The Treatment of Nature

in the works

of

George Meredith and Thomas Hardy

by Stella McGuire

1920.
PLAN

1. Introduction The main characteristics of the Nineteenth Century and their influence upon Hardy and Meredith.

II. Theme (a) Nature used as description.
(b) Nature in connection with the philosophy of the two men.

III. Conclusion A general summary of the characteristics of Meredith and of Hardy, showing their chief points of divergence and of similarity.
George Meredith was born in 1828 and Thomas Hardy in 1840, dates which proclaim them at once as members of the group known as "Nineteenth century writers". Hence it is obvious, that in order to obtain anything approaching a comprehensive appreciation of their places in English Literature, a general survey of the main tendencies which marked their period is necessary. The first duty of the introduction is to give briefly the chief trends of thought of their time, as well as to indicate to what extent these men re-acted to them, while the major portion of this study will endeavor to show in what way the contrasting personalities of the two led them to opposite viewpoints, and to widely contrasting interpretations of the new theories which were formulating around them as they wrote.

The shortness of the space of time which has elapsed since the appearance of the literature of the nineteenth century makes it difficult to view such productions in anything like a firm or a correct perspective. The tendencies which arose and developed during that time are still in existence in the writings of the present day, so that it is impossible to state, as yet, whether some of those developments have reached their culminating point or whether
some of them have begun to decline. What is certain, however, is that the novel became the dominant form during the latter half of the century to a far greater extent than at any previous period in its history. Until the eighteenth century the form had hardly attained admission except on sufferance, but in the early nineteenth century with the writings of Scott, it acquired recognized influence and position. From then on its development was steady, and its popularity increased to such an extent that during the later years it was the most universally favored form. To-day every aspirant to letters attempts a novel, the professional men of letters make their incomes from these novels, and every reader turns to novels for his "something to do," because the modern man distinctly prefers reading prose to reading verse.

All that is necessary to connect Hardy and Meredith with this characteristic of their time is to count the list of the novels they have written. The former gave us sixteen prose volumes in contrast to six in verse, while the latter also wrote sixteen novels and eight collections of verse. Further-more both were consummate masters of the form as "The Woodlanders", and "Rhoda Fleming" adequately prove.

The outstanding influence of the period - that of Jean Jacques Rousseau, was not only at work upon nineteenth century writers, but it persists to a tremendous degree even to-day. In so far as it is possible to point to any one writer as the definite beginner of a literary movement, it is possible to point to Rousseau as the man who awakened into consciousness a real
taste for nature. As the describer of the beauties of nature, as the depicter of the effects of nature on the feelings as well as the effects of the feelings upon the aspect of nature, he points the way for scores of writers in all countries. He showed the reading public the relationship between nature and their dreams; he gave them the idealistic side of nature-communion and he portrayed the ecstasy of love in a beautiful natural setting. After the publication of "La Nouvelle Héloïse" in 1766 every one wanted to love like St. Preux and Julie. Every one wished to be emotional, to dream in the fields, to make the spirits natural. The cry of the succeeding period was "Back to Nature!" Nature became the fashionable affectation of the moment, but the underlying idea persisted and Rousseau may be said to have shaped the thoughts of the century which followed him. His principal works not only called for the successions of imitations but the whole world was imbued with his ideas, for they continue to be renewed and recapitulated from time to time in modern writings. Before Rousseau only a few poets had perceived nature, after him none dared ignore her. Every one prided himself upon loving her and she found many sincere adorers, what would perhaps have never perceived her if they had not listened to Jean Jacques Rousseau. The attentive and sympathetic attitude to nature exemplified in his works has penetrated very deeply into the consciousness of the generations which have followed him.
English Literature shows clearly the manner in which this impetus came at a period when the minds of the people were ready to respond to the new interest. During the period from Waller to Pope the general feeling in our literature toward nature had been one of indifference. The whole emphasis was laid upon man and his social relations and the facts of nature were little known, for when nature references were made, it was done in imitative and conventional terms. Gradually however, a real curiosity and interest in nature began to make itself manifest, and the literary history of the eighteenth century clearly shows steadily increasing scope in nature treatment. This new feeling, as exemplified in the early nineteenth century poets, especially Wordsworth, is marked by full and first-hand observation, by sincere delight and by a strong preference for the wilder forms of nature. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the classical feeling had predominated; by the beginning of the nineteenth a great reversion of feeling had taken place. Whether it was expressed in pictures, in gardens, in journeys, in tales or in poems the new spirit was always at work, calling attention to the world of nature and commanding pre-occupation with her power and her loveliness.

William Wordsworth ushered in the new era and although every writer after him worked out his own treatment of this subject along self-determined lines, Wordsworth, as a single
example, best typifies the variety and complexity of the interest in nature which marked the whole of the nineteenth century. Again we are brought face to face with the close relationship existing between Hardy and Meredith and their time, for it is this very pre-occupation with nature which trans-fuses all their writings. Like Rousseau we find, particularly in Meredith, a beautiful natural setting for idyllic love scenes and like Wordsworth and all the school which followed him, we find highly individual interpretation of nature and her significance in life, permeating all their mature productions.

In the numerous bits of landscape description which abound in the works of these two authors, recognition of the connection between nature and man is always manifest whether such connection be sympathetic or not. The dynamic relationships between scene and character are always made to gain from each other through interaction.

It was typical of the century that knowledge of nature was no longer confined to her wild and lovely aspects. The conventional parks and gardens of the classical writers had given place to rugged mountains, wild oceans and torrents, and to mysterious haunting night scenes.

In this special aspect of nature treatment Hardy and Meredith again reflect the attitude of the time. Both are fond of depicting storms, night scenes, and while Meredith has beautiful descriptions of Alpine landscapes, even their wild beauty is equalled by the
lovely heaths and moors which are omnipresent in Hardy's best books.

This sincere interest in nature so typical of their age results in both cases in masterly manipulation of the subject, not only do they attain pure descriptive effects but they are able to embody a certain philosophy in nature and to show her deepest significance in connection with man. The inmost vital beliefs of these men are inextricably woven around her and they have written whole chapters drenched with feeling for natural setting. For example the dramatic scene of the dice-throwing in Hardy's "Return of the Native," is heightened and strengthened tenfold by its perfect fusion with the nature background - indeed the all-important game itself comes to depend on the natural light afforded by tiny insects. From Meredith's "Richard Feveral," comes the exposition in the storm scene of how an elemental cataclysm can affect the dramatic situation and develop a completely new feeling in the hero.

Of no less importance than the preoccupation in Nature and the steady development of its treatment in literature, was the marked and widespread interest in natural science. This curiosity concerning the physical facts of life was so far-reaching that it affected every branch of life to a greater or lesser degree, and naturally the realm of literature did not escape the impact any more than did the other departments of human activity. Dowden speaks of this result in his
"Studies in Literature". He says:—

"To ascertain and communicate facts is the object of science; to quicken our life into a higher consciousness through the feelings is the function of art. But though knowing and feeling are not identical and a fact expressed in terms of feeling affects us as other than the same fact expressed in terms of knowing, yet our emotions rest on and are controlled by our knowledge. Whatever modifies our intellectual conceptions powerfully, in due time affects our art powerfully". So it is but natural that the influence of the scientific trend of thought can be traced everywhere in the writing of the century.

Charles Darwin who lived from 1809 to 1882 gave up his life to patient and continuous work which has proven the most fruitful and inspiring in the annals of modern science. In 1859 his epoch-making book "The Origin of the Species," appeared and his theory of evolution expressed therein rapidly gained acceptance to such an extent that he can be said in a large measure to have moulded modern thorough thought. Tennyson's poetry is full of references to evolutionary beliefs and George Eliot's masterly studies in environment are the result of the same tendencies. In the dramatic field, Ibsen applied the theory of heredity to his problem plays with powerful results and in the productions which are classed as
scientific novels, H.G. Wells and Jules Verne held up a mirror to the scientific mania of the age. George Meredith's frank acceptance of the doctrine of Evolution was combined with his transcendental view of nature and his idealistic Theism. His whole-hearted adoption of the new idea caused it to become one of the main sources of his inspiration and one of the basic principles upon which he based his thought.

Emile Zola applied the scientific fad of the time directly to literature and developed definite theories from it. As he exerted considerable influence, a school of writers known as the naturalists, grew up around him and resulted in a real influence on the thought of the century. This gave an additional impulse to its already strong scientific proclivities. The main tendency of this school of Naturalism was to attach the novel to studies of vice and crime executed with minute fidelity and rigid obedience to the so-called scientific principles. This school relied, to a great extent, on the now popular theory of heredity. Zola gave his personal expression to the movement in his theory of the "Roman experimental". He ventured into the half-explored regions of sociology and physiology and improvised a set of doctrines of his own, which had no inconsiderable influence despite a vast amount of adverse criticism.

His experimental method was evolved from his consideration of the science of life as something depending on a single kind of investigation. He believed that a novelist could
experiment upon a character and study its behaviour under any set of circumstances to which he chose to subject it, just as a scientist could experiment in his laboratory. The duty of the novelist was to apply exact scientific methods of procedure in his studies of intellect and emotion, that is to say, he should use experiment and observation in place of the old-fashioned and non-scientific expedient of relying upon his imagination. This experiment was to be the means whereby knowledge should be renewed and prolonged through the medium of literature.

The novel, in Zola's hands, was to effect a glorious mission by becoming an experience which sought to set forth facts and to formulate a law for them.

The "experimental novel" or practical attempt to demonstrate his theory, resulted in a series of studies of life in the Second Empire, typified in the family of "Rougon-Macquart". In this series Zola pushed the theory of heredity to its extreme consequences. His thesis, however, was not very carefully prepared, for not only did he fail to obey the laws of scientific experiment but he did not even follow the laws of observation itself. He frequently laid himself open to the charge of contenting himself with superficial impressions, and Robert Vallier, one of his critics, says that he outrages, under the name of his beloved science, the inseparable allies, the Good, the True and the Beautiful.

Notwithstanding the weakness of his execution his method contained the germ of wholesome truth, and had his followers
but recognized the fallacies in his argument, the naturalistic school might not have gone to such excess. Zola was right in realizing that science could teach men the deep significance of all facts and would consequently broaden the field of subjects ready at the novelist's hand. He was wrong, however, in declaring so flatly that the old method of imagination must be eliminated and replaced by observation. The actual "experiment" or circumstances in which the characters are to perform must be in itself the direct product of this very quality of imagination.

Coming when he did, Thomas Hardy felt the full measure of this tidal wave of influence from France in the School of Naturalism. Despite the frequent recurrence of his besetting sin, the use of coincidence, he is one of the finest examples in our literature of the logic of modern realism when applied by a first class scientific mind to the art of fiction.

Science has taught writers some invaluable truths which they can never afford to overlook in their works. First of all it has brought to them the realization that all details must be wrought with scrupulous care and nicety, and it has taught them the necessity for accurate and analytic vision in all forms of art. It gives them the power to generalize from specific facts, and the importance of a firm basis of facts for the ideas promulgated in any work cannot be over-estimated.

Thomas Hardy learned this lesson of scientific accuracy
with great thoroughness and turned it to wonderful account. One of his most admirable qualities is his ability to describe real and living rustics. The telling factor behind this realism is undoubtedly his scientific precision of recording impressions which results in faultless reproduction of the west country dialect.

The general interest in science soon led to specialized studies of its different branches. These specialized studies all contributed their share of truths to the increasing accuracy of treatment accorded to fiction. For example the specialized science of physiology taught the readers as well as the authors to value the beauty and dignity inherent in the human body. The direct result of this realization was a marked change in the type of characters which gained popularity. The dandified heroes and the puny heroines of the early part of the century rapidly gave place to strong and virile personages.

George Meredith is closely linked to this tendency as can be seen by his consistent pictures of courageous, spirited and vividly healthy heroines and his manly heroes. Robert Eacles in "Rhoda Fleming" is a red-blooded, robust youth who tries to settle his own and others' difficulties by means of his two fists. Witness also the delight of Vernon Whitford in "The Egoist" in a brisk cross-country walk, a morning swim. Action, strength and courage typify all Meredith's best characters. The epitome of this new and healthy spirit which
was gradually permeating all fiction is exemplified in a spirited and joyous account of a prize fight which is the first incident in the honeymoon described in "The Amazing Marriage".

The specialized study of Psychology now began to play such a large role in novels that its steady development has had the result that to-day a psychological study is the highest aim of all serious writers, and such a work is rated as the supreme measure of an author's achievement.

Both Hardy and Meredith attained a startling proficiency in psychological studies. In the "Return of the Native", Eustacia is a splendid depiction of a high-strung and imperious girl, while "Jude the Obscure" furnishes an even more outstanding instance in the wonderfully intricate and clever picture of the futile Sue Bridehead.

Meredith's remarkable power of insight into mental processes has given us Sir Willoughby, the unforgettable egoist, and it has also given us the gloriously real boys in "The Egoist" and in "Richard Feveral". Meredith's weakness lay in his response to the interest in psychology which characterized his time. He sometimes put over-emphasis on the psychological viewpoint and in so doing he was misled with the over-cleverness which robbed his thought both of simplicity and naturalness. Many of his pages are so acute and super-subtle that they become
perverse and pointless to the bewildered reader and cause him to berate the novelist as unreadable.

These then, are the most outstanding characteristics which found expression in the literature of the nineteenth century. First and foremost came the universal and elaborate expression of interest in nature - the direct result of Rousseau's influence and the matured impetus which Wordsworth had caught up and given to English literature of the eighteenth century. The nineteenth carried on the development of varied nature treatment. Meredith and Hardy were closely connected with this characteristic, in fact, as will be shown, their main preoccupation is with nature in her most elaborate and subtle aspects.

Second came universal attention to science in all its branches. The principles of scientific accuracy of treatment as well as the theories of evolution, heredity, psychology and physiology, were all found to have direct influence upon the works of the two novelists under consideration. To what extent these were applied, and in what manner they were interpreted in relation to the more outstanding absorption in nature by the two men will be the concern of the following chapters.

In both cases the subject divides into two broad divisions. Nature is treated in the obvious manner by both authors in a great many instances. That is to say, Hardy and Meredith offer frequent examples of the use of nature as simple description and in these cases there is nothing deeper in their
purpose than the attainment of an artistic effect or the
delineation of the necessary setting.

On the other hand, both writers have evolved their
philosophy into the frame-work of nature to such an extent
that the most casual of readers is aware of an underlying
significance in the nature passages.

It is my intention to examine the work of each man under
these two divisions, and in so doing, to obtain a working
knowledge of the characteristic methods and beliefs of the two men.
Illustrations of Meredith's power of description are to be found in almost every novel or poem that he has written. Nature is used as an introductory passage, nature scenes recur again and again to illustrate the narratives and ballads, and frequently his poems in their entirety are no more than simple descriptions of earth and sky. The final impression of beauty and power which is derived from such passages is produced by a combination of three important qualities in the writer. The first gift which contributes to the intimate effectiveness of his descriptions is his habit of first-hand observation of the scenes he describes; the second is the admirable accuracy with which he is able to record his impressions and convey them to his readers, and his third endowment is his ability to catch the true spirit lurking in the scene and the hour. These three result in an unique sensitiveness which gives him a keen sense of sympathetic inter-communion with nature.

The youthful poems which were published in 1851 were already characterized by the first-mentioned quality of close observation of nature in all her moods. Meredith was born in Hampshire and the characteristic aspects of the landscape of that section were very dear to him, for the scenes of all his English poems and novels are laid in that part of the country. The Pastorals in this early volume are little more than clever nature studies of the south of England, while the following passage showed that a new nature poet of England was at hand.
"Heavily weighs the hot season, and drowzes the darkening foliage,
Drooping with languor, the white cloud floats, but sails not, for windless
The blue heaven tents it; no lark singing up in its fleecy white valleys,
Up in its fairy white valleys, once feathered with minstrels, melodious
With the invisible joy that works wakes dawn o'er the green fields of England".

This habit of close attention to salient features enables the poet to give an exact impression of a Southern night as clearly as he portrays the languid English summer afternoon. In the ballad, "The Young Princess", a beautiful Southern midnight is described in the closing stanzas. The young squire is waiting under the orange-boughs in the garden while his lord has gone within to seek and claim the Princess. His expectancy is exalted by the verses which portray the fresh luxuriance of the balmy night.

"The soft night wind went laden to death
With smell of the orange in flower,
The light leaves prattled to neighbor ears;
The bird of passion sang over his tears;
The night named hour by hour.

Sang loud, sang low the rapturous bird,
'Till the yellow hour was nigh,
Behind the folds of a darker cloud:
He chuckled he sobbed aloud aloud.
The voice between earth and sky."

The opening passage in "Vittoria" proves that Meredith can use his powers of observation as effectively in prose as he can in verse. The period of his sojourn in Italy as a war correspondent enabled him to give his readers the following real picture of the
Italian Alps.

