

Art and Craft in Thomas Hardy

The Technique of Thomas Hardy, by Joseph Warren Beach. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. \$2.50.

THE study of a special phase of a writer's work is apt to involve the implication that that phase has a primary importance in the writer's achievement. Professor Beach has walked warily and has in the main escaped the pitfalls along his path. His appreciation, for example, of the peasants in the Wessex Novels is beautifully accomplished; quite as satisfactory also are his studies of the scenic background of the novels. But the very nature of his theme has forced this critic to disregard that portion of Mr. Hardy's work which many good judges hold to be the most characteristic and most truly creative: the poems. Indeed, if one may read between the lines, Professor Beach seems to regard the poetry somewhat superciliously—an attitude probably due to the conservative academic prepossession in favor of the body of work whose fame has been long established. So long as he holds himself down to a consideration of the novelist's art and craft the poems could be safely set aside; but in his final chapter the theme of "Truth" leads him into a discussion of Hardy's philosophy; and such a discussion, ignoring the evidence of the poems, is valueless. Thus, he argues that Hardy entangles his characters in "a web of circumstances" to make an interesting plot rather than "to illustrate a theory of life." But various early poems show that the idea of "hap," "chance," "circumstance" has always been an essential part of Hardy's theory of life and that the excessive use of surprise and coincidence in the novels, though it owes much to the technique which Hardy inherited from certain earlier writers, carries with it a philosophic implication.

The development of Hardy's art is traced from the mere Collins-like ingenuity of *Desperate Remedies* through the introduction of irony in *A Pair of Blue Eyes* to a full realization of the value of setting in *Far from the Madding Crowd*. So far, however, he was possessed by the demon of plot and was willing to arouse interest by resorting to the devices of old-fashioned fiction and melodrama. He was, like Shakespeare, concerned primarily with the essential truths of humanity and was content to illustrate character by actions and episodes evolved from the traditional stuff of fiction. Nearly all this lumber he discarded in *The Return of the Native*. Professor Beach admirably appraises the structural excellences of this novel.

As an explanation of its perfect technique the critic hesitates between a happy accident and a thoroughly assimilated artistic creed. I am myself inclined to the former view. For Hardy is not a conscious innovator. The structure of his novels shows a clarification, generally a simplification of the Victorian technique; the lavish shapelessness of Dickens and Thackeray has been cut down and often moulded into symmetry; the novel is no longer an omnium gatherum of episodes, incidents, and observations. But in essentials the technique is still Victorian. One finds no such elaborate experiments as those of Henry James: the telling of a tale in strictly scenic form or from within the consciousness of one character only. Hardy chooses to disregard the multitudinous contrasting facets of actuality, an awareness of which makes a tale by Mr. Conrad a thing of a thousand profiles.

After *The Return of the Native* came a period of decline during which several insignificant stories were written. But

I question the wisdom of including *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Woodlanders* within this period of More Craft than Art.

The critic can of course pick both books to pieces, showing how incident is huddled on incident, how dialogue is abrupt and scant and often sacrificed to a succinct paraphrase, how the skeins of motive are tangled, and so forth. And without difficulty he has pointed the contrast with some other novel that fully develops the implications in each chapter and exhaustively analyses character and (especially) motive. Yet when Professor Beach writes of "that feeling of the way, that jockeying for position, that long ghostly fencing-match of allusion, before the opposed parties come to a grapple, which gives its breathless interest to so many a dialogue of . . . Henry James," one is tempted to apply the pragmatic test to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*. For *it works!* With all its technical shortcomings it is interesting, moving and monumentally sound. With all their technical sleights-of-hand such books as *The Awkward Age* and *What Maisie Knew* are dull, nearly unreadable, and essentially frivolous. Too much may be made of mere technique; and if Mr. Lubbock's monograph on the Craft of Fiction and the James prefaces upon which that essay is based are to be accepted as doctrine necessary to salvation we shall be confronted with a set of a priori rules such as those which for so long put shackles on the drama.

The monograph is typical of American academic scholarship; it has the excellence of thoroughness and the defect of rigidity. I object to the critic's economic habit of clipping titles, often with the result of destroying their force and flavor: *The Madding Crowd*, for example, instead of *Far from the Madding Crowd*; or *The Native* instead of *The Return of the Native*. "High-brow" is an odious word to find in a piece of serious literary criticism. And only the exigent American demand for the spry and up-to-date could have persuaded Professor Beach to call his chapter on *The Mayor of Casterbridge* "Movie." The glamour of Wessex vanishes at the word.

SAMUEL C. CHEW.

Henry Ford

My Life and Work, by Henry Ford, in collaboration with Samuel Crowther. New York: Doubleday, Page & Company. \$3.50.

EVEN in his garden the man can organize production. He likes birds. Especially he likes wrens. They came to the farm at Dearborn in the spring. They liked the boxes hung for them in the branches of the cherry trees. But the sparrows drove them out. Once more the conquering race was asserting itself. But this time it failed to reckon with its host. Sparrows, it seems, like their nests immovable. Wrens like *theirs* to sway. "So we mounted a number of wren boxes on strips of spring steel," says Henry Ford. "The wrens liked the idea. The sparrows did not."

