

THOMAS HARDY

a

Study

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At the

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by

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His Field

"Dear delightful Wessex whose statuesque dynasties are even now only just beginning to feel the shaking of the new and strange without, like that which entered the lonely valley of Ezekial's vision and made the dry bones move: where the honest squires, tradesmen, clerks and people still praise the Lord with one voice for His best of all possible worlds!" "New ideas, new doctrines, changes of any sort come slowly up this way... Time is slow and drowsy. In London twenty or thirty years ago are old times, in Paris ten or five; in Weatherbury three or four score years were included in the mere present, and nothing less than a century set a mark on its face or tone. Five decades hardly modified the cut of a gaiter, the embroidery of a smock frock by the breadth of a hair. Ten generations failed to alter the turn of a phrase!"

In fifteen of his novels Mr Hardy has not strayed from this Wessex. It is the field

with narrow boundaries but the soil is rich and the products infinitely various. Of this limited field he takes one part in especial, Dorset only one county. But from its fetid soil he has brought forth a most surprising wealth of human nature. Some of his most eloquent prose is in description of this, his home. Not in words that might have been written by a mere observer, however appreciative that one might be of historical possibilities and the abundance of associations to be got therefrom, but prose written by one who has lived and breathed the air, one who is at home, a patriot, a lover.

Every spot has an individuality and a personality for him. He knows its special history, its life. The whole country is saturated with the doings of a thousand years. For all its face has seen, its lover has a feeling. Nothing is too common, too ugly, for his imagination to play over. His large sympathy and patience for the most trivial details is like that of an anthropologist; as is his impartial and impassive manner in dealing with facts and fancies. Nothing is too commonplace or too insignificant for his notice.

He sees that under these may be the germs of a higher emotion or the need for it.

This impartialty and comprehensiveness does not exclude enthusiasm for special features. Egdon Heath fills him with a pride almost personal. He talks of it in book after book: the whole first chapter of the Return of the Native is given up to it; he lingers on it with a peculiar sympathy; now it is a Titanic form lying face skyward with a watchful intentness awaiting something, the final overthrow perhaps; now it is a kindly friend to those who loved it; a thing majestic, impressive in its barrenness, grand in its simplicity. "Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learned emotion than that which responds to a sort of beauty called charming and fair". Other places, the Valley of the Great Dairies flowing with milk and honey, the Blackmore Vale in its luxuriant beauty appeal; but it is to bleak and dreary Egdon he turn for relief and solace. He takes comfort in the fact that from prehistoric times Egdon has been as unaltered as the stars, older than the seas. He even takes the trouble to prove its antiquity

As the very atmosphere is old in Wessex, as changes are so rare and there is no glaring newness in people or things, we are not surprised that distances are great. After her calamity Tess took refuge in another part of her own county with no fear of recognition. Cainy Ball has been to Bath and makes a report on returning that sounds very much like caricature in this age of rapid transit and general travel, but doubtless is not so strange in out of the way places where a man lives and dies in the same dooryard.

'The people of Bath,' said Cain (who by the way came into possession of that astonishing cognomen through a slight mistake of his mother's who was rather uncertain on Biblical matters) 'never need to light their fires except as a luxury, for the water springs up out of the earth ready boiled for use!

' 'Tis true as light' testified Matthew Moon.. 'Ive heard other navigators say the same!

'They drink nothing else there,' said Cain, 'and seem to enjoy it, to see how they swaller it down!

'Well it seems a barbarian a practice enough to us, but I dare say the natives think nothing of it,' said Matthew.

'And don't victuals spring up as well as drink?' asked Coggan, twirling his eye.

'No--I own to a blot there in Bath--a true blot. God didn't provide 'em with victuals as well as drink, and 'twas a drawback I couldn't get over at all.'

'Well, 'tis a curious place, to say the least,' observed Moon; 'and it must be a curious people that live therein.'"

Men and Women

The men and women that Mr Hardy places in this Wessex have the air of being bound to their position so that it would be almost impossible to imagine them as having an idea or a possibility of being anything different. They are rooted by their whole natures to the soil. They are its natural products and they cannot be truly understood outside of its environment. This is especially true since like their home they are not open to the gaze of the superficial observer. For one who can get below the surface into the heart of them as can Mr Hardy there is a pay streak that will reward working. They are rather a close mouthed set before strangers; for Mr Hardy they express views of life, religion, society, law and whatnot that are as odd as multifarious. These men show themselves to be far from inexperienced--all they lack is self expression, the decisive phrase. They are so sincere and

earnest they have no fear of talking cant or truisms; for they know them not.

They do not tell their experiences and observations lightly and consequently they hear what others have to say with respect. In the most uncouth and unthoughtful, this respectful listening seems to be almost an instinct. Grandfer Cantle may tell of his soldiering with the Bang-up Locals in the year Four a hundred times a day and never once suspect that his listeners have ever heard any thing like it before. Notwithstanding this indulgence to old men in their aimless re-dintegrations, they have no sympathy with talk for talk's sake. Telling what one thinks is a serious business. Never trivial themselves they set a price on silence. Geoffrey Day is a man who can keep a very clever silence.

" 'Yes; Geoffrey Day is a clever man if ever there was one. Never says anything: not he.'

'Never.'

'You might live wi' that man, my sonnies, a hundred years, and never know there was any thing in him.'

'Ay; one o' these up-country London ink-

bottle fellers would call Geoffry a fool.'

'Ye never find out what's in that man: never,' said Spinks. 'Silence? ah, he is silent! He can keep silence well. That man's silence is wonderful to listen to.'

