

every one though he be as innocent as a babe of any tendency to weak romances, the most strictly matter-of-fact person being indeed the arch offender, as regards deviation from the centre of general truth.

His own faculties and prejudice, in this case, play the artist, selecting images of reality which group themselves after a certain inevitable fashion; and these represent for him what he is pleased to call "real life," with its "morals" and its "lessons," precisely corresponding, not to existence itself, but to the judgment and the temper of the unconscious dramatist.

"The eye only sees that which brings with it the power of seeing," whether "the eye" belong to one who describes his impression, or to him who allows it to be written secretly on his heart.

For in the heart of every man lies a recorded drama, sternly without purpose, yet more impressive and inevitable in its teachings than the most purposeful novel ever written.

To transcribe this invisible work so that the impress becomes revealed is to write a novel, good, bad, or indifferent, as the case may be, but a novel *par excellence* and not an essay.

The writer of fiction has to present, as best he may, a real impression made upon him, including the effect of such impulse to the imagination as it may have given, and of all the art—if art there be—or exercise of fancy by which the record is faithfully conveyed to the minds of others.

To reveal the image with so much skill that the vividness of the representation is hardly less than that of the original, is to write a novel well, though even yet the image itself may not be of sufficient interest to make its revelation of extreme value.

These are—according to my view—the conditions of the novel: first, of its claim to the title at all; secondly, of its merits, and thirdly, of its greatness, which implies the fulfilment of the other two requirements, while demanding also that the impression recorded shall be fine enough and striking enough to appeal to those sympathies in human nature which are most noble and most generous, as well as to that mysterious sense of proportion and beauty which holds relation to the suppressed and ill-treated but ever-present poetic instincts of mankind.

I have described these unattained ideals of the art of fiction, in order to show as convincingly as possible that, however much this book may be thought to deal with the question which has been recently so much discussed, there is no intention on the writer's part to make it serve a polemical purpose, or to advocate a cause.

Its object is not to convert or to convince, but to *represent*. However much it fails, that is its aim.