

carved the surface into mountain, valley, and plain. None of the water could penetrate the surface, because it was so hot that it was driven out as steam. Thus the whole of the moisture was on the actual surface or in the clouds.

As the earth cooled, water was able to penetrate the surface more and more, following the heated core as closely as the temperature would allow. The whole crust is permeable, though not equally so. All rocks and strata hold water to greater or less degree. It is not possible to sink a deep shaft for a mine without encountering water, as we know to our cost, for it has to be pumped out at great expense. It is common knowledge that, if a mine is not worked, it is soon flooded.

We are thus irresistibly forced to the conclusion that we are in the midst of a gradual progressive drying-up of

our earth, due to causes almost entirely out of our control, which has already destroyed a great deal of the best parts of the earth's surface and now menaces the rest, and which must sooner or later put an end to our race and all other life on the world.

Though the world is drying up, mankind can probably delay the process, if the nations will work together to this end. Our nearest planetary neighbor, Mars, is apparently in worse case than we are, having reached a more decrepit stage of stellar existence. There, according to Professors Schiaparelli, Lowell, and Pickering, life exists, but it is only made possible by irrigation on a world-wide scale. Whether, when the earth reaches this stage, there will be a struggle for the water sources or not, is a problem that the future only can solve.

## THE FRENCH NOVEL OF 'TO-DAY

BY PIERRE MILLE

*[M. Pierre Mille is a well-known French writer who has been publishing a book every other year since his De Thessalie en Crète appeared in 1897. He has written several books on the Congo, a number of novels, and, as he says himself, 'hundreds of tales which I, being the most negligent of men, have never collected into a volume.' Some of these merry little pieces have been translated in the Living Age.]*

From the *Observer*, December 31, January 7, 14  
(LONDON MIDDLE-GROUND LIBERAL WEEKLY)

To be right in the swim and to be borne along with the stream are not the best conditions under which to form an estimate of the course of the current. I am honestly of opinion that a well-informed Englishman would have the likeliest chance of achieving the best essay on contemporary French literature, and a well-informed Frenchman

the best on contemporary English literature.

I can only promise to endeavor to form as just an appreciation as possible, and to be as objective as I well can. But I must warn the reader not to expect from me a bibliographical record, so to speak, of the French novel for the last quarter of a century. My sole aim

will be to point out the leading tendencies of French fiction since the opening of the present century, and to note a few of the leading works in that department of literature which have made a name for themselves, either because of their intrinsic worth and interest, or because of their special significance, which may even transcend in importance their worth and interest. For a book that has left its mark, that opens up a new path, may occasionally fail as a literary achievement, or may even appear not to be of a nature to engage the interest of a wide circle of readers.

The most obvious characteristic of French literature in the case of fiction — though not as regards the drama — for the past twenty years is a revival of idealism, and even at times of a kind of spiritualism that is scarcely distinguishable from Catholic teaching at its purest.

Naturalism as a literary school would seem to be dead in France. There is not a single writer left who professes to belong to it. Not that naturalistic novels — or at least those of Zola — are no longer read. But Zola's novels are read only abroad, or, if they are read in France, it is, curiously enough, exclusively among the less-educated classes. Ask any bookseller in Paris whose customers are of the middle class, and he will tell you that he does not sell ten novels by Zola in a year. But in the Bastille or Ménilmontant quarters another bookseller will tell you there is always a demand for Zola.

The explanation is that among middle-class buyers of books the greatest readers are women, and the coarseness of language and the indelicacy of the situations in the work of Zola repel women, and to a fairly considerable extent also men. Moreover, the materialism of his social problems, as well as their purely democratic atmosphere, is no longer in favor, for the middle

class has become spiritualistic in theory and reactionary in practice. The state of society described by Zola, on the other hand, continues to resemble that known to the masses, whose tendency in France is to gravitate toward the lower middle class both in town and country. The somewhat elementary simplicity of the social ideas of the author of the *Rougon-Macquarts*, and the rather heavy boldness, — which is not, however, without some sort of grandeur — of his spacious canvases, therefore appeal to the new public who have been taught to read in the primary schools. It is also among this public of the lower and lower middle classes that are found the readers of Maupassant, an author somewhat neglected now by the more educated classes.