'There's so much sense in it. Every moment o' it is brimmed over wi' sound understanding.' "

Common with the unsophisticated every where they freely comment upon others present, discussing their merits or demerits in a perfectly dispassionate and impartial tone as if they were articles of furniture. The more simple of the commented upon rather enjoy the distinction than otherwise. Leaf takes an innocent childlike delight in never having had "no head." Christian Cantle, more timid and selfdistrustful, has a pleasure decidedly more mournful, almost terrifying in being a "no moon man" and occasionally causes a good humored laugh at some one's else expense.

" 'Do ye really think it serious, Mister Fairway, that there was no moon?'

'Yes; "No moon, no man." 'Tis one of the truest sayings ever spit out. The boy never comes to anything that's born at new moon.

A bad job for thee, Christian, that you should showed your nose then of all days in the month.'

'I suppose the moon was terrible full when you were born?' said Christian, with a look of hopeless admiration at Fairway.

'Well, 'a was not new,' Mr Fairway replied with a disinterested gaze."

Oaks was not so comfortable under the same treatment, when after playing the flute he was told:

" ' 'Tis a pity that playing the flute should make a man look such a scarecrow," observed Mr Mark Clark, with additional criticism of Gabriel's countenance, the latter person jerking out, with the ghastly grimace required by the instrument, the chorus of 'Dame Durden: '-

'Twas Moll and Bet, and Doll and Kate,
And Dorthy Draggie Tail.

'I hope you dont mind that young man Mark Clark's bad manners in naming your features?' whispered Joseph to Gabriel privately.

'Not at all,' said Mr Oak.

'For by nature ye be a very handsome man, sheperd,' continued Joseph Poorgrass, with winning suavity.

'Ay, that ye be, sheperd,' said the company.

'Thank you very much,' said Oak, in the modest tone good manners demanded, thinking, however, that he would never let Bathsheba see him playing the flute; in this resolve showing a discretion equal to that related of its sagacious inventress, the divine Minerva herself."

One could not expect people having so many different sources of ancestry, with a legacy so composite of varied beliefs and faiths, to hold a religion pure and undefiled. As would appear most natural the religion of the Wessexer is a medley of natyral theology, superstition, fetish worship, belief in conjuring and all sorts. Mr Hardy makes very effective use of the odd beliefs and customs that survive in present day Wessex. Some of the most curious and unusual rites and ceremonies are met with. At the opening of the Return of the Native we have the bonfire, a survival of an ancient custom, which plays an important part in the story before it closes. In the same Susan Nonsuch, believing in Eustacia's evil influence, makes an effigy of wax and after thrusting the figure full of pins and repeating the Lord's prayer backwards holds it to

the fire til it wastes away. Henchard the mayor of Casterbridge goes to Conjuror Fall; Gertrude Lodge in the Withered Arm visited conjuror Trendle. Perhaps Mr Hardy over emphasises the literal in their fetish worship and superstition. Often in childish, simple folk the need for something objective to produce an emotion is imperative for the existence of the emotion. Their imaginations are not developed enough to enable them to see with the mind's eye. The thing alone can arouse their feelings. Then again, for a people with their birth right it would be quite impossible to escape, in the course of a few centuries, the instincts and impulses that were so powerful with their fathers. To a people of their nature the Established Church could not escape being cold and formal and its ceremonies meaningless or at least unmoving. They need something more thrilling and mysterious.

Their attitude toward the church is curious and characteristic of their feeling for everything old and established. It is at one with the other powers that be, the nobility, old houses, old families, old names. The established religion is a thing to be respected

and put up with. They are thankful that it is no worse--another very common attitude of theirs.

" 'I haint been there these years,' said Humphrey, speaking of church going, 'for I am so dead sleepy of a Sunday and 'tis so terrible far to get there: and when you do get there 'tis such a mortal poor chance that you'll be chose up above, when so many bain't that I bide at home and don't go at all.' "

" 'Chapel-folk be more hand-in-glove with them above than we,' said Joseph, thoughtfully.

'Yes,' said Coggan. 'We know very well that if anybody do go to heaven, they will. They've worked hard for it, and they deserve to have it such as 'tis. I baint such a fool as to pretend that we who stick to the Church have the same chance as they, because we know we have not. But I hate a feller who'll change his old ancient doctrines for the sake of getting to heaven. I'd as soon turn king's-evidence for the few pounds you get... No, I'll stick to my side; and if we be in the wrong, so be it; I'll fall with the fallen.' "

This church-going business has nothing

to do with their weekday religion, of course. But weekdays and Sundays aloke, their dominant mood is one of fatalism. The sun shines, we are happy and prosperous--' 'Twas to be.' Tess brings disgrace on her family--' 'Twas to be.' Henchard is ousted by the man he has befriended: he meets like all other humiliations with, 'I precieve that I am to suffer..'

This calm endurance of fearful dooms un+ deserved and unforeseeable has elements of *grandeur* in it, though as a philosophy it blights and deadens. There must be a suitable setting for misery and for the working out of fate or this subjection to it becomes extravagance. The place must match the passion. Ethelberta has this feeling of fitness of circumstance, when after taking her numerous brothers and sisters on her hands, she sees the necessity of keeping up to her standard. 'There is something not without *grandeur*,' she says, 'in the thought of starvation on an open lountain or in a wide wood and your bones lying there to bleach in the pure sun and rain; but a back garret in a rookery and the other starvers in the room insisting on keeping the windows shut--anything to deliver

us from that.'

