however, sees it through.

The conclusion of the story affords a kind of companion piece to the soliloquy. This is the letter which Mr. Britling writes to the parents of the funny, lovable German boy who lived as a tutor in Mr. Britling's family, until the war broke out, and then went to the front, to be shot somewhere on the Russian line of battle. In this much re-written letter, impersonal feeling triumphs. Later, Mr. Britling comes to a new knowledge of religion and of God. He is able to conceive of a God who is not responsible for all the ills of humanity, of a God who is close and real. The conclusion may not be wholly sound as philosophy, but as the climax of a sequence of emotions and experiences it is convincing and heartening. It seems to embody the meaning that the war has for the personal life.

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MULTITUDE AND SOLITUDE. By JOHN MASEFIELD. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1916.

Mr. Masefield's novel, *Multitude and Solitude*, first printed a good many years ago and now republished, will be read by a great many persons on the strength of the author's subsequently acquired reputation. It deserves to be read, not because it is at all what is ordinarily meant by a "poet's novel," but because it is a remarkably good story. One does not need to be a lover of Masefield's poetry in order to enjoy *Multitude and Solitude*: to enjoy it, one needs only to care for clean construction, clear narrative, and intense style in fiction.

The central figure of the story is a young playwright who, having become dissatisfied with art, and life, and love, finds a new gospel in science and service. With a scientist of his own age, who has recovered from an attack of sleeping-sickness by the use of a new drug, he goes to Africa to combat the deadly disease. The African experience has plenty of strangeness, of a good wholesome imaginative and realistic sort; and the plot takes a clever Jules Verne-ish