"From Monte Motterone you survey the Lombard plain. It is a towering dome of green among a hundred pinnacles and rust-red crags. With sunrise come the mists. The vast brown level is seen narrowing in; the Ticino and the Sesia waters, nearest, quiver on the air-like sleepy lakes; the plain is engulfed up to the high ridges of the distant southern mountain range, which lie stretched to a faint cloud-like line, in shape like a solitary monster of old seas crossing the Deluge. Long arms of vapor stretch across the urn-like valleys, and gradually thickening and swelling upward, enwrap the scored bodies of the ashen-faced peaks and the pastures of the green mountain, till the heights become islands over a forgotten earth. Bells of herds down the hidden run of sweet grasses, and a continuous leaping of its rivulets, give the Motterone a voice of youth amid that stern company of Titan-heads, for whom the hawk and vulture cry. The storm has beaten at them until they have got the aspect of the storm. They take color from sunlight and are joyless in color as in shade. When the lower world is under pushing steam they wear the look of the revolted sons of Time, fast chained before Heaven in an iron place. Day at last brings vigorous fire; arrows of light pierce the mist-wreaths, the dancing draperies, the floors of vapours, and the mountain of piled pasturage is seen with its foot on the shore of Lago Maggiore. Down an extreme gulf the full Sunlight, as if darting on a jewel in the deeps, seizes the blue-
green lake with its isles. The villages along the darkly-wooded borders of the lake show white as clustered swans; here and there a tented boat is visible, shooting from terraces of vines, or hanging on its shadow. You behold a burnished realm of mountain and plain beneath the royal sun of Italy. In the foreground it shines hard as the lines of an irradiated Cellini shield. Farther away, over middle ranges that are soft and clear, it melts, confusing the waters with hot rays and the forests with darkness, to where wavering in and out of view like flying wings, and shadowed like wings of archangels with rose and with orange and with violet, silver-white Alps are seen. You might take them for mystical streaming torches on the border-ground between vision and fancy. They lean as in a great flight forward, upon Lombardy. The curtain of an early autumnal morning is everywhere lifted around the Motterone, save for one milky strip of cloud that lies lizard-like across the throat of the Monte Boscero facing it.

The second characteristic which marks the nature descriptions of Meredith, is his ability to transcribe his impressions with great accuracy and pictorial power. In this connection the first passage which occurs to one's mind is found in "The Night of Frost in May". Here we are given a beautiful and accurate impression of two nightingales answering each other in the depths of the woods. Critics may point to imperfections in style and clearness, but these have no power to diminish the vividness and insistence of the impression. Indeed the passage seems to gain in effectiveness from
its very imperfections. George Macauley Trevelyan says of this passage: "Milton, Arnold, Shelley, Keats all praise the nightingale's song; Mr. Meredith gives it back to our memory. His words strike in our brain and body the very chords which last vibrated when last we listened to the bird."

"In this shrill hush of quietude,
The ear conceived a severing cry,
Almost it let the sound elude,
When chuckles three, a warble shy,
From hazels of the garden came,
Nearby the crimsom-windowed form
They laid the trance on breath and frame,
A prelude of the passion charm

Then soon was heard, not sooner heard
Then answered, doubled, trebled, more,
Voice of an Eden in the bird
Renewing with his pipe of four
The sob: a troubled Eden, rich
In throb of heart, unnumbered throats
Plunged upward at a fountain's pitch
The fervor of the four long notes
That on the fountain's pool subsides,
Exult and ruffle and upspring:
Endless the crossing multiplied
Of silver and of golden string.
There chimed a bubbled underbrew
With witch-wild spray of vocal dew.

It is not alone in picturing the beauty of a bird's song that Meredith's accuracy serves him in such good stead. A more powerful and sustained descriptive passage is found in "The Spirit of Earth in Autumn" wherein the description of the south-west wind rising after sunset conveys to the reader the actual experiences of one who observes mature in her stormier moods. The skilful change of metre combines with the accurately selected details to

...
to give an extraordinary rendering of wind in a forest during a night of "pagan glee".

"Not long the silence followed:
The voice that issues from thy breast,
O glorious south-west
Along the gloom-horizon hollowed.
Warning the valleys with a mellow roar
Through flapping wings;
Then sharp the woodland bore
A shudder and a noise of hands:
A thousand chorus from some far vale
In ambush sounding on the gale.
Forth from the cloven sky came bands
Of revel-gathering spirits; trooping down,
Some rode the tree-tops: some on torn cloud-strips
Burst screaming through the lighted town:
And scudding seawards, some fell on big ships:
Or mounting the sea-horses blue
Bright foam-flakes on the black review
Of heaving hulls and burying beaks.

Still on the furthest line, with out-puffed cheeks
Twixt dark and utter dark the great wind blew
From heaven that disenchanterd harmony
To join earth's laughter in the midnight blind:
Booming a distant chorus to the shrieks
Precluding him; then he,
His mantle streaming thunderingly behind,
Across the yellow realm of stiffened day,
Shot through the woodland alleys signals three,
And with the pressure of a sea,
Plunged broad upon the vale that underlay".

Turning to the prose for examples of accuracy in description the "Farewell to an Old Home" in "The Amazing Marriage" at once occurs to any one acquainted with that series of vivid mountain pictures. The coming of dawn is depicted in a few faultless sentences:

"Meanwhile the high wind had sunk; the moon after pushing up her withered half to the zenith, was climbing the dusky edge,
revealed fitfully; threads and wisps of thin vapor travelled along a falling gale, and breached from the dome of the sky in migratory broken lines, like wild birds shifting the order of flight, north and east, where the dawn sat in a web, but as yet had done no more than shoot up a glow along the central heavens, in amid the waves of deepened cloud: a mirror for night to see her dark self in her own hue.

Further along in the same chapter an equally clear cut picture of noon in the mountains, serves to add weight to the contention, that the novelist's love of nature and his habit of careful study of her every aspect has resulted in a remarkable ability in tabulating his impressions correctly as well as artistically. The sun's triumph over the morning mists is described as follows:

"The phantom ring of mist enclosed for miles the invariable low-sweeping dark spruce-fir. Near midday the haunted circle widened, rocks were loosely folded in it, and heads of trees whose round intertwining roots grasped the yellow roadside soil; the mists shook like a curtain and partly opened and displayed a tapestry landscape, roughly worked, of woolen crag and castle and suggested glen, threaded waters, very prominent foreground, autumn flowers on banks, a predominant atmospheric greyness. The sun threw a shaft, liquid instead of burning, as we see his beams beneath a wave; and then the mists narrowed again, boiled up the valleys and streams above the mountain, curled and flew and were Python coils pierced by brighter arrows of the sun."
A spot of blue signalled his victory above.

A final example of this second trait in Meredith's descriptions is to be found in the paragraph about a mountain torrent seen by Dacier: "Waters of past rain-clouds poured down the mountain sides like veins of metal, here and there flinging off a shower on the busy descent; only dubiously animate in the lack lustre of the huge bulk piled against a yellow East that wafted fleets of pinky cloudlets overhead. He mounted his path to a level with inviting grass-mounds, where water circled, running from scoops and cups to curves and brook-streams, and in his fancy, calling to him to hear them. Heights to right and to left, and between them, aloft, a sky the rosy wheelcourse of the chariot of morn, and below, a mong the knolls, choice of sheltered nooks, where waters whispered of secrecy to satisfy Diana herself".

This accuracy is closely connected with the third point which concerns the present chapter, for it enables Meredith to embody his impressions in adequate descriptions. The third characteristic, as has been said, is found in the fact that it is always his inspiration to catch the exact spirit that lurks in the place and in the hour. This gives a rare and haunting beauty to his nature-pictures. The lovely poem "Love in a Valley" is typical of this characteristic. It is a song of youth and joy - a picture of a young girl seen against the background of the four seasons. The
liquid lilting form embodies the joyous spirit of the piece and effect of the whole is consistently heightened by frequent nature metaphors and symbols, and the vivid descriptions in which the poem abounds are characteristic of the best of his work.

The moods of the lover vary as his fortunes waver or prosper and in every case he connects his loved one with some aspect of nature which mirrors his own mood. Every picture fits perfectly into the spirit of the piece. First of all, as he is tormented by the girl's aloofness he thinks that:

"Heartless she is as the shadow in the meadows
Flying to the hills on a blue and breezy noon!"

Despite the strong appeal which her loveliness makes to him he cannot pierce her indifference to his admiration and so he is made to reflect:

"Lovely are the curves of the white owl sweeping,
Leaving in the dusk, lit by one large star
Love on the fir-branch his rattle note unvaried
Brooding o'er the gloom spins the brown eve-jar,
Darker grows the valley, more and more forgetting".

The cold beauty of the summer dawn reminds him at once of the unattainable maiden. He gives utterance to his thoughts in a famous passage:

"Happy happy time when the white star hovers
Low over dim fields fresh with blooming dew
Near the face of dawn that draws athwart the darkness,
Threading it with color like yewberries the yew.
Thicker crowd the shades as the grave east deepens
Glowing with crimson a long cloud swells.
Maiden still the morning is and strange she is and secret.
Strange her eyes; her cheeks are cold as cold sea shells".

The voice of the lark only serves to suggest to the young man a new thought of his loved one, and the delight he experiences in the beauty
of the bird's note is intensified by the kinship he senses in it to the clear laughter of the maiden.

"Mother of the dews, dark eye-lashed twilight,
Low-lidded twilight o'er the valley's brim
Rounding on thy breast sings the dew-delighted skylark,
Clear as though the dew drops had their voice in him.
Hidden where the rose-flush drinks the rayless planet
Fountain-full he pours the spraying fountain showers.
Let me hear her laughter, I would have her ever
Cool as dew in twilight, the lark above the flowers".

The moods of the speaker are typified in a subtler fashion by the plan of the poem. The four seasons of the year are described in the course of the piece. The beginning of the young man's love is in the spring, it deepens and grows more intense throughout the summer and the harvest season; finally in the pure white setting of winter the young girl's love is won, while the joy and hope of the accepted lover is expressed in the return of spring.

The first spring is pictured in the verse which describes the young girls searching for wild flowers.

"All the girls are out with their baskets for the primrose".

The climax of midsummer pulses through the wonderful "yellow verse":-

"Yellow with bird foot-trefoil are the grass glades
Yellow with cinquefoil of the dew - gray leaf;
Yellow with stone crop; the moss-mounds are yellow;
Blue-necked the wheat sways, yellowing to the sheaf.
Green-yellow bursts from the copses the laughing yaffle;
Sharp as a sickle is the edge of shade and shine;
Earth in her heart laughs looking at the heavens,
Thinking of the harvest: I look and think you mine".

The next emotional crisis comes in mid-winter:

"Large and smoky-red the sun's cold disk drops
Clipped by naked hills on violet-shaded snow! "
It is in this season that the girl yields her heart's secret to her lover and as is fitting, the last stanzas sound the note of new joy mirrored in the return of spring:-

"Swift with the to-morrow green-winged spring
Sing from the south-west, bring her back the truants Nightingale and swallow! song and dipping wing."

Another example of the manner in which Meredith is able to attune the nature background to a theme of love and youth in such a way as to make the setting re-echo the very spirit of the characters is to be found in the inspired and idyllic chapter called "A Diversion Played on a Penny Whistle."

"Let us breathe the air of the enchanted island. Golden lie the meadows — golden run the streams, red and gold is on the pine-stems. The sun is coming down to earth and walks the fields and waters. Sweet are the shy recesses of the woodland. The ray treads softly there. A film athwart the pathway quivers many-hued against purple shade fragrant with the warm pines, deep moss-beds, feathery ferns. The little brown squirrel drops tail and leaps — the immost bird is startled to a chance tuneless note; From silence into silence things move........

For this is the home of the enchantment. Here secluded from vexed shores, the prince and princess of the island meet; here, like darkling nightingales they sit, and into eyes and ears and hands from pour endless ever-fresh treasures of their souls."

The theme of joyous love is not, however, the single note to which Meredith is able to attune his nature backgrounds.
In another connection he has used the device of interweaving nature with the subject matter of a poem in such a manner as to obtain the moods of pathos and of humor. The poem deals with the death of a wandering juggler, by the English roadside. The old man is lying on a heath which overlooks a typical English south country landscape. He is resting in the arms of his faithful wife and watching the scene with which he is so familiar, he points out to her that:

"Up goes the lark as if all were jolly!"

He realizes pathetically that his death can make no impression upon the happy spring-time scene before him and although his faith is unshaken, he cannot help but be puzzled and bewildered by such a reflection.

"Yonder came the smells of the gorse so nutty,
God-like and warm; it's the prime of May,
Better than mortar—brick and putty,
Is God's house on a blowing day.
Lean me more up to the mound;
Now I feel it: all the old heath-smells;
Ain't it strange? There's the world laughing as if to conceal it,
But He's by us, juggling the change".

In his earliest novel, a slighter example of this power occurs in the clever suggestion of enchantment which is obtained by a short description of a magic sea.

"And soon the length of the sea was darkened with two high rocks and between them there was a narrow channel of the sea, roughened with moonlight. So they sped between the rocks, and came upon a purple sea, dark-blue overhead, with large stars"
leaning to the waves. There was a soft whispering near in the breath of the breezes that swung there, and many sails of charmed ships were seen in momentary gleams, flapping the mast idly far away. Warm as new milk from the full udders were the waters of that sea. Long paths of starlight rippled into the distant gloom, and the reflection of the moon opposite was as a wide nuptial sheet of silver on the waters: islands, green and white, and with soft music floating from their foliage, sailed slowly to and fro.

Meredith's ability to transmit the mood of his narrative to his readers through the medium of apt nature touches never fails him. He has a genius for catching the spirit which lurks beneath the outward manifestations of nature. In his nature poems this trait often leads him to deserve the criticism of offending through subtle and difficult expressions, but after the difficulties of style are removed, the reader is amply repaid by the way in which the poet catches for him the mood of the moment and helps him to see the ghost of the place.

These three qualities of which examples have been given, have combined to give Meredith a keen sense of sympathetic communion with inanimate nature. He is a sincere and accurate nature lover, as we have seen, but his unique endowments enable him to do more than picture the woods and reproduce the song of the lark; he has attained an original and inspiring philosophy that links man closely
to earth. In the sonnet sequence "Modern Love," he has given voice to this realization in a description of wind and waves, which is not only unsurpassed as description, but which definitely points to man's connection with nature in all the crises of his life.

"Mark where the pressing wind shoots pollin-like, Its skeleton shadow on the broad-backed wave! Here is a fitting spot to dig love's grave; Here where the ponderous breakers plunge and strike, And dart their hissing tongues high up the sand: In hearing of the ocean, and in sight Of those ribbed wind-streaks running into white".

Nature's effect upon the lives of two lovers, is described in "Sandra Belloni". This passage sums up the three qualities of close observation, of accurate portrayal and of embodying the spirit — and the result is clearly expressed at the same time — Meredith believes there is an inter-communion between nature and humanity.

"So, now, the soft summer hours flow like white doves from off the mounting moon, and the lovers turned to go, all being still; even the noise of the waters still to their ears, as life that is muffled in sleep. They saw the cedar grey-edged under the moon; and Night, that clung like a bat beneath its ancient palm. The bordering swale about the falls shone silvery. In its shadow was a swan. These scenes are but beckoning hands to the hearts of lovers, waving them on to that Eden which they claim: but when the hour has fled, they know it; and by the palpitating light in it they know that it holds the best of them."
The whole of this sensitiveness to the influence of nature is summed up with rare insight and delicately-inspired descriptive power in a few lines from "Song in the Songless"

"They have no song, the sedges dry,
And still they sing,
It is within my breast they sing
As I pass by.
Within my breast they touch a string,
They wake a sigh,
There is but sound of sedges dry
To me they sing".

In this manner it is possible to continue selecting passages from novel and verse which exemplify all these qualities, for everything that Meredith has done is touched to a greater or lesser degree by some or all of these phases. The beautiful lyric descriptions invariably serve as an artistic background against which the characters and events gain tenfold in force and in loveliness.
THOMAS HARDY'S USE OF NATURE AS DESCRIPTION

As is the case with Meredith, one of the most outstanding features of Hardy's novels is his abundant use of nature descriptions. The similarity between the two men does not go much farther however. In the first place sustained descriptions are not found in Hardy's verse, while some of the most effective nature pictures which Meredith has given us are to be found in his poetry. Of the two, Meredith had greater poetic power for Hardy does not seem to attempt long descriptions in verse. He often attacked the same subjects in his poems as he had treated in his novels but in every case the prose treatment is the more powerful. An example of this is found in the two treatments of Marty South's lament for Giles Winterbourne, they show clearly that prose was Hardy's most facile instrument. For this reason the examples given in the following pages are invariably taken from the prose and this constitutes first point of differentiation from the section on Meredith's descriptions.

Meredith's characteristics were summed up under three broad headings. Hardy can be treated in the same manner. In the first place the two men are alike in their gift of accuracy. In the second place Hardy's power of observation is equally as strong as that of his contemporary but it has resulted in a more practical treatment of nature. He is scientific in his practical knowledge of the facts of nature and he permeates his novels with this wisdom. Meredith does not introduce this element in
any of his descriptions. The third characteristic of Hardy's nature sections is his ability to co-ordinate his details in such a way as to give his readers one general impression. The whole effect of a paragraph can usually be summed up in one word such as beauty or gloom. Meredith's descriptions catch a pre-dominant mood - Hardy's convey one distinct aspect of a scene.