Mr Hardy's manner of handling his rustic characters is quite worth noticing. It is as rare as it is delightful; there is never the least hint of superciliousness, rarely the slightest caricature.. This is almost as uncommon as to find a writer of today who does not 'wallop the ladies' as Mr Dooley says. Even so large a sympathied writer as George Eliot is not free from this as is Mr Hardy! Now and then she cannot resist having a quiet laugh at the expense of her country folk; here and there is a smile of tolerance or a lurking sner at their weakness, ignorance or clumsiness. This freedom from aloofness on the part of Mr Hardy is not primarily a matter either of sentiment or of sympathy: never was there a writer less sentimental, never one more severe in his ideas of fitness and beauty. His attitude seems to be due rather to this idea of fitness and his thorough appreciation of them and their ways, but most of all to the scientific spirit that is such a fundamental thing in his nature and work. He knows the possibilities of his materials, and though at first glance the con-

versation may seem slow and awkward and desultory, certainly not so humorous or pointed as that of George Eliot's country characters, it has a ring of truth and naturalness that is unmistakable. Mr Hardy is content with the capability of his material and is guided only by its various natures and not by a desire to dazzle or amuse.

B Against this background of rustics, gentle and simple, sophisticated and innocent, commonplace and indifferent, morose and gay, gloomy and careless; for their characters are numerous, he has placed men and women whose natures have essentially the same groundwork as that of their neighbors but are otherwise out of the ordinary and superficially different. They have intenser feelings, stronger passions, more restless minds or larger hearts. For some reason or other their experiences and impulses and capacities are not after the stereotyped pattern; and while they differ enough from the common run to make their figures distinct in a crowd, their natures, fundamentally of the same ground quality, the bonds of sympathy for each other are not as lax as if they

were not of a common clay: their lives and deeds act and react on the deeds of those around them as they could not if the actors were men apart. Though their lives have something special or distinctive or picturesque that their neighbors' lives lack, there is that mysterious ingredient of racial instinct that binds them to home and to home folks.

These protagonists fall roughly into groups. First, a class in the handling of which Mr Hardy is at his best; the native Wessex laboring man, simple in habits of thought and of living, single purposed, direct and staunch. Men who seem to know the secret of right living, philosophers in the rough, almost stoical in their endurance of fate; come what may they keep the even tenor of their ways without relaxing a muscle. If love is unfavorable, they do not curse and tear their hair nor sulk, but go on setting out apple trees, shearing sheep or cutting furze with a hand ready to help others. They are men of peculiar nobleness and manliness, men who seek not their own. Winterbourne, Oak and Venn belong to this group.

The men of this class are always in per-

fect harmony with their surroundings. They love the things of their daily life and have a knowledge of the earth in her seasons, the woods and the fields and the living creatures thereof, that one can but stop and admire with a little sense of shame at one's own ignorance. How unmeaning to most of us would have been the signs of nature that before the great storm that turned the tide in Oak's favor with Bathsheba. But how full of import were they to Oak, and how ready and resourceful he was at the hint!

"Gabriel proceeded towards his home. In approaching the door, his toe kicked something which felt and sounded soft, and distended, like a boxing-glove. It was a large toad humbly travelling across the path. Oak took it up, thinking that it might be better to kill the creature to save it from pain; but finding it uninjured, he placed it again among the grass. He knew what this direct message from the Great Mother meant. And soon came another.

"When he struck a light indoors there appeared upon the table a thin glistening streak as if a brush of varnish had been lightly dragged across it. Oak's eyes followed the serpentine



sheen to the other side, where it led up to a huge brown garden-slug, which had come indoors to-night for reasons of its own. It was Nature's second way of hinting to him that he was to prepare for foul weather.

"Oak sat down meditating for nearly an hour. During this time two black spiders, of the kind common in thatched houses, promenaded the ceiling, ultimately dropping to the floor. This reminded him that if there was one class of manifestation on this matter that he thoroughly understood, it was the instincts of sheep. He left the room, ran across two or three fields towards the flock, got upon a hedge, and look over among them.

"They were crowded close together on the other side around some furze bushes, and the first peculiarity observable was that, on the sudden appearance of Oak's head over the fence, they did not stir or run away. They had now a terror of something greater than their terror of man. But this was not the most noteworthy feature: they were all grouped in such a way that their tails, without a single exception, were towards that half of the horizon from which the storm threatened.

There was an inner circle closely huddled, and outside these they radiated wider apart, the pattern formed by the flock as a whole not being unlike a vandyked lace collar, to which the clump of furze bushes stood in the position of a wearers neck.."

Or again Winterbourne's or Marty's knowledge of the 'wondrous world of sap and leaves called the Hintock Woods' was a 'clear gaze' beside the casual glances of the ordinary man and woman.

Such men as these might so easily have been made weak if they had been put into any but the strongest hands. Disappointed lovers are as a general thing anything but edifying spectacles. Winterbourne might so easily have been a second hero of 'Maud'. However Mr Hardy has made him nothing of the sort; without the least tang of indifference or coldness, he is yet most selfcontained, noble and dignified. He is not faultless but thoroughly human. Mr Hardy does not shrink from showing us his homlinesses and rusticity; he in no way idealizes him. The essential truth and fineness of the character cannot suffer in a white light. Venn and Oak have less

distinction but are admirable in their way.

Then there are the men outside who are not wholly of Wessex, who have little sympathy for its ways or its people. Men who with more of education and refinements have not the sterling worth of their uncouth neighbors. They all have some of the villain in their natures; but they are men of fascination, dazzling and enchanting to women: nevertheless showing to disadvantage beside the country folk. They are cheap, tawdry imitations of gentlemen; all brag or swagger in one way or another; Fitzpiers, of his superior knowledge and understanding; Angel Claire, of his larger soul and spiritual vision; Troy's is a swagger of the body, a mean pride in his personal appearance and accomplishments. All have good qualities, but they are all selfish: all cause their own failure. Troy's good qualities are offset and defeated by his tawdry sentimentalism; Fitzpiers' self-love and pity cause his downfall; Clair, pluming himself on his freedom from the narrow timid bigotry of his brothers, allows himself to judge more severely and inhumanly than they. He presents the pitiable spectacle of a man

having large intellectual perceptions and convictions with a soul too small ever to live up to them. None of these men are really villains though some are very near it. Manston has a redeeming quality or two; and Alec D'Urberville, a sensualist and nothing more, is a villain quite.

