

THOMAS HARDY.



MR. THOMAS HARDY, the author of "Far from the Madding Crowd," "The Return of the Native," and the rest of that remarkable company of novels,¹ had afforded, up to the time of the full publication of his latest book, "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," a striking example of the half-appreciated writer. He has had a well-established and tolerably wide reputation. He has even had a small following in England who contested on his behalf the modest pre-eminence among the living authors of English fiction which is claimed by a larger number for Mr. George Meredith. Yet his greatest qualities of all—the creative imagination, and the power of picturesque expression, by virtue of which he is really very great indeed, and worthy to rank with the few consummate masters of English prose romance, have obtained hitherto only scant and languid recognition.

As a mere story-teller he has his own peculiar vein, rather narrow, but under his ingenious management yielding richly, and one which has led him from year to year into ever deeper and stranger places among the hidden things of human nature. He finds humble folk, upon the whole, more remunerative, dramatically, than their so-called betters, and the whole series of his tales, from the almost forgotten "Desperate Remedies" to "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" inclusive, constitute something like a complete epic of that remote rural county—a portion of the ancient Wessex—which on the maps of modern England is written Dorsetshire.

I have named "Far from the Madding Crowd" first among his books, not because it is the best, but because, for some reason or other, it seems always the best known. It was, in fact, the first which won anything like a wide popularity. "Desperate Remedies" proved a desperate venture, and as for that joyous idyl, "Under the Greenwood Tree," it was far too exclusively rustic to appeal to any but a highly sophisticated literary taste. It was as certain to be "caviare to the general," as that corresponding triumph of verdancy in the culinary art, a French *maigre* soup. Nevertheless, it was "Under the Greenwood Tree" that Mr.

Hardy found his vein, for here was first produced that wonderful chorus of Shaksperian clowns destined to figure more or less in all the subsequent books, and to charm the *ennui* of the world by their archaic aspect and accent, their blundering wisdom and buoyant folly, their innocent mixture of piety and blasphemy, and their broad and beautiful misuse of our mother tongue. It was at first conjectured—and the Shaksperian title of "Under the Greenwood Tree" gave color to the notion—that the precious dialect of these West Country clowns was a purely imaginary reproduction of Elizabethan English, as it may have lived upon the lips of the clodhopper. Later it came to be understood that Mr. Hardy emphatically disclaimed the honors of such an invention; and that if any one wanted to see in the flesh the unmitigated English peasant of the sixteenth century, he had only to pay a visit to the heathery solitudes and seaward slopes of Dorset and East Devon. There remained, therefore, with the observant author, as with Shakspeare himself in the case of Bottom, Dogberry, and the grave-diggers, only the responsibility for the reflex and seemingly involuntary wit of passages like the following:

"His sermon was well enough;—a very excellent sermon enough, only he could n't put it into words and speak it. That's all was the matter wi' his sermon! He had n't been able to get it past his pen."

"Well, aye, the sermon might be good enough, for ye see the sermon of old Ecclesiastes himself lay in old Ecclesiastes' ink-bottle afore he got it out!"

"Well, now, that coarseness that's so upsetting to Ann's feelings, is to my mind a recommendation, for it do always prove a story to be true. And for the same reason I like a story wi' a bad moral. My sonnies, all true stories have a coarseness or a bad moral, depend upon 't. If the story-tellers could ha' got decency and good morals from true stories, who 'd ha' troubled to invent parables?"

Note the last remark, for it contains the germ of one of two or three fixed ideas or theories which have remained with Mr. Hardy throughout a literary life of some five-and-twenty years, growing with his growth and

¹ "Desperate Remedies," 1867; "Under the Greenwood Tree," 1872; "A Pair of Blue Eyes," 1873; "Far from the Madding Crowd," 1874; "The Hand of Ethelberta," 1876; "The Return of the Native," 1878; "The Trumpet-Major," 1880; "A Laodicean,"

1881; "Two on a Tower," 1882; "The Mayor of Casterbridge," 1886; "The Woodlanders," 1888; "A Group of Noble Dames," 1891; "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," 1892.

strengthening with his strength as a writer. We shall find these self-same theories determining the main lines of every one of his rustic pieces, guiding their seemingly naïve and irregular action, and giving them a certain moral unity which corresponds with the unity of scene already noted.

