

CHANCE IN THOMAS HARDY

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THOMAS HARDY'S USE
OF
THE CHANCE PRINCIPLE

The aim of this essay is to determine an answer to the query: Does Thomas Hardy's use of the principle of chance tend to impair the verisimilitude of his novels? The method of enquiry will be as follows. First, it will try to show that the aim of art is verisimilitude rather than rigid truth, and to illustrate this principle with an example which has truth but no verisimilitude, and which owes this lack of verisimilitude to those devices supposedly characteristic of Hardy---chance and coincidence. Secondly, it will analyze the excerpt quoted in order to arrive at some definite working basis on which chance or coincidence in those novels which exemplify these devices may be criticised. Thirdly, it will venture an absolute estimate as to the degree to which the chance principle, as used, affects the verisimilitude of these works. Lastly, it will confirm, if possible, this absolute estimate, by a comparison of a novel characterized by chance with a novel distinguished by its almost complete absence.....

To write convincing fiction, an author must not follow fact too closely: he must rather select his material with a view to securing verisimilitude. In this connection William Archer, the dramatic critic, has the following to say (his remarks are directed primarily at dramatic presentation, but may be with equal pertinence applied to narrative-writing): ' ... an improbable or otherwise unacceptable incident cannot be validly defended on the score that it actually happened: that it is on record in history or the newspapers. In the first place, the dramatist can never put it on the stage as it happened. The bare fact may be historical, but it is not the bare fact that matters. The dramatist cannot restore it to its place in that intricate plexus of cause and effect, which is the essence and meaning of reality. He can only give his interpretation of the fact; and one knows not how to calculate the chances that his interpretation may be a false one. But even if this difficulty could be overcome; if the dramatist could prove that he had reproduced the event with photographic and cinematographic accuracy, his position would not thereby be improved. He would still have failed in his peculiar task, which is precisely that of interpretation. Not truth, but verisimilitude, is his aim; for the stage is the realm of appearances, in which intrusive realities become unreal.' (1)

An extremely happy vindication of this view occurs in that most entertaining book of Mark Twain, Roughing It. It is necessary to say in advance that the book is a more or less true

account of Samuel Clemens's early experiences in the Far West.

For this reason the book cannot be treated as fiction, though many of the yarns in it merit a far harsher term than this. The incident below quoted is, however, vouched for by the author as a record of fact. The preliminary circumstances it is necessary to understand are these: Clemens and his partner Higbie have made a rich 'strike' in mining land. According to the law of the country they must do a reasonable amount of work within ten days after the location of the mine, or forfeit it. Before they have done any work at all, they are both forced to leave town for a few days, Clemens to nurse a sick friend, and Higbie to help find a 'cement bed'. They leave almost simultaneously, each having previously left a note to the effect that he will be absent for a few days, and admonishing the other to perform the necessary work on the location. The thread of the story is taken up on the evening of the ninth day.

'When I had been nursing the captain nine days,' relates Clemens, 'he was somewhat better, but very feeble. During the afternoon we lifted him into a chair, and gave him an alcoholic vapor bath, and then set about putting him to bed again. We had to be exceedingly careful, for the least jar produced pain. Gardiner had his shoulders and I his legs; in an unfortunate moment I stumbled and the patient fell heavily on the bed in an agony of torture. I never heard a man swear so much in my life ... It was simply a passing fury, and meant nothing ... but it angered me a little, at the moment.'

So much so, indeed, that I determined to go back to Esmeralda ...
I took supper, and as soon as the moon rose, began my nine mile journey, on foot ...

'As I "raised the hill" overlooking the town, it lacked fifteen minutes to twelve. I glanced at the hill over beyond the canon, and in the bright moonlight saw what appeared to be about half the population of the village massed on and around the Wide West croppings. My heart gave an exulting bound, and I said to myself, "They have made a new strike to-night --- and struck it richer than ever, no doubt." I started over there, but gave it up. I said the "strike" would keep, and I had climbed hills enough for one night. I went on down through the town, and as I was passing a little German bakery, a woman ran out and begged me to come in and help her. She said her husband had a fit. I went in, and judged she was right --- he appeared to have a hundred of them compressed into one ... He grew quiet, now, and the doctor and I withdrew and left him to his friends.