The final difference between the two men is found in the result of these qualities upon their general beliefs. Meredith arrives at a conviction of some subtle link between nature and man. Hardy has an equally sincere regard for nature and is endowed with equal powers of observation, but he reaches no such conclusion. A sense of inter-communion is entirely lacking and it is from this point of difference that the widely differentiated philosophies of the two men develop. One can admire the nature descriptions of Thomas Hardy for their own intrinsic effectiveness but it should be borne in mind that they are never detachable ornaments which embellish the novels and contain no purpose beyond simple description. For example the elaborate accounts of Egdon Heath and the vales of Blackmoor and Froome are vital parts not only of the substance of their respective novels but of the action itself. Nature is neither an abstraction nor a scenic setting but a vast impressive organism, which is deeply imbedded in the heart of the novels. When this is borne in mind, it is permissible to examine some of the nature passages purely as descriptive art, for a man with Hardy's interest in, knowledge of
and genius for this type of writing could not fail to make considerable contribution to the purely descriptive passages of English literature. In all the Wessex novels there he displays a wonderful sensitiveness to natural beauty and grandeur.

First let us examine Hardy from the standpoint of the accuracy of his descriptions. The early novel "Under the Greenwood Tree" takes the reader into close friendship with earth from the first page until the last. It is divided into four parts to correspond to the four seasons of the year so that at the very outset the reader is made to feel that setting and description are to play no mean part in the story. The book opens with a description of the sounds of out-of-doors which falls under the heading of accuracy.

"To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature. At the passing of the breeze the fir-trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself; the ash hisses amidst its quiverings; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall. And winter, which modifies the note of such trees as shed their leaves, does not destroy its individuality".

Hardy has given many depictions of the coming of evening throughout his novels and all of them are true to reality. An especially good example occurs in "Far from the Madding Crowd" while the shearing supper was in progress and as the shearers sat and talked and grew merry as the God of Homer's heaven."
"It was still the beaming time of evening, though the night was stealthily making itself visible low down upon the ground, the western lines of light taking the earth without alighting upon it to any extent, or illuminating the dead levels at all. The sun had crept round the tree as a last effort before death and then began to sink, the shearer's lower parts becoming steeped in an embrowning twilight, whilst their heads and shoulders were still enjoying day, touched with a yellow of self-sustained brilliancy that seemed inherent rather than acquired. The sun went down in an ochreous mist. Bathsheba still remained enthroned inside the window, and occupied herself in knitting, from which she sometimes looked up to view the fading scene outside. The slow twilight expanded and enveloped them completely before the signs of moving were shown."

An equally, truthful glimpse of the coming of night is portrayed in "Under the Greenwood Tree" - this time it is nightfall in the woodland.

"Saturday evening saw Dick journeying on foot to Yalbury Wood. The landscape was concave and at the going down of the sun everything suddenly assumed a uniform robe of shade. The evening advanced from sunset to dusk long before Dick's arrival and his progress during the latter portion of his walk though the trees was indicated by the flutter of terrified birds that had been roosting over the path. And in crossing the glades, masses of hot dry air, that had
been formed on the hills during the day, greeted his cheeks alternately with clouds of damp night air from the valleys. He reached the keeper's house where the grass-plot and the garden in front appeared light and pale against the unbroken darkness of the grove from which he had emerged, and paused at the garden gate. Nature plays such an important part in everything that takes place throughout the "Return of the Native" that it is possible to allude to no aspect of Hardy's treatment without a reference to this book. In this particular connection there is a splendid description of nightfall on the heath given at the beginning of the book, but it is fraught with so much meaning in its bearing upon the action of the story that it cannot be isolated from its kinship with Hardy's subtlest philosophy. But later in the course of the book an accurate description of a hot summer twilight is given as Clym Yeobright sets forth on his tragic journey which ends in his finding his mother prostrate upon the ground.

"In the evening he set out on the journey. Although the heat of summer was yet intense the days had considerably shortened and before he had advanced a mile on his way, all the heath purples, browns, and greens had merged in a uniform dress, without airiness or gradation and broken only by touches of white where the little heaps of clean quartz sand showed the entrance to a rabbit burrow, or where the white flints of a
foot-path lay like a thread over the slopes. In almost every one of the isolated and stunted thorns which grew here and there, a night hawk revealed his presence by whirring like the clack of a mill as long as he could hold his breath, then stopping, flapping his wings, wheeling round the bush, alighting and after a silent interval of listening, beginning to whirr again. At each brushing of Clyne's feet white miller moths flew into the air, just high enough to catch upon their dusty wings the mellowed light from the west, which now shone across the depressions and levels of the ground without falling thereon to light them up.

This same accuracy which enables Thomas Hardy to convey a perfect impression of twilight in all its aspects enables him to reproduce the sensation of heat in both "Far from the Madding Crowd" and the "Return of the Native". In the former at harvest time the enervating effect of weeks of hot weather is faithfully presented.

"The oat harvest began, and all the men were afield under a monochromatic sky, amid the trembling air, and short shadows of noon. Indoors nothing was to be heard save the droning of blue-bottle flies, out-of-doors the whetting of scythes and the hiss of tressy oat-ears rubbing together as their perpendicular stalks of amber-yellow fell heavily to each swath. Every drop of moisture not in the men's bottles and flagons in the form of cider, was raining as perspiration from their foreheads and cheeks. Drought was everywhere else".
The justly famous chapter in "The Return of the Native" entitled "The Journey across the heath" conveys the impression of a sun-baked land with scientific accuracy and precision. It was, "ome of a series of days during which snug houses were stifling and when cool draughts were treats; when cracks appeared in clayey gardens and were called 'earthquakes' by apprehensive children; when loose spokes were discovered in the wheels of carts and carriages, and when stinging insects haunted the air, the earth, and every drop of water that was to be found. In Mrs. Yeobright's garden large-leaved plants of a tender kind flagged by ten o'clock in the morning; rhubarb bent downward at eleven; and even stiff cabbages were limp by noon".

Then follows the description of the mother starting out upon her long walk while "the air was pulsating silently and oppressing the earth with lassitude. The sun had branded the whole heath with his mark, even the purple heath-flowers having put on a brownness under the dry blazes of the preceding days. Every valley was filled with air like that of a kiln and the clean quartz sand of the winter water-courses which formed summer paths had undergone a species of incineration".

The aching light of the hot sky is characterized at a single stroke when we are told that "the sapphirine hue of
the zenith in spring and early summer had completely gone to be replaced by a metallic violet". Next comes a masterly presentation of the drying heath-pools, "Independent worlds of empherons were passing their time in mad carousal, some in the air, some on the hot ground and vegetation, some in the tepid and stringy water of a nearly dried pool. All the shallower ponds had decreased to a vaporous mud, amid which the maggoty shapes of innumerable obscene creatures could be indistinctly seen heaving and wallowing with enjoyment".

Finally Mrs. Yeobright sinks down in exhaustion upon the heath and looks around her at the hot sun which had now got far to the west of south and stood directly in her face like some merciless incendiary, brand in hand, waiting to consume her. All visible animation disappeared from the landscape, though the intermittent husky notes of the male grasshoppers from every tuft of furze were enough to show that amid the prostration of the larger animal species an unseen insect world was busy in all the fulness of life. She leant back to obtain more thorough rest and the soft eastern portion of the sky was as great a relief to her eyes as the thyme was to her head. While she looked a heron arose on that side of the sky and flew on with his face towards the sun. He had come dripping wet from some pool in the valleys, and as he flew the edges
and lining of his wings, his thighs, and his breast were so caught by the bright sunbeams that he appeared as if formed of burnished silver.

The second characteristic of Hardy's nature descriptions is his display of practical and scientific knowledge of nature facts. The habits of animate nature were as clearly understood by him as were the minutest variations in the aspects of inanimate nature. That the habits of animate nature were a well-learned lesson to him can be easily proven by the minute knowledge of sheep which is displayed at every turn in "Far from the Madding Crowd" while Marty South in "The Woodlanders" reads and interprets changes in the weather by means of her intimate knowledge of the habits of the pheasants.

"Across it the bare bough of a tree stretched horizontally, revealing every twig against the evening fire and showing in dark profile every beck and movement of three pheasants that were settling themselves down on it in a row to roost.

"It will be fine to-morrow," said Marty, "for they are acroupied down nearly at the end of the bough. If it were going to be stormy they'd squeeze close to the trunk".

In the first named story there is a vivid depiction of the habits of bees which adds another instance of accuracy.

"The Weatherbury bees were late in swimming this year. It was the latter part of June. Not only were they late this year but unruly. Sometimes throughout a whole season the swarms
would alight on the lowest attainable bough such as part of a currant bush or espalier apple-tree; next year they would, with just the same unanimity make straight off to the uppermost member of some tall quant costard or quarrington and there defy all invaders who did not come armed with ladders and staves to take them.

This was the case at present. Bathsheba's eyes, shaded with one hand, were following the ascending multitude across the unexplored stretch of blue till they ultimately halted by one of the unwieldy trees spoken of. A process somewhat analogous to that of alleged formations of the universe, time and times ago, was observable. The bustling swarm had swept the sky in a scattered and uniform haze, which now thickened to a nebulous centre: this glided on to a bough and grew still denser, till it formed a solid black spot upon the light.

The blundering bumble bee is sketched briefly in "Two on a Tower" as follows: "All was warm, sunny and silent, except that a solitary bee which had somehow got within the hollow of the abacus was singing around enquiringly, unable to discern that ascent was the only mode of escape".

In the same novel the heroine spends a night in the woods, and with the coming of dawn her attention is attracted to the awakening bird-life around her, and to the different sounds the birds make:— "She became conscious of some interesting proceedings which were going on in the trees above
her head and around.

A coarse-throated chatter was the first sound.
It was the sparrow just waking.
Next: 'Chee-weeze-weeze-weeze !' from another retreat.

It was a finch.
Third: 'Tink - tink - tink a-chink!' from the hedge.

It was a robin.
'Chuck - chuck - chuck !' overhead
A squirrel."

Then through the trees she watched the horses
stopping for their morning drink, and we are told: "they
stopped to drink at a pond on the other side of the way".
She watched them flouncing into the pool, drinking, tossing
up their heads, drinking again, the water dribbling from
their lips in silver threads. There was another flounce
and they came out of the pond and turned back again towards
the farm".

The sounds, sights and sensations attendant upon a
recur rain storm scene, again and again in the various Wessex
Novels, and they are invariably depicted with unerring skill
and taste which does not allow their scientific accuracy
to obtrude itself unpleasantly. "Under the Greenwood Tree"
contains a clever picture of an autumn rain storm.

"A single vast gray cloud covered all the country,
from which the small rain and mist had just begun to blow
down in wavy sheets alternately thick and thin. The trees
of the old brown plantation writhed like miserable men as
the air wended its way softly among them; the lowest portions of their trunks that had hardly ever been known to move were visibly rocked by the fiercer gusts, distressing the mind by its painful unwontedness, as, when a strong man is seen to shed tears. Low-hanging bows went up and down; high and erect boughs went to and fro, the blasts being so irregular and divided into so many cross-currents, that neighboring branches of the same tree swept the skies in independent motions, crossed each other, passed or became entangled. Across the open spaces flew flocks of green and yellowish leaves, which after travelling a long distance from their parent trees, reached the ground and lay there with their undersides upward.

A similar though slighter passage is found in "Two on a Tower", "ten blurred and dreary days during which the whole landscape dripped like a mop; the park trees swabbed the gravel from the drive, while the sky was a zinc-coloured archivault of immovable cloud."

The sounds and sensations experienced by the uneasy Clym after his wife had gone out into the night to run away from her unhappy life, are vividly sketched in the "Return of the Native".

"It began to rain and blow hard as the evening advanced. The wind rasped and scraped at the corners of the house and filliped the eaves-droppings like peas against the window panes. He walked restlessly about the untenanted rooms,"
-42-

stopping strange noises in the windows and doors by jamming splinters of wood into the casements and crevices and pressing together the lead work of the quarries where it had become loosened from the glass. It was one of those nights when cracks in the walls of old churches widen, when ancient stains on the ceilings of decayed manor-houses, are renewed and enlarged from the size of a man's hand to an area of many feet.
The little gate in the palings before his dwelling continually opened and clicked together again, but when he looked out eagerly nobody was there; it was as if invisible shapes of the dead were passing in on their way to visit him.

Clyne arose and looked out of the window. Rain was still falling heavily, the whole expanse of heath before him emitting a subdued hiss under the downpour.

In the sustained description of the struggle to get the grain under shelter before the impending storm which occurs in "Far from the Madding Crowd", a most complete picture of a violent rainstorm is given in all its details. On the night of the supper and dance given by Sergeant Troy, Gabriel Oak with his accurate nature knowledge realizes that the harvest is in danger and is warned of the coming change in the weather by countless trivial signs.

"The night had a sinister aspect. A heated breeze from the south slowly fanned the summits of lofty objects and in the sky dashes of buoyant cloud were sailing in a course at right angles
to that of another stratum, neither of them in the direction of the breeze below. The moon, as seen through these films, had a lurid metallic look. The fields were sallow with the impure light, and all were tinged in a monochrome as if beheld through stained glass. The same evening the sheep had trailed homeward head to tail, the behaviour of the rooks had been confused, and the horses had moved with timidity and caution.

Thunder was imminent, and, taking some secondary appearances into consideration, it was likely to be followed by one of the lengthened rains which mark the close of dry weather for the season.

After some period of misgiving, Gabriel suddenly betought himself of the sheep, and he knew that the evidence they would give him would be infallible so he went to the flock and saw enough there to firmly convince him that his suspicions were correct.

"They were crowded close together around some furze bushes, and the first peculiarity observable was that, on the sudden appearance of Oak's head, they did not stir or run away. They had now a terror of something greater than the 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. Every voice in nature was unanimous in bespeaking change. But two distinct translations attached to these dumb expressions. Apparently there was to be a thunder
storm, and afterwards, a cold, continuous rain. The creeping things seemed to know all about the latter rain, but little of the interpolated thunder storm; while the sheep knew all about the thunder-storm and nothing of the latter rain.

So Hardy builds up the feeling of hushed expectancy in the night, while Oak hurriedly prepares for the struggle against time and finally, the chapter ends with the cataclysm imminent.

"Time went on, and the moon vanished, not to reappear. The night had a haggard look, like a sick thing; and there came finally an utter expiration of air from the whole heavens in the form of a slow breeze, which might have been likened to a death. A light flapped over the scene, as if reflected from the phosphorescent wings crossing the sky, and a rumble filled the air. It was the first move of the approaching storm. The second peal was noisy with comparatively little visible lightning. There came a third flash. Manoeuvres of a most extraordinary kind were going on in the vast firmamental bellows overhead. The lightning now was the color of silver, and gleamed in the heavens like a mailed army. Rumbles became rattles.

Every hedge, bush and tree was distinct as in a line engraving. In a paddock was a herd of heifers, and the forms of these were visible at this moment in the act of
galluping about in the wildest and maddest confusion, flinging
their heels and tails high into the air, their heads to earth.
A poplar in the immediate foreground was like an ink stroke on
burnished tin. Then the picture vanished, leaving the darkness
so intense that Gabriel worked entirely by feeling with his
hands.

The picture of Gabriel and Bathsheba working frantically
at the thatching is interspersed with many more such details
as the storm gains in fury. Finally the climax comes with
a flash of lightning which strikes a tree in the vicinity and
interrupts all further labor. In this description the
splendid power with which the author handles his knowledge equals
the depth of his knowledge. The result of this combination
makes his storm an actual elemental experience through which
the reader passes in spite of himself. The final stupendous
fury of the lightning is expressed with startling clearness.

"Heaven opened then indeed. The flash was almost too
novel for its inexpressibly dangerous nature to be at once
realized, and they could only comprehend the magnificence of
its beauty. It sprang from east, west, north, south.
It was a perfect dance of death. The forms of skeletons
appeared in the air, shaped with blue fire for bones - dancing,
leaping, striding, racing around, and mingling altogether in
unparalleled confusion. With these were intertwined undulating
snakes of green. Behind these was a broad mass of lesser
Simultaneously came from every part of the sky, what may be called, a shout. Since, though no shout ever came near it, it was more of the nature of a shout than anything else earthly. The tall tree on the hill seemed on fire to a white heat, and a new one among these terrible voices mingled with the last crash of those preceding. It was a stupefying blast, harsh and pitiless, and it fell upon their ears in a dead flat blow, without that reverberation which lends the tones of a drum to more distant thunder.

By the lustre reflected from every part of the earth and from the wide conical scoop above it, he saw that the tree was sliced down the whole length of its tall straight stem, a huge ribband of bark being apparently flung off. The other portion remained erect and revealed the bared surface as a strip of white down the front. The lightning had struck the tree. A sulphurous smell filled the air; then all was silent and black as a cave in Simon.

Later when Gabriel had saved the major portion of the harvest, the great storm subsided and the setting-in of autumn is depicted.

