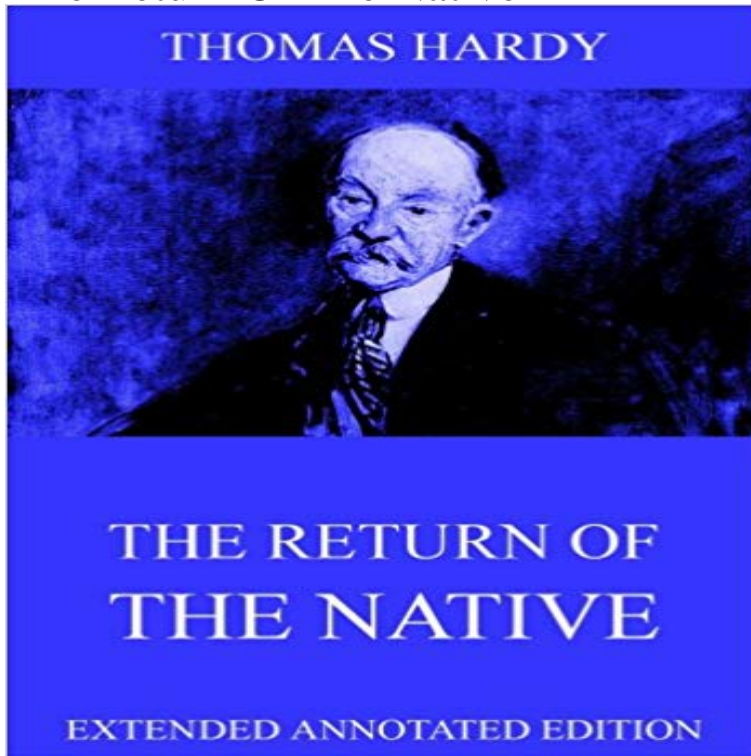


The Return Of The Native



This is the annotated edition including a rare biographical essay on the life and works of the author. Some regard this book as Hardy's masterpiece. Here again we have a rural setting and a powerful and moving plot. The characters, too, are striking and well drawn, and one of them, Clym Yeobright, the hero, just misses greatness. Unlike Mr. Hardy's previous works, it is predominantly a tragedy; but it is not a thoroughly artistic success, because our pleasure at the artist's triumph is overbalanced by disagreeable sensations caused by the repulsiveness of many of his characters and of the environment in which they move. Mr. Hardy himself must have felt the effect of this repulsiveness, for his humor is almost entirely absent. A passion for excessive realism, too, has taken a greater hold upon this essentially poetic idealist, and it is only when he is in the presence of inanimate nature that his soul appears to be truly inspired. The descriptions of Egdon Heath in this novel, and of the effects of its sombre vastness upon its scattered inhabitants, are unequalled in modern fiction. But if nature has taken hold of Mr. Hardy as it has done of few men since Wordsworth, it has not disturbed him with the joy of elevated thoughts, as Wordsworth sang; it has not proved itself to be the power whose secret is not joy, but peace of Matthew Arnold; but rather it has proved itself to be the mysterious, inscrutable counterpart in the world of the senses, of that insoluble enigma with which Herbert Spencer and so many modern minds have found themselves confronted in the world of thought.

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