In "A Pair of Blue Eyes," which followed the "Greenwood Tree," the scene is permitted to shift as far as Cornwall, and the actors are taken from a somewhat higher social rank than is common with Mr. Hardy. It reckons as one of his slighter efforts, thanks chiefly, I believe, to a suspicion of undue sentimentality in the title; but it has its importance in a review of the whole series, because it was here that Mr. Hardy first diffidently essayed a theme to which he was destined to give a tremendous development later on; namely, the capacity for headlong and devouring passion of an innocent but ardent woman, the capacity for sheer brutality of a baffled and angry man, and the helpless slavery to circumstance of them both. Here, too, we meet the first clear confession of our author's own broad and simple pantheism, his belief in something like an integral and sentient life pervading the whole mass of physical phenomena, his power at intervals almost of identification, at all times of free communication, with that life, and of partly translating into the petty speech of men the generalized expressions and vast symbolism of its extra-human language. Let the reader turn to the passage in "A Pair of Blue Eyes" which describes Knight's sensations when he had slipped half over the beetling cliff, and hung suspended by his arms, while Elfride arranged the ingenious device whereby she was to effect his rescue. The sensibilities of the man are naturally exalted to the utmost, and, his attention being arrested by a bit of a fossil sticking in the gravel underneath his eye, immediately there arise and sweep across his mind in vivid procession all the immense geological periods implied by the presence of the stony little corpse. And the author actually describes these in detail while his hero's fate hangs on a hair,—to the length, if I remember rightly, of several pages; and yet so concentrated is the expression, so complete the transfusion of the immanent life of nature into the imperiled life of the individual, that we are not impatient, or aware of any infraction of the rules of art. No time seems to be occupied by the passage of the cosmic vision.

"Far from the Madding Crowd" opens innocently on the same note as the "Greenwood Tree," but the tone deepens fast, and the covert satire of the title soon becomes apparent. The honest shepherd in the lambing-hut, one of the best of Mr. Hardy's homely heroes, regulates

his humble midnight doings by the march of the great constellations. The heroine, who is introduced in the undignified act of studying her own charms in a small looking-glass while she progresses, on the top of a load of household furniture, from one domicile to another, becomes one whose character can be fairly summed up by her biographer in these epigrammatic words: "She was of the stuff of which great mothers are made; indispensable to high generation, feared at tea-parties, hated in shops, and beloved at crises." And yet how weak, how fickle, how all but wanton, had not that heroine displayed herself before the supreme moment in her history at which she behaved so as fully to deserve this singular eulogium!

The judgment which Mr. Hardy seems always threatening to denounce against universal womankind will be found in most cases to be scrupulously tempered by mercy,—one might almost say by remorse,—but his attitude toward the weaker sex is, upon the whole, more chivalrous than flattering.

In "Far from the Madding Crowd" he also began to show us the full measure of his remarkable power of devising new, strange, and intensely dramatic incident; untoward situations, almost oppressive in their significance; chance moments, half revealed in passing as very ganglionic centers of fate. Such are the wild throbbing of poor Fanny Robins's fevered pulses, detected in the darkness by the accidental contact of Gabriel's hand with hers; the lop of the leering gargoyle on the old church tower, which results in the prompt effacement of Troy's meretricious attempts at gardening around his victim's grave; the truly extraordinary scene where that same infamous Troy performs the sword-exercise round the slight, immovable figure of the enslaved Bathsheba in the ferny dell. Alone, almost, among modern writers outside of Russia, Hardy has an easy mastery of the true grotesque. Witness the quasi-comic incidents attending the passage of the pauper funeral in "Far from the Madding Crowd," and the irony of accident which determines the place of its midnight halt. We shall find the same quality taking on a positively uncanny development in "The Return of the Native," where Venn and Wildeeve gamble on the heath, at midnight, by the light of glow-worms; and the adders wink, out of the frying-pan of their torture, at the poor victim poisoned by their venom.