There is an attractive set of youths scattered through the novels; Christopher Julian, Swithin StCleeve, Smith, Somerset, Bob Loveday, Dick Dewey and Clym Yeobright. This is not a class at all; for no one is like **any** other. Julian is a man who 'had an under feeling that at the most propitious moments the distance to the possibility of sorrow is so short that a man's spirits should not rise higher than mere cheerfulness out of bare respect to his understanding.' StCleeve is an astronomer with an eye single to his scientific pursuits till he is sought out and compelled to love by a woman his senior. His emotions are of the most simple and rudimentary sort and therein lies the tragedy of Lady Constantine. Somerset and Smith are architects on the side and lovers in the main. Bob Loveday and Dick Dewey have one thing in common; the faculty

of falling in love to ridiculous lengths. Dick is one of the most interesting, because we can laugh at him so openly. He has a curious lack of dignity, a statement which he would be quick to resent. One remembers him hopping on one foot to catch step with the vicar as he tells him of his approaching marriage; or in his amazement at the landlord's ignorance of his engagement to Fancy an hour previous; or, best of all, as he pens the letter which was not at all clear as to whether 'he then and there left off loving Miss Fancy Day; whether he had never loved her seriously, and never meant to; whether he had been dying up to the present moment and now intended to get well again; or whether he had hitherto been in good health and intended to die forthwith.'

Clym, the idealist, is a hard figure to handle. Aman with high aims, with a desire to reform the world, is in danger of being a prig or a bore. Clym is so lacking in selfish ambitions that he escapes that and is one of Mr Hardy's most convincing characters. Yeobright and Winterbourne are his most admirable men.

Among the older men there are the two

gloomy figures of Henchard and Boldwood. Both are men of strong personalities and vigorous minds. Henchard so loving, capriciously jealous and partial, rash tempered and arrogant that he seems a born maker of catastrophes. Boldwood's is a much simpler nature. Both bear their doom of suffering brought on by their own acts with what grace they may. Henchard with a dogged selfreliance, dying, knowing that his punishment was not greater than he could bear.

Like the men his women are strongly individual. With a few exceptions they have not as much family likeness as the men in like groups.. Though with these few exceptions his men are finer studies and more noble than his women. This is not in any way derogatory to his studies of the feminine for perhaps no other man has studied women so painstakingly as has he; and few writers if any can compare results favorably with his. His women are women beyond question, they are never figureheads, they all have reserve force that is forever surprising, and none of them can be entirely understood; so we cannot doubt their

reality. But Mr Hardy has given us few if any of the higher types. Excepting one group which I shall speak of later, his women are women of impulse alone, strangers to themselves. They have no inner life in the true sense, no intellectual arrogance, no pride in their own minds; they live by and within and for their emotions and for nothing else; they have no self-control, no dignity of will.

This class of which I am speaking to which belong roughly; Elfride, Bathsheba, Tess, Lucetta, Viviette, Felice and Eustacia are all weak where George Eliot's women are strong. One and all are Pagan in instincts, desires and actions. They have one thirst, one hunger, an appetite for joy. This consumes all, themselves included and remains insatiate. Dissociated from sympathetic emotions, from a reasonable altruism and love for any and all of their kind, this immoderate craving for happiness produces monstrous disorders. Try to imagine Maggie Tulliver with such impulses. Her deep sense of duty to those around her, her vigorous and sound sympathies for them, her social sense would keep her clear of such temptations, almost, at least free from

yielding. Take this sense away from her and she is nothing. These women of Mr Hardy's however despite their charm and loveliness and lovableness are animals with one instinct inordinately developed; to love and to possess. However much that instinct is characteristic of women, these have it out of all proportion, out of all reason. They become monsters of selfishness notwithstanding the lengths of sacrifice and self-humiliation they run for the one loved. In their zeal for loving one man they cut themselves off from every other feeling and sympathy; all other creatures are outside their world. Viviette loses all moral sense in her enthusiasms and almost super-woman self-sacrifice for StCleeve. Felice, Viviette and Lucetta's emotions become feverish, unhealthy and morbid.

What is this appetite for joy? At bottom it is selfishness--it lives only in the energy of individual life. It is egotism. In this respect his women are children; their demands for pleasure and delight are limited only by desire. They have no self-questionings, no rigid self-examinations; they shy from their real selves like a horse at his shadow.

They do not see the claims of others on them or if they do, they look on it as tyranny, a thing for offense, something unintelligible imposed by cruel fate. Duty is a curse, a chain that crushes rather than stays and strengthens. Tess the most appealing of them all, with mind and heart sweet and desirous of whatsoever is pure and of good report, allows this appetite for joy to down all her love of truth and straight-forwardness after a slight struggle. 'O we women, why are we so precipitate,' says Viviette. Yet nothing can keep them back. The world is so unjust, happiness is so sweet, fate is so cruel; 'I must snatch this one delight;' and so they go. Felice looked as if she were chiding her own soul, we are told, but not that she did chide it. She excused herself by the same fallacy that all these Wessex characters indulge in; 'fate is to blame, not I.' One pities the poor lady whose heart is crushed under the monotony and deadliness of the quiet woodland, when it longs for excitement and intrigue and love and power. 'I lay awake last night and I could hear the scrape of snails creeping up the window-glass,' "she tells Fitz-

piers. " 'Of why are we given hungry hearts and wild desires, if we have to live in a world like this?' " Though she is evidently doing the grand-stand act, she is pitiable nonetheless.