"It was now five o'clock and the dawn was promising to break in hues of drab and ash. The air changes its temperature and stirred itself more vigorously. Coal breezes coursed in transparent eddies round Gabriel's face. The wind shifted yet a point or two and blew stronger. In ten minutes every wind
of heaven seemed to be roaming at large. A huge drop of rain smote his face, the wind swirled round every corner, the trees rocked to the bases of their trunks, and the twigs clashed in strife. The rain came on in earnest and stretched \smashed\ obliquely through the dull atmosphere in liquid spires, unbroken in continuity between their beginnings in the clouds and their points in the earth".

The same story is so closely woven about the different aspects of nature, that it affords a complete example in itself of the detailed practical knowledge which Hardy possesses concerning all country activities. In the beginning of the book all the wisdom of the experienced shepherd is displayed in a description of lambing-time, later the same faculty is evinced when the foolish creatures become "blasted" through eating the young, green clover.

The wisdom of out-of-doors which enables its devotees to derive practical information from what would seem the most significant of signs, is hinted at in the beginning of the book in the passage which describes Gabriel telling the time by glancing at the star-lit heavens.

"He stood and carefully examined the sky to ascertain the time of night from the altitudes of the stars.

The Dog-Star and Aldebran, pointing to the restless Pleiades, were half-way up the Southern sky, and between them hung Orion, which gorgeous constellation never burnt more
vividly than now, as it swung itself forth above the rim of the landscape. Castor and Pollux with their quiet shine were almost on the meridian: the barren and gloomy square of Pegasus was creeping around to the north west; far away through the plantation, Vega sparkled like a lamp suspended amid the leafless trees and Cassiopeia's chair stood daintily poised on the uppermost boughs.

"One o'clock" said Gabriel.

In the eleventh chapter, which describes the coming of snow, a curious passage occurs, which is almost incongruous in a narrative because it reads like a scientific treatise on the seasons. Whether it is a blemish in its setting or not, it is undoubtedly a section which shows Hardy's amazing practical knowledge of nature.

"The changes of season are less obtrusive on spots of this kind than amid woodland scenery. Still, to a close observer they are just as perceptible; the difference is that their media of manifestation are less trite and familiar than such well-known ones as the bursting of the buds or the fall of the leaf. Many are not so stealthy and gradual as we may be apt to imagine in considering the general torpidity of a moor or heath.

Winter in coming to the place under notice, advanced in some such well-marked stages as the following:

The retreat of the snakes.
The transformation of the ferns.
The filling of the pools.
A rising of fogs.
The embrowning by frost.
The collapse of the fungi.
An obliteration by snow.

Such examples as the foregoing go far along the way to justifying the claim made in the beginning of the chapter that Hardy's scientific in his practical knowledge of all the manifestations of nature and that he permeates his novels with this wisdom.

The third characteristic of his nature descriptions is his ability to collect his details in such a way as to convey to his readers a general and finished impression of some one sensation.

In this connection the repelling picture of a swamp which follows Bathsheba's awakening in the woodland reproduces the noisome quality of the place in a most faithful manner and the general impression is that of its balefulness or treachery.

"Between the beautiful yellowing ferns with their feathery arms, the ground sloped downwards to a hollow, in which was a species of swamp dotted with fungi. A morning mist hung over it now - a fulsome yet magnificent silvery veil, full of light from the sun, yet semi-opaque - the hedge behind it being in some measure hidden by its hazy luminousness. Up the sides of this depression grew sheaves of the common rush, and here and there a peculiar species of flag, the blades of which glistened in the emerging sun, like scythes. But the general aspect of the swamp was malignant. From its moist and poisonous coat seemed to be exhaled the essences of evil things in the earth, and in the waters under the earth. The fungi grew in all manner
of positions from rotting leaves and tree-stumps, some
exhibiting their clammy tops, others their oozing gills.
Some were marked with great splotches red as arterial blood,
others were saffron yellow and others tall and attenuated
with stems like macaroni. Some were leathery and of richest
brown. The hollow seemed a nursery of pestilences small and
great, in the immediate neighborhood of comfort and health."

Some of the most effective of his nature presentations
are those which deal with the beauty in the dawn. After a night
of rain comes this lovely awakening of nature—"Almost before
the first faint sign of dawn appeared, she arose again and
opened the window to obtain a full breathing of the new morning
air, the panes being now wet with trembling tears left by the
night air, each one rounded with a pale lustre caught from
primrose-hued slashes through a cloud low down in the awakening
sky. From the trees came the sound of steady dripping upon the
drifted leaves under them, and from the direction of the church
another noise peculiar and not intermittent like the rest, the
purl of water falling into a pool."

A picture of haunting beauty is painted by the contrast
between the night and the first faint signs of dawn in winter.

"The moon shone to-night, and its light was not of a customary
kind. The window admitted only a reflection of its rays, and the
pale sheen had that reversed direction which snow gives, coming
upward and lighting up the ceiling in a phenomenal way, casting
shadows in strange places, and putting lights where shadows used
Then the dawn drew on. The full power of the clear heaven was not equal to that of a cloudy sky at noon. It was one of the usual slow sunrises of this time of the year, and the sky, pure violet in the zenith, was leaden to the northward and murky to the east, where over the snowy down and apparently resting upon the ridge, the only half of the sun yet visible burnt rayless, like a red and flameless fire shining over a white hearthstone. The whole effect resembled a sunset as childhood resembles age.

In other directions the fields and sky were so much of one direction by the snow that it was difficult in a hasty glance to tell whereabouts the horizon occurred; and in general there was here too that prenatural inversion of light and shade which attends the prospect when the garish brightness commonly in the sky, is found on the earth, and the shades of earth are in the sky. Over the west hung the evening moon, now dull and greenish-yellow, like tarnished brass.

Every one of the Wessex novels shows Hardy as much in sympathy with the natural world as he is with the men and women who seem a part of the soil on which they live. Throughout the stories of his beloved Wessex country, there runs the perennial refreshment of nature, for he has the love of genius for the open air. From the length of the examples cited, it must not be imagined, however, that the narrative itself, is ever subsidiary
to this nature interest. His stories are always well-told and every detail is charged with the significance of the whole. Description, unless very relevant and vivid, is apt to lessen the power of the narrative for it is apt to cause enjoyment through its intrinsic beauty, rather than through its relation to the story. But in Hardy's hands the descriptions appear to be wrung from him by the story and to derive the major share of their power, from their relationship to it.

The reader is conscious of their particular charm but his attention is riveted on the general heightening of emotion produced by the vivid statement of relevant facts. This is a quality of excellence that is rare in prose or in poetry. Too often descriptive passages have to rely solely upon their own beauty for their effect, and they only serve to interrupt the progress of the narrative in which they appear.

Unless descriptions add to the culminating power of a whole, they are irrelevant however beautiful they may be. Thomas Hardy never falls below this standard, for as we have seen, his descriptive passages are effective in themselves and doubly so through their closer relationship to the novel as a whole. It is safe to say in this connection, that the nature descriptions, as such, are always an element of first importance, essential in the development of the story no less than masterly pictorial passages in themselves.

Although Hardy reaches no realization of the relationship existing between nature and man.
as high a standard of excellence in his descriptions as does his contemporary. The qualities which are peculiar to the two men seem to gain in effectiveness through their points of variance with each other.
The Philosophy of Nature in George Meredith

As stated in the introductory chapter, the second general heading into which Meredith's nature treatment falls, is that which concerns his philosophy and ethical interpretation of the natural world. As we have seen, he is a master of simple description and has given us liberal examples of his power throughout his novels and his verse. No student of Meredith can ignore the fact that nature is closely bound to the author's view of life itself and therefore no study of his works is complete without an attempt to find out in what way he has linked his creed to nature.

When his works come up for examination in this respect, his novels and his poems should be considered with equal care for one is never the product of a particular side of his character, and the other the result of a second phase. Both forms are permeated in equal measure with his characteristics theories. His novels share, to a great extent, in the lyric spirit seen in his poetry, and his poems have the same rich endowment of masterly insight as is found in the best of the novels. In both are found the same flashing beauty, the same faults of unco'stly style and over-subtle expression and the same ethical ideas. A fairly comprehensive view of the outstanding theories to which the man has given expression can be found there, in either division of his work. As is often the case, in the poetry the concentrated essence of these theories is more easily discernible than amid the progress of his narratives. The more condensed form of the poetry naturally results in a
more compact presentation of ideas than is necessary in prose. For this reason most of the illustrations given in this chapter have been taken from the poetry.

His disposition varies according as the different phases of human thought and experience are treated by him, but on the whole a certain set of major ideas which contribute to his general attitude can be selected and examined as characteristic. In his consideration and treatment of practically every question the same broad group of ideas recurs consistently, although sometimes in slightly differing forms. This is because everything he has done has been pervaded by the author's own strong personality and temperament.

There is, naturally enough, no logical sequence or arrangement in the recurrence of these beliefs, so that it is impossible to set them forth in tabulated form. However, it is possible to trace a general attitude to life by means of an array of outstanding examples picked from everywhere in his Works. In this case it does not seem amiss to group this under the general title of Meredith's "reading" of the spirit of Heaven and Earth. Throughout his writings he seems to be elaborating the doctrine expressed by Wordsworth in a letter to Ruskin which bids us "go to nature in all singleness of heart, and walk with her laboriously and trustingly, having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning and remember her instruction; respecting nothing, selecting nothing and scorning nothing and rejoicing always in the truth". To Meredith this is but a beginning,
for as he puts it "Earth only, "gives the edifice". It is not enough to know that the secret inspiration of earth has given us a fair start in life, a share in the evolutionary development of human society must act as a complement to this and teach us the rest of life's truths. If men "build no base" upon the edifice Earth has given them, they are doomed to disappear. They must realize that it is their duty to march steadily onward and upward and nature is the spirit which guides them to this realization in every instance. If fully developed man keeps ever in close contact with Earth he can develop into her comrade and helper rather than a subordinate in her scheme.

This is briefly the final message Meredith gives his readers when all his subsidiary theories are massed together. Each of the component parts of his creed is full of significance in itself and each should be picked out from the mass in order to show how everyone phase contributes its share to the final attitude of the poet to the facts of the Universe. I shall endeavor to give examples of nine distinct theories, all more or less closely linked together in their relation to the poet's creed in its entirety but all possessing individuality of their own. These theories are briefly, his optimism; his belief in the possibility of spiritual renewal; the necessity for implicit Faith; the belief in Earth as the path to Heaven; the necessity for implicit perfect union of brain, body and spirit; the kinship between man and earth; the application of Evolution, and finally his ability to derive some lesson
from every conceivable aspect of nature. Finally I shall give an example of the summation of the philosophy, such tenets have produced when combined in Meredith’s "reading of life".

The first point to be considered is that Meredith is an optimist in his creed. His nature, we are told, was full of strength, ardor and joy. He was frank and sturdy in his acceptance of the imperfections of the universe for his conception of true Optimism was not a blind and fatuous thing. He was fully aware of all the flaws in existence but his optimism was unshaken by them for he had a sincere belief in the essential goodness of things. He gives his devotion willingly and consistently to what he calls, "the dream of the blossom of Good", defined by him as,

"Our banner of battle unrolled
In its wave and current and curve."

His "reading of earth", is the logical result of the beliefs which are instinctive to him, and it is the result of deep thought upon his part. He himself says that "blood and spirit" that is, body and soul, cannot read Earth alone. There must be fusion of these two with "mind", and he goes on to lay stress upon the part which is played by the brain. In "Hard Weather" he says, in this connection, "Never is Earth misread by brain". This is a far saner and more convincing attitude to take than is that of the emotional optimist who believes in everything indiscriminately for the sheer joy of being optimistic. Meredith recommends penetrating thought and vouches for it, that the inevitable conclusion which
"brain" will reach will be an optimistic one.

He holds tenaciously to the belief that beneficence has an assured place in the elements which go to make up the universe. He realizes that there must be a continual struggle between this force and the elements of the world, which are not good and he does not know what will be the result for us, the children of Earth. He does know however, that we have reasonable grounds for faith and hope. Since it is obviously impossible to get beyond the universe and the secret it contains, our wisest course is to evolve the best interpretation possible out of what is tangible and to cling to that. Even were we to discover in what way the universe is managed, we would be unable to understand and therefore, idle speculation and questioning on such a problem is worse than futile on our part. The only way for us to realize life at its best, is to believe in the best, and such belief is to be found through true feeling and action, not through "questions that sow not nor spin". In "A Faith on Trial" the poet begins to propound just such questions but he is deterred by his belief in nature. His conviction in the uselessness of vain questioning is expressed as follows:

"Shall man into frmx the mystery of breath,
From his quick-beating pulse a pathway spy?
Or learn the secret of the shrouded death
By lifting up the lid of a white eye?
Cleave thou thy way with fathering desire
Of fire to reach the fire."

The second phase of Meredith's philosophy with which we must deal in this chapter, is his belief in the possibility of spiritual renewal through contact with the
forces of nature. This is one of his favorite theories and he returns to it time and again throughout his novels as well as his poems. When the good Vernon is obliged to walk cross country in a drenching rainstorm in search of the truant Crossjay, we are told that we should love all changes of weather for they all "bring us benefit of some kind". "The taking of rain and sun alike befits men of our climate, and he who would have the secret of a strengthening intoxication, must court the clouds of the south-west with a lover's blood."

The same theory is worked out more elaborately in the chapter entitled "Nature speaks" from "The Ordeal of Richard Feveral". Here Richard is depicted in the depths of his black despair and rebellion against the unbending sternness of his father's system. In his fury he plunges out into the Rhineland forest and the chapter which follows describes his wild walk through a roaring storm which lasts throughout the night. With the morning the tempest subsides and the agony of the young man's mind has abated. He emerges from his buffet with nature in a chastened mood and he is purified of his angry rebellion. At this point the following pregnant lines occur:

"When he looked out from his trance on the breathing world, the small birds hopped and chirped: warm fresh sunlight was over all the hills. He was on the edge of the forest, entering a plain clothed with ripe corn, under a spacious morning sky."

These indications of returning life and joy are the final proofs needed to settle Richard in his conviction that he must go back to his wife and try again. This significant incident
affords a striking parallel to "Peter Bell" which was written to illustrate the healing and redemptive impulses from a "vernal wood".

The counter part of the same idea clothed in poetic form is given in "Earth and a Wedded Woman". This is the story of a lonely and despairing wife, whose husband has long been at the wars. The poem opens with drought in the land as well as in her soul. At last the rain comes and as she lies listening to it throughout the summer night, she awakens again to life and hope, for when the splendour of the elemental forces is revealed to her, she realizes that part of the spirit of Earth is the spirit of brave endurance.

"Through night, with bedroom window wide for air
Lay Susan, tranced to hear all heaven descend
And gurgling voices came of Earth, and rare
Fast powerful breathings deeper than life's end,
From her heaved breast of sacred common mould!
Whereby this long-laid wife was made to feel
Unworded things and old
To her pained heart appeal.
Rain! O the glad refresher of the Grain!
And down in deluges of blessed rain!"

The last verse is a scene of glad recovery in the morning:

"At morn she stood to life for ear and sight
Love sky or cloud, or rose, or grasses drenched.

Rain! O the glad refresher of the grain!
Thrice beauteous is our sunshine after rain!"

This idea of the benefit and purification which can be derived from the rainstorm is typical of Meredith's ethics, He feels that contact and sympathy with all moods of nature enables man to find inspiration and strength which he can use
in his personal struggles in life. "Unworded things and old" are the means by which Earth appeals to the deepest that is in us and stirs within us our dim and dormant memories of an unshaped promise which Earth holds and which is waiting for us to decipher it. So the poet tells us that we should get near to the secret by going into the fields and woods to breathe recovery and preparation for the renewal of life's battle.

"Leave the uproar: at a leap
Thou shalt strike a woodland path,
Enter silence, not of sleep,
Under shadows, not of wrath;
Breathe which is the spirit's bath
In the old Beginnings find."

He re-echoes this identical theme in a more jocular way in the poem entitled "By the Rosanna". The whole of this poem is a humorous expression of his conviction that man must go to nature to extract the best of spiritual renewal for life's struggle. The lovelier aspects of nature can convey the deepest meaning to those who are attuned. It is for this reason that he depicts the marriage of a prosaic London cabman with the spirit of an Alpine rainbow. It is an extreme and eccentric expression of his theory that the loveliest aspect, the most poetic side of nature must be united to the commonest of every day humanity if the mutual essence of both is to be made manifest.

"Your Nymph is on trial. Will she own
Her parentage, Humanity?
Of her essence these things but form a part
Her heart comes out of the human heart."
Faith in ourselves is faith in Time!

And faith in Nature keeps the force
We have in us for daily wear."

The memory of an hour of communion with nature can do much to revive the benefits of the actual experience for, as the poet says:

"How often will those long links of foam
Cry to me in my English home,
To nerve me, wherever I hear them bellow,
Like the smack of the hand of a gallant fellow."

The third topic which contributes to Meredith's general philosophy is his insistence upon the necessity of unfaltering faith in Earth the mother. Any attempt to question her processes is reprehensible for it argues lack of faith. The poet's rooted aversion to such a weakness is repeatedly presented.

"There let our trust be firm in Good,
Though we be of the fasting.
Our questions are a mortal brood,
Our work is everlasting.
We children of Beneficence
Are in its being sharers;
And whither vainer sounds than Whence,
For word with such wayfarers."