'It was a little after one o'clock. As I entered the cabin door, tired but jolly, the dingy light of a tallow candle revealed Higbie, sitting by the pine table gazing stupidly at my note, which he held in his fingers, and looking pale, old, and haggard. I halted, and looked at him. He looked at me, stolidly. I said:

"Higbie, what --- what is it? "

" We're ruined --- we didn't do the work --- THE BLIND
LEAD'S RELOCATED! "

' It was enough. I sat down sick, grieved --- broken-hearted,
indeed ... we dropped into mutual explanations, and the mystery was
cleared away ... he had never seen my note till this moment, and this
moment was the first time he had been in the cabin since the day he
had seen me last. He, also, had left a note for me, on that same
fatal afternoon --- had ridden up on horseback, and looked through
the window, and being in a hurry and not seeing me, had tossed the
note into the cabin through a broken pane. Here it was, on the floor,
where it had remained undisturbed for nine days:

'Don't fail to do the work before the ten days expire.
W. has passed through and given me notice. I am to
join him at Mono Lake, and we shall go on from there
to-night. He says he will find it this time, sure.

'CAL.'

" W." meant Whiteman, of course. That thrice-accursed
cement!

'That was the way of it. An old miner, like Higbie could
no more withstand the fascination of a mysterious mining excitement
like this "cement" foolishness than he could refrain from eating when
he was famishing ... He said they prosecuted their search in the
fastnesses of the mountains during nine days, without success; they
could not find cement. Then a ghastly fear came over him that something
might have happened to prevent the doing of the necessary work to hold

the blind lead (though indeed he thought such a thing hardly possible) and forthwith started home with all speed. He would have reached Esmeralda in time, but his horse broke down, and he had to walk a great part of the distance. And so it happened that as he came into Esmeralda by one road, I entered it by another. His was the superior energy, however, for he went straight to the Wide West, instead of turning aside as I had done --- and he arrived there about five or ten minutes too late. The "notice" was already up, and the relocation of our mine completed beyond recall, and the crowd rapidly dispersing.'

(2)

After reading this tale one is inclined strongly to doubt the author's veracity; but that the story is true is testified to by his unequivocal statement: 'It reads like a fancy sketch, but the evidence of many witnesses, and likewise that of the official records of Esmeralda District, is easily obtainable in proof that it is true history.'

Why is this ^S_A tory, vouched for as true, so incredible? Why is it that, though we know it to be a fact, we still have frequent doubts as to its possibility? The obvious retort is: "Chance occurs too frequently to render the story immediately credible; if the author did not state quite seriously that the narrative is a record of fact, no one would for a moment accept it as true. This

multiplication of chances is quite outside the limits, not only of probability, but also those of possibility." And the judgment is undubitably a fair one. But are the chances in themselves incredible? I do not think that a similar opinion can with justice be given on this question. There are five separate chance incidents in the tale: first, the sudden sickness of 'the captain,' necessitating Clemens' absence from the mine; secondly, the appearance of Whiteman, which so irresistibly draws Higbie away from the centre of operations; thirdly, the failure of Clemens to ascertain the cause of the crowd at the 'Wide West'; and fifthly, the accident to Higbie's horse which prevents him from reaching the mine in time. The two first chances must be accepted (separately) without question. They are 'initial' chances, without which no story, true or otherwise, could have its existence. Even supposing that the "captain's" sudden illness could be shown to be extremely likely to occur on the particular day on which it did occur, such casuistry is too fine for the average reader who, it must be remembered, must always be humored. Similarly with Whiteman's appearance. No doubt a long and involved explanation of Whiteman's immediately previous history would show that he, too, would be passing through Esmeralda at the time of the mine 'strike', but what reader would tolerate such a lengthy and involved preliminary? Far better simply to accept the fact as stated without question. But, having accepted the 'initial chance' the reader need accept no chance subsequent to this without having received adequate preparation for it.