The psychological and society novel, with the aid of Paul Bourget as well as certain women writers of remarkable talent, — Mme. de Noailles, Gérard d'Houville, the daughter of the poet José Maria de Heredia, who has since become Mme. Henri de Régnier, Marcelle Tinayre, Colette, and Lucie Delarue-Mardrus, — is now building up a vast and brilliant school on the ruins of the naturalistic novel.

Gérard d'Houville's *L'Inconstante* is a work quite as remarkable for its passionate feeling and insight as the *Visage Emerveillé* of Mme. de Noailles. M. Charles Maurras has very justly remarked, in the *Avenir de l'Intelligence*, that romanticism, by appealing more to feeling than to reason, has produced at the hands of women, as was to be expected, its finest late autumn fruits. This is because, in the analysis of the passions, the feeling and sensual life of women remain intimate, sincere, and, therefore, lyrical. Colette, even up to her last novel, *Chéri*, in which she is more feline and subtle, also more highly strung, displays dangerous and singular

charm. And it may be said that Marcelle Tinayre, Lucie Delarue-Mardrus and Myriam-Harry have the gift, somewhat rare among their sex, in France at least, of writing works that are not exclusively 'subjective,' in which something more than the exaltation of their own personality is to be found.

MM. Gilbert de Voisins, Jean de Tinan, Marcel Boulenger, André Beaunier, and Edmond Jaloux, with their varied talents, are pleasing, incisive, and witty. Finally, in a novel by M. Paul Bourget, even though he be hampered, not to say checked, by his Conservative and Catholic doctrinairism,—it is that excellent critic M. Paul Souday who attributes this fault to him,—there is always to be found, along with a theory, *an idea*—which is not quite the same thing; for the author of the *Disciple* is a thinker of a very high order. But it is important that this should be noted: up to the time of the war the French novel, considered as a whole, if no longer naturalistic, had in its treatment of individual life and social phenomena remained essentially 'pessimistic.'

Indeed, this is what differentiates it more particularly from the contemporary English novel, which is naturally much more optimistic, even when—as is pretty frequently the case nowadays—it adventures into a criticism of morals.

People are inclined to attribute this pessimism of the French novel to the dejection following on the defeat of 1870; but they are wrong. It dates from before that time, from the last years of the Second Empire. And, moreover, the defeat of Waterloo, which involved consequences far more serious for us,—as serious almost as the defeat of 1918 for Germany,—did not make pessimists of the early romanticists—neither Hugo in *Les*

*Misérables*, nor even Balzac. Let who will question it. Balzac's heroes are conquerors as optimistic as Napoleon I. The pessimism of the French novel during the last three quarters of a century is to be traced to causes other than the Capitulation of Sedan.

And the first of these was the profound disillusion consequent on the failure of the splendid humanitarian dreams of 1848. As a reaction against the latest optimistic works of Hugo and Michelet, writers plunged into realism and 'Art for Art's sake,' with a preconceived contempt for human nature. Secondly, the low birthrate of France was then already to some extent, and is now to a far larger extent, responsible. A nation among whom there are more middle-aged and old men than youths is no longer a joyous people. And finally I believe this pessimism is also to be attributed to the ever-growing importance devoted by our literature to 'sex,' to the depicting of the passion of love considered in its sexual and physical aspect. For, viewed from that standpoint, love is a melancholy passion: it brings to the heart and lips a feeling akin to bitterness and despair, and nothing bears this out more than Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal*, which has exercised so powerful and enduring an influence on our literature.

The *Fleurs du Mal*, moreover, amply proves that sensual pessimism is able to give birth to literary works of the first rank. Another example is the *Pêche-resse* of M. Henri de Régnier, one of the most powerful and most finished of novels, but, in spite of a style brilliantly polished, coarse almost to brutality, permitting itself great freedom in some of its situations, and endowing some of its characters with a cynical display of vice. None the less, it is a masterpiece.