From characters such as this tragedy naturally springs; and Mr Hardy makes the most of it. Such women as Viviette, Felice and Eustacia are utterly out of harmony with their surroundings; they must conquer them or leave them or submit--any of which three may result in tragedy more or less bitter. Eustacia and Egdon Heath must conflict, and thwarted in her efforts to leave it and proudly refusing to subdue herself, she suffers the consequence, not without dragging others in her downfall. 'Queen of Night,' he calls her, in the most magnificent chapter he has written. 'She was the raw material of a goddess'--'she had Pagan eyes full of nocturnal mysteries'--'her presence brought memories of such things as Bourbon roses, rubies, and tropical mid-nights: her moods recall lotus-eaters and the march in Athalie: her motions the ebb and the flow of the sea, her voice the viola'. But her imperiousness, love, gloom and revolt was thrown

away on grim Egdon. 'Egdon was her Hades and since coming there she had imbibed much of what was dark in its tone, though inwardly and eternally unreconciled thereto.' How could a woman of this sort live on Egdon Heath? Her one desire, her one passion was to have power, to be loved to madness, anything for power. 'She had mentally walked around love, told the towers thereof, considered its palaces: and concluded that love was a doleful joy. Yet she desired it as one in a desert would be thankful for brackish water.' How this desire led her to make a hero of that poor thing, Wildeve, for want of a better object, and then to pin her faith to Clym, a man enamoured of plain living and high thinking and having ideals perfectly unintelligible and hateful to her makes a story of the most vivid interest. How in the event her mean soul suffers and causes much misery to others better than it, is told with greatest power and truth.

Never do the best characters, either men or women, show a single trace of sullenness or ignoble resentment and revolt. In this way such women as Grace, Faith, Elizabeth Jane, Tess, Ann Garland, Thomasin and Marty South are brought into admirable contrast with the other

types. Their wisdom, foresight, patience, sagacity, self-control, dignity, sweetness and reticence, they too suffered but in silence, are set sharply against the perversity, passion, inconstancy and imprudence of the others. They are at peace with their own hearts; they have thoughts as well as emotions. To be sure some of them have had their emotions starved; and Grace suffers from fine-ladyism and a conventional and a rather timid morality, but on the whole they are the noblest and the most restful. It is curious that Grace and Bathsheba with such different natures when scourged by the rod of circumstance alike change in one noticeable and significant thing. Each as she grows in a knowledge of sorrow and evil and especially of goodness, comes less to delight in mere brightness of intellect and comes fervently to admire and fully to appreciate less patent qualities; even though she must take them in the homely and unbeautiful and unpoetic forms of Winterbourne and Oak.

It is impossible to speak of these characters separately and they are too individual to be bunched. One or two characteristic scenes will bring out the characters of

most of them clearly enough for the purpose. Grace, when Felice and Suke come to her concerning her husband; Tess, as Angel carries her in his sleep and lays her in the abbot's coffin; Bathsheba, surveying herself in the hand-glass, as she rides on the load of furniture; Elfride, tearing her linen and knotting it into strands to save Knight from a horrible death; together with her chess-playing experience; Fancy, saying, 'I like Dick and I love him but how plain and sorry a man looks in the rain, with no umbrella and wet through;' Viviette, pitifully marshalling her arguments, in her bold resolve to free Swithin; and Marty South, the most subtle of Mr Hardy's country girls, one whose desires and actions had never had any connection, who loving in life was faithful in death though unloved in her turn, come to mind as characterizing in a few words the various women.

The Novels

If one takes the novels chronologically a certain development can be traced--speaking generally of course, for in strict chronology a map drawn on the plan of a plotted variable would show a line ragged with elevations and depressions. Speaking broadly however it is a development from mere delight in power over materials through steady progress, to an increasing gravity and seriousness of presentation; from a surprised delight in skill to a feeling of respect and reverence for the opportunities open to that skill. His early books bear the same relation to the later ones that the early plays of Shakspeare do to the later plays. Under the Greenwood Tree and the Hand of Ethelberta, like Love's Labour's Lost and Romeo and Juliet, could better be spared than the Return of the Native and Tess and Hamlet and King Lear.

With one or two exceptions such as Des-

perate Remedies, his first book, which is most prodigal of detail, there is a certain wise economy of material practiced. Each book has a large simplicity of design that is more classic than anything else. Under the Greenwood Tree, 'a rural painting after the Dutch school' which tells the joyousness and brightness of country life with a disregard for the sorrows of yesterday, the pains of to-morrow and the drudgery of every day is perhaps the simplest design of all. But all the tragedies show the same simplicity of design. At mention of the Return of the Native, the few naked facts of the story flash before one. Only great works of art can stand thus stripped of their flesh; they do not depend for their truth and beauty on details; however full of life these may be; they adorn the tale only. Thus many incidents strongly dramatic or otherwise effective occur to the mind at once; the magnificent opening chapter of the description of Egdon Heath, the grotesque wild scene of the bonfires, and so on. But they are duly subordinate to the conception of the whole and are kept within definite limits. The few stark facts of this tragedy fix themselves

in the memory; the war of temperments between man and man and between nature and man, the Heath with its personality stronger than that of any human, giving stubborn resistance to the fierce struggle of the woman for mastery; the blending of the compatible nature with its natural environment; the eternal warfare of ambition against idealism--all these indelibly stamp themselves: and around all and over all and through all is the dark, resisting untameable, brooding mood of the Heath.

Tess has been pushed to the front largely because of the problems that it involves as well as because of its universal appeal to human sympathies. Judged from the wideness of this appeal it would be his greatest book. Mr Hardy meant it to be a bone of contention and it has been; simply because he has made claims for her purity. He throws down the gauntlet in the subtitle 'a pure woman faithfully presented.' Much of the protest is directed against ~~this~~. A discussion for or against this would be of no value here: there is nothing new to be said.