Once the narrative is in full swing any factor which, as it were, 'drops into the story from the skies' is likely to strike a false note and impair its verisimilitude, unless the said factor is well 'prepared for'. Now in Clemens's story the three chance incidents which take place after the narrative is in full swing are facts --- they actually did occur; but has Clemens so described those incidents as to make them credible? The first incident is the failure of Higbie to see Clemens in the cabin. We are told that Higbie 'had ridden up' to the cabin 'on horseback, and looked through the window, and being in a hurry and not seeing me, had tossed the note into the cabin through a broken pane'. Nothing could be more reasonable than this story, told as it is told by Clemens. Neither can any objection be taken to the second chance --- Clemens decision to go straight to the cabin, instead of turning aside to the mine. After his nine mile walk the prospector would hardly be likely to waste any time getting home unless there was very good reason for so doing: 'I started over there, but gave it up. I said the "strike" would keep, and I had climbed hills enough for one night'. The third chance is quite as acceptable as the first two. Higbie 'started home with all speed. He would have reached Esmeralda in time, but his horse broke down and he had to walk a great part of the distance'. It requires no stretch of imagination to believe that a horse, hard-ridden over the rough foot-hills of eastern California, would be very liable to accident. The author might possibly have brought this

point out a little more fully, but perhaps considered the circumstances of the ride too obvious for enlargement. In summary: examination has shown that none of the five separate chance incidents enumerated can be called too strange for belief. The initial chances, considered separately, must be allowed perforce, while the subsequent chances are either plausible in themselves, or are rendered so by the author's remarks.

Yet the fact remains that the story as a whole is hardly credible. It is lacking in verisimilitude: but where? The answer lies, I think, not so much in the chances themselves, but in the coincidence, ^{which are fairly easily prepared for,} Archer says: 'It is not always clearly recognized that chance and coincidence are by no means the same thing. Coincidence is a special and complex form of chance, which ought by no means to be confounded with the every-day variety. We need not here analyse chance, or discuss the philosophic value of the term. It is enough that we all know what we mean by it in common parlance. It may be well, however, to look into the etymology of the two words we are considering. They both come ultimately, from the Latin "cadere", to fall. Chance is a falling-out, like that of a die from the dice-box; and coincidence signifies one falling-out on the top of another, the concurrent happening of two or more chances which resemble or somehow fit into each other. If you rattle six dice in a box, and throw them, and they turn up at haphazard --- say, two aces, a deuce, two fours, and a six --- there is nothing remarkable in this falling-out. But if they all turn up sixes, you at once suspect that the

dice are clogged; and if that be not so --- if there be no sufficient cause behind the phenomenon --- you say that this identical falling out of six separate possibilities was a remarkable coincidence. Now, applying the illustration to drama, I should say that the playwright is perfectly justified in letting chance play its probable and even inevitable part in the affairs of his characters; but that, the moment we suspect him of clogging the dice, we feel that he is taking an unfair advantage of us, and our imagination either cries, "I won't play! " or continues the game under protest.⁽³⁾ This is, indeed, what we would like to say to Mark Twain. His narrative is such a tremendous coincidence taken as a whole that we almost cannot refrain from feeling that somewhere the dice were clogged. If we analyze the story again we find that there are really two coincidences. First, the simultaneous illness of the 'captain' and the appearance of Whiteman the prospector; secondly, the simultaneous failure of Clemens and Higbie to stop the relocation of the mine - for totally different reasons. Reference has already been made to the credibility of the first-mentioned chances when viewed separately. Either the arrival of the prospector or the sickness of the 'captain' might have been shown to be not only possible, but also probable, at the particular time when Higbie and Clemens made their 'strike.' But what makes the reader doubt the truth of even a true story is the fact that these two incidents, which had such a disastrous after-effect,

coincide --- occur within an hour or two of each other. Although Mark Twain has little difficulty in securing the reader's belief in the chance incidents of the narrative, not his art, nor that of artists far greater than he, could secure credibility for the coincidence of any of those chances. So, again, it is with the respective failures of the partners to prevent the relocation of the mine. Each of these incidents is shown to be quite probable by itself; what disturbs the reader is that they should dovetail so extraordinarily perfectly: Highble, distracted with a fear that the mine may be lost, is suddenly deprived of the power to prevent that loss; Clemens, who is not in the least troubled about the safety of the mine, has it in his power to avoid the catastrophe, but fails to do so merely because he happens to be tired. This coincidence, though the separate chances which make it up can be explained, cannot be explained itself by any process of logic, or (what amounts to the same thing in a narrative) by any amount of preparation.