The only sure way to arrive at Nature's meaning is through loving and perpetual contact with Earth. The face of Nature may be interpreted only by those who study her and love her. This offers a distinct contrast to Wordsworth in his "Intimations of Immortality" where he belittles Earth and declares that we are first of all, the children of Heaven:

"Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter darkness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our Home.”

To him Earth plays the role of a rather ignoble foster-
immother and no more -

"The homely Muse doth all she can
To make her foster-child, her inmate, am,
Forget the glories he hath known
And that imperial palace whence he came."

To Meredith Earth herself is the great Mother, the
mightily "She" whose praises he continuously sings through
out the pages of his poetry. For this reason we owe
her our implicit faith. The spiritual elements in man
come from Earth as surely as do the elements of the
flesh. Other poets look to Heaven for the moral sanction
of our actions. Meredith believes that what ever is
conceded by Earth and approved by her is absolutely
and finally right. Earth is the only part of the
Universe which we know and, just as in it the good and
the evil are intricably mingled, so Earth is a part of
Heaven itself, that part in which we have our present
home. What is moral for Earth cannot go very far afield
from what is moral in the whole scheme of things. This
earth is the only portion of the whole of space which we can
observe with any accuracy, and assuredly the only way
to faith or belief in underlying laws is through an
approximation of what must be the eternal truths for
our Earth. This idea in Meredith’s own words is given in
"Lord Hamont and his Aminta" -
"We do not get to any heaven by renouncing the mother we spring from; and when there is an eternal secret for us, it is best to believe that Earth knows, to keep near her, even in our utmost aspirations."

He reiterates the idea in a letter written to his friend, the Reverend Mr. Jessapp, - "Does not all science tell us that when we forsake the earth, we reach up to a frosty, inimical

For my part I love and cling to Earth, as the one piece of God's handiwork which we possess."

In "Meditation under Stars" the poet is led to reflect that there are other Earths and infinite life akin to ours, and therefore, to look about at the myriads of stars is but to see our hopes duplicated infinitely. Reason gives us a sense of brotherhood with the infinite spiritual life of space and we cannot help but conclude that Love must be the gift of other stars even as it is the gift of ours.

The issues known in us, our unsolved, solved,
That there with toil life climbs the self-same tree.

--

"So may we read and little find them cold;
Not frosty lamps illumining dead space,
Not distant aliens, not senseless Powers,
The fire is in them whereof we are born;
The music of their motion may be ours!
Spirit shall deem them beckoning Earth and voiced
Sisterly to her, in her beams rejoiced,
Of love, the grand impulsion, we behold
The love that lends her grace
Among the starry fold.
Then at new flood of customary morn,
Look at her through her showers,
Her mists, her streaming gold,
A wonder edges the familiar face;
She wears no more that robe of printed hours;
Half strange seems earth and sweeter than her flowers."
This idea naturally leads Meredith a step further to a theory which is expressed again and again throughout the course of his poems and which seems to sum up his whole attitude towards life, if it is possible to point to any one particular phase of it as completely representative. It is his theory that Earth is the intermediate step to heaven, the fourth heading under which his philosophy of nature falls.

To reach the spiritual God we must commence with nature, we must "read" earth and therein only will we find the direct path to God.

"She can lead us, only she,
Unto God's footstool whither she reaches;
Loved, enjoyed her gifts must be;
Reverenced the truths she teaches."

Of course, as is obvious, it is with the good elements in Nature that the Deity is identified. Man's task is to segregate and make conscious this good and his reward will be a clear vision of his kinship with God. Nowhere in his poems does Meredith state, in his enthusiasm for earth, that to him all Nature is good. That would be the very reprehensible and blind optimism which he deplores, but it is only reasonable to believe that the moral part of nature is synonymous with God. The seeking for and finding of this good is a slow and often a terrible ordeal. This is the central theme of the "Egoist", the "Ordeal of Richard Feveral" and "Rhoda Fleming". Each of these books is an elaborate picture of youth winning through to wisdom and
and strength by means of soul-stirring trials. Earth commands acquiescence in these trials; that, as we are told in "Outer and Inner" is her way of testing man's faith in her.

"Accept she says; it is not hard
In woods; but she in towns
Repeats accept; and have we wept
And have we quailed with fears,
Or shrunk with horrors sure reward
We have whom knowledge crowns;
Who see in mould, the rose unfold,
The soul through blood and tears."

True acceptance embraces only the good in nature. The other elements are something against which we must sturdily contend. A man should be,

"Obedient to Nature, not her slave:
Her lord, if to her rigid laws he bows,
Her dust, if with his conscience he plays knave,
And bids the Passions on the Pleasures browze."

The poet's belief in our kinship with animate nature, the fifth topic, must not be disregarded. Meredith believes that since we live under the same laws and conditions as do the animals and the growing things, we must have a real kinship with them. The same laws that have produced man have produced the other living things, and so it is that we do feel or should feel a keen sense of sympathy with them. He says that the appeal which the crocus flower makes to us is not so much through her beauty as through the fact that she is part of our common and fundamental attribute, - "life" itself.

The fields and the woods are really counterparts of ourselves on a lower plane. They may lack the elements of
continuous struggle for advancement which characterizes man but the peace and beauty that is theirs, whispers to man of Paradise itself.

"Sweet as Eden is the air
And Eden - sweet the ray.
No Paradise is lost for them
Who foot by branching root and stem,
And lightly with the woodland share
The change of night and day."

"Sweet as Eden is the air
And Eden - sweet the ray."

A contemplation in the woods leads the poet to feel again that the life of Earth in its multifarious phases, is in some way a counterpart of our own - one divine plan underlies everything.

"I neighbor the invisible
So close that my consent
Is only asked, for spirits masked
To leap from trees and flowers
And this because with them I dwell
In thought, while calmly bent
To read the lines dear Earth designs
Shall speak her life on ours."

This last theory proves the sixth idea which states that body and spirit must be united to brain in order to get the best of nature's meaning. The poet could not have arrived at his conviction that man is akin to all other forms of animate nature had not his brain collaborated with his love of nature. The transition to the sixth point is a natural one for this reason. The poem "Nature and Life" shows how nature in the woods can give man refreshment by making him feel his kinship with her
deepest elemental forces. But man must give something in return for this, and that something is the allegiance of his mind for nature can only be interpreted adequately through that one medium. The woodland cannot develop all that is in man, but when he takes the peace he has found in the forest, back to his ordinary life he will find that he has won a new store of courage. In "The woods of Westermarn" a forest is used as an allegorical symbol for human life, and the poem as a whole gives compact expression of Meredith's conviction that the physical, the intellectual and the spiritual must be completely balanced in man so that he may have the necessary courage and faith to carry him safely through the "enchanted woods". The dragon mentioned in the poem is the same as the one which appears in "The Ode to Youth in Memory" and it is the symbol of selfishness - the one unpardonable sin to Meredith.

"Enter these enchanted woods, You who dare, Nothing harms beneath the leaves More than waves a swimmer cleaves, Toss your heart up with the lark, Foot at peace with mouse and worm, Fair you fare. Only at a dread of dark Quaver, and they quit their form: Thousand eye-balls under hoods Have you by the hair, Enter these enchanted woods, You who dare."

"Enter these enchanted woods, You who dare, Nothing harms beneath the leaves More than waves a swimmer cleaves, Toss your heart up with the lark, Foot at peace with mouse and worm, Fair you fare, Only at a dread of dark Quaver, and they quit their form: Thousand eye-balls under hoods Have you by the hair, Enter these enchanted woods, You who dare."

Man is not mere flesh, or mere mind, or mere spirit - At his completest he is a splendid harmony of all three and his development to this stage is due to the
inscrutable workings of life or Mother Earth who is the Deity reverenced above all others, by Meredith.

"Each of each in sequent birth
Blood and brain and spirit three
(Say the deepest gnomes of Earth),
Join for true felicity.
Are they parted, then expect
Some one sailing to be wrecked;
Separate hunting are they sped,
Scan the morsel coveted.
Earth that [Triad] is: she hides
Joy from him who that divides;
Showers it when the three are one
Glossing her in union."

The same thought underlies the following passage from another letter to the Reverend A. Jessapp — "Let men make good blood I constantly cry. I hold that to be rightly materialistic — to understand and take nature as she is — is to get on the true divine highroad. That we should attain to a healthy humanity is surely the most pleasing thing in God's sight." We need only look at his array of well-balanced men and women who live in his novels to see whether or no Meredith has borne out and illustrated his conviction.

The idea of the ideal development which man must reach before he represents the ideal that Earth has planned for him leads the poet on to consider our seventh topic, the relationship which exists between earth and humanity. The poem "Earth and Man" as its title suggests, aims to set forth this relationship and lays emphasis upon the attitude which man should have to earth and to life. To begin, Earth is man's mother, "his well of strength, his home of rest", but man is again reminded of the fact that,
"More aid than that embrace, 
That nourishment, she cannot give; his heart 
Involves his fate; and she who urged the start 
Abides the race!"

That is to say, Earth can give man his first foothold in life but he must work out his own destiny. The means by which he must do this is the attainment of the perfectly balanced development Earth desires to see in her children, and his final reward will be in glimpsing Earth's vision and recompense. A surer knowledge of the Mother leads to a knowledge of the Deity, consequently man should reverence the precepts of Earth and never forget that he is closely linked to her in all his failures and his successes.

"And are we the children of Heaven and Earth, 
We'll be true to the Mother with whom we are, 
So to be worthy of him afar, 
Beckoning us on to a brighter birth."

The famous line "wing our green to wed our blue" which occurs in "Wind on the Lyre" is a more condense expression of the whole theory discussed in the foregoing paragraph.

"Earth and Man" goes on to tell how these two may derive mutual benefit from each other when the ideal conditions of their relationship are realized and

"And order, high discourse, 
And decency, than which is life less dear. 
She has of him; the lyre of language 
Love's tongue and source."

That is to say, that Man, through his soul expresses Earth's highest type of life - "Earth's best". Man in his turn gets compensation for his gift to her, -

"Of her he draws, 
Though blind to her by spelling at her laws, 
Her purest fires."
"Her purest fires" represent the best qualities in man which we term the spiritual essences in his make-up. Earth is good to man—but although she is just to him, she is never the indulgent mother. Her way may sometimes seem obscure and even hard, but if man holds steadfastly to his faith in her, he will rapidly learn that her wisdom is best:

"He may entreat, aspire,
He may despair, and she has never heed,
She, drinking his warm sweat will soothe his need,
Not his desire."

And her own desires for him are—
"For happiness, for lastingness, for light,
'Tis she who kindles in his haunting night
The hoped dawn—rose."

The eighth phase of Meredith's philosophy might be cited as a proof of the contention made in the introduction, that was closely in touch with the thought of his century. He was whole-hearted in his acceptance of the doctrine of Evolution and he evinced his deep interest in it by weaving the theory into his own "earth reading" in such a way as to make it peculiar to himself. We have already seen that he believes that man must progress in his struggle of segregating the good elements of the universe from the bad.

His insistence upon man's obligation to strive for the perfect union of the physical, the intellectual and the spiritual is little more than a special phase of Evolution. He goes farther than this, however, and states that Earth desires. Evolutionary development and even takes an active part in forcing man along the path. Earth he tells us, has two
different aspects, pain and pleasure, or life and death, and both have a common purpose. They have been the forces instrumental in leading man up from his native savage state to his present stage of development, and were "men of earth, made wise in watch" -

they could not but have glad faith in, "that deep breast of song and light". They would be convinced that she will continue to guide them to the highest point where they will come to see that death is but her means of clearing the path to yet higher growth.

"Her double visage, double voice,
In oneness rise to quench the doubt
This breath, her gift has only choice
Of service, breathe we in and out."

"Since pain and pleasure on each hand
Led our wild steps from slimy rock
To yonder sweeps of garden-land,
We breath but to be sword or block."

To some, earth is a lumpish, senseless mass, to others she has no entity, but the clear brain will never fail to see that she not only has a being of her own but that she is the active, far-seeing force which is driving and guiding man to his heaven.

"The sighting brain her good decree
Accepts; obey those guides, in faith
By reason hourly fed, that she,
To some the clod, to some the wraith
Is more, no mask, a flame, a stream,
Flame, stream are we in mid-career,
From torrent source, delirious dream,
To heaven - reflecting currents clear.
Any why the sons of strength have been
Her cherished offspring ever, how
The spirit served by her is seen
Through law; pursuing love will show,
Love born of knowledge, love that gains
Vitality as Earth it mates,
The meaning of the Pleasures, Pains,
The Life, the Death, illuminates."

This reflection brings the poet to the triumphant knowledge that Death is only a preparation for a new and glad life, because everything in this world is but part of one and the same great forward Evolutionary march.

"For love we Earth, then serve we all;
Her mystic secret then is ours;
We fall, or view our treasures fall
Unclouded as beholds her flowers
Earth from a night of frosty wreck,
Enrobed in morning's mounted fire,
When lowly, with a broken neck,
The crocus lays her cheek to mire."

The poem entitled "Sense and Spirit" is nothing more than an elaboration of Meredith's evolutionary view of Nature, and the same view appears for the third time, in its concisest form in the last lines of "My Theme" -

"I say but that this love of Earth reveals
A soul beside our own to quicken, quell,
Irradiate, and through ruinous floods uplift."

This Evolutionary progress which is due to Earth's influence is so vital to Meredith's belief, that he goes far enough to make the statement that dissatisfaction and unhappiness will accrue to those who do not accept it and act in accordance with it. Earth can never be interpreted by those who allow the senses to overpower the seeing brain and the spirit. Such beings will derive nothing from Earth but cause for fear and superstition. If, however, they can learn to regard Earth as a spirit which is active for her children's advancement to good they will readily find the highest happiness and satisfaction. "Sense and Spirit" gives a practical illustration
of one who does not use his reason, the safeguard to Faith in all nature's workings. Here the poet, forgetting for the moment the general plan of advancement, cries out, in the midst of chilly autumn for just one warm light day. Such a desire for purely creature comfort is worthy of none but an undeveloped man, whom Meredith stigmatizes as an "animal infant". By steadily watching the Earth such a person can come into closer contact with her truths and he will see, if he but watches the husbandman, how she works unalteringly for the ultimate good. Were it not for her seasons of wise preparation the husbandman would have no craft.

Instances of this sort confirm the poet himself in his supreme faith in Evolutionary development. He does not pretend to understand all the intermediary steps towards final achievement but Earth will be successful in her endeavor — it is man's duty to trust in the Mother —

"Earth your haven, Earth your helm,
You command a double realm,
Laboring here to pay your debt,
Till your little sun shall set,
Leaving her the future task;
Loving her too well to ask ".

His conviction that Death is a step in Evolutionary progress is put to its supreme test in "A Faith on Trial". Here he is taught to accept even the death of his beloved wife. At first in his grief, he is forgetful of nature's plan, but the sudden sight of a "young apparition", the wild cherry tree in bloom recalls all the tenets of his belief and the poem ends with an expression of his deep faith in earth's plans for steady
progression. His suffering brings him into closer sympathy with humanity and he sees that Life and Death must play an equal part in this existence. We must not "strain to the farther shore" for God is reached by Earth's scheme of development and this will brook no interference. Earth promises man that she will urge him on -

"To behold
High over time - tumbled sea,
The bliss of his headship of strife,
Him through handmaiden me."

"Change in Recurrence" marks the quiet return to his normal belief in progress after the stress and storm of "A Faith on Trial" has subsided. The culminating expression of steadfast belief in increasing progress to which the grave is only the preliminary step, comes in the beautiful and famous passage wherein the poet speaks of his feelings when he contemplates his own death -

"Great Mother, Nature, teach me like thee,
To kiss the season and shun regrets.
And am I more than the Mother who bore,
Mock me not with thy harmony!
Teach me to blot regrets,
Great Mother, me inspire inspire
With faith that forward sets
But feeds the living fire.
Faith that never frets
For vagueness in the form
In life, O keep me warm!

For what is human grief?
And what do men desire?
Teach me to feel myself the tree,
And not the withered leaf.
Fixed am I and await the dark to-be!

And O, green beauteous Earth,
Bacchante Mother, stern to those
Who live not in thy heart of mirth;
Death shall I shrink from loving thee?
Into the breast that gives the rose,
Shall I with shuddering fall?"
Further in the poem he recapitulates his insistent belief that Earth leads man from one stage of development to another until at last, through her influence, he reaches the highest spiritual life.

"She can lead us, only she,
Unto God's footstool, whither she reaches;
Loved, enjoyed, her gifts must be,
Reverenced the truths she teaches,
'Ere a man may hope that he
Ever can attain the glee
Of things without a destiny."

That the poet has surely grasped the "hoped dawn rose" of belief is proved in his splendid summation of evolution as applied to his nature creed, -

"Behold in you stripped Autumn,
Shivering grey;
Earth knows no desolation;
She smells regeneration,
In the moist breath of decay."

To Meredith the voice of Earth is ever, "jubilant in ebbing life".