And is it not apparent that this is the case also with Anatole France? This great writer, the only survivor with

Loti of the great galaxy of the nineteenth century, — comprising Flaubert, Renan, and Taine, — who would seem to belong to no special epoch, so essentially a classic is he — he too is a thorough pessimist. No one is more strongly convinced, and no one has proclaimed it with more incisive irony, that human nature is essentially bad, and that man is a vicious animal. To this extent — and the statement might surprise him if anything could surprise a radical skeptic like him — this fine old pagan genius, this philosopher who no doubt believes himself to have succeeded to the mantle of none other than Lucretius, has remained truly Christian, for he neither thinks nor writes other than as a firm believer in original sin.

Pursuing our inquiry as far as the limits of these articles will permit, it remains to be seen — and it is rather a curious phenomenon — how the consequences of the war, notwithstanding that thirteen hundred thousand households mourn their dead and despite the anxieties born of the economic situation, have brought about to a certain extent a reaction against pessimism.

The reaction against naturalism drove the contemporary French novel back upon psychological analysis, and perhaps into ideology more than into idealism. There it encountered a pitfall which it has not always succeeded in avoiding; it developed intellect rather than feeling, while remaining pessimistic, as during the naturalistic period. It ran the risk, therefore, of losing in feeling and breadth of sympathy what it gained in precision and subtlety of observation.

Previous to Rousseau, our literature of the eighteenth century had suffered from the same evil. It is also met with in some of our psychological novelists, and they then require all the resources of their intellect and talent to spare the reader the impression of absolute bald-

ness. Such is the case with M. Abel Hermant, the remarkably shrewd anatomist of the *Courpière* series, afterward of the *Coutras*, of the *Renards*, of *L'Aube Ardente*, *La Journée Biève*, and *Le Crépuscule Tragique*. Others do not even succeed in this, and for that reason I shall not name them.

And yet, so strong has the worship of intellect and close analysis become in France that we may consider it a special dispensation of Providence that our wonderful Loti began to write and to make his mark some forty years ago, at a time when the views of writers and critics on the subject were less exclusive. For Loti never made any pretensions to what we in France understand by 'intelligence.' He was content, greatly to his credit and fame, to be a marvellous instrument of feeling. Had he appeared later he would probably not have triumphed so easily, in spite of the melancholy and sincerity of his pessimism, which assimilate him to the general standard.

Sufficient proof of this may be found in the comparative silence and indifferent success encountered by two novels which would at any other time have been placed in the foremost rank by virtue of their intensity of pathos, their poetry, and their note of pity, tenderness, and sympathy — I mean the *Nono* of M. Gaston Rouporel and *L'Histoire d'une Marie* of M. André Baillon, works which I cannot recommend too highly to English readers who are not repulsed by the unbridled expression of a sensuality from which our French novels are rarely free.

An exception, however, must be made in respect of *Maria Chapdelaine* by Hémon, which has gained readers by the hundred thousand, has been translated into nearly every language, and which displays, though in a slightly lower measure, the same qualities. But it must be remembered that *Maria*

*Chapdelaine* is not only a chaste work, which may be put in the hands of anyone, but has religious tendencies which have enabled the Catholic press to recommend it. On the other hand, the exquisite Charles Louis-Philippe, so emotional and original in the expression of his feeling, has not met with the number of readers his merit deserves.

I said at the outset that it is already twenty years since the naturalistic novel died or was in extremis. This may have been something of an exaggeration, although necessary to make my meaning clear. As a matter of fact it has continued to live by developing in the direction of the society novel, with Rosny the elder (*La Charpente*, *La Vague Rouge*, and, earlier still, *Le Bilatéral*) and Paul Adam (*Le Trust*). From a literary point of view the case of Paul Adam is extremely interesting. There is no writer more fertile, more teeming with ideas, more ambitious to portray everything and to present a comprehensive picture of contemporary society. And yet, with these perfectly novel and wholly modern conceptions, he holds fast to the medium of the symbolism in which he had steeped himself, and of which he had been one of the inventors, at the period when symbolism succeeded naturalism. It is perhaps owing to this contrast between the form and the substance that he has not succeeded in obtaining quite the place he deserved.