We may now summarize the deductions made in this analysis of a true story. In the first place, it was seen that faithful adherence to fact in recounting a narrative is not necessarily the way to secure verisimilitude. In the second place, it was found in the tale under examination that the chance incidents, whether 'initial' or otherwise, were not, considered in themselves, incredible. Finally, it was decided that the coincidence of these chances was the

cause responsible for the lack of verisimilitude. With these conclusions as a working basis, we may proceed to a study of the use of chance and coincidence in the novels of Thomas Hardy.

A frequent criticism advanced by readers of Hardy is that he relies too much on chance and coincidence in working out his stories. Though this be the opinion of the cursory reader, it is necessary to remember that he is often nearer the truth than he is generally given credit for. Those who have studied Hardy carefully --- Lionel Johnson, Lascelles Abercrombie, Harold Child, and Dr. Samuel Chew --- have, with the exception of the last-named, no specific comment to make on the use of chance and coincidence in his work. Chew's opinion, however, is quite worth citing: 'Frankly, it must be admitted that Hardy often follows his natural bent towards the mysterious and improbable to the point where he overreaches himself in the employment of coincidence. But two pleas may be entered on his behalf. One --- it is hardly valid --- is that he never completely shook off the literary influences of his apprenticeship to the school of "sensation novelists" who made abundant use of the same device. The other and stronger plea is the fact that Hardy senses, and in the endeavor to bring it home to the reader exaggerates, the factor of chance in life. His indictment against life is so ordered that such chances as occur again in the novels dictate often the misery or happiness of human creatures.'

(4)

To say that Hardy exaggerates the factor of chance in life is tantamount to admitting that his stories lack verisimilitude. It is my intention to analyze Hardy's novels in the light of the critical findings already arrived at --- and any others which may become apparent in the examination itself --- to determine, as far as is possible, whether chance and coincidence do produce the effect of unreality in the work of the Wessex novelist.

The novels may, for the purposes of this analysis, be placed in two categories --- the dramatic, and the epic. It is not my intention to launch into a detailed explanation of the difference between the dramatic and the epic form. Let it suffice to say that in the novel of dramatic structure the interest is fairly evenly divided between several characters, while in that of epic structure it is centred chiefly on one particular character. Up till about 1880 Hardy wrote in the dramatic form. Subsequently to this date a gradual concentration of interest becomes apparent in his work. Instead of four chief characters as we find in Desperate Remedies (Miss Aldclyffe, Manston, Cytherea, and Edward Springrove) or in Far from the Madding Crowd (Bathsheba Everdene, Gabriel Oak, Sergeant Troy, and Boldwood) or again in The Return of the Native (Eustacia Vye, Mrs. Yeobright, Clym Yeobright, and Wildeve), we find three in The Trumpet Major (Anne Garland, Robert and John Loveday), and two in Two on a Tower (Viviette Constantine and St. Cleeve).

After this period of transition came the epic novels, The Mayor of Casterbridge, Tess of the D'Urbervilles, and Jude the Obscure.

The last-named novel, though apparently treating two characters in similar detail, is actually epic because Sue Bridehead is in a sense a foil to Jude Fawley.

Owing to this dissimilarity of form, it is not practicable to consider any one book as typical of Hardy's work. For this reason I shall deal first with The Return of the Native as representative of his earlier work. The choice of this novel is well-advised, since it is not only typical of the earlier work, but is perhaps the most generally liked of them, if not of all his works.