The sparrows didn't know what they were up against. Here was a man who has never trusted a cherry bough if a steel spring would do instead. Life has kept him busy, proving that wrens can hold their own with sparrows. Unlikely things can be made to happen. The wise men told him, thirty years ago, that a gas engine couldn't compete with steam, and that it was folly to think of hitch-

ing one to a buggy. But he made a motor car; it shook like a tornado—and it provoked so much curiosity in the streets of Detroit, invited so many inquisitive people to try to run it, that its owner “had to chain it to a lamp post when he left it anywhere.” But it was a motor car. And if it shook, it also ran.

Then they told him, once he was started in production, and talked of specializing on a single model, that it was madness to fly in the face of every law of business. Whether you are making motor cars or shoes or carpet sweepers, you must have a diversity of models to tempt the buying public. “If you make a single model,” his salesmen told him, “you’ll be out of business in six months.” But Ford announced, one day in 1909, that he intended to build one car and only one. Chassis, motor, equipment would be standardized. As for color: “Any customer can have a car painted any color he wants so long as it is black.” And with that suicidal policy he jumped his sales from six to eighteen thousand.

Successively they have told him that he could not cut his prices annually, that he could not pay a \$5 wage to every workman in his factory, that he could not take a defunct railway whose roadbed was “something more than a streak of rust and something less than a track,” and in less than two years turn it into a profitable venture. Henry Ford knows how to organize production. Even those who used to prophesy his downfall now admit that fact. It is the conventional attitude to acknowledge his genius as a production engineer. And to couple it with the assertion that once he leaves the four walls of his factory he becomes the world’s great goose.

He has sometimes seemed to like the rôle. There was the frenzy of his crusade against the Jews. There were those great arid stretches in the panorama of his information, brought out in the Tribune suit. More than once he has claimed the bells and called the cap his own. But if this book is a sample of Henry Ford outside his workshop, then I, for one, am by no means ready to subscribe to the conventional appraisal of him as an industrial Dr. Jekyll and a social Mr. Hyde.

For there is an extraordinary amount of good thinking and original thinking in this book of his. I have skimmed rather lightly, as I suppose others may, that section entitled *Things in General*. It takes him airily through international trade and Jews and higher education and what starts people fighting. The body of the book is quite another matter. What electricity and modern machinery are doing for industry, where the machine age is headed, what we may expect by way of centralization or decentralization of our production centres—those are things that Ford discusses, and discusses ably. There are moments when he is as much the pioneer as he was that day when he made two snorting cylinders from a discarded steam-pipe and belted them to the rear wheels of a defenceless buckboard. The framework rattles. But it takes him up the street.

I suspect that one of the answers to the riddle that has set a good many people guessing—“What kind of a man is Henry Ford?”—lies in recognizing the fact that Ford hasn’t put into practice the philosophy of the Brothers Barnabas; he hasn’t lived to be three hundred years. His appetite for data is enormous. Of his own business he says that he “thinks of it by day and dreams of it by night.” He is so thorough in his pursuit of facts that when he gets them they are his; but so thorough that he is still rummaging the corners of one floor in a world with many

stories. Ford’s own explanation is that “One idea at a time is about as much as any one can handle.” If he’s thorough, I suppose. Which is what led the Brothers Barnabas to conclude that able men stopped functioning about the time they should be born. Three-score-and-ten, though it might be long enough for a crude sort of village life, wasn’t long enough for a complicated civilization like our own.

What three hundred years would do for Henry Ford, the oracles alone could tell. It is typical of him today, as a mere youth of fifty-nine, that his whole emphasis is on method and none of it on goal. Possibly there has never been another autobiography so completely consecrated to ways and means for their intrinsic merit. The stress is all on saving time, cutting cross-lots, utilizing scrap, economizing on inconsequential. Wee man comes from the life process like a new Ford car dipped bodily in paint. He has traveled along the famous moving belt. His chassis has been assembled in forty-two time-saving operations. On the forty-third his tank is filled with gasoline. He is set to go. But where? “God’s great open spaces” is as near as Henry comes, with mapping his itinerary.

And yet—let the man live three hundred years . . . In 2223 A. D. he might give cards and spades to Pasteur and Confucius.

CHARLES MERZ.

Sickness and the State

Public Relief of Sickness, by Gerald Morgan. New York: The Macmillan Company. \$1.50.

SOME three years ago, when the British miners were voting for or against a strike, Professor E. L. Collis had the inspiration to range the various coal fields in order of discontent (as shown by the ballot) and to compare the result with a list of the same fields placed in order of accident rate. The two lists tallied with a single exception: that of an area where there had been a recent strike and where the men were not ready for another struggle. Such a coincidence cannot be attributed to chance, and the explanation advanced by Professor Collis is altogether the most probable; namely that insecurity contributes directly to discontent.

Discontent is not in itself a bad thing, but the kind of discontent which derives its emotional stimulus from a chronic foreboding of disaster is the kind which drives nations into senseless militarism and classes into aimless and unfruitful strife. The political importance of disease depends as much upon this fact as upon the obvious economic loss which it occasions to the state, and which has of late been much emphasized by health officials in search of more adequate appropriations.

Public relief of sickness is thus of interest for other than purely humanitarian reasons. Mr. Morgan’s book—interesting, well-balanced, and packed with information—deserves to be studied by every progressive citizen. The reader will find an orderly presentation of the subject, beginning with the present plight of the sick poor in America, passing on to the experience of certain European countries with their schemes of voluntary or compulsory “health insurance,” and concluding with suggestions for the better handling of the problem in these United States.

We are concerned, of course, with that great majority of citizens who live on or about the poverty line. When the bread-winner falls sick the family is faced with two urgent needs: money and medical care. What are its