As for Rosny the elder, his vast culture and encyclopædic interests have carried him from the society novel to the prehistoric novel, as in *Vamireh* and *La Guerre du Feu*, and to the scientific novel, in which latter sphere he is, it would appear, the rival of Wells. But in reality the scientific culture of Rosny is deeper than that of Wells. Before everything Wells is a socializing moralist; for him the scientific thesis is only a starting-point. With Rosny the

scientific thesis is the very heart of the work.

As will have been seen, it is somewhat rash to try to set up schools and distinguish tendencies when one has notable writers to deal with, whom it would be impossible to classify or assort. A proud, lofty, and individualistic nature like Henri de Régnier must always stand apart. It is impossible to allocate to any special group the author of that admirable and wonderful work, the *Pêcheresse*, of which I have already spoken, and of *La Canne de Jaspe*, *Les Amants Singuliers*, *La Double Maîtresse*, *Le Bon Plaisir*, and *Les Rencontres de M. de Bréot*. His aristocratic and varied talent carries him by turns toward something that might be termed the analytic novel treated with dignified imagination, or toward historical fiction.

The same may be said of Pierre Louys, whose *Aphrodite* and *Le Pantin* were such a success. A reconstruction of Greek life? Hardly — a species of sensual poem, rather. And M. Marcel Prévost himself, he too cannot be classified, unless we label him a feminist novelist. But he is above all a novelist who achieves real novels, and works them out to perfection.

When the very modest writer who pens these lines published *Bernavaux*, certain critics, without any malicious intention of course, dubbed him 'the French Kipling.' Thus he was crushed beneath a weight of honor which he does not deserve. And this for a very simple reason: apart from all question of relative talent Kipling was a genuine colonial story-teller, an Anglo-Indian who finds his subjects in the country of his birth, whereas in France, until quite recent years, — with perhaps one exception, that of Marius and Ary Leblond, natives of the island of Réunion, the authors of *Le Zézère* and *La Sarabande*, — there existed merely the ex-



otic literature of the tourist, which is an altogether different thing.

Yes, colonial tourist literature — with genius in it — are the novels of Loti on Tahiti and Senegal, narratives of a naval officer who, after all, only saw things from his ship! And so with the tales of Bernavaux, written by another city-dweller known to me. Colonial tourist literature again are *Le Sang des Races* and *Pépète le Bien-aimé*, those delightful works of Louis Bertrand, another city man of whom chance for a few years made a professor in Algeria. Colonial exotic tourist literature, finally, are the works of Farrère on Indo-China and Japan, and so too are *Les Conquérants* and *Le Chef des Porte-plumes*, those powerful and even brutal works of Robert Randau, although their author, at least, as an old colonial official, has a more intimate acquaintance with that of which he writes.

But for the past few years this is no longer the case. To the Réunionists, Marius and Ary Leblond, — whose last novel, *Ophélia*, has a special merit of its own, — may now be added some Algerians 'of Algeria,' whose talents are essentially of the soil: Magali Boissard, whose *Maâdith* and *L'Enfant Taciturne* deserve to be read; Lecoq and Hagel, whose collection of tales, *Broumitch le Kabyle*, presages the birth of a truly Algerian literature. Here we have certainly a new and valuable asset.

To some extent the colonial and exotic novel met the requirement of the reaction against realism: it took the reader abroad. But during the ten years that preceded the war the idealist movement gave proof of the power it has developed by works of an entirely new character. André Gide, who in *Paludes* and *L'Immoraliste* had shown himself to be purely an intellectualist, — outstanding enough, however, to make him the leader of a school, —

produced that beautiful and sad tale of the crisis of a Protestant soul called *La Porte Étroite*. About the same time appeared, in Péguy's *Cahiers de la Quinzaine*, the *Jean-Christophe* of Romain Rolland, a work of unequal interest throughout its many somewhat loosely connected volumes, but full of matter, broad in sympathy, and with a singularly fresh tone both for our day and for France; full of enthusiasm, internationalist, and — what distinguishes it from all the rest of the literary output of the time — in no sense pessimistic; on the contrary, quivering with confidence — a man among human kind; Wagnerian one might almost say, though the writing is occasionally rather dull and loose. His *Annette et Sylvie*, which has just appeared, is in the same vein.

