

Contributions from the student body.

Article

Verse



Truth and a Woman

Rebellion for Knowledge

"There is no greater pleasure than to be going to the University of Paris in this year of our Lord 1215!" Thaddeus Angers ironically blew on his cold fingers, and looked out of the cloth-covered window that opened on the Rue du Fouare.

Jean Dubois nodded soberly from the floor where he was attempting to get his sabots on with one hand. His serious, thin face worried over the sabot, but he seemed to be thinking of something else.

"Oh, come now, Jean!" Thaddeus said. "It really is a great life. Must you be always preoccupied with the future and truth and such nonsense?" He gulped his breakfast wine and repeated. "Yes, it's a great life, and if you don't get those shoes on we'll miss Guiscard's lecture, bad as it is."

Onward to school.

They rushed pellmell out of the little garret into the narrow Street of Straw, through groups of noisy, boisterous students, toward the hall of Jacques Guiscard, Master of Trinquet College, and lecturer of anatomy.

Jean, sober-faced and earnest, spoke as if he were resuming a conversation. "Whatever you say, Thad, you really do agree with me. Jacques Guiscard does not know a straw about anatomy. All we've ever learned from him were the words of Galen and Aristotle." Thaddeus, with his eyes on the town girls who passed, replied, "Who is there but Galen? He has always been the authority. We cannot doubt his word; that would be a sacrilege!"

"Galen is no oracle!" Jean muttered vehemently. "He did not know everything! He never dissected a human being. How can we tell what is inside us if we don't look?"

"That we can never do," Thaddeus avowed. "Our church forbids it. We would be imprisoned and excommunicated if we were suspected of even thinking of such a thing!"

Mutual understanding.

He eyed Jean warily. They had been together two years at school, and they understood one another. He knew that Jean—with his capacity for taking himself seriously—would stop at nothing if he felt he could gain useful knowledge. Only Jean's reverence for his church, and the deep-seated devout faith that he had absorbed from his first day on earth kept the brazen spirit of science that was his from upsetting their lives. Thad also knew that because he was himself insatiably curious he would be forced to help Jean in any experiment.

Jean, with his dark eyes blank, pondered within himself. Guiscard was an old woman. Cowardly, mercenary, with an incurable thirst for gold, he ignored the challenge to learn more about anatomy. His classes were digests of Galen, Issac, and Constantinus. He had never touched the knife nor the scissors. What was needed was a man who would not be afraid to defy the narrow dogmatic views of the world. They needed someone who could think. Someone who would think.

Prince and pauper.

They entered the Master's hall and seated themselves on the floor. All the students, prince and pauper alike, sat on the straw-strewn floor. Guiscard, arrogant and loquacious, rambled on from the only chair in the room. He spoke so swiftly that the students could not copy his notes. That was sly! they could not tell how much he repeated himself. He read in a sleep-producing tone, from Galen's Pantegni, once brilliant and original, now so powerful that it had stifled all thought. He droned on and on.

Jean fidgeted and wriggled with his impatience at the words of the learned Master. He shook his head uneasily and seemed ready to burst into angry contradictions, but Thad jerked at his cloak and he subsided rebelliously. After all,

hadn't they, in the secrecy of their room, dissected mice and birds? Hadn't they proved without doubt that Guiscard was teaching a false doctrine? They knew him for a revered hypocrite, and they could do nothing.

Class finally over.

Three long hours of it. Jean's teeth were clenched in a soundless fury when they reached the street. His eyes blazed with resentment at the injustice of being forced to believe the absurd formulas of Galen. He had forgotten for a moment his creed and his church.

At the doorway of the Studium he stopped and turned with venom. "That That!" he said. "That is what we starve ourselves for! It won't do! Guiscard is a lazy liar! For all we know, so was Galen. I'm going to find out the truth!"

"How can we do it?" Thad, ready for excitement was instantly at his side. He scrutinized his friend's face, saw the fanaticism there, and hesitated—for he knew what was in Jean's mind.

"No," he said, "I can't do it!"

Planning dissection.

"Do as you like!" Jean flung at him defiantly. "Whether I lose my soul, my mind, and my life, I'm going to know the truth. By the Mother Mary! I'm going to perform a human anatomy, and..." He noticed the relenting gleam in Thad's eyes. "You're going to help me."

They ate their lunch as if it were their last. Thad's usual high spirits lay frozen in his heart by

the unreasoning horror of what they were about to do. All the ominous and awful powers of the universe were watching them, waiting to see if they would have the towering presumption to carry out their purpose—an act expressly forbidden to man. Is not the spiritless body a possession of God's? To tamper with the secrets of life, even the curious seeker after truth must beware!