The catastrophe of "Far from the Madding Crowd" was, I remember, stigmatized at the time as "too sensational" by readers who rather piqued themselves on the possession of that acquired taste which alone could enable a man thoroughly to appreciate "Under the Greenwood Tree." But what, it may be asked by the

way, renders an event too sensational in fiction? Not its essential impossibility, for there is no such thing. No imagination, not even Thomas Hardy's, can contrive more horrible concatenations of circumstance, more blasting calamities, than actually occur—nay, even than some which have come within the personal knowledge of most of us. And yet the phrase has a meaning; the censure points to an undeniable artistic fault, an error of disproportion or incongruity, an incident too big for the canvas, too black for the general scheme of color. The painful infatuation of Boldwood, for example, his open assassination of Troy, and the fatal sanity of his subsequent self-surrender to justice, belong to the class of incidents usually described as high tragedy; and the too prompt critics of "Far from the Madding Crowd" made the mistake of supposing that Mr. Hardy's muse was bound to decline such themes, and that, as a belated pupil of Rousseau and St. Pierre, he had intended to portray the supposed regular association of virgin innocence of soul with agricultural simplicity of manners. What he really did intend, we now know very well, was to illustrate the solemn unity of human fate; the momentous fact that the organic instincts and primitive passions of men, and emphatically also of women, are the same in all ranks and on every stage, and that the prophetic "besom of destruction" is an instrument far too thoroughly wielded for any neglect of the world's out-of-the-way corners. "It was one of those sequestered spots," says Mr. Hardy, after accurately mapping out the scene of one of his later tales, "outside the gates of the world, where may usually be found more meditation than action, and more passivity than meditation; where reasoning proceeds on narrow premises, and results in inferences wildly imaginative; yet where, from time to time, no less than in other places, dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real, by virtue of the concentrated passions and closely knit interdependence of the lives therein."

Yet, as a man who feels that he has been charged with a tale almost too sad for the telling may dally with his grim message for a time, and digress to gossip, and even to chaff, quite as much for the sake of staying his own nerves as of sparing those of his audience, so before singing "The Return of the Native," Mr. Hardy undertook to divert our minds by the amusing but tolerably preposterous history of the fortunes of Ethelberta. "If you like social satire and an artificial environment," he appeared to say, "I can give you these too"; and some of the satire in "Ethelberta" is in its way extremely good, although it is impossible to care very deeply for Mr. Hardy's ladies and gentle-

men as such. Moreover, we felt all the while that our *raconteur* was trifling. The Ancient Mariner trod hard upon the heels of the Wedding Guest; and no sooner was the hand of the adventurous butler's daughter finally and most unromantically bestowed, than we were gravely summoned back to another order of spectacle.

By this time we were tolerably well acquainted with the main divisions and chief settlements, as well as with the more prominent natural features, of the remote and primitive county where the action of Mr. Hardy's tales almost invariably centers. Weatherbury we knew by name, and Budmouth, and Overcombe, and Melchester, and Casterbridge, and the general trend and chief divagations of the highways and byways connecting them. But now we were informed that in the heart of this comparative solitude there was a deeper solitude still—so very sparsely populated, indeed, by odd refugees and remnants of humanity, that large spaces of it had been unfurrowed and almost untrdden since the days of the aboriginal tribes. In all recent literature, whether of prose or verse, I know of no passage more profoundly poetic, fuller of unearthly and ineffable suggestion,—in Goethe's word, more *dæmonic*,—than the picture, with which the "Native" opens, of Egdon Heath at twilight, under a fallow November sky, rapidly and greedily absorbing the blackness of the approaching night.

It was the good fortune of the present writer, on a certain warm September afternoon in the year 1886, to explore, under Mr. Hardy's own guidance, a portion of that extensive tract of common land which figures as Egdon Heath in the Dorsetshire "cycle." It is no longer, as it was twenty years ago, continuous common for a stretch of many miles. Various bits, here and there, have been reclaimed, inclosed, and planted, so that the general aspect of the region, as our party entered it first from the direction of the mossy hamlet which Mr. Hardy calls Weatherbury, was less eery and solitary than one had expected. But, as the evening shadows lengthened, the spell of the place began to work. The seer, in his character of cicerone, imparted to the aliens from over seas more and more of his own power of inner vision, until at last, when after a short, sharp climb we caught from the top of Eustacia's barrow the first flash of the evening star, I can testify to having seen with my own eyes the curious natural phenomenon so effectively described in the weird overture to the "Native": not the *fall* of night from the twilight skies, "as a feather is wafted downward," but the *rising* of night out of the ground, like an ebon exhalation coming at a given moment, suddenly suffusing and hiding, as beneath a

level velvet pall, the trifling inequalities of the wide plain below, while the air around and the sky above were still bright. "I suppose," said Mr. Hardy, characteristically, as we followed his voice down the steep slope of the barrow (for there was absolutely no seeing where to set one's steps), "that yours are the very first feet from the New World which ever passed over this grave of our common ancestor."