The ninth and last phase of his nature philosophy is the logical result of the foregoing points which contribute their share to the whole. Meredith has been able to derive some truth from every aspect of nature. It is not in special woods or special places that Earth conveys her lessons to man, a true student of her can find ever-increasing indications of her message wherever he happens to seek for them. The color in a dawning is fraught with deepest meaning which intensifies its beauty for those who can detect its significance. The opening lines of the "Hymn to Colour" set forth the idea that life and
Death are counterparts which cannot exist apart from each other since both are due to the workings of Love. Love in man's life is the counterpart of color in nature, thus the glory of color in dawn weights its beauty with the deepest possible significance. The effect of the moments in life which have been colored by love is a lasting and uplifting one and the sight of dawn renews their effectiveness.

"Nor know they joy of sight,
Who deem the wave of rapt desire must be
Its wrecking and last issue of delight
Dead seasons quic'en in one petal-spot
Of colors unforgot.

This way have men come out of brutishness
To spell the letters of the sky and read
A reflex upon earth, else meaning less.
With thee 0 fount of the untimed to lead,
Drink they of thee, thee eying, they waged
Shall on through brave wars waged.

More gardens will they win than any lost:
The vile plucked out of them, the unlovely slain;
Not forfeiting the beast with which they are crossed,
To stature of the Gods will they attain,
They shall uplift their Earth to meet her Lord
Themselves the attuning chord!"

A thoughtful reverie, during a walk in the woods, can serve to convey an equally deep truth to the brain of the poet. He reflects that belief in some from may come from contemplation "above", but he is convinced that, at best, this is apt to be but a fitful thing. The comfort to be derived from loving contemplation of the truth which "green earth" holds ready as soon as ever we turn to her, is always sure and steady.

"Take up thy song from woods and fields
Whilst thou hast heart, and living yields
Delight; let that expire-
Let thy delight in loving die,
Take thou thy song from star and sky,  
And join the silent quire.

I know that since the hour of birth,  
Rooted in Earth,  
I have looked above,  
In joy and in grief;  
With eyes of belief;  
For love.  
A mother trains us so.  
But the love I saw was a fitful thing;  
I looked on the sun  
That clouds or is blinding aglow;  
And the love around had more of wing  
Than substance, and of spirit none.

Then follows the joyous contrast wherein we see that Mother Earth never fails to answer all men's needs, —

"Then looked I on the green earth we are rooted in,  
Whereof we grow,  
And nothing of love it said  
But gave me warning of sin  
And lessons of patience let fall,  
And told how pain was bred,  
And whereof I was weak,  
And of good and evil at strife,  
And the struggle upward of all,  
And my choice of the life's glory of life;  
Was love farther to seek?"

It is possible to continue selecting passages from one poem after another which serve as further illustrations of the fact that nature's every aspect has a moral lesson for George Meredith. Finally it is advisable to examine a few of the passages which are in themselves a more or less complete summation of the whole of his nature philosophy. It is permissible to do this after the separate phases which contribute to the final attitude have been examined — In the latter part of "In the Woods" Meredith speaks of two attitudes to life — the one he condemns as "lust of life" since all it craves is tangible proof of life's continuance. The second
attitude, he contends, is the one which Earth desires her children to have, it is called "love of life" and its major element is faith in nature's development. He contrasts the two attitudes in the last verses of the poem.

"The lover of life knows his labor divine,
And therein is at peace,
The lust after life craves a touch and a sign
That the life shall increase.

The lust after life in the chills of its lust
Claims a passport of death
The lover of life sees a flame in our dust
And a gift in our breath."

In this connection the long poem entitled "The Empty Purse", must be considered, not because it contains any new phase of Meredith's — earth theory, but because it has often been said to contain the whole concentrated essence of his philosophy. The subject of the poem is that of a young man who has lost all his wealth in the first bloom of his youth. Instead of condoling him, the poet says heartily that it is the best thing that could have happened to him, for now he will have an opportunity to prove his worth as a man. Struggle with poverty, such as he has ahead of him, means nothing more than a struggle with the laws governing Earth. Meredith thinks this opportunity the "Summum bonum", because a contest with Earth is the surest way to open the windows of the soul. This fall to Earth will have the same potent effect in this case, as it is said to have had of old upon the giant Antaeus, who could not be beaten when wrestling since every time he fell and came into contact with Earth his strength was re-doubled.
"Strike Earth,
Antaeus, young giant whom fortune trips!
And thou com'st on a saving fact,
To nourish thy planted worth.

Nature will be kind to the efforts of the young for she sympathizes with the eager experiments which they make. She knows too, that it is precisely the lack of this quality which makes the old impediment to her scheme of eternal progress.

"Precedents icily written on high;
Challenge the Tentatives not to rebel.
Our Mother who speeds her bloomful quick
For the March reads which the impediment well.

She smiles when of sapience is their boast,
0 loose of the tug between blood run dry
And blood running flame, may our offspring run!"

It is in this same poem that two of Meredith's most famous and most characteristics lines occur -

"Keep the young generations in hail,
And bequeath them no tumbled house,

This is the final urge of the spirit of Earth, the Innermost.

"There hast thou the sacred theme,
Therein the inveterate spur,
Of the Innermost."

Every poem adds additional proof to the statement that nature is indissolubly woven into the basic principles of the poet's belief by the simple fact of the prevalence of the pronoun "she". This pronoun stands for "Mother Earth" and around "her" are built all the chief tenets of his creed; so that as we have seen a study of Nature in his works leads one inevitably and imperceptibly to a
consideration of his profoundest life theories. When these have been examined, it is found that he has left his readers a helpful and buoyant message pulsing with his own sincerity. He is honestly convinced that despite occasional cases of sorrow and apparent injustice, on the whole life is worth living. As a greater number of people grow to realize this truth so life will become more worth the living. If there is cause for complaint, is it not wiser and more constructive for man to fix his attention upon the many causes he has for rejoicing? Joy strengthens him to combat the evils he must face. In "The Day of the Daughter of Hades", a practical example of this truth is developed. Here the young girl has but one short day upon Earth and she spends it royally allowing no regrets to spoil it, so that when her father's gloomy chariot comes to carry her away, she has something of which she cannot be deprived—the memory of the satisfaction she has experienced.

"And the silence about her smile
Said more than of tongue is revealed.
I have breathed, I have gazed, I have been:
It said, and not joylessly shone
The remembrance of light through the screen
Of a face that seemed shadow and stone."

Thus he teaches us, that if we live rightly and heartily, our whole being in its compound of blood, brain and spirit, is made more keenly alive to joy and can experience

"Pleasures that through blood run sane,
Quickening spirit from the brain!"

And at every turn Despair will be cheated of his grip
upon us, if only we remember to cherish the advice Meredith has so eagerly and consistently offered to us throughout his works —

"This love of Nature, that allures to take
Irregularity for harmony,
Of larger scope than our hard measures make,
Cherish it as thy school, for when on thee
The ills of life descend."
Like Meredith, Thomas Hardy has treated nature in two general aspects. We have seen in a foregoing chapter, how both men have scattered beautiful descriptive passages profusely throughout their books. They are alike in the second phase as well insofar as in both cases they have co-ordinated nature and their deepest beliefs. Both have a "philosophy of Nature". These "philosophies" are widely different from each other however. In the first place, it is more difficult to segregate the component parts of Hardy's belief and examine them separately. Everything falls under the title of "pessimism", so that all this section purposes to do is to give varying instances of this attitude and attempt to trace it, to some extent, throughout the course of his writings.

Meredith exalts man and his mission. Hardy presents an emphatic picture of the unending insignificance of man. Both men present the eternal reality of nature but Hardy's impression is as far removed from the picture of Meredith's "Great Mother", as it is possible for it to be. Nature is never a benevolent mother to him, and it is from this that his pessimism develops.

The scene is always an element of first importance with him. Sometimes he treats it, especially in his earlier work, in a poetic and idyllic fashion, as an escape from the tragedy of life - the pastoral escape. But more often he uses it with symbolical meaning, as in the well-known passage in the
"Woodlanders" where the warped trees are made to suggest the futile attempts and unrealized aims of human life. Sometimes he represents it as the embodiment of the power which works man's humiliation. In his human types he chooses those which are closest to nature for he holds that nothing is so significant in man as race, sex and his great servitude to nature. In his poetry as in his novels, he is concerned primarily with one thing and that is the principle of life itself seen visibly in the world as nature. He has made the heath, the village, the fields and the roads of the English countryside his own, and his knowledge of nature derived therefrom has brought him close to the primal elements of the world. Burton speaks of this characteristic and says that mother soil gives him his idiosyncrasy his flavor and his strength. He points out that when he shifts his scene to London as in the "Hand of Ethelberta", and introduces sophisticated types he meets with comparative failure.

He selected as his setting the south-west part of England (old Wessex, or Somerset shire) because he knew that part of England best and because he felt that the types of humanity and the view of life he wished to show could best be thrown against just such a primitive background.

The general attitude then, which is found in Hardy's works is that of a pessimist. What he calls "the optimistic grin which ends a story happily", is never present in his work, and his tales end in compromise, in tacit acknowledgment that all
humanity can do is live on trying to make the best of what is essentially a bad bargain or in failure. The obvious quality of his tragedies is the insistent invasion into human consciousness of the general inevitable tragedy of existence, which, struggle as he will, finally overpowers man and casts its unrelenting gloom over all. The tremendousness of human fate is constantly implied and emphasized in the most impressive way. Burton says again of him that Fate is to him that impersonal thing known as environment - When this is allied with the temperament of his characters and with opportunity, an element of luck it follows naturally that man is the sport of the Gods." "A Pair of Blue Eyes" presents this combination of circumstances and pictures a tragic outcome from it.

In her article on Hardy, Anna McClure Scholl mentions this characteristic -

"Acknowledging no creed this most modern of novelists is eminently Calvinistic in his portrayal of men and women as predestined to misfortune or failure, as pulled or tossed about at the impish pleasure of the God - Circumstance. The keynote of his work indeed is the effect of circumstance - of luck - upon man's war with the elements of nature. Some foreordained event for which he is in no wise responsible turns the tide of the battle against him, yet he is held accountable for his defeat. He reaps where he has not sown. He is overwhelmed with punishments for sins committed by
others. He is literally badgered through life by the devil of ill-luck. In "A Pair of Blue Eyes" Elfride is victimized by circumstances. The adverse star is already risen above her brow when the book opens. She goes, artlessly as a child, into the hopeless labyrinth of mischance from which death alone can release her. Tess is an innocent sinner browbeaten by bad luck into a guilty one. So persistent is this evil fortune, this malign spell which might be broken by a word more or less, that Tess becomes well nigh an irresponsible being a mere bruised flower floating on an irresistible current of doom."

This aspect of life is the one which seems to have impressed Hardy most forcibly. In the "Return of the Native" the hero again plays an uneven game with chance from the moment that Eustacia Vye influences him through love and he is stripped of his former steadfast ambitions. The people of Hardy, as Stuart P. Sherman in his book "On Contemporary Literature" says, are pitiful antagonists of destiny. The intelligence of mortal beings seems wholly inactive in the combat. In condemning the ways of God to man this "grim artist", seems obsessed by the idea that nature is conspiring to bring a helpless humanity to degradation and shame. This is hardly to see life as a whole.

The irony of circumstance is always present. Tess
is the "modern classic of misfortune", that portrays the spirit-rending struggle of a maiden against the treacherous power of circumstance, destiny or nature. In "Jude the Obscure, the hero is born under an evil star, his early ambition to go to Oxford is continually thwarted by his lower nature, and as always in Hardy, accident and chance take sides with the baser elements of his character, "Tess" mirrors this same cruel adversity of fate, while the history of Jude's baffled aspirations seems as though fate were arguing with itself and experimenting with the problem of whether or no man's personal efforts have any final value, - should they be aided or even unmolested? With the outcome of this gloomy book we are forced to the conclusion that nature will ever be wholly alien and hostile to the noblest and to the meanest of human endeavor alike.

"The Mayor of Casterbridge" is the story of how a man pays for one hour of dissipation with a whole life-time of struggle and remorse and ends in grim failure. The strength of a single person is submitted to a contest with the indeviating process of impersonal event. His spirit is pitted against the fatal energy of general existence or nature. The processes of outer nature, which are so carefully woven into the other tales with symbolic intent are absent in this book, but the story leaves the impression of the same characteristic attitude wherein the general sin of
personal existence and personal desire must be expiated to a universe of indifferent fate.

In the poem "The Voice of Things" this supremely sardonic view of the existing order of things is summed up in the lines:

"And I heard the waters wagging in a long ironic laughter
At the lot of men and all the vapoury Things that be."

The outstanding example of the influence of this implacable force in nature undermining all men's endeavours is the elaborate use made of Egdon Heath in "The Return of the Native". The tragic note is struck at the outset by a description of that vast tract of moorland whose spirit breathes over the whole story like an evil fate. Lascelles Abercrombie says that these opening paragraphs show Hardy's strong persuasion to delight in the tragic ground -bass which his keenly civilized consciousness always hears accompanying the "tune of the world".

"The place became full of a watchful intentness now; for when other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it would only be imagined to await one last crisis - the final overthrow."

This shows the reader at once that Egdon Heath is not
to play the role of background in its usual sense, but it is to be a central actor in the drama through its potent influence upon the other characters. Its malignant power to dwarf and thwart the aspiring soul drives Eustacia and Clym to the final irretrievable disaster. Its dark potency issues forth to stain with inevitable tragedy the persons that move within its scope, and all the characters are totally unable to escape the grasp of its subtle compulsion. With all its sights and sounds so vividly imagined, it presides over the whole action like a vast and careless oppression.

Gloom and desolation are touched upon at once as it is presented on that first memorable November evening.

"The heath wore the appearance of an instalment of night which had taken up its place before the astronomical hour was come; darkness had, to a great extent, arrived thereon, while day stood distant in the sky. The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half an hour to evening, it could, in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread ------- The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it -------

Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct,
to a more recently learned emotion, than that which responds
to the sort of beauty called charming and fair".

Hardy's deeply serious mind easily conceived that a
setting like Egdon was the most graphic of all back grounds for
the solemn interblending and of the underlying pitilessness in
the silent forces of nature and the futile forces set in motion
by the human will.

"Intensity was more usually reached by way of the
solemn than by way of the brilliant and such a sort of
intensity was often derived at during winter darkness, tempests
and mists. Then, Egdon was aroused to reciprocity, for it
maybe said that the storm was its lover, and the wind its
friend. Then it became the home of strange phantoms; and
it was found to be the hitherto unrecognized original of those
wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be
compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and
disaster and are never thought of after the dream until
revived by scenes like this.

It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's
nature - neither ghastly, hateful or ugly; neither
commonplace, unmeaning nor tame; but, like a man, slighted
and enduring, and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in
its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long
lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance.
It had a lovely face, suggesting tragic possibilities.

This suggestion of the ceaseless drifting power of fate
which is simply indifferent to a struggling, vainly desiring
humanity, is elaborated and worked out in all its significance throughout every page of the tragic novel.

Hardy recognized as clearly as did George Meredith the truth in the conception of nature as a power which moulds the characters and destinies of men; but unlike his contemporary, it was not clear to him that "an impulse from a verger wood" would always send a Peter Bell to church. It seemed quite as likely that it would send a Jude to an Arabella, or a Tess to an Alec. To him the idea of nature working for the moral aims of man is nothing but a "sweet Pantheistical illusion". His insight into the relationship between the two is tragical. To him concurrence by nature in the moral ends of man is utterly impossible, and the convincing symbol of his grim belief is that of Tess swinging upon the gallows. The sardonic final thought with which he leaves Tess is that fate, that is to say, the force of nature, had played its last jest with this fair-souled country-lass. Nature is used time and again as a power which reflects upon people of deep, simple character and is far more potent than the forces of the conventional world; but this is never a benevolent power, it is rather an ironic expression of supreme cosmic indifference to the petty fate of man. At times the power is characterized by actual malignity. As it blindly moves on its way, it may occasionally coincide with human law, but it always urges man on to the fulfillment of its own tendencies.
irrespective of the disasters which may consequently befall them in the social order established and regulated by reason and foresight. Because he is aware of this resolute power perpetually conflicting with the insatiable pressure of instinct, naturalism in his treatment attains to tragedy.

Lascelles Abercrombie deals with this characteristic in his study of Hardy. He sees a manifestation of the conflict between the personal and the general in the types of humanity which are depicted in the novels. He says that the sequestered humanity with which Hardy's greatest novels concern themselves is deeply impregnated with the impersonal common vigors of the Earth. Not only those are dyed by the surrounding circumstances of nature, who willingly know themselves immersed therein like Giles Winterbourne, Gabriel Oak and Marty South; but those also who rebel against nature's possessing them like Eustacia Vye, Wildeve and Bathsheba, have the stain of it in their tissues. This immersion of personality in the larger surrounding life of nature is more acutely felt by the reader when it appears in those who for all their rebellion, do not perceive how completely they are dpt. A subtle hint of this is given in the signals used by Eustacia and Wildeve. Sometimes they signalled to each other by means of throwing a stone into a pond in such a way as to sound like a hop-frog, later Wildeve attracts the attention of the unconscious Eustacia to his presence outside her window by putting a moth through the chink of the lighted shutter so
that it flies into her candle and perishes. A tragic

**magnified** significance is evoked by such acts as this. Even these characters seem to become helpless portions of life’s ruthless force and the elemental vigor of the earth flows through them, even although it is against their desire and their consciousness. In all the books where such characters are drawn unity is found by the general significance of personality forever moved to assert itself against the impersonal, implacable drift of things, gaining thereby not the desired alteration of the unalterable, but a keener consciousness of human destiny. This is a kind of groundwork of earth which is common to all the purposive novels.