The objectionable thing in Tess is something quite different from this; Mr Hardy's

condemnation of things that be, much of which is unintelligible to me. Now he attacks nature tooth and nail; she is shameless, unmindful and uncaring, only man is kind; now Society is the most cruel of all cruel things, and Nature is kind and healing. When one gets through with all of this he is rather at a loss to know just what Mr Hardy means by Nature. A few passages will make clear the vagueness and looseness of terminology and of thought. Speaking of the six Durbeyfield children he says; ' All these young souls are passengers in the Durbeyfield ship--entirely dependent upon the judgement of the two Durbeyfield adults for their pleasures, their necessities, their health, even their existence. If the heads of the Durbeyfield household chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither with these half dozen little captives under hatches compelled to sail with them--six helpless creatures, who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such hard conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of Durbeyfield. Some people would like to know whence the poet

whose philosophy in these days is deemed as profound and trust-worthy as his song is sweet and pure, gets his authority for speaking of "Nature's holy plan"..'

'So passed away Sorrow the Undesired-- that intrusive creature, that bastard gift of shameless Nature who respects not the civil law...'

Speaking of Tess' compassion for the tortured birds and her impatience at her own depression when she had no bodily pain he says, 'She was ashamed of herself for the gloom of the night, based on nothing more tangible than a sense of condemnation under an arbitrary law of society which has no foundation in Nature.'

'Alone in a desert island would she have been wretched at what had happened to her? Not greatly! If she could have been just created, to discover herself as a spouseless mother, with no experience of life except as the parent of an nameless child, would the position have caused her to despair? No, she would have taken it calmly and found pleasures therein.'

'Justice was done, and the President of

the Immortals (in Aeschylean phrase) has ended his sport with Tess.'

There is little point to saying that a woman would feel no shame in a desert island when morality and conscience, as much as mere convention is, social. He might as well say where there is no law of gravitation, the man who had the worthy ambition to soar, would experience no pain if his wax wings did melt. A person cannot enjoy society and non-society at one and the same time, any more than he can profit by living in a universe of law and still have the individual advantage of no-law at the same time.

So his arraignment of Justice has the fault of all of our ideas of absolute justice. The point of view is individual and being applied to a thing not individual but to a universe made up of countless individuals, alike and yet unlike in their needs and circumstances and desires, is rather foolish. Where so many are concerned it is fatuous to expect individual justice. For this, a law must change to fit every occasion. Then we should indeed have a mad world. It is this stability and unchangeability that keeps the world from

chaos.

This by no means excuses man for hardness and inflexibility as Mr Hardy wishes to teach, if he wishes to teach at all; it should rather enlarge his social sympathies and fill his heart with pity and forbearance. It seems almost brutal to question or criticise such a pitiful story.

As in Tess so likewise in Jude the insinuated argument is a detriment to the art of the novel. There is an absolute refusal to let the story convey its own meaning and moral. In both, Mr Hardy is too insistent on carrying his point. Though in Jude the characters do the commenting and in Tess Mr Hardy himself fills that office, the general effect is the same. In neither is the manner objectionable, for it is done so artfully, so naturally and always so entertainingly one does not resent it. Still a novel is not a thesis.

After reading Jude some five or six times I think of the book as if it had been conceived and fashioned thus:

1 There is something wrong with the institution of matrimony as now existing; because--

(a) It fetters and thwarts the highest

aspirations of a young man, etc--e.g. Jude..

(b) To the majority of people it is merely the hall-mark of decency and respectability; a way to make sure of a man, so if he kicks one out of doors one can have the law on him--e.g. Arabella.

(c) Its conditions are too severe and distasteful in many cases; making life a misery to one or both parties--e.g. Sue.

2 The institution is based on a gross misconception of human nature and is immoral; because--

(a) It does not increase the sum of human happiness.

(b) Its basis is supposed to be love, while love, a spontaneous thing, must die under the forced conditions of a compulsory life-long companionship,

Therefore: it is positively vicious for husband and wife to remain together after their union has ceased to contribute to their common happiness--e.g. Jude and Arabella and the fruit of their union, Father Time.

Some additional theories:

1 A woman is never brave enough to live up to her convictions (Sue can defy conventions

only up to a certain point).

2 Experiences which would develop an ordinary man and widen his outlook, narrow and warp and bias a woman's vision (Sue a woman of brilliant intellect after her great sorrow insanely turns to the superstitions and customs that she despised when in her senses).

3 A woman however much she may advance in her youth finally goes back intellectually to the position of her mother and grand-mother; owing to her misfortune of being a child-rearer, not to her capacities or capabilities for development.

All these are worked out in the woman Sue.

As an example of a young man of worthy ambitions, he takes Jude, a poor boy of the lower ranks, who as he peddles bread and while he is resting prepares himself for the one desire of his heart, entrance at Christminster. On the eve of fulfillment of that ambition he falls in with Arabella, a coarse woman, with conventional ideas of men's and women's relations to each other. Needless to say he does not go to Christminster. After a few months of hell with Arabella and a separation

from her he finally gets to Christminster. Here he meets woman number two; and is persuaded by an authority from attempting entrance at college. Foiled in this hope he turns to the church; but before he enters it Sue who has married in the mean time calls him and he elopes with her.

Musing on it Jude thinks; 'Strange that his first aspiration--towards academical proficiency--had been checked by a woman, and that his second aspiration--towards apostleship--had also been checked by a woman. "Is it," he said, "that the women are to blame; or is it the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springes to noose and hold back those who want to progress?"'