It was easy now to picture the actors in the saddest of all our friend's dramas except the last, creeping silently forth from the furzy thickets, and over the immemorial burial-mounds, and casting long shadows in the appropriate light of Guy Fawkes's annual fires. Here came Eustacia Vye with her gloriously beautiful person, and her perfectly elementary soul, "the raw material of divinity"; and Wildeeve, that favorite weak villain of our author, who is yet not quite all a villain; and gentle Thomasin, and magnanimous Venn, and that ill-starred exile from a more civilized world,—the most distressingly *real* of all his women,—loving, exacting Mrs. Yeobright; and, last of all, the visionary Clym, overtopping the rest alike in character and aspiration, and a sure mark for the lightning, by the same token. The familiar chorus of clowns appeared to flounder and gibber about the footsteps of the homespun company as they walked unsuspecting into the toils of doom. The loud-voiced insects of the early autumn night might have been singing in one multitudinous chorus that strangely mocking stanza which figures as motto to "The Return of the Native":

To Lady Sorrow
I bade good-morrow,
And thought to leave her far-away behind;
But cheerly, cheerly,
She loves me dearly,
She is so constant to me, and so kind!
I would deceive her,
And so leave her,
But, ah! she is so constant and so kind!

For plain and unadulterated tragedy, complete but symmetrical, and in no wise overdone, throwing deep contempt upon man's free agency, and suggesting the ascendancy over all things in heaven and earth of some absolutely unintelligible power, there has been, I think, with the one exception of the tale of "The Master of Ravenswood," nothing in English literature since "Lear" to compare with "The Return of the Native." It requires some nerve even to re-read the book, in cold blood, from the beginning; but it should be done by any one who would fairly measure Mr. Hardy's caliber. In this tale, and in "The Mayor of Casterbridge" and in "Tess," he is positively epic. Without evident intention on his part, or any conscious-

ness on their own, his homely creatures take their natural rank with the sons of the house of Atreus and the house of Volsung. They become spokesmen with the Eternal, and scape-goats for the entire race. Their author himself seems to stand off from them at the end, regarding, with consternation and awe, the ruthless grinding of the supernatural machinery his own hand has set in motion.

He did sometimes think [is Mr. Hardy's last word concerning the Native] that he had been ill used by fortune so far as to say that to be born is a palpable dilemma, and that instead of men aiming to advance in life with glory, they should calculate how to retreat out of it without shame. But that he and his had been sarcastically and pitilessly handled in having such irons thrust into their souls, he did not maintain long. It is usually so, except with the sternest of men. Human beings, in their generous endeavor to construct a hypothesis that shall not degrade a First Cause, have always hesitated to conceive a dominant power of lower moral quality than their own, and even while they sit down and weep by the waters of Babylon, invent excuses for the oppression which prompts their tears.

Fortunately for the novel-reader's peace of mind and tolerable content with the universe, Mr. Hardy is not always at this level. It was indeed a considerable drop to that of the "Laodicean," which is merely a pleasant story rather cleverly told. "The Trumpet-Major" is far more, being in fact the most tenderly conceived and, in its limited way, perhaps the most exquisitely proportioned of all the author's romances. The reproduction of the speech, fashions, and general atmosphere of an interesting time only a little while gone by is effortless and complete; the slight heroine is, for once, a perfectly maidenly and candid creature, and though in the strife of magnanimity between the two generous brothers who loved her it is naturally the more entirely noble who is worsted, yet John Loveday goes to a soldier's death with so chivalrous a smile upon his lips, and so fine an air of unbroken manliness, that the heart-break does not seem a cruel one.

This temperate, wholesome, and beautiful tale was followed by one conceived in a spirit so startlingly the reverse that Mr. Hardy's truest admirers must wish most heartily that he had left it untold. "True stories," he had made his sententious clodhopper say in "Under the Greenwood Tree," "have a coarseness or a bad moral." In "Two on a Tower" our author may be said faithfully to have tried the effect of combining the two. The wit of the text, though rather *risqué* at times, is exceptionally keen; but the intrigue, disagreeably implied in the very title, is—let us take courage to say

it—insufferably low. The character of Lady Constantine is, properly speaking, a pathological study, fit only for a professional book, and Felice Charmond, in "The Woodlanders," to which we shall presently recur, is another case for the same ward.