Where, a corpse?

Jean ate little, his mind preoccupied with the plans for obtaining a corpse. They could have a body for the trouble of picking it up—if they were not seen—at the pauper-burying grounds outside the city. The transportation of their gruesome package to their room would be more difficult; but—would he have the courage to cut his way into the inviolable secrets of God? Jean made the sign of the cross many times that day, wrestling with his own spirit for freedom. Could he cast aside the great mass of religious belief that was burned deep in his soul? Could he ferret out the ageless secrets of life and death, look at them.

Sombre spectre

Sunset found them in the little tavern beneath the chaste, purifying shadow of the Cathedral. The sombre spectre of the unknown had descended upon the table. They talked in low whispers while the comely barmaids looked askance at the two who were usually so cheerful and friendly.

"We've got to do it tonight, Jean! Tomorrow is St. Thomas' fete. We'll work the whole day."

Thad stopped whispering when the girl appeared with their food.

"Yes," Jean replied, on the verge of hysteria. "We will get it over with now. Leave the food."

Fearful of their own courage, they turned their footsteps toward the forest south of Paris. They walked slowly, scanning each face for a friend, feeling completely alone in their world.

By the Sein rose the smoke of the rubble dumps. The smell of lime, eraser of memories, assailed their nostrils. In the distance the trees with their swaddling of dirty snow waited silently for the two truthseekers.

I can't do it!

And then, with a sudden light-headed laugh, Jean stopped upon the road, and looked fearfully past Thad—his face gone soft and courageless. "I can't do it," he said quietly. "I can't do it, Thad! I'm afraid!"

Thad, shocked, pulled up. He attempted to encourage Jean, but the dread clutched at his throat and he managed only a weak. "But we must, Jean!"

They looked woefully at one another, and sat at the side of the road wrapped in mutual horror—pondering.

Thad hit upon an idea. Jean had been studying too hard. The student riot with the townspeople only a few days before, his bitter enmity with Guiscard—all had combined to bring Jean's nervous mind to a pitch that he could not control.

"Jean," he said, "we've been tak-

ing ourselves too seriously. I know a new tavern where the wine is cheap and the girls are pretty. Come on. We'll forget our troubles!"

And the terror-stricken Jean let himself be dragged away.

Wine and women.

They raised their glasses many times in the brightly lanterned Bleu Loup, and the girls who laughed with them were pleasant and full of life.

Somewhere in Paris that night they picked up a friend. As they staggered home down the narrow street in the early morning, the strains of some bawdy tavern song rose from their throats. Their new-found friend, with an arm over the shoulder of each, had to be dragged along, for he seemed long ago to have lost interest in the frivolities.

They struggled into the little garret room and laid their companion at full-length upon the only table. They carefully covered him and dropped, still fully clothed, to sleep.

The chimes of the Abbey Saint Genevieve were brazening the air with a holy resonance when Jean stirred. He rolled over and looked covertly at his sleeping friend. He tickled the prominent broken nose with a wisp of straw until, with a roar, Thad rose to battle. They wrestled furiously on the cot. A powerful kick sent Jean surging out on the floor. He clutched handfuls of straw and plunged back into the melee.

...love a pretty lass.

Breathing hard, the two rested looking at each other foolishly; then Jean arose and went to the form on the table, whistling a tune of the night before.

"Ho, I will love a pretty lass, And we will drink another glass..."

"I have a fear sir," he said, taking the pose of an orator, and addressing the prone figure on the table, "that you are going to make a liar out of Guiscard. Maybe you will help turn old Galen over in his grave. At any rate, sir, your worth has trebled since you left this lovely world. En garde, m'sieu!"

He removed the cloak from the corpse on the table and skillfully—as though he had made the motions in his mind a thousand times—made the preliminary marks of the scalpel on the bared diaphragm.

Thad's recollection.

Thad rolled to a sitting position, his blurred mind trying vainly to recollect and comprehend the scenes of the previous night. How they suddenly left the tavern and gone to the burying grounds. How they had painstakingly selected a cadaver from the open graves, and how they had staggered home in the open holding it up between them! and come away unscathed? Would the great God above let him, little Jean Dubois, pluck from the dead the information that he wanted? He felt his desire for truth to be like a pale iris growing in a patch of weeds: Weeds that he could not fight.