Although the author is by birth a Catholic, one would be justified in saying that *Jean-Christophe* is Protestant in its inspiration. But, while it was asserting itself, the idealist trend of our contemporary fiction assumed, in part, a tone distinctly spiritualistic and subsequently Catholic. There is now in France a Catholic literature with a richer output of works, whatever may be their value, than at any other period of our history.

The idealistic revival certainly contributed to the development of the national or nationalist novel, of which *Colette Baudouche* and *En Service de l'Allemagne*, by Maurice Barrès, remain the most brilliant examples. It might be said that in appearance they are the very antithesis of Romain Rolland's *Jean-Christophe*, which is deliberately and decidedly 'international.' Yet, if we go to the root of things, we find in the nationalist novel of Barrès, as in the international novel of Romain Rolland, the same concern to get away from the passive pessimism of the naturalistic and the purely psychological schools; to take as their inspiration some gener-

ous sentiment, either of national hope, or, on the other hand, of European reconciliation, which appeals to the heart of its readers and not merely to their intelligence — in short, the quest of a common bond of feeling at once ideal and vast.

One of the most curious results of the war from a literary point of view will have been to leave these works with merely an historical interest, apart from the unquestionable merit which they retain — particularly those of M. Barrès — as works of art. For on the one hand — Alsace-Lorraine having once more become French — the question they deal with is out of date; while on the other Germany has been so altered by her defeat that to-day it would perhaps be difficult to find there the mental characteristics of a Jean-Christophe. This is at any rate less impossible than it would seem at a first glance.

The nationalist movement in literature, for various reasons, — one being that it is opposed to an international and deliberately anticlerical Socialism, — is rather intimately associated with the spiritualistic and Catholic movement, as is shown by the novels of M. Henri Bordeaux, which, generally speaking, are as nationalist as they are Catholic. The sources of the Catholic novel are tolerably ancient; they are at least to be found in the early developments of romanticism under Chateaubriand. Even Balzac declared himself a Catholic, although his Catholicism was strongly suspected of heresy. I would not swear that his works are not on the 'index.' This could not be said of those of M. René Bazin and M. Henri Bordeaux, or of those belonging to the second period of MM. Paul Bourget and Francis Jammes.

The case of M. Francis Jammes is rather singular. A woman writer who was in love, and who had just written a tolerably poor novel and knew it, once

said to me: 'Don't you see, love does n't help my talent!' So it has been with M. Francis Jammes. His piety has not helped his talent. The delicate pagan author of *Clara d'Ellebeuse* and the *Roman du Lièvre* has not recaptured that delicious vein which makes his early works a feast for the epicure or, for that matter, for everyone. His conversion has not helped his talent. It is only the more meritorious on that account, if he only considers the matter. So, too, it has been with M. Louis Bertrand, although since his *Sang des Noirs* and *Pépète le Bien-aimé* he has produced *Mlle. de Jessancourt*, a remarkably fine novel which ought to be read.

M. Henri Bordeaux did not require conversion, as he was born a dutiful son of the Church. He produces novels of excellent construction, decorous and conscientiously written, which enjoy great popularity and can be safely placed in anyone's hands. Curiously enough, this is not quite the case with those of M. René Bazin. Although a Catholic by birth, a convinced and fervent son of the Church, the very simplicity and ardor of his faith sometimes lead him into daring situations which his extremely pure style, charming and crystalline in its sonority, — for he is truly an artist, — does not altogether succeed in masking. Had some anticlerical writer been bold enough to deal with the subject of *L'Isolée*, he would have been charged with defaming the female religious orders. In another of his novels M. Bazin denounces the immorality of society in language the harshness of which recalls the crudity of the preachers of former days. But *Donatienne*, too, must be read, for it is a work of artless and delightful purity and one of the finest things written in France for thirty years.