But again, in "The Mayor of Casterbridge," the successor of "Two on a Tower," Mr. Hardy was found fully to have recovered his graver and greater manner. This moving monograph, accurately, if somewhat cynically, described in its subtitle as the "Life and Death of a Man of Character," is one which fairly defies abridgment. The Mayor, like the Native, should be sought out and accompanied, step by step, in his dim pilgrimage, upon his own rough and weary ground. These two are denizens of the same haunted country; and when, after the swift vicissitudes of his rise and fall, the self-exiled Henchard sets his foot upon the same venerable roadway along which the self-accusing Boldwood once marched to judgment, and especially when he crosses the ominous boundary of Egdon Heath, whose "imperturbable countenance, having defied the cataclysmal onset of centuries, reduced to insignificance, by its seamed and antique features, the wildest turmoil of a single man," we know instantly what we have to expect, and that the time for authentic tragedy is once more fully come. The figure of the forsaken Mayor now takes on colossal proportions; and if the strangely equal conflict between the principles of good and evil within the man had been analyzed with a scientific exactitude which is all of to-day, his final defeat through the mustering of sinister outside forces, which no man can calculate or measure, is related in such a manner as to give the victim rank in the reader's imagination with *Oedipus* and *Siegfried*. The essential heathenism of Mr. Hardy's own creed strikes the reader less as a matter of reasoned acceptance than of historic, or rather mythologic, instinct, an intimate perception of that everlasting paganism of the *rerum natura*, which darkly underlies and threatens to outlast all its ephemeral religions. There are reminiscences in these essentially modern pages, not of *Lucretius* and *Heraclitus* merely, but of the sanguinary pieties of those Druid priests who ministered for no man knows how long amid the scenery of these ingenious fables.

Yet Christianity too has passed this way, and one of the least of those whom Henchard had carelessly benefited in his prosperous hour dogs his "wambling" footsteps when he goes out to die, and ministers to him in his agony. And let us not fail to notice the more than honorable *amende* which Mr. Hardy makes to womanhood in the beautiful character of Elizabeth.

She, who "had early learned the lesson of resignation, and was as familiar with the wreck of each day's wishes as with the diurnal setting of the sun," is the first to offer company and consolation to the man whom all the world abandons; and there is something soothing, upon the whole, in the parting glimpse given us of this noble woman during the quiet afternoon of her days, when her strange experience is summed up for us by her biographer in the bitter-sweet words which follow:

Her position was, indeed, one that, in the common phrase, afforded much to be thankful for. That she was not demonstratively thankful was no fault of hers. . . . But her strong sense that neither she nor any other human being deserved less than was given, did not blind her to the fact that there were others receiving less who deserved much more. And in being forced to class herself among the fortunate, she did not cease to wonder at the persistence of the unforeseen, when the one to whom such unbroken tranquillity had been accorded in the adult stage was she whose youth had seemed to teach that happiness was but the occasional episode in a general drama of pain.

In "The Woodlanders" likewise the unabashed and irresponsible animalism of Mrs. Charmond is offset by the girlish, if somewhat mawkish, innocence of Grace, and the rare union of crystalline fineness and flawless purity in the character of Marty South. Honest Marty, with her daily business of self-extinction, and her fine peasant pride, and faithful, tender, manly Giles Winterbourne are so evidently the counterparts of each other, that they could not, of course, in Mr. Hardy's system of things, be permitted to come together. But they are both intensely and most pathetically human, and who but Mr. Hardy could ever have given us that final glimpse of Marty beside the grave of the man whom she had humbly and hopelessly loved?

As this solitary and silent girl stood there in the moonlight, a straight, slim figure, clothed in a plaitless gown, the contours of womanhood so undeveloped as to be scarcely perceptible, the marks of poverty and toil effaced by the misty hour, she touched sublimity at points, and looked almost like a being who had rejected with indifference the attitude of sex for the loftier quality of abstract humanism. She stooped down and cleared away the withered flowers that Grace and herself had laid there the previous week, and put her fresh ones in their place.