Miraculously, a wicker-covered bottle appeared between his knees. He pulled the cork, watching Jean with intent solence. With the bottle opened, and tipped, and appreciated, he moved to the chair by Jean's side.

"Holy Mary, Mother of Christ!" he murmured fervently. "How can you? You're not afraid of anything!"

"Ah, but I was afraid last night," Jean said half seriously. "I was afraid of Maria. What lovely eyes she has. I but chose the lesser of my two fears!"

Tess of the D'Urbervilles

A review of Hardy's fiction child

Thomas Hardy and I get off on the wrong foot from the very start. In Tess of the d'Urbervilles he is apparently making Fate synonymous with coincidence. He proposes that chance happenings direct a man's destiny, that man is a victim of coincidental circumstances and has no control over his life or actions.

With this assertion Hardy can not get in on the ground floor with me, for I choose to believe that I have a free will to a certain extent. I want to believe there is a difference between Fate and coincidence.

The question of fate is an unanswerable one on which, I have come to the conclusion, one can only take an arbitrary position—neither side being able to advance any evidence as proof. The fact that coincidence does occur is no logical argument for the proposition that it was fate to be predestined and all laid out just waiting for the principals to come along and meet it.

Hardy, the fatalist.

So Thomas Hardy takes the side of the fatalists who blame their all on external circumstances, and my aversion to his fundamental idea spoils Tess, herself, for me.

I consider Tess an ineffectual protagonist of Hardy's alleged aim, but he has much better argument in the character of Angel Clare. Hardy plays God to his characters, though it was no doubt pity that drove him to create and write of them. God is evidently a fiend, who confers upon youth a roseate outlook as a trick, a friend who gives you the illusion that you're not being tricked, but never lets your hopes be realized. Tess d'Urberville is portrayed as the innocent young girl who is mangled by the hand of fate.

Tess is a puppet.

Tess is a puppet. She has been made to order, she has specifica-

tions. Humans aren't made to order. Tess is. She impressed me as a stock character—the sweet young thing seduced and forever miserable thereafter. What I object to primarily is not her character, but the fact that her career is handled by coincidence. The most important moments of her life—the occasions, that is, most vital to the plot of the novel, are purely chance happenings.

When she is still virgin and innocent, gamboling on the green with the other maids, and Angel Clare came in to dance with them, he dances with all except her. Coincidence—so what? What reason does that give me to believe that because of this incident, Tess is, wated to go on to her doom? I am sorely tempted to believe that the coincidence was placed there as a bit of emotional play to reinforce the plot—and no more.

Overplayed coincidence.

A flagrant misuse of coincidence is, in my estimation, the end of the letter in which Tess tried to confess her past to Angel before their marriage. She slips it under the door—it goes on under the carpeting—and Angel passes by oblivious. So through no fault of her own, her good intentions are thwarted, as the novel's plot necessitates, by sheer accident—which in itself is no argument for its having been directed by the hand of destiny.

Now Angel Clare, as I suggested before, is a much better argument for Hardy's fatalistic convictions. Angel is not governed by coincidence. One can certainly not, for instance, say that it was coincidence that he did not make a deliberate effort, go out of his way, to look under the carpet for the letter.

Angel's destiny.

No, Angel's destiny is within

him, in his own nature, his own mental constitution, in his education and in his heresy in breaking away from that education in his own choices of the sort of material with which to stimulate his mind, and in the consequent convictions of right, morality, behavior which he developed. Perhaps he was fated to work out his life as he did, as a result of his heritage of mind and body—at least the course which his life took was in causal relationship with the kind of person he was.

Angel may have been a skunk, but because of his nature and his background—thru no fault of his own,—for have the fatalists any more reason for saying that it was his fault (as opposed to the innocence of Tess) than I have for saying that it wasn't.

Hardy's salvation.

The fatalist's can say Angel acts as he does because he is what he is—and all that has come before predestined his action in deserting Tess.

This is the determinist point of view—and it is the salvation of Hardy's novel.

How well Angel's career as a skunk is worked out to last!—his great love was not Tess, it was himself and his "superior" idea of the good in life. He was consistently rigorous in his demands upon the virtuosity of others, excused himself from guilt and was repulsed by the thought of leveling himself down, so to speak, with those who failed him. All that he did he did because it was like him to do so—yes, indeed—

Oh-my Dar-ling Clem-en-tine—
How—I missed her
How—I missed her
How—I missed—my Clem-en-tine
Till I kissed her
lit-tle sis-ter—