The Catholicism of M. René Bazin is

free of all alloy. That of M. Paul Bourget, who has become choir-master of the new and ever-growing Catholic school, — MM. Vallery-Radoit, Baumann, and so forth, — is mixed up with politics. The fact is that Catholicism has long seemed to the author of the *Disciple* — that remarkable study of egotism — a genre from which M. Maurice Barrès has broken loose — a conservative force, necessary to what we must call the 'bourgeoisie,' to use the language of Socialism. During the last three quarters of a century, in fact, there has been a change in the attitude of Frenchmen toward the religious problem. The peasantry and working classes have become anticlerical. Moved by the instinct of self-defense, the middle classes, menaced in their privileges, have become reconciled, at least from the political standpoint, with Catholicism.

I shall not quote any of the works of M. Paul Bourget's later manner. Those he has written since *L'Étape* — a notable work — are sufficiently well known, even abroad.

It is a general phenomenon in all the countries which took part in the war that people do not want to hear anything more about it, even those who actually fought — perhaps those most of all. Neither such works as the *Croix de Bois* of M. Dorgelès — a fine work nevertheless — nor even *Le Feu* of M. Henri Barbusse, the popularity of which was tremendous, are any longer read. Of late people have even applied their ingenuity to discovering defects in the latter work, charging it even with unreality. I would humbly suggest that, had this novel been from the pen of a Russian, its very defects would have seemed to us merits, and we should have gone on lauding it to the skies. The same would undoubtedly have been done with M. Gaston Rouporel's *Nono* and M. André Bail-

lon's *Histoire d'une Marie*, the high merit of which I have already mentioned.

The war having been thus suppressed — in literature — two main currents of fiction have become marked. That which attracts the greatest number of readers bears them toward the romantic novel which is coming to life again — the amusing, diversified, adventurous novel. When M. Pierre Benoit's delightful *Königsmarck* appeared, one was encouraged to hope that this witty and ingenious inventor in fiction might follow in the footsteps of Cherbuliez. And, for that matter, neither his *Comte Kostia* nor *Méta Holdenis* was without psychological and social significance. M. Pierre Benoit, possibly discouraged by the poor reception given the former work by the critics, — although the public, on the other hand, delighted in it, — has in *L'Atlantide* and his other novels preferred merely to amuse his readers. In this he is marvelously successful and appears to wish for nothing better.

M. Pierre MacOrlan, whose early works, *L'Étoile Matutinale* and *Cavalière Elsa*, attracted some attention, appears to have ambitions of a loftier and more complicated nature. In the adventure story he mingles humor and even mystification with elements of daring which can hardly appeal to the fastidious reader. It is just possible that this is a mistake, for the adventure story ought to have the appearance of having 'arrived.' In this the works of English writers, who are masters in this genre, are preëminent. But M. MacOrlan will, apparently, import into literature the processes of the cubist and 'simultanéiste' painters, rather in the manner of M. Jules Romains, the 'unanimist,' one at least of whose novels, *La Mort de Quelqu'un*, is very nearly a masterpiece. Nevertheless, M. MacOrlan, who is seeking



but does not yet seem to have found himself, is an interesting and talented writer.

Like him, M. Marcel Proust, M. Jean Girandoux, and M. Paul Morand are in quest of new methods of expression. In the series of works by M. Marcel Proust, who has just died, we find not only a most keen observer, at once very 'snobbish' and very cruel, but also a 'simultanéiste' who sees all the details of a picture, a character, or a situation on a single plane and sets out to express them in a single interminable phrase entangled in an infinity of subjunctives. He does not always know where he is, nor does the reader. But the effect produced is none the less novel and curious.

M. Jean Girandoux and M. Paul Morand — also with ultramodern methods of expression — have introduced into our fiction, previously so forced back upon itself — so entirely Parisian and so seldom provincial — the study of international environments.