"Now, my own, own love," she whispered, "you are mine, and on'y mine; for she has forgot 'ee at last, although for her you died. But I—whenever I get up I'll think of 'ee, and whenever I lie down I'll think of 'ee. Whenever I plant the young larches I'll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I turn the cider-wring, I'll say none

could do it like you. If ever I forget your name let me forget home and heaven. But no, no, my love, I never can forget 'ee; for you was a good man, and did good things!"

And then what scene-painting we have in "The Woodlanders"! What a sylvan atmosphere, and universal suffusion with the dim, green light that comes sifted through a canopy of luxuriant leafage! What shrewd guesses at forest secrets, and endlessly patient rendering of forest sights and scents and sounds! What vegetative people, and what human trees! It recalls the Forest of Arden,—that ideal Arden of one's own youthful imagination, which is neither the Bois de la Cambra nor the crude, conventional Arden of the actual stage. And what is yet more curious, here, as indeed everywhere in his latter-day bucolics, Mr. Hardy shows himself exactly as familiar with agricultural industries and processes and implements of all kinds as with the general aspect of the sylvan scene. In this respect he is more, or at all events earlier, than Shaksperian; he is Vergilian, and those exquisite vignettes, in the Georgics, of the thrifty peasant who used to sit by the fireside of a winter evening, sharpening his torches, while his wife skimmed with dry vine-leaves her throbbing kettle of must, and of the sweet old man among his bees and flower-beds under the walls of Tarentum, are the only pictures I know fit to set beside this of Giles Winterbourne with his traveling cider-press:

He looked and smelled like autumn's very brother, his face being sun-burned to wheat-color, his eyes blue as corn-flowers, his boots and leggins dyed with fruit-stains, his hands clammy with the sweet juice of apples, his hat sprinkled with pips, and everywhere about him that atmosphere of cider which at its first return each season has such an indescribable fascination for those who have been born and bred among orchards.

After the publication of "The Woodlanders," which, in spite of the rich poetry of passages like the one just quoted, was never, and for good reason, a very popular novel, Mr. Hardy's Vergilian muse took a long rest. We suspect now, since the appearance of his latest and in some respects his profoundest work, that during these five years of seeming inactivity he was constantly brooding over a single theme. The outline sketches which he made from time to time, and certain of which he afterward collected and published as "A Group of Noble Dames," were many of them strikingly powerful, but all hard and bald, and some positively repulsive. He had, however, an ulterior design in view, and these preliminary studies and broad bits of charcoal practice were subservient to its execution. Hitherto Mr. Hardy had appeared to the world as an artist merely. If

he glanced now and then at moral and social problems, he begged us to observe that it was in the interests of art he did so, that he disclaimed the didactic and emphatically waived discussion. But now, after these many years of labor as the most curious and conscientious of dilettanti, his attitude is abruptly changed. He comes down into the arena, proclaims a purpose, and adopts a cause. If in the few words we shall have space to say concerning "Tess of the D'Urbervilles" we consider it in the light of a tract rather than of a tale, it is because we are openly invited to do so by the novelist himself. In the subtitle, "A Pure Woman Faithfully Portrayed," he distinctly announces a Tendenz-Roman, and asks our assent or our objection to the pitying yet despairing theory of woman's place in the universe so passionately portrayed therein. His manner, which, as we have already seen, always rises with the seriousness of his subject, was never greater than here. The tale of Tess is told with a simple distinction of style not to be matched by any living writer of English, and hardly even in France, where the men who write well in these days are apt to be distressingly preoccupied with their own manner. The singular but perfectly plausible *donnée* of the story is clearly unfolded in the opening paragraph, and a visionary glimpse is afforded even there of the peculiarly tragic possibilities which it involves. The catastrophe of Tess's early fall is described with the utmost delicacy, leaving the reader as fully persuaded of her essential innocence as her biographer can ever have desired. From this point onward, through the nobly accepted humiliation of her first, almost superfluous, penance, through the insidious temptations of that idyllic life upon the dairy farm, through the cruel shock of her husband's contemptuous rejection, and the long drudgeries and manifold dangers encountered by the deserted wife, he bears her safely, reverently, all but triumphantly. The goal is close at hand where, in Mr. Hardy's own striking words concerning the Native, the fairest child of his fancy may grasp the supreme boon of *retreating from life without shame*. We are actually beginning to thank him for an enlarged perception of the moral possibilities of primitive womanhood. The interest of the narrative has been breathless all along; now, at its final crisis, our pulses begin to throb as though we were on the eve of some stupendous revelation. Has our pantheist and pessimist of other days, we ask, been transformed into the most powerful and penetrating of all the preachers of Neo-Christianity? Are we about to be told, at last, what the words were which Jesus "stooped down and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not"—the mystic import of

the divine sentence, "Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more" ?

