

### Famous Agnostic Pleads Religion's Causes

In the Preface to What is Likely to Be His Last Book, Thomas Hardy, Aged 82, and Long Regarded as an Absolute Pagan, Declares That World Will Perish Unless Religion Survives. A Sensational Apology by One of the Most Celebrated of Living Authors.

By Professor W. T. Allison.

By far the most important volume published in the English-speaking world this year, mayhap the most valuable for years to come, is "Late Lyrics and Earlier" by Thomas Hardy (the Macmillan Company, London and Toronto). There are several reasons why this book of poems will have a large sale and will provoke much comment and discussion in literary circles everywhere. In all probability it is the last child of Thomas Hardy's invention, the last production of a man of genius whose brain is still active, whose pen is still facile, although he has reached the great age of eighty-two. As the title indicates, not all the 153 poems in this collection are of recent composition, but enough of them have been written during and since the great war to show that this famous dean of England's novelists and singers is still in full possession of his faculties and is still master of his craft. I question whether any great writer at his age has produced a work of such compass or of such powerful application of ideas to life. Another reason why "Late Lyrics and Earlier" will command instant attention from his contemporaries and will be referred to with much comment by critics yet unborn is that this octogenarian book of poems contains a remarkable preface in which a writer who has been very reserved in the face of much criticism speaks out at long last and makes some surprising statements about his philosophy of life and his hopes for the future of mankind.

#### Hardy, a Modern Pagan.

The most surprising thing about this preface, or apology as the author styles it, is the respectful, even affectionate, way in which Mr. Hardy speaks about religion. Critics will rub their eyes and wonder if they are dreaming when they run across his emphatic statement that unless religion is retained the world will perish. Can this be the same man who wrote "Jude the Obscure" and those other great but terrible mid-victorian novels in which the characters are pictured as being helpless in the grasp of heredity and at the mercy of destiny? In his novels Hardy has painted life as a vast tragedy in which things always come out wrong, where a belief in a loving God is merely idiotic, for fate rules mankind and fate is a cruel monster. Between 1870 and 1902, Mr. Hardy published twelve novels and all of them reveal a philosophy which is blank negation, so much so that their author has been characterized as an absolute pagan and the blackest pessimist of our time. No doubt it was the hostile reception accorded by his contemporaries to "Jude the Obscure," in which this pessimism found its horrible climax of brutal realism, that led Mr. Hardy to make the decision that he would write no more novels, but would devote himself to the pleasanter paths of poetry. Some of his admirers have bemoaned this decision, for they did not regard him as a successful poet, and, while they lamented his pessimism, they admitted that he possessed marvelous skill as a plot-maker, as a portrayer of character and as an interpreter of nature. Mr. Hardy's father designated him for the church, but in his youth he decided that he could not take holy orders owing to his inability to reconcile the pain and sorrow and evil in the world with an all-wise or all-loving God. Church-outraged by unbelief, he became an ecclesiastical architect, and until the age of thirty, when he forsook architecture for novel-writing, he built new churches and restored old ones

than the church, of sufficient dignity and footing, and with such strength of old association, such architectural spell, is left in this country to keep the shreds of morality together? "It may be a forlorn hope, a mere dream, that of an alliance between religion, which must be retained unless the world is to perish, and complete rationality, which must come, unless also the world is to perish, by means of the interfusing effect of poetry—the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; the impassioned expression of science, as it was defined by an English poet who was quite orthodox in his ideas. But if it be true, as Comte argued, that advance is never in a straight line, but in a looped orbit, we may, in the afore-said ominous moving backward, be doing it pour mieux sauter, drawing back for a spring. I repeat that I torridly hope so, notwithstanding the supercilious regard of hope by Schopenhauer, von Hartmann, and other philosophers down to Einstein who have my respect. But one dares not prophesy."

#### What Does He Mean by Religion?

The latter part of this astonishing deliverance is rather gloomy, and the whole thing is rather vague, for while we may be glad, and are glad, to hear that Mr. Hardy, author of "Jude the Obscure" is in his wise old age convinced of the absolute necessity of religion if the world is not to perish, it is to be regretted that he did not enlighten us as to the meaning of religion. Mr. Hardy seems to intimate that he and millions of agnostics like him would have joined the church of Rome if the mother church had accepted the findings of modern science a generation or so ago. Does this not imply that all these agnostics, Mr. Hardy among them, have ceased to be agnostics as far as a belief in God is concerned? For even if the Roman church had accepted the theory of evolution, we may be sure that she would not have surrendered her faith in God, nor yet in Christ and immortality. Neither Mr. Hardy nor any other agnostic could have entered her fold, therefore, without professing a belief in those doctrines. If this eminent novelist has come thus far, he has made a great advance since he wrote his early novels in which a blind fate, a cruel destiny, is described as governing the little lives of men. But interpreting his plea for religion in the largest and most general way, is there not good reason to hope that Mr. Hardy has come to believe in God and the future life? For there can be no religion which does not demand a belief in the first, if not in the second teaching as well. It may be that Mr. Hardy "faintly" trusts the larger hope that there is a God and that the soul of man is immortal, but hope he does in some degree, else he could not stultify his intellect by speaking so kindly of the church and by declaring that humanity will perish if religion decays and dies. At any rate his whole statement is an interesting refutation of the assertion that H. G. Wells puts into the mouth of one of his leading characters in his new novel, "The Secret Places of the Heart," that after a man is forty he does not feel the need of a personal God.

