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## Hardy the Poet

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## HARDY THE POET

A YEAR ago (or, to be exact, on April 6, 1951) John Crowe Ransom read a paper before the Ohio English Association—a paper subsequently published in the August 1951 issue of the *Kenyon Review*. Professor Ransom's subject was "The Poetry of 1900-1950." He declared: "The five poets whom I think a common consent will rank as the Major Poets of our period are: Thomas Hardy, William Butler Yeats, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Robert Frost, and T. S. Eliot. These poets need no recommendation of mine. But I will conclude with an impression of one of them, whom none of them (as I think) will outweigh or outlast, but who in the retrospect of history is likely to seem the most surprising. It is Hardy." Look up the *Kenyon Review* for last August and read Mr. Ransom's comment on this poet.

It is just fifty years since the publication of Hardy's *Poems of the Past and the Present*. This is a significant and memorable volume. It contains the poem "To Life"—one well worth memorizing—and the lines on "A Broken Appointment." In the opinion of J. M. Murry this last-named is "one of the finest of modern lyrical poems." The same volume also contains the poignant "In Tenebris," with its oft-quoted "if way to the Better there be, it exacts a full look at the Worst." But ranking above all other poems in the book stands "The Darkling Thrush." Let Mr. Alfred Noyes, himself a poet, sing its praises:

"Those who are really abreast of the achievements in poetry during the last fifty years are aware that *The Dark-*

## 86 Colby Library Quarterly

*ling Thrush* is a lyric of rugged strength, that peculiar strength which comes from understatement and the sense of something in reserve; a lyric of such pathos and beauty as can be compared with the best that has ever been done in our great lyrical language; and that is to say one of the finest lyrics in the world. From the first line . . . to the restrained and intense rapture of the close, the poem bears upon it the stamp of a truth and sincerity beyond praise. . . . It is a lyric that, read once, may be forgotten. Read three times, it will haunt the reader's memory as long as pain and death retain any meaning for him."

On the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of the volume containing this beautiful lyric, we devote the entire issue of our quarterly to the poet to whom we are indebted for "The Darkling Thrush," and to show his appearance at various times in his long life we reproduce four photographs of him.



### A POETIC APOSTROPHE TO HARDY

By ERNEST C. MARRINER

AN interesting addition to Colby's Hardy Collection is a holograph copy of a poetic apostrophe to Thomas Hardy, with marginal annotations by the author, W. E. Harker of Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex, England. On November 23, 1951, Mr. Harker addressed a letter to "The Principal, Colby College, Waterville, U.S.A.," in which he said: "Learning from Lt.-Col. Drew, D.S.O., O.B.E., F.S.A., the curator and secretary of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society, of the wonderful Hardy Collection your college possesses, I thought you might care to have the enclosed copy of an apostrophe by me [which was] placed in the Hardy Room [in the] Dorchester Museum at [the time of] Hardy's death. If so, I beg the honour of your acceptance."

In his letter Mr. Harker contends that Hardy, instead of