Alas! nothing of the sort. Mr. Hardy's conversion is no more authentic than Alec D'Urberville's own. Just when his noble work lacks naught but the finishing touch, he is seized by what looks like a paroxysm of blind rage against his own creation, and with one violent blow he destroys irreparably both its symmetry and its significance. There was no need to condemn the finest of his creations to an after-life of bourgeois security and prosperity as the wife of Angel Clare. That would have been at once too bad for her and too good for him. But surely a kindly, compassionate, natural death might have rescued Tess from her sharp dilemma at any one of the later turnings of her hunted way! Or, if not, she had still the last remedy in her own hand, and the daughter of the D'Urbervilles would never have lacked the courage to apply it. But from the moment when, despite the dreadful illumination

of her experience, and the painfully acquired habit of heroic resistance, Tess yields a second time to the importunities of her first and now doubly repulsive seducer, the claim put forth for her by her historian upon his title-page is stultified; and artistically, no less than morally, his work lies in ruin. To call Tess "pure," after this, is a ferocious sarcasm. The first stain had been effaced by a purgatory of suffering; the second is indelible. The ghastly incidents crowded into the last pages of the book avail nothing. The murder and the scaffold are mere vulgar horrors, gratuitously insulting to the already outraged feelings of the deeply disappointed reader. They exceed the proper limit of tragedy, exciting neither "pity" nor "terror," but simply repugnance. No writer of our own gloomy time — I say it regretfully, and even resentfully — has grasped for one moment, only to wantonly fling away, a more sublime opportunity than Mr. Hardy in "Tess of the D'Urbervilles."

Harriet Waters Preston.

THE OFFICIAL DEFENSE OF RUSSIAN PERSECUTION.

A REPLY TO "A VOICE FOR RUSSIA."



HERETO, except for some unauthorized exploits in Parthian archery by the notorious "O. K.," official Russia has received in dogged silence the remonstrant appeals that have been made by the whole civilized world against Russia's treatment of her Jewish subjects. Since she first entered on the retrograde movement, some twelve years ago, — and vast have been the strides toward Torquemada in the interim, — Russia has pursued her path of more than medieval intolerance, unmoved either by the plaintive cries of her Jewish victims, or by the indignant protests of her Christian neighbors. But at last she has spoken. M. Pierre Botkine, signing as "Secretary of the Russian Legation in Washington," has given, in his article "A Voice for Russia," in *THE CENTURY* for February, 1893, the official explanation why Russia has recently treated her Jews with barbarous cruelty, depriving them of all means of livelihood, hunting them like wild beasts from localities where they had previously an express or implicit right to dwell, closing all means of a liberal education or a professional career to them, and in general treating them as social pariahs without the common rights of humanity. M. Botkine's

article explains at least one thing — the wisdom of the Russian officials in hitherto refraining from defending the indefensible. Even his skill in presenting his views cannot disguise the inherent weakness, or rather the utter vacuity, of his case. If official Russia has no better defense for her treatment of her Jews than M. Botkine's, we that defend the cause of justice and the Jews cannot wish anything better than that his wish may be fulfilled and "the other side be heard." Its presentation is its own condemnation, and it will need but few words of mine to deal adequately, if summarily, with each of M. Botkine's points, to which I entirely confine myself on the present occasion.

M. Botkine prefaces his defense with a general reference to the friendly relations between Russia and the United States. The international amenities of two states separated by some thousands of miles from each other are not likely to be disturbed, and are at best Platonic, while it is difficult to see how they bear on the question whether Russia has been harsh and unjust to her subjects. But M. Botkine can scarcely be said to flatter his American readers if he thinks to influence them by the quite unfounded assertion that Russia was "the first state to extend to the United States a brotherly hand." A secretary of legation should surely know that Catherine II. refused to recognize



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