#### Will Not Make His Reason Blind.

But Mr. Hardy abates no jot of his habitual right to indulge in questionings and misgivings regarding the suffering and evil in the world. "While I am quite sure," he says, "that a thinker is not expected, and indeed, is scarcely allowed, now more than heretofore, to state all that crosses his mind concerning existence in this universe, in his attempts to explain or excuse the presence of evil and the incongruity of penalizing the irresponsible—it must be obvious to open intelligences that, without denying the beauty and faithful service of certain venerable cults, such disallowance of 'obstinate questionings' and 'blank misgivings' tends to a paralysed intellectual statement. Helne observed nearly a hundred years ago that the soul has her eternal rights; that she will not be darkened by statues nor lulled by the music of bells. And what is to-day, in allusions to the present author's pages, alleged to be 'pessimism' is, in truth, only such 'questionings' in the exploration of reality and in the first step towards the soul's betterment and the body's also. If I may be forgiven for quoting my own old words, let me repeat what I printed in this relation more than twenty years ago, and wrote much earlier, in a poem entitled 'Tenebris':

"If way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst; that is to say, by the exploration of reality, and its frank recognition stage by stage along the survey, with an eye to the best consummation possible; briefly, evolutionary meliorism." And looking down the future, with some belief in the freedom of the human will in the presence of necessity, he says that he holds fast to this, "that whether the human and kindred animal races survive till the exhaustion or destruction of the globe, or whether these races perish, and are succeeded by others before that conclusion comes, pain to all upon it, longed or dumb, shall be kept down to a minimum by loving kindness, operating through scientific knowledge, and actuated by the modicum of free will conjecturally possessed by organic life when the mighty necessitating forces—unconscious or other—that have 'the balancing of the clouds,' happen to be in equilibrium, which may or may not be often."

An Apostle of Lovingkindness. Numerous as Mr. Hardy's obstinate questionings have been and now are, no one can gainsay the fact that he has a loving heart. In spite of the darkness behind her, he has always loved nature, and no one can read

### Folks Back Home

Sketches by J. H. Striebel

### By Robert Quillen

Conversation. Uncle Gus laid aside his newspaper with a sigh and snuffed a smother in his blackened, corn-cob pipe. "I reckon I'm ol'-fashioned," said he, "but it makes me feel right bad to see the way women is chargin' 'G-tin' into business an' votin' an' things like that—is makin' 'em like men. They talk straight out; what they mean an' keep the promises an' don't ask no favors. Seems like I just can't git used to it. When I was a young feller, a-courtin' gals, they was all sweet an' feminine an' 'clingin'." They expected ever-thin' an' didn't give nothin'. If one of 'em promised somethin', I knowed she'd change her mind, like as not; an' I never believed much 'em the privilege o' lyin'. They was mighty cheerful winners, them gals was, an' the sex 'em from payin' when they lost. I never knowed one of 'em to admit that anythin' was her fault. Gosh, but they was sweet an' enticin'. Well, well; I reckon ever-thin' has to change. I only hope if this here feminism makes 'em as honest an' fair an' reasonable as men, it won't plum' spoil 'em."

#### Pride.

Pride is the 'bulwark of civilization. It is pride that keeps men decent, pride that makes men strive for excellence. The two prides most common among men are pride of birth and pride of possession, but the prevalence of these two is the work of circumstance and not the result of choice. Man must have some peg on

#### Willie Willis.

Little Willie Willis went home from play Tuesday evening, voluntarily washed his ears, and announced his intention to become a missionary. The doctor said it was nothing more serious than a touch of

his last volume without feeling that his lovingkindness extends to the weakest thing in creation. Scores of poems show how keen is his sympathy for erring, sinful human beings, his brothers and sisters, and the last lyric in the book, given this special position on the chance that it might be a foretold rendition of St. Paul's saying that the greatest of virtues is Charity. In next week's article I will give the text of this notable poem and will discuss and quote other poems in this important book.

—W. T. ALLISON.

#### Literary Notes.

Douglas Durkin, late of Winnipeg, now of New York, has returned to the Canadian west this summer to write a series of stories descriptive of the life of northern British Columbia. Some years ago he was on a mission held in that part of the world and has gone back to renew earlier memories. We may expect some lively out-door stories as the result.