To furnish some idea of the continuity of the story, it will be as well to summarize it briefly: Clym Yeobright, the son of Mrs. Yeobright of Blooms-End, Egdon Heath, is brought up as a jeweller, and becomes manager of a large establishment in Paris. Becoming tired of city life, he returns to Egdon with the intention of opening a school. While staying with his mother he becomes acquainted with Eustacia Vye, who lives at Mistover Knap (also on Egdon) with her grandfather, a retired naval officer. Eustacia, who is of a pleasure-loving, amorous disposition, has already been engaged in a clandestine affair with Damon Wildeve, the landlord of "The Quiet Woman" inn on Egdon Heath. Wildeve, however, marries Thomasin Yeobright, Clym's cousin. Eustacia, constantly in search of one upon whom she may fasten her affections, finds in Clym Yeobright

a man responsive to her feelings. After their clandestine courtship is discovered by Mrs. Yeobright, who opposes the union bitterly, the lovers marry and depart from Blooms-End to live at Alderworth, which is in another part of Egdon Heath.

Mrs. Yeobright, who has charge of an inheritance to be divided between Clym and Thomasin, decides to send it to them by Christian Cantle, her half-witted servant. She chooses a night on which Clym and Thomasin are both at a dance at Mistover Knap, thinking this the best time to effect the delivery. On the way Cantle drops in at The Quiet Woman, and foolishly talks to Wildeve about his trust. Wildeve, who has himself been refused the care of Thomasin's money, sees an opportunity of obtaining it in spite of Mrs. Yeobright's precautions. He accompanies Cantle on his journey and eventually inveigles him into a game of dice. He wins all the money from Cantle, including Clym's share. The game has been played on a spot in the heath: when Cantle departs, very much perturbed, Diggory Venn (a reddleman --- itinerant riddle vendor --- who frequents the heath and is Thomasin's secret lover and guardian) suddenly appears, and challenges Wildeve to further play. Wildeve agrees --- and loses all the money to the reddleman. Venn, who is of course ignorant of the fact that half the money belongs to Clym, places the whole sum in Thomasin's hands. Thomasin acknowledges receipt of the money, but Clym naturally does not. Mrs. Yeobright discovers that Cantle lost the money to Wildeve, and decides to visit Alderworth for the purpose

of straightening out the matter. She meets Eustacia on the way, and bluntly asks her if Wildeve has given her any money. Eustacia flares up: and the result is a bitter quarrel between the women, which estranges them permanently. The matter of the money is later cleared up, but this does not alter the feelings of Eustacia and Mrs. Yeobright towards each other.

Eustacia is secretly opposed to Clym's half-formed idea of opening a school, and hopes to be able to persuade him to take her to Paris with him. Her hopes are dashed when Clym's eyes suddenly give way, and oblige him to give up, for the time being, the idea of pursuing any occupation necessitating eye-work. She is further distressed by the fact that Clym takes up furze-cutting to fill in time and earn a little extra money. She resumes her affair with Wildeve.

Some weeks after Clym's wedding his mother resolves to become reconciled to him and Eustacia, and accordingly sets out one summer morning to walk over the Heath to their house. It so happens that at the time of her arrival Clym is in the house, fast asleep, while Wildeve has called to interview Eustacia. Eustacia sees Mrs. Yeobright approaching the door and delays answering the latter's knock to give Wildeve an opportunity of getting away unnoticed. Incidentally, she supposes that Clym will open the door for his mother, since she is under the impression that the knock awoke him.

When she finally goes into the front room, she finds that Clym is still asleep, and that Mrs. Yeobright has departed. Mrs. Yeobright has, in fact, seen Eustacia through the window, and has also previously seen Clym enter the house. She has concluded that Eustacia has at last prevailed upon Clym to turn against his mother. Wearied by her long walk, she is overcome with emotion caused by the failure of her mission, and rests for a space on the heath. A heath boy, Johnny Nonsuch, comes along and renders her some help, but becoming alarmed at her appearance and conversation, leaves her. Some time after the boy's departure Clym passes by that way and discovers her lying unconscious. He finds that she has been bitten by an adder. Despite his efforts and those of friends whom he calls to his aid, Mrs. Yeobright dies without regaining consciousness.

Clym has a stroke, the effects of which last for several weeks. On his recovery he makes every attempt to learn the circumstances leading up to his mother's death. He at length discovers through Johnny Nonsuch and Diggory Venn (who also saw Mrs. Yeobright on the afternoon of her death) that his mother must have been returning from a visit to Alderworth (his home) at the time of the tragedy. Realizing that she must have called while he was asleep, he asks Eustacia her reason for not admitting her, and finally learns the whole story. He and Eustacia part, the wife returning to her grandfather's house.