This is an immense field worthy of cultivation, whose existence stay-at-home Frenchmen would never have suspected but for the war, by which nations and races have been thrown together or united. In manner M. Paul Morand is a direct disciple of M. Girandoux, whose *Siegfried et le Limousin* has just been awarded the Prix Balzac, and whose previous novel, *Suzanne et le Pacifique*, although rather strained in its fancy, was a work of remarkable ability. On the other hand M. Paul Morand, the author of *Ouvert la Nuit*, possesses a vigor and intensity

of observation which are entirely his own and which should secure him the favor of the public.

In this rather brief sketch I have tried to show an English reader what works he must read in order to form a general idea of the tendencies of the French novel during the past twenty years. But I have confined myself, with few exceptions, to mentioning those which would not offend, either by their language or their situations, that sentiment of reserve which is still general in England, but not among us. The task would have been impossible otherwise. I must say, however, that in this respect a certain change is taking place in France as a result of what might be called the awakening of the trade-union spirit among literary men themselves. They are showing a disposition to police their own profession. Recently a considerable number of them protested against the gross immorality of a novel on behalf of which the excuse of compensating artistic merit could not be alleged. A certain young writer, too, whose fault, however, had been no graver, lately had the doors of the daily journals and publishers closed to him, at least for a time, that he might repent his sins.

At the same time I must point out that while in England restraint in literature is imposed in the name of public and religious morality, it is imposed in France at present rather as a result of a reviving respect for the classical division of genres. In any case it is imposed in the name of what is due to the honor of literature itself and not to morals.

# DONALD HANKEY'S LAST BATTLE

BY A. CRUDGINGTON

*[A Student in Arms was one of the most widely read war-books in the days when we all knew less of the origins of the war and felt more idealistic about it. Even in these days of disillusion, however, there is room for this simple account of Lieutenant Donald Hankey's death, told by a private of his company, which is printed just as written save for a few changes in punctuation. Mr. J. St. Loe Strachey, editor of the Spectator, through whose hands passed the original manuscripts of A Student in Arms, comments on the spirit of this article: 'How little the British private soldier changes through the centuries! Corporal Trim might have written what Mr. Crudginton writes. Dr. Johnson describes exactly this spirit in his essay on the English Common Soldier. Hankey would have wanted no better memorial than this plain and yet deeply moving proof of what he was to his men.']*

From the Spectator, December 30  
(LONDON CONSERVATIVE WEEKLY)

SIR, —

You say you would like to know something about Donald Hankey, particularly in the last hour of his life. I will tell you exactly what I know and saw, and how I had the honor to bury him. I will have to give you the full story, but I do not want anybody to think that I am boasting, as what I did nearly every soldier did while at the front. We were ordered to relieve a London Division at Le Transloy, Somme, where we took over on the night of October 10, 1916. It was a very warm position, and dead were laying about wholesale. The Germans were blowing down our trenches, which were only just big enough for us to stand in; so when the shells hit the trench it fell in, as there were no sand-bags to support it.

That night went off all right; we only had a few wounded; we buried the dead near our position. The following day we built our trench up, but had to be very careful in case the Germans saw us. In the night time, after stand down (which means that at sunset every man stands on the fire-step for one hour, and the same at sunrise; after the hour is up

you are ordered to stand down), we were told that we were going to make a daylight attack on the following day, October 12, at two o'clock.

On the day of attack every man was told by his platoon officer to be in the trench at one o'clock. I was told to look after the men's packs as they were going to leave them in the trench. I went and asked Lieutenant D. Hankey if I could go over the top with the boys, and said that an old man named Private Allen could take my place to look after the packs. He went and saw the company officer (Captain Walters), and he told me I could go with them. We got extended out — I was with the company officer.

About 1.30 P.M. Lieutenant Beamish sent down and asked me if I could manage to make the company officers a drink of tea. I said I would try. The four officers sent their water-bottles down. I got a candle, wrapped some rag around it, and stuck my bayonet into the side of the trench and put my canteen with the water in on it and lit the candle under it. In about ten minutes the water was nearly boiling, when a lot of earth from the side of the