"The King's Pilgrimage," an account of His Majesty's recent journey to the war graves of France and Belgium, is to be published shortly by Hodder and Stoughton. The volume will include a full text of the king's address at Terlinthun, and Rudyard Kipling's poem, "The King's Pilgrimage." By His Majesty's desire, the profits from the sale of this book will be distributed among the philanthropic organizations which have been assisting relatives to visit the cemeteries abroad.

A. S. Hutchinson, author of that famous novel, "If Winter Comes," has made a recent confession to an English editor that his characters all ways pop into his brain with their names attached or else he imagines them out of the faces of people he sees in the streets or public places. "I see a face," he says, "and a way goes my imagination into the face's life, career, friends—all kinds of things. The longest and best short story I have written was written for me from start to finish by the faces of a man and girl opposite to me for two stations in the tube. I think this trick is responsible for the exaggeration with which I sometimes draw a character."

John Galsworthy has collected his Forsyte novels into one volume, and dedicates them thus: "To my wife I dedicate the Forsyte Saga in its entirety, believing it to be of all my work the least unworthy of one without whose encouragement, sympathy, and criticism I could never have become even such a writer as I am."

Robert Nichols, the young English poet, who recently came through Canada, and dropped off to see some of us on his way back from Tokio, where he has been professor of English in the Imperial University for the last three years, has been telling an English interviewer his opinion of the Japanese. "It is quite a mistake," he says, "to suppose that the Japanese are Europeanized. They are not. They are far too proud of their own institutions and far too

which to hang a shred of pride, else life would be insupportable; but his first and most lively desire is to be proud of himself—his attainments, his excellences and his integrity. It is only when he finds nothing in himself of which to be proud that he turns to other sources to find comfort for his ego.

The natural desire of man is to be decent, for a sense of decency soothes his vanity as nothing else can. Place him where he can build

a home and rear his children in freedom, with none to molest or make afraid, and he will be a model citizen. But let authority endeavor to take away his liberty and he becomes sullen. Hate kindles in his heart, and in spirit he becomes an outlaw. In the name of liberty he stoops to crimes that a free man would scorn. He feels no pride, but only a sullen desperation. To chain man is to take away the pride that prompts him to be decent.

Deformity. The land is full of uplifters and the people are divided into two groups, one of which holds that all reformers are great and good men, while the other as sincerely believes that persons interested in reform have axes to grind and are in the business for revenue only. That there are knaves who fatten on the credulity of pious folk is an established fact. But to talk with reformers, great and small, is to be persuaded that nearly all of them are inspired by a sincere and uncompromising hatred of the things that are evil.

When men make argument in public, personal interest of the desire to overcome an adversary will persuade them to maintain that evil is good and good evil; but in their secret hearts all sane men agree concerning the right or wrong of things that matter. When normal people pass a hunchback or a cripple whose hideous malformations are exposed to invite charity, they feel qualm that is very near to nausea. An innate sense of fitness, of beauty and of harmony causes them to recoil from any violation of the normal; for the normal is invariably pleasing.

To normal men right is pleasing and logical. To those wrong is hideous and the wrong-doer a monstrosity. The desire to rid the world of wrong, held in common by all proper men, is but a desire to heal the mental and moral deformity that makes wrong seem desirable. So men would labor to heal the hunchbacks and cripples if it were possible by laboring to make them straight again.

Aunt Het. "I hear a lot o' talk about idle tongues spoilin' the reputation o' good girls; but I've yet to see idis tongues waggin' about a girl until she gives 'em plenty 'em was about."

#### The Girl Across the Street.

Once more the girl across the street is dreaming dreams and once more the butcher boy finds life bitter and existence as ashes in his mouth. There are only six typewriters in town, and the only unmarried man who has one is Lawyer Davis. Davis is a widower, bald, lean and solemn; but he has lived here only three years, and doubtless his past life was romantic and mysterious. They say he has money. The butcher boy was permitted to see the letter, and in the post office lobby Tuesday he said in the presence of Davis that he could look any man who wrote anonymous letters. Davis did not appear interested in the suggestion, however, and the mystery deepens as the days pass.

Monday the girl received a letter. It was typewritten and unsigned, but it radiated romance and cupid peered between the lines. "My dream creature," it began, and thereafter, through two single-spaced pages, it pictured the adoration of a strong man, saddened by contact with the world, for an idol whom he worshipped from afar, deeming himself unworthy as yet to tell the story of his love face to face. Gosh! The girl brought the letter

over to our house and she and Daughter had the time of their lives. How delightful is mystery! There are only six typewriters in town, and the only unmarried man who has one is Lawyer Davis. Davis is a widower, bald, lean and solemn; but he has lived here only three years, and doubtless his past life was romantic and mysterious. They say he has money. The butcher boy was permitted to see the letter, and in the post office lobby Tuesday he said in the presence of Davis that he could look any man who wrote anonymous letters. Davis did not appear interested in the suggestion, however, and the mystery deepens as the days pass.

Every man has a lot of natural resources he ought to conserve more than he does. Small talk is responsible for the use of many big words. A man's good opinion of himself is the real thing.

### Public Library Bulletin

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