In "Far from the Madding Crowd" the tragedy has this essential element of the unalterable universal movement of the earth, the sightless substance, which does not and cannot take the petty endeavors of man into consideration; The second scene described in the book forms an admirable prelude to such a theme for it is a description of a night of stars over the open heath, when it is almost possible to feel the earth swinging unalterably on its path through space. The nature description becomes symbolical at once.

"The Sky was clear — remarkably clear — and the twinkling of all the stars seemed to be but throbs of one body, timed by a common pulse. The North Star was directly in the wind’s eye, and since evening the Bear had swung round it outwardly to the east, till he was now at a right angle with the meridian. A difference of color in the stars — oftener read of than seen in England —
was really perceptible here. The kingly brilliance of 
Siri\(\text{\textcopyright}\)s 
pierced the eye with a steelly glitter, the star called Capella was 
yellow, Aldebran and Betelguese shone with a fiery red.

To persons standing alone on a hill on such a clear midnight as this, the role of the world eastward is almost a palpable movement. The sensation may be caused by the panoramic glide of the stars past earthly objects, which is perceptible in a few minutes of stillness, or by the better outlook upon space which a hill affords, or by the wind, or by the solitude, but whatever be its origin the impression of riding along is vivid and abiding."

In the face of such a sincere conviction of the blind relentlessness of the universe it is not possible for Hardy to preach a doctrine of faith akin to that of Meredith. He does not believe in questioning nature., that "she" which affords Meredith such comfort is an alien impersonal "It" to Hardy and it is useless to question such an entity. It can do no more than give back its own fruitless group of questions. In the poem "Hap" which was written as early as 1866 this futile enquiry is summed up in one question -

"How arrives it joy lies slain? 
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?"

It seems inadequate to look for an explanation of the theory of a malignant power. Nature herself can only question too -

"Has some vast Imbecility, 
Mighty to build and blend,
But impotent to tend,
Framed us in jest, and left us now to hazardry?

Or come we of an Automaton,
Unconscious of our pains?
Or are we live remains,
Of Godhead dying downwards, brain
and eye now gone?

Or is it that some high Plan betides,
As yet not understood,
Of Evil stormed by Good,
We the Forlorn Hope over
which achievement strides?
As he reasons along these lines Hardy is forced on to the conclusion that Earth is not conscious of anything that is going on in this existence. She is like one drowsed and there is no remedy for the existing ills to which man is doomed as long as he continues in such a state. We are existing in "visionless wilds of space" with no guiding spirit watching over us, and from the depths of his gloomy conviction the poet cries out:

**THE SLEEP WORKER**

When will thou wake O Mother, wake and see -  
As one, who held in trance, has labored long  
By vacant rote and prepossession strong -  
The coils that thou hast wrought unwittingly.

Wherein have place unrealized by thee  
Fair growths, foul cankers, right enmeshed with wrong,  
Strange orchestras of victim shriek and song,  
And curious blends of ache and ecstasy?

Should that day come and show thy opened eyes  
All that life's palpitating tissue feel,  
How wilt thou bear thyself in thy surprise?

Will thou destroy in one wild shock of shame  
Thy whole high-heaving firmamental frame,  
Or patiently adjust, amend, and heal?"

As the last verse plainly shows Hardy is so far from faith in nature that he even questions the possibility of it ever arousing itself to attempt redemption, even in the remote contingency of its attention being directed to human ills. It seems equally probable to him that such a spirit would destroy all rather than take the trouble to adjust conditions.
When this becomes evident to him, his immediate conclusion is that the old Greek poets were correct when they held that the best lot of all is not to be and had the opportunity to reach the ear of the unborn he would give them just such counsel. In his later poems, which give the most direct statement of his philosophy he treats this thought. As he reflects upon the "ghosts whose mould lies around and below", he says:-

"Perhaps they speak to the yet unborn,  
And caution them not to come  
To a world so ancient and trouble-torn  
Of foiled intents, vain loving-kindness,  
And ardours chilled and numb."

In such a conception the relationship of the Deity is regarded in a cynical manner. If the Deity made Earth he has evidently forgotten about it or is simply watching its blind endeavors as a source of amusement.

"What do you think of it (earth) Moon,  
As you go?  
Is life much or no?"  
'O, I think of it, often think of it  
As a show.  
God means surely to shut up soon  
As I go."

In a more hopeful mood he reflects that the earth represents nothing more reprehensible than a mistake on the part of the Deity. So in "I travel as a phantom now ", he says:-

"I travel as a phantom now  
For people do not wish to see  
In flesh and blood so bare a bough  
As nature makes of me.  
And thus I visit bodiless  
Strange gloomy households often at odds,
And wonder if Man's consciousness
Was a mistake of God's

The most optimistic reflection to which he has given voice comes in "The Blow", wherein he admits that perhaps in some future time the pall of unconsciousness may be lifted and the Deity will be grieved to think of what suffering has been permitted.

"Time's fingers should have stretched to show
No aimful author's was the blow
That swept us prone
But the Firmament Doer's that dost not know,

Which in some age unguessed of us
May lift its blinding incubus,
And see, and own:
'It grieves me I did thus and thus!"

There is no counterpart to Meredith's theory of the spiritual comfort to be derived from communion with nature, in the works of Thomas Hardy: nature as an influence which can soothe the mind of man and modify his passions so as to give him peace, is far outside the limit of his comprehension. The soothing force of the Earth Mother which uplifts Meredith's soul in her presence to actual prayer and charms his intellect into a suspension of its graver career, leaving only love and joy is powerless before the deep-rooted disbelief of Hardy. Nature has given him a deeper wisdom than books and schools can ever give but even she has not been able to inspire him to belief in her morality and virtue. He is engrossed in nature but derives no comfort from her.
Nature is always employed in his powerful novels. It is used dramatically when it is made the appropriate background and accompaniment of human life and it mingle with the thought and action. There is always a close interrelation between his characters and nature the fateful force.

Fate in Hardy's Tragedy has sometimes been criticized as a sort of sinister interference in which the idea is one of a sort of supernal force enjoying its leisure by deliberately wrecking human happiness. Fate really is the general measureless process of existence wherein all activity is included. It cares nothing in working itself out, for the needs and desires of individual existence. In the long run the individual must obey the general. The main stream of tendency has the ultimate power. Human desire must, at best, be an irony, and when completely wrought into its artistic form by Thomas Hardy, it must be a tragedy. We never feel his characters to be in a purely human world. There is always the immense background of measureless fate processes, a moving supporting darkness, more or less apparent but always felt. This produces a striking effect of a passionate intricate human event thrown into contrast with the simplicity and deliberateness of the earth.

The background of nature seems to exist chiefly as a spectacular variation of human moods, and yet this nature which supplies the background also holds the human action in solution. Tragedy is the inevitable answer to.
personality's self assertion against this impersonal power, lurking in the background.

Examples of kinship in mood between humanity and surrounding nature may be selected from almost any novel, but in this phase, as in all others, the best examples seem to come invariably from the same small group of outstanding books which has already been quoted, and requoted in this study. One such notable passage is the description of Melchester on a snowy evening:

"It was a night when sorrow may come to the brightest without causing any great sense of incongruity: when, with impressible persons love becomes solicitousness, hope sinks to misgiving, and faith to hope; when the exercise of memory does not stir feelings of regret at opportunities for ambitions that have been passed by, and anticipation does not prompt to enterprise."

The elaborate description of a thunder storm which occurs in the same novel and which was quoted in another connection is obviously treated with such minute care in order to assure the effectiveness of its culmination in a crisis of emotion between Gabriel and Bathsheba. In "The Return of the Native", the broken-spirited Mrs. Yeobright is made to feel kinship between herself and the desolate life of the waste space known as the "Devil's Bellows"!"
"The trees beneath which she sat were singularly battered, rude and wild, and for a few moments Mrs. Yeobright dismissed thoughts of her own storm-broken and exhausted state to contemplate theirs. Not a bough in the nine trees which composed the group but was splintered, lopped and distorted by the fierce weather that had held them at its mercy whenever it prevailed. Some were blasted and split as if by lightning, black stains as from firemarking their sides, while the ground at their feet was strewn with dead sticks and heaps of cones blown down in the gales of past years. The place was called Devil's Bellows and it was only necessary to come there on a March or November night to discover forcible reasons for that name. On the present heated afternoon, when no perceptible wind was blowing the trees kept up a perpetual moan which one could hardly believe to be caused by the air".

The same artistic sense of fitness leads Hardy to depict the final catastrophe of the November night during a violent rainstorm, which makes the upheaval in nature correspond to the overturning of the lives of all the principal characters. As the unhappy Eustacia starts across the heath to meet Wildeve we are told that:

"Skirting the pool she followed the path towards Blackbarrow, occasionally stumbling over twisted furze-roots, tufts of rushes, or oozing lumps of fleshy fungi, which at this season lay scattered about the heath like the rotten
liver and lungs of some colossal animal. The moon and stars were closed up by cloud and rain to the degree of extinction. It was a night which led the traveller's thoughts instinctively to dwell on nocturnal scenes of disaster in the chronicles of the world.

Eustacia at last reached Blackbarrow and stood still there to think. Never was harmony more perfect than that between the chaos of her mind and the chaos of the world without.

"The Woodlanders" are placed under the dominance of a much more kindly aspect of nature than is usual but the dominance is scarcely less masterful. All the villagers are drenched by the subtle influences of the surrounding woods. Melbury's anxious fears for his well-educated daughter are an indirect expression of this fact. His innate consciousness of the formidable assimilating power of the Earth is shown in his quaint remark, "We, living here alone don't notice how the whitey-brown creeps out of earth over us". The book is full of the most profound penetration of humanity by nature.

The most obvious instance is the strange link between the life of John South and that of a tree. He protests, "I could bear up, I know I could, if it were not for the tree - yes, the tree, 'tis that's killing me.........Whenever the wind blew as it did now the tree rocked naturally enough; and the sight of its motion and sound of its sighs, had gradually bred the terrifying illusion in the woodman's mind.
Thus he would sit all day, in spite of persuasion
watching its every sway and listening to the melancholy
Gregorian melodies which the air wrung out of it.
This fear it apparently was, rather than any organic
disease, which was eating away the health of John South".

Marty South and Giles Winterbourne in their acquiescence
in the impersonal life that has them in its power, give the
book its special quality. These two have the chief share
Hardy's
of the elements of tragedy, that unyielding personal desire
mixed with a sense of the frustrating impersonal life carrying
them forward, are the very characters whom events most severely
punish. From working among the trees, the two of them have
a vast common knowledge of nature's ways. Marty notices that
the young pines begin to sigh as soon as they are held upright
and says quaintly that it must be that "they sigh because they
are sorry to begin life in earnest".

Grace Melbury is less keenly attuned to the minutest
aspects of nature but she responds quickly to the influence
of the woodland around her as she flees away from her home
at the advent of her faithless husband. The woodland around
her faithfully mirrors the weird sensations of terror which
she experiences.

"The leaves overhead were now in their latter green -
so opaque that it was darker at some of the densest spots
than in winter time. Scarcely a crevice existing by which a ray could get down to the ground. Summer was ending in the daytime, singing insects hung in every sunbeam: vegetation was heavy nightly with globes of dew; and after showers creeping damps and twilight chills came up from the hollows.

The plantations were always weir'd at this hour of evening - more spectral far than in the leafless season when there were fewer masses and more minute lineality. The smooth surfaces of glossy plants came out like weak lidless eyes; there were strange faces and figures from expiring lights that had somehow wandered into the canopied obscurity; while now and then low peeps of the sky between the trunks were like sheeted shapes, and on the tips of boughs sat faint cloven tongues.

In the same way the scenery of Tess is made obedient to the whole emotional process. The descriptions are done with a minute intensity that builds up a spacious background of living earth. Only "The Return of the Native" has its action placed as grandly as this tale. The setting alters with the progression of the emotional tenseness of the story, turning bleaker and harsher as the tragic stress deepens. The relentless onward movement of the conflict between the personal and the impersonal is vitally connected with the natural setting. The different phases of the narrative
are successfully bound to the most significant of scenes.

The first incidents which are connected with the happiest time of Tess's life, are enacted during the flowery months of May and June in the pleasant Froome valley, then comes retribution in the bare and stony Flintcomb Ash farm - Tess's second lapse attended by more revolting circumstances and her lurid vengeance take their color from the unsympathetic, turgid surroundings of fashionable Sandbourne. The final scene of the dramatic capture is graphically pictured at Stonehenge and Tess is compared to one of the victims who first suffered in this spot.

The wisdom which Earth can give is discovered in the unconscious humour and common sense of the immortal peasants of the Wessex novels. Such scenes as that of the serenade by the local Church Choir and that of the opening of the vault by the rustics in "A Pair of Blue Eyes" have given Hardy the reputation of approaching the power of Shakespeare in this respect. The primitive peasants are distinguished by their quaint humor, their wisesaws and their unalterable hold upon Earth. All the entertainment which Hardy gets out of life comes to him from his contemplation of the peasant as a rooted part of the earth, translating the dumbness of the fields into humor. He has a truly Shakespearean sense of their placid vegetation by the side of hurrying animal life to which they seem to act the part of chorus
with an unconscious wisdom derived from their close undisttracted view of earth.

The best examples of Hardy’s beliefs are to be found in his prose works; in this respect he is unlike Meredith. He sometimes took the subjects of his novels and treated them in verse but never without loss of power. For this reason the most representative quotations come from his prose. However, his poetry repeats his pessimistic view as consistently as does his prose. It too, tethers us close to a God-forgotten tainted ball.” Poem after poem reiterates that this poor scene of our earthly life is a “show” which God ought to shut soon, the unseeing, dream-work of some vast imbecility that spends eternity in passive reverie or remorse, that framed our planet in jest: “That I made earth and life and man it still repenteth me”.

Nature is nothing more than a sleep-worker, busy in her handsome house known as space; she has fallen a-drowse and man’s only sure reward for all his hopes and aspirations is that “storm-tight roof” which “earth grants all her kind”.

Hardy is too great an imaginative philosopher to try to answer the final riddle, he only asks and asks:

Thy Shadow Earth, from Pole to Central Sea,
Now steals along upon Moon’s weak shine
In even monochrome and curving line
Of imperturbable serenity.

How shall I link such sun-cast symmetry
With the torn, troubled form I know as thine,
That profile, placid as a brow divine,
With continents of moil and misery?
And can immense Mortality but throw
So small a shade?"

"The Dynasts", a huge unwieldy drama is the greatest consummation of all the philosophy which is scattered through the novels. It is a dramatic study, in prose and in verse of the Napoleonic Wars. Its immensity is such that it contains no less than nineteen acts and one hundred and thirty scenes. It is an attempt to crowd into one work the sum total of his mundane philosophy in puppet guise. The outstanding result is not so much a revelation of Napoleon as a revelation of Hardy himself. History, contemporary gossip, elemental forces and fate are all blended together. Choruses and semi-choruses reveal the unseen forces that move behind the current of life and it gains what unity it has from its consistent lack of Optimism.

In the Preface, Hardy tells us that his subject is "the doctrines of impersonated abstractions that are but the tentative attempts to lift the burden of the mystery of the unintelligible world".

The primary single energy presented is the "Will" of the Universe, which is in no wise concerned with the joys and agonies of the existence it causes. No God could loom more phantasmal and remote from our trivial and agonizing affairs than this "All Immanent Will", that drives us into the world in "rabble rout" and mutters in slumber or mocks at the "monotonous moil of strained, hard-run humanity ". 
Shade of Earth:

"What of the Immanent Will and its designs?"

Spirit of Years:

It works unconsciously as heretofore,
Eternal artistry in circumstance
Whose patterns wrought by rapt aesthetic rôte,
Seem in themselves its single listless aim,
And not their consequence".

Spirit of Pities:

"Voiceless, viewless Turner of the Wheel?"

Spirit of Years:

"Nothing appears of shape to indicate
That cognizance has marshalled things terrene,
Or will (such is my thinking) in its span.
Rather they show that like a knitter drowsed,
Whose fingers play in skilled unmindfulness,
The Will has woven with an absent heed
Since life first was, and ever so 'twill weave".

Spirit of Earth:

"Yet know I am but an ineffectual Shade
Of her the Travailleur, herself a thrall
To It; in all her laborings curbed and tanged!"

Spirit of Years:

"'Tis not in me to feel with or against,
These flesh-hinged mannikins Its hand upwinds
To click-clack off Its preadjusted laws"

Spirit Sinister:

"For if my casual scorn, Father Years, should
set thee trying to prove that there is any
rhyme or reason in the Universe, thou wilt not
accomplish it by Doomsday.

Throughout the huge drama such choruses as these are
interspersed between the scenes in which human figures
take part, and wherever they occur throughout the whole
length of the piece, they are made to embody the same group of ideas.

