

popular, no popular novel can be good. So often it has been so, and emotionally the critic would so often wish it so. "A is high-minded, serious, deserving; he will never be popular, never financially successful. At least I can comfort him by telling him that he is a good writer, that his name will live when Priestley and Walpole are forgotten."

And on their side the popular writers see that they are not being given even their deserts and lose their confidence in the critics. After being demolished by Middleton Murry in a review Walpole wrote to Arnold Bennett: "If I didn't sell and found life a horrible tragedy and wrote in the Tchekov manner Murry would find me a darling." Walpole felt his real offence had been that he did sell. Many of his admirers felt the same. As recently as last year a writer in the book trade paper, *The Bookseller*, wrote about Walpole: "Hugh was a continuous success story—much more of a success than most of his detractors. And they are determined to go on telling us how little he deserved it."

Embedded here is of course some misunderstanding of Walpole's critics. Some of them at least said that he had become a best-seller and that he deserved it, richly.

Some critics treated Walpole's success with the public as one of calculation. He knew his public and what they wanted—and he gave it to them. Mr. Hart-Davis in his biography falls on this accusation with considerable vigour. Walpole, he says, wrote as well as he could, the kind of books he wanted to write. It is fanciful, he thinks to imagine that he wrote down to a middlebrow public whose measure he had carefully taken; and the descriptions in his biography of Walpole with his eager desire to please the highbrows as well as the middlebrows, followed at times by his more modest admissions in his journal about his status as a writer, do suggest the writer who did his best.

It is perhaps easy to see why the legend that Walpole was a shrewd fellow calculatedly writing down to his readers circulated so easily. Two of his early novels, *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill* and *The Dark Forest*, contain so very much his best work that they suggest a writer