Arabella is taken as a type of woman to whom marriage is a matter of business; a sure way of catching a man. She typifies all that is low and coarse in the common conception of marriage.

Sue exemplifies the--in her estimation--the majority of women, to whom marriage is a daily martyrdom. She is a woman of the keenest brightest mind, the complement of Jude. For

her love, fettered, soon ceases to be love and becomes captivity. She is the most womanish of his women, the least tangible, and a good example of impulse versus principle, both an individualist and an egoist.

Of course, on first or second reading there may be no suggestion of this skeleton framework or of the hand behind manipulating it. Mr Hardy is too much of the artist to make puppets and jerk them about by visible wires. Each character looks and feels and perhaps is, flesh and blood man or woman. Nevertheless they are types; more than individuals--classes rather. All are more or less convincing, not so much so as many others of his characters. But I like better the novels in which Mr Hardy is a spectator, transcribing what he sees as he walks to and fro upon the earth. I like best to have him a part and not fisticuffing with the rabble. For a writer a theory of life or a hard and fast theory of anything is dangerous. He cannot be so convincing when he argues. He wrongs himself by putting his reader up in arms: and loses his one chance of an impartial hearing.

Tess slaps Society in the face but Jude

knocks her prostrate. All along one has an uneasy feeling that there is a weakness some where; but it is not so easy to put finger to the spot. But certainly, unless the whole present theory of physical and mental evolution is false, there is an inherent weakness in the arguments of Jude and Sue; for they disregard utterly race and social ties. It is suicidal for any individual to cut away from the life of the race. He can throw off no part of his inheritance; he must be a part of the common life that has preceded him and is surrounding him. Any attempt to isolate the individual life from the common life, to shape a system of conduct from merely personal feelings and convictions, inevitably predetermines defeat. No man can safely be a law unto himself. He must depend for strength on the fund of feelings and instincts and traditions handed down to him. It is his privilege to share in this heritage with those about him and his necessity to hand it on to those after him. He must accept the traditions of the past and of the many; he cannot create through his own resources a time and place other than the actual. So there comes to be a peculiar

sacredness in long custom.

When Sue and Jude despise and revile marriage and try to justify their repudiation of its ties because those ties have become irksome; they assert that love has the right to gratify itself at the expense of all else. We know that a contract has, under human conditions, a sacred and binding force even though its spirit is dead. One's sympathy and support is rather on the side of the spirit which animates such an one as Maggie Tulliver at a time of great trial somewhat similar to this. Elsewhere also George Eliot makes a statement to the point here: 'The light abandonment of ties whether inherited or voluntary because they had ceased to be pleasant would be the up-rooting of social and personal virtue.'

Point of View

If one attempted to read too strict a philosophy from Mr Hardy's novels, he might well retort that novels are only pictures of life; that the novelist merely 'holds the mirror up to nature'; that it is no business of his to give expression to his own personality. Yet in holding the mirror to interpret the vision he must necessarily see things at a particular angle and from an individual point of view. Consequently there is a personal philosophy in a novelist's work, and it will be shown more or less clearly in his manipulation of the characters. The novel is merely a new and lifeful convenience for giving form to the play of human passions and emotions: and Mr Hardy concerns himself particularly with the complications of these forces. Right and wrong, courage and cowardice, duty and desire, war confusedly with irrevocable fates, tragic dooms, blind Law, inherited impulse,

distracted and perverted and uncertain emotions make the air misty with doubts and difficulties. How all these things arise, progress, and what they lead to, brings out inevitably the author's thoughts about life.

We need to expect nothing of the Puritan in Mr Hardy. He would scorn to belittle this life and the men and women of this earth by exalting another life and a heavenly people. Like Shakspeare he wholly ignores the transcendental, and as a consequence, exalts unduly, perhaps, the things of this world. His point of view is purely humanistic: his characters, men and women alike, Pagan--in life, interests, sympathies, almost wholly in thought and altogether in their pathos. He neither justifies the ways of God to man, nor of man to God. But his sympathies are plainly on the side of humanity in its vain struggle with ruthless Destiny. What he thinks of Man, he best tells himself in speaking of Egdon Heath: 'It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature, neither ghastly, hateful nor ugly--neither common place, unmeaning, nor tame; but like man slighted and enduring and with all singularly colossal and mysterious

in its swarthy monotony.'

One might escape further difficulty by calling him a pessimist. Of course he is, he insists most emphatically upon that himself; but he is much more. He has looked about him and like Swift concluded that to be happy a man must be a fool among knaves--that the only condition upon which perfect happiness can rest is ignorance--that content is incompatible with a knowledge of life and its conditions! He sees no justice in Nature's laws, they are antagonistic to all higher emotions and life of man. To die, to suffer, and especially to live is an exceedingly uncomfortable thing, yet these things are, and even to attempt a solution or an explanation is futile. We must accept this **unsolvable** mystery of life and come into accord with its facts. Much of which is of course pessimism of the deepest dye.

However, he is far from being a cynic. There is never a hint of despair; though for him God is not in His heaven and all is not well with his world, he has one belief, one faith that is ever present--a faith in the virtue of man and the usefulness of his effort.

He has perfect confidence in the goodness and long suffering of mankind; only Fate, only circumstance, only social codes are cruel. It is to society he looks for help if not for cure. We must accept natural law or we perish; more, we must make unconditional surrender to it; the individual must suffer for the good of the many; the part for the whole: Fate has so decreed. What avails it to kick against the pricks? He admits, none. But there is one sting that might well be less sharp, he insists.. He thinks that evil exists less in human character than in human institutions. Then why cling to a rotten social code that is based upon inhuman misconceptions and cruelties? Nature is careless, heedless and unmindful of the individual's needs; there is all the greater reason why society should be careful of her own. Man should clasp hands with man and join against this common foe.