"So the Will weaves through space, and moulds the times, with Mortals for Its fingers! We shall see again men's passions, virtues, visions, crimes, obey resistslessly, the purposive, unnoticed dominant thing, which sways in brooding dark, their way-faring!"

Other significant terms applied to this force as it is discussed again and again throughout the work are these:

"Immense Unweavable Mind", "All-urging Will", "deft manipulator of the Slide", and "the Great Unshaken".

In the closing lines the chorus of Pities is made to express a hope that this "Immanent Will" that "Neither Good nor Evil knows" may wake and understand.

God's education must be brought about by men, for God is without pity, plan or purpose and is even capable of this utterance,

"Strange that ephemeral creatures who by my own ordering are should see the shortness of my view, use Ethic tests I never knew or made provision for!"

Search as we may through Hardy's poetry and prose, his philosophic interpretation of Earth and Nature affords no hint of better comfort than what has been cited here. The one conclusion which can be derived from the heaped-up evidence is the initial one in this chapter, that in all senses of the word, Thomas Hardy embodies the
pessimistic viewpoint in temperament, conviction and creed. His genius alone preserves enough balance of Art to keep this overmastering tendency from marring all that he has done.

It is to his unerring sense of artistry that thanks are due, in every case his morbidity does not get the upper hand and result in such depressingly sombre stories as "Jude the Obscure".
A GENERAL ESTIMATE OF HARDY AND MEREDITH.

It appears that the sum-total of the evidence yielded by a study of the different aspects of the work of Hardy and of Meredith leads to one general statement. Both started with the general premises which they derived from their observation of and reaction to the external world and its history, yet the conclusions at which they arrived are as widely separated as it is possible for them to be. As is so often the case with great writers, the two men were contemporaries and were subjected to exactly the same influences and trends of thought, yet their constitutional variance resulted in an interesting example of how general beliefs and interests can find directly opposing expression when translated by contrasting personalities. Other great pairs of novelists who have illustrated this fact are Richardson and Fielding, Scott and Jane Austen, and Dickens and Thackeray. In this case Hardy reaches a fatalistic pessimism which offers a strong contrast to the buoyant optimism which is attained by George Meredith.

This contrast is directly due to their respective attitudes to life. First of all Meredith had a genial robust delight in life - he was fond of violent exercise himself and he made the men and women of his novels reflect his heartiness. Consequently they are all fond of exercise. Men and women excel at walking, riding and swimming; there is a frank delight in good eating, the
men are strong drinkers of the good wine which is always abundant in the novels. Hardy, while tenderly sympathetic and responsive to joyousness in others, seems to have no geniality of his own and no conception of actual joy in life. He feels sure that tears follow laughter on every occasion, and it is on this bitter aftermath that he continually focuses his gaze.

From such temperaments it follows naturally that the second phase of variance should be their opposing conceptions of man's relation to Fate. Meredith's human beings are undaunted, they are never passive instruments of this thing, Fate, for he is sure that they can nobly conquer heredity and environment. It is part of their duty to develop into masters of their own destiny and he insists upon their power to struggle and to gain control over the impersonal forces of existence.

To Hardy, this is an impossibly assertive outlook; nothing can shake his inmost determination that man is a vain puppet, a bit of a vast machine which is resistless in its tendencies, and which punishes any futile attempt at resistance.

In Hardy's belief man is unable, overwhelmed by the huge, ruthless currents of Nature, to avoid his very acts; in that of Meredith his course of action can be determined by himself alone, but the one thing he cannot avoid is the consequence of his acts when they are wrong. This is brought out in the former case by "The Return of
The Native" or by "Jude the Obscure", and in the latter by "Rhoda Fleming" and by the "Ordeal of Richard Feveral".

Neither author denies the existence of the baser elements in man's nature; indeed this is one of Hardy's chief concerns; but to him it seems that men and women, entangled as they are in webs of circumstance, are invariably the prey of their desires, aspirations or follies. They are racked and cheated from spiritual development by every conceivable form of mischance. The novels are inescapably overcast with the precariousness of man's hold on the spiritual, for he is always represented as being at the mercy of his lower nature. Meredith's genius was profoundly spiritual and he accepted the earthly facts because he believed that the spirit expressed itself through the body. In a letter to his son written in 1888, he said:

"I have written always with the perception that there is no life but of the spirit; that the concrete is really the shadowy; yet that the way to spiritual life lies in the complete unfolding of the creature, not in the nipping of his passions. An outrage to nature helps to extinguish his light. To the flourishing of the Spirit, there, through the healthy exercise of the senses".

This explains Meredith's contempt for asceticism.

In education and in temperament Meredith was decidedly un-English. The only English author with whom his style has anything in common is Carlyle, who was also
inspired by the Germans. Meredith had a towering admiration for Carlyle and like him was more interested in the metaphysics of passion than in passion itself. His novels were the product of speculative thought and of the accurate observation of an original and powerful thinker. Hardy, on the other hand, is paramountly English, he never attempts other than insular subjects, his settings are England herself. In scenes within doors and without, in landscape, in times, lights and seasons, in Englishness he is incomparably rich. The stately inevitable march of his tragedies has been compared to the tragedies of the Greeks, but beyond this special phase he shows no influence of anything but English viewpoints and English modes of expression.

Meredith is often obscure; the force of his personality and the unconventionality of his mode of expression show the master mind but not the master of English prose. We are often conscious, especially in the latter works, of how the author's magnificent intellectual endowments obtrude upon the vehicle of his expression much to the detriment of clearness and beauty. He convinces his readers that neither stimulating thought nor startling originality of diction can take the place of clear expression. Hardy never displays this weakness. He also is a master mind but his is a masterly style as well. Critics frequently express the opinion that his early training influenced his writings and resulted in the perfect structure
and beautiful clearness which they have termed "architectonic"
Some criticisms have been levelled at "The Dynasts" for
its obscurity, but this is due rather to the immensity of
the subject and to the fact that it sums up all Hardy's
theories, than to any intrinsic faults in style.

The last and not the least important point of
contrast between the two novelists is the different degrees
of popularity attained by them. Contrary to a natural
supposition, it was the pessimist and not the optimist who
commanded attention from the reading public. Meredith's
fame is still vastly inferior to Hardy's. This is due to
his obscurities of style, to a large extent, and to the
fact that the increasingly gloomy tone of the Wessex novels
was an appeal in itself to the mood of the later nineteenth
century, a mood of weakness and reaction from moral
strenuousness, of lack of interest in questions of con-
science. This tendency found its natural outlet in the
romantic escape offered by the next genius to appear,
Robert Louis Stevenson.

To sum up the general estimate Meredith's formula
offers strong contrast to that of Hardy. In Meredith's
view of life man is all-important. The works of man, his
society, his conventions, his expressions of himself are
the great facts of the world. Man is indeed, held down
and sacrificed by his own perverseness and by that of his
fellows; but he can rise against this, attack it and
overthrow it, or die valiantly in the attempt. The struggle
of humanity is one of man with men, and it is always capable of yielding glorious victory. This hope gives brightness to all of Meredith's books, even to the most tragic. In Hardy's world, on the other hand, man is of the smallest importance; the study of man's intellect and of his works will never bring us nearer to the secret of the universe to the essential reason or unreason of things. A man is not held, thwarted and insulted by his fellows only; his warfare is not chiefly with them; the perversity of his lot is not wholly of their making. It is rather of the very nature of the world into which he is born, a world full of the irony of circumstance. It is true, human beings are often the vehicles of that irony, but we cannot say that Hardy's heroes are conquered by human opponents. They fall before they can come to close quarters with the enemy. Jude the Obscure, checked in his ambition for scholarship cannot get at the man behind the system which damns him. He can only write bitter words on the outside wall of the college which refuses him admittance. Thus Hardy's world is without an element of healthful hopeful combat. Life is tragic by hypothesis; the irony of circumstance is a recognizable element in the metaphysical constitution of the world. Often the operations of this time spirit are humorous, with a grim contemptuous humor that is as bitter as its malice: but in Hardy's later works the tragedy is not lightened even by this devilish play. At the end of "Tess" he does indeed
call the work of "Time the Arch-Satirist" with Tess a
to be a joke, but we cannot help feeling that it has been all along
a matter of bitter earnest.

In contrast with the ephemeral importance of man
Hardy presents the eternal reality of nature. With him
the scene is an element of first importance, essential in
the development of the story. Sometimes he treats it in a
poetic and idyllic fashion, as an escape from the tragedy of
life but this is only in his early pastoral works. More
often he uses it with symbolical meaning as when he makes
the warped trees in the "Woodlanders" the sign of unfulfilled
human aspirations. It is noteworthy that he chooses the
most primitive types of humanity as closest to nature, for
in them impulses are strongest and action is the natural
mode of expression. Meredith draws his characters from the
walks of life where men and women are most complex, where
thought is most active. In Hardy's view thought is as futile
a medium to the underlying truth as was the tower of Babel
for its purpose. In his belief in the significant, Meredith
is continually heightening the individual, pushing his
characters beyond human limits! Hardy holds that nothing
in man is significant except sex and nature's dominion and
he chooses the types which will present these realities most
clearly.

It must not be imagined that there are no points
of contact between the two writers, however. They have
some few points of similarity, minor considerations it is
true, but such as they are they should not be entirely overlooked.

In the first instance they were contemporaries and they both reflect the main trends of thought of the nineteenth century. They both accepted the theories of Rousseau, Zola and Darwin although they translated them into different conclusions. Both were original and powerful thinkers and both were pagans. Nowhere does either of them give any orthodox religious teaching, while of the two Hardy is the completest pagan. Their real emphasis is on this life and on man's conduct in the present world. Any mention of an orthodox God is as rare as it is vague, all the men and women whom they have created seem to get along somehow without any religion.

Meredith is the greater theorist, moralist and teacher, although the pagan doctrine of the later books where the instincts of the heart seem superior to law, is rather dangerous. Aminta leaves her husband for no better reason than that she prefers another man and in so doing destroys any teaching which the book might possess. But he cherished a wholesome contempt for selfishness and launched a great campaign against it in "The Egoist" and in "Richard Federal". In this respect and in his consistent teaching of faith and hope he far outshines Hardy as a messenger of vital truth.

Hardy is, however, the greater novelist, as such. His is the greater perfection of constructive power, and his the most splendid style as the beautiful stately march of the narrative in "Far From the Madding Crowd" shows. His people
have a touch of universality - they would catch our interest under any circumstances. This is not true of Meredith's personages. They are interesting only in the midst of their own groups. Were they transplanted from their especial sphere they would become mere lay figures - type studies. All Hardy's folk are human but it is only occasionally that Meredith gives us a living pulsing being such as Clara Middleton.

Despite his superiority in special phases Hardy must take second place in regard to his teaching. The only fundamental truth which we can derive from him is that pessimism may be helpful, inasmuch as it takes away any illusory hopes - those who hope for nothing can never be disappointed. This is not of much value as a basic truth and it leads us to re-echo Meredith's remark made in a letter in which he discussed Hardy.-

"I am afflicted by his twilight view of life".

The last point of contact between the two men came in the form of a tribute from Hardy upon the occasion of Meredith's death,-

George Meredith.

"Forty years back when much had place,
That since has perished out of mind,
I heard that voice and saw that face.

He spoke as one afoot will wind
A morning horn 'ere men awake;
His note was trenchant turning kind.

He was of those whose wit can shake
And riddle to the very core,
The counterfeit that Time will break--.
Of late, when we two met once more,
The luminous countenance and rare
Shone just as forty years before.

So that, when now all tongues declare
His shape unseen by his green hill,
I scarce believe he sits not there!

No matter! Further and further still
Through the world's vapourous vitiate air
His words wing on - as live words will."

Upon the same occasion Sir James M. Barrie gave a
symbolical expression to the same idea of true immortality
being attained by one who had laboured so sincerely and
faithfully to give the world a helpful message.

22, 1909. The Day, As they Say, Of His Funeral.

"All morning there had been a little gathering of
people outside the gate. It was the day on which Mr. Meredith
was to be, as they say, buried. He had been, as they say,
cremated. The funeral coach came, and a very small thing
was placed in it and covered with flowers. One plant of the
wallflower in the garden would have covered it. The coach,
followed by a few others, took the road to Dorking, where, in
familiar phrase, the funeral was to be, and in a moment or two
all seemed silent and deserted, the cottage, the garden, and
Box Hill.

"The cottage was not deserted, as They knew who now
trooped into the round in front of it, their eyes on the closed
door. They were the mighty company, his children, Lucy and
Clara and Rhoda and Diana and Rose and Old Mel and Roy
Richmond and Adrian and Sir Willoughby and a hundred others,
and they stood in line against the boxwood, waiting for him to come out. Each of his proud women carried a flower, and the hands of all his men were ready for the salute.

"In the room on the right, in an armchair which had been his home for years - to many the throne of letters in this country - sat an old man, like one forgotten in an empty house. When the last sound of the coaches had passed away he moved in his chair. He wore gray clothes and a red tie, and his face was rarely beautiful, but the hair was white and the limbs were feeble, and the wonderful eyes dimmed, and he was hard of hearing. He moved in his chair, for something was happening to him, and it was this: old age was falling from him. This is what is meant by Death to such as he, and the company awaiting knew. His eyes became again those of the eagle, and his hair was brown, and the lustiness of youth was in his frame, but still he wore the red tie.

"He rose, and not a moment did he remain within the house, for "Golden lie the meadows, golden run the streams, and fields and waters shout to him golden shouts".

"He flung open the door, as they knew he would do who were waiting him, and he stood there looking at them, a General reviewing his troops. They wore the pretty clothing in which he had loved to drape them; they were not sad like the mourners who had gone, but happy as the forget-
me-nots and pansies at their feet and the lilac overhead
for they knew that this was his coronation day. Only one
was airily in mourning as knowing better than the others
what fitted the occasion, the Countess de Saldaña. He
recognized her sense of the fitness of things with a smile
and a bow. The men saluted, the women gave their flowers
to Dahlia to give to him, so that she, being the most un-
happy and therefore by him the most beloved, should have
his last word, and he took their offerings and passed on.
They did not go with him, these, his splendid progeny, the
ladies of the future; they went their way to tell the whole
earth of the new world for women which he had been the first
to foresee.

"Without knowing why, for his work was done, he
turned to the left, passing his famous cherry-blossom and
climbed between apple trees to a little house of two rooms,
whence most of that noble company had sprung. It is the
Chalet where he worked and good and brave men will forever
bow proudly before it; but good and brave women will bow
more proudly still. He went there only because he had gone
so often, and this time the door was locked; he did not
know why nor care. He came swinging down the path singing
lustily, and calling to his dogs, his dogs of the present
and of the past; and they yelped with joy, for they knew
they were once again to breast the hill with him.

"He strode up the hill whirling his staff, for
which he had no longer any other use. His hearing was again so acute that from far away on the Dorking road he could hear the rumbling of a coach. It had been disputed whether he should be buried in Westminster Abbey or in a quiet churchyard and there came to him somehow a knowledge (it was the last he ever knew of little things) that people had been at variance as to whether a casket of dust should be laid away in one hole or in another, and he flung back his head with the old glorious action and laughed a laugh, "broad as thousand beeves at pasture".

"BoxHill was no longer deserted. When a great man dies,—and this was one of the greatest since Shakespeare,—the immortals await him at the top of the nearest hill. He looked up and saw his peers. They were all young like himself. He waved the staff in greeting. One, a mere stripling "slight unspeakably" R.L.S. detached himself from the others, crying gloriously, "Here's the fellow I have been telling you about!" and ran down the hill to be the first to take his master's hand.

"In the meantime an empty coach was rolling on to Dorking".
BIBLIOGRAPHY

MEREDITH

1849 Chillianwallah
1851 Modern Love and other Poems
1856 The Shaving of Shagpat
1857 Farina
1859 The Ordeal of Richard Feveral
1861 Evan Harrington
1862 Poems
1865 Rhoda Fleming
1867 Vittoria
1871 The Adventures of Harry Richmond
1876 Beauchamp's Career.
1877 Short Stories — The House on the Heath. The Case of Gen. Ople and Lady Camper. The Tale of Chloe 1891
1879 The Egoist
1880 The Tragic Comedians
1887 Ballads and Poems of Tragic Life.
1888 A Reading of Earth
1891 One of Our Conquerors.
1892 The Empty Purse
1895 The Amazing Marriage
1896 Ode in Contribution to the Song of French History.
1901 A Reading of Life.
1905 Celt and Saxon — unfinished

The Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith — George Macaulay Trevelyan
The Letters of George Meredith

HARFY

1871 Desperate Remedies.
1872 Under the Greenwood Tree.
1873 A Pair of Blue Eyes
1874 Far from the Madding Crowd
1876 The Hand of Ethelberta
1878 The Return of the Native.
1880 The Trumpet Major
1881 A Laodician
1882 Two on a Tower
1886 The Major of Casterbridge
1887 The Woodlanders
1888 Wessex Tales
1889 One of Our Conquerors.
1904 -6 The Dynasts. Vols. I and II.
1909 Time's Laughing Stocks and other verses

Masters of the English Novel — Burton.