

HARDY THE NOVELIST



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Book Description

HARDY THE NOVELIST BY DAVID CECIL THIS study was composed as a course of lectures. I fear that, transferred to the printed page, its mode of expression may seem at once too colloquial and too declamatory, too loose in structure and too emphatic in phrase, not to jar on a fastidious taste. If so, I hope my critics will remember that it was designed to be heard by an audience, not perused by a solitary reader and will grant

me their indulgence. May I also take this occasion to thank the Master and Fellows of Trinity College, Cambridge, first for doing me the honour of inviting me to deliver the Clark Lectures, and secondly for the warmth of their welcome to me during my sojourn in their stately courts. D.C. CERTAINLY it is gratifying to be asked to deliver the Clark Lectures. Yet, when I first sat down seriously to consider the task before me, gratification changed to despondency. For these lectures meant literary criticism and, somehow, I found myself disinclined to add to the already formidable bulk of literary criticism. That spirit of disillusionment which, we are told, is characteristic of the present age, had begun, like the thin rays of a winter daybreak, to penetrate the antique seclusion of my College rooms, revealing their contents in a grey and disenchanting light. I examined the rows of critical books which lined my shelves sound old fashioned works with titles like Towards a Theory of Comedy and 18th Century Influences in Romantic Poetry, or lively modern cantankerous books called Rhythm as Pattern and the Tragedy of Coleridge and was filled with a sense of futility. It is true that they were, most of them, ingenious and learned works and reading them was a pleasant enough occupation. Nor was it more harmful, I dare say, than gazing out of the window and watching the tawny leaves drift and circle one after another down the waters of the River Thames, But it was about as fruitful. For what, after all, was the good of it? How far did all this erudition and industry and illtemper make any difference to my appreciation of letters? What living connection was there between these books and the feeling stirred in me by reading Hamlet or The Ancient Mariner? The answer, I am afraid, is that there was very little. The reason that so much criticism is unprofitable is that the critics do not stick to their subject This subject is books. In every generation certain books are written which are works of art, which we read not for any ulterior motive not for instruction or edification but for the same reason that we go to a picture gallery or concert: because reading them is in itself a satisfying experience. These books are the critics subject they start with, they are the cause and justification of his existence. It is his function to illuminate our appreciation of them, to define the nature of the satisfaction they give, to analyse the circumstances conditioning their production and the arts by which they make their impression This ought to be enough, work for any one man. Critics, however, seldom seem to think so.

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