Through his pessimism, his fatalism, his sense of fearful dooms he has the purely scientific spirit. He out-sciences the scientists. He works the evolutionary theory for all it is worth. He is almost evolution-mad in so far as that term implies the awfulness

of the eternal warfare of creature against creature, the inexorableness of the law of self protection. Nature to him is 'red in tooth and claw'. It is almost safe to say he sees only the instinct of self-preservation, of self against all the world. Owls are catchers of mice; rabbits eat the winter green, stoats suck the rabbits' blood, ad infinitum. Trees and vines and blossoms are exempt—, all are combatants, all.

'Since, then, no grace I find
Taught me of trees,
Turn I back to my kind,
Worthy as these.
There at least smiles abound,
There discourse trills around,
There, now and then, are found
Life-loyalties.'

Of the woods in the Woodlanders--

'Here as everywhere the Unfulfilled Intention which makes life what it is, was as obvious as it would be among the depraved crowds of a city slums. The leaf was deformed, the curve was crippled, the taper was interrupted; the lichen eat the vigor of the stalk, and the ivy slowly strangled to death the prom-

ising sapping.' Everything as the mood strikes him has an aspect of the horrible. StCleeve the young astronomer talks to his sweet-heart of his beloved sky which is much more than lover to him-- 'The actual sky is a horror... You would hardly think what monsters lie up there waiting to be discovered by any moderately penetrating mind...Impersonal monsters namely, Immensities...'

'There is a size at which dignity begins,' he exclaimed; 'further on there is a size at which grandeur begins; further on there is a size at which solemnity begins; further on a size at which awfulness begins; further on a size at which ghastliness begins.. That size faintly approaches the size of the stellar universe. So am I not right in saying that those minds who exert their imaginative powers to bury themselves in the depths of that universe merely strain their faculties to gain a new horror?'

Some one has said that the study of astronomy is fitted to elevate the sentiments and give a freer and larger outlook. That mere physical vastness can dilate and liberate the emotions and that the heavens can become

awful only to a morbid imagination. Perhaps this learned person had not gone far enough: anyway, knowing StCleeve, we feel sure that this morbidness is Mr Hardy's and not his.

I might go on thus without end. In other things he goes rather farther than caution would dictate. He assumes much in psychological lines. In both Jude and Tess, he insists so much on the force of heredity that he comes very nearly making his characters machines; alive to be sure, but with an entirely mistaken notion that they are capable of making or of changing their states: and if the men and women did not take matters into their own hands and get away from their creator, he would have come perilously near keeping them from being tragic. Fortunately they were too much for any such narrow limits; as man still is, in spite of psychology.

He has not escaped yet another influence of this sort. Not so scientifically psychological perhaps, but very much the fashion nevertheless--the psychology of morbid love. Squire Petrick's lady, an imaginative woman; Felice Charmond and others are studies of this sort. These characters have peculiarly un-

healthy surroundings and must need grow strangely.

This smack of psychology is rather to be expected since it is such a fashion of the times; but if one were guessing, off-hand, what had influenced Mr Hardy's view of things, probably he would hit last if at all, on the philosophy of Godwin and Shelley. Yet his two latest books, *Jude the Obscure* and *The Well-beloved*, are filled with the spirit of Shelleyan love. Sue's and Jude's love is rather Platonic than ordinary, but more Shelleyan than either; and Sue's thoughts and arguments are peculiarly so. Indeed she has a trick of using almost the precise words of Shelley at times. Her is a curious instance of similarity in phrasing; in Shelley's notes to *Queen Mab* on the line 'even love is sold' he says 'to promise forever to love the same woman is not less absurd than to promise to believe the same creed...'. Sue says to Phillotson 'it is as culpable to bind yourself to love always as to believe the creed always, and as silly as to vow always to like a particular food or drink.' There is much to remind one of Shelley and Godwin in the theory of the book as well as in the occasional phrasing.

Jocelyn Pierston in the Well-beloved is another lover after Shelley's own heart. He might have said in the words of Epipsychidion:

'In many mortal forms I rashly sought
The shadow of that idol of my thought.
And some were fair--but beauty dies away.'

On the whole the novels are depressing but the atmosphere is not always heavy. Over against much that is pessimistic and morbid we must put all that he has written of the beauty of the earth and the joy of the simple and healthy life of simple and healthy men, the admirable fitness of the lives of such as Marty, Winterbourne, Oak, Dick Dewey. The loyalty, purity of heart, self-mastery and self-surrender of Winterbourne are as characteristic of and more common in his characters than the treachery, ingratitude, selfishness and lust of Fitzpiers. So Elizabeth Jane's calm self-control and staunchness and her spirit of making the best of things, is as distinctive of the quality of her maker's mind as the passionate revolt and selfishness of Felice.

At first blush it seems hard to reconcile his gloom and austerity with his mani-

fest pleasure in all that is young and fresh and joyous. A delight in the inconsequence, the feather-headed and scatter-brained ways of youth seems almost incompatible with a serious and sad view of our destiny. Such love for things, youngly human, is a small part of a reasonable and liveable philosophy.

Considering Mr Hardy's present attitude, one wonders if this mood is final. In each successive book, there is an increased seriousness, a heightening of the tone of revolt. At first there was more delight in the things of the world, in its beauty and joy, mingled with a dissatisfaction with human conditions that was due to whimsicality of humor. In the later books the irony is decided, the humorous side of it is lost and the tone imbittered. Is this ironical mood one that will remain to the end or can one reasonably look for another? So far his development has been strikingly like that of Shakspeare: first, a period of youthful, vigorous, joyful composition; second, a period more staid and dignified and experienced but active and aggressive; third, one in which the increasing seriousness has become gloom and dissatisfaction with an

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