



The Underside (Bloomsbury Reader)

H. R. F. Keating

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This novel, set in Victorian London in its heyday, presents a picture, both horrific and authentic, of the 'underside' of life in the first city of the world.

It tells of Godfrey Mann, a young painter, who has access to the golden world of privilege and yet is possessed by a compelling sexual drive towards the hidden squalor and darkness below, a *nostalgie de la boue* that wars tumultuously both with his ideals as an artist and his love for the lion-couraged social reformer, Elizabeth. It is between Godfrey's reckless urges and Elizabeth's purity that truth must ultimately lie. And in working out this conflict of opposites, the story, though placed in an age whose fixed moral structure contrasts so forcibly with our permissiveness, has a meaning for today.

Here are 'scenes from Victorian life' that will not be quickly forgotten. There are vignettes of the elegance of the upper side, as ornately formal in its social routines as in the sheer magnificence of its horses and carriages and opulent settings. There is the underside with its appealing sexuality, violence and open putrescence. There is, above all, the mingling of the two in a brilliantly brought to life picture or the whole rich, riotous, bawdy assembly of a Victorian Derby Day. It is compulsive story-telling, handled with the cool detachment and lucidity which in other fields have brought H.R.F. Keating a wide readership.

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