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WEBER AND THE WESSEX GIANT

THROUGHOUT each of the preceding eulogia and down the entire length of the *Bibliography* the name of Thomas Hardy weaves itself like a strand of crimson ivy. There is no escaping the profound influence that the life and works of the Dorchester titan exerted upon the life and works of Carl J. Weber. Where did it all start? How did this phenomenal passion take root and flourish?

Our story opens in 1914 when, as a zetetic young Rhodes Scholar, Professor Weber was ruminating at large in Blackwell's famous bookshop in Oxford. With no particular target in mind, he wandered toward a shelf-full of what appeared to be novels by a T. Hardy. The name meant nothing. As he glanced across the line of titles, however, his eyes were drawn to *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Something inside him tinkled; he purchased the volume and read it forthwith. It would strike a titillating note to record here that it was love at first sight. But, alas for romance, such was not the case. The book aroused no more than an urge to read a little further in the author.

Fourteen years must elapse and a change of scene occur before the spark is quickened. Upon news of Hardy's death in 1928, Professor Weber thought to mark the occasion with a review of Hardy's novels in the weekly "Prospero's Column" he was now conducting in the Water-ville *Morning Sentinel*. Of necessity, he read more of the novels at this time and was more deeply impressed.

But the incident which clinched matters had to wait until the following year. The first gathering of the Colby Faculty Club in the autumn of 1929 took place in the menage of Professor Everett F. Strong. The speaker of the evening, Professor Weber; his topic, a recent sojourn in the heart of Hardy country. Among the auditors that night sat Dr. Franklin W. Johnson, newly inducted President of Colby College. At the conclusion of the talk

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he buttonholed Weber and suggested that he develop his themes into a full-scale book. In one of her electric short stories, Katherine Mansfield describes cognition in this manner: "She felt the strange beast that had slumbered so long within her bosom stir, stretch itself, yawn, prick up its ears, and suddenly bound to its feet." Some such apocalypse befell Weber. To supplement his own experiences, he conned the library catalogues for serviceable Hardy items. They contained nothing of consequence. The crusade was on—and the rest is history. Within twenty years that void was filled by the most inclusive collection of Thomas Hardy materials anywhere.

Principal among those who contributed moral and financial support, Professor Weber cites: G. Cecil Goddard who, early in the game, coaxed bibliophilic alumni to assist with useful sums; Carroll N. Perkins and Frederick A. Pottle, members of the Board of Trustees, who listened with sympathy and opened channels for acquisition; Carroll A. Wilson, Philo Calhoun, H. Bacon Collamore, Walter Beinecke, Jr., and H. Ridgely Bullock, who gave generously and continuously. Unreported, of course, is a numberless host out of the blue—unsolicited strangers and anonymous donors who surrendered their beloved chattels as the collection grew in worldwide repute.

If it is true—as Vincent Starrett has it—that "when we are collecting books, we are collecting happiness," then Carl J. Weber has left for all of us a sure legacy of happiness in the Treasure Room of Colby College.

