

LITERARY DEPARTMENT

HOW AND WHY MR. MARKHAM WROTE "THE MAN WITH THE HOE."

The teaching of Mr. Markham's famous poem "The Man With the Hoe" has been so often misunderstood that it is interesting to see what the author himself has to say as to his aim in writing it. In *The Saturday Evening Post* (Philadelphia, Dec. 16th), he tells us how he came to write the poem, and what was his real viewpoint. After alluding to his own early life, which was passed amid the hard conditions of a frontier stock-farm, he says :

"I have mentioned a few of the external forces that colored my thought. I may say, also, that for years my reading had drifted toward the philosophy evident in the poem. From boyhood till this hour I have wondered over the hoary problem that has been passed on to us from Job—why should some be ground and broken? Why should so many go down under the wheels of the world to hopeless ruin as far as human eyes can see? Is it necessary that many should perish that we who are the few may have life and light, may have food and shelter? And, withal, I had read in Isaiah of the 'pestilential wrongs of old—in Isaiah, that voice of Vesuvius, shaking all around the horizon. Then, too, I knew how the world's injustice had forced from Christ's strong heart that cry against the mouths that devour widows' houses; and that other cry against the feet that walk over graves. . . .

"I did not write it as a protest against labor, but as my soul's deep word against the degradation of labor, the oppression of man by man. Of course I believe in labor; and I have little respect for an idler, be he rich or poor. It is against both the personal and the public good for any man to be at the same time a consumer and a non-producer.

"I believe in labor; I believe in its humanizing and regenerating power. Indeed, I believe that a man's craft furnishes the chief basis of his redemption. While a man is making a house, he is helping to make himself. While he chisels the block of marble, he is invisibly shaping his own soul. And it does not matter much what a man does—whether he builds a poem or hoes a field of corn. The thing of chief importance is the spirit in which he does his work. It must be done thoroughly, and in the spirit of loving service. Work of this order is a perpetual prayer. Work of this sort is sacred, however lowly—sacred tho' it be the sweeping of a gutter or the carrying of a hod.

"The spirit of use, of loving service, sends a gleam of the ideal into every labor. And man needs the ideal more even than he needs bread. The ideal is the bread of the soul."

A distinguished resident of New York took exception to the sentiment expressed by Mr. Markham, and offered \$400, \$200 and \$100 for the three best poems written from the opposite standpoint. Mr. Thomas Bailey Aldrich and Mr. Ernest Clarence Stedman were the judges, and out of about a thousand contributions gave the award to the following poems. The criticism of the gentlemen in New York, as well as the poems, are from the *New York Times* :

"While I would detract in no degree from the beauty, grace and strength of his versification, it seems to me that Mr. Markham has twined some very leafy and flowery vines around a vacuum. Either the "Man With the Hoe" is a type of the great mass of those who use farming implements for a living or else he is an exception. If the latter, then the strength of the sentiment uttered lies in the concealment of its weakness, and if the former, then the