At this time Wildeve comes in for a large sum of money, and persuades Eustacia to agree to run away with him. Eustacia has made a secret reservation, however, that she will go with Wildeve only if she does not receive a conciliatory note from Yeobright within a week. On the evening of her determined departure, a note from Yeobright arrives, but Eustacia misses it by chance. She meets Wildeve at the appointed place but in a passion of despairing reaction plunges into the pool nearby (Shadwater Weir). In a vain attempt to rescue her Wildeve is drowned, and Clym (who with Venn and others has followed up the fugitives) narrowly escapes the same death in attempting to rescue them both.

The faithful Venn is rewarded with Thomasin, and Clym devotes the rest of his life to preaching and educating the inhabitants of the neighboring villages.

There are apparently five major chance incidents in this narrative. Taken in the order of their occurrence, they are: first, the sudden appearance of Diggory Venn after the Christian Cantle-Wildeve dice-game; secondly, Clym's eye-weakness, which so dashes Eustacia's hopes of Paris; the coincidence of chances which lead to Mrs. Yeobright's death; fourthly, Wildeve's inheritance, which appears to pave the way for Eustacia's escape; and fifthly, Eustacia's missing of Clym's note.

I shall apply the leading questions already arrived at in regard to chance and coincidence in the following order: Is the

incident in question a coincidence or is it chance? If it is determined, for logical reasons, to be the former, appropriate comment in keeping with what has been decided with regard to coincidence will be made. If it turns out to be the latter, the next question applied to it will be: Is it an initial chance or not? If it is not initial, is it sufficiently well prepared for to give the impression of verisimilitude?

Venn's appearance on the heath is certainly not an initial chance, for this particular incident received its impetus from Mrs. Yeobright's determination to despatch the inheritance. It therefore demands preparation. Dr. Chew considers the incident an extraordinary juxtaposition, but I cannot bring myself to agree with him on this particular point, ⁽⁵⁾ after reading chapters 7 and 8 of Book Three. In the first place, the appearance of Venn on the heath is not a chance in any sense of the word. In detail the events immediately preceding the dicing-games on the heath take place thus: Christian Cantle, on his way to deliver the money to Clym and Thomasin at Mistover Knap, drops in at The Quiet Woman. There he is persuaded to participate in a 'raffle' (apparently a dice-throwing match, in Wessex). He wins the prize, to his great astonishment and glee, and becomes unwisely talkative: "' Well, to be sure ... To think I should have been born as lucky as this, and not have found it out until now! What curious creatures these dice be --- powerful rulers of us all, and yet at my command! I am sure I never need

5. Dr. Samuel Chew: Thomas Hardy, p.114.

be afeard of anything after this." He handled the dice fondly one by one. "Why, sir," he said in a confidential whisper to Wildeve, who was near his left hand, "If I could only use this power that's in me of multiplying money I might do some good to a near relation of yours, seeing what I've got about me of hers --- eh?" He tapped one of his money-laden boots upon the floor.

"What do you mean?" said Wildeve.

"That's a secret. Well, I must be going now." ...

"Where are you going?" Wildeve asked.

"To Mistover Knap. I have to see Mrs. Thomasin there --- that's all."

"I am going there, too, to fetch Mrs. Wildeve. We can walk together."

Wildeve and Cantle depart).

' Within the room the men fell into a chat till their attention was for a moment drawn to the chimney-corner. This was large, and, in addition to its proper recess, contained within its jambs, like many on Egdon, a receding seat, so that a person might sit there absolutely unobserved, provided there was no fire to light him up, as was the case now and throughout the summer. From a niche a single object protruded into the light from the candles on the table. It was a clay pipe, and its colour was reddish. The men had been attracted to this object by a voice behind the pipe asking for a light.

"Upon my life, it fairly startled me when the man spoke!" said Fairway, handling a candle. "Oh --- 'tis the reddleman! You've kept a quiet tongue, young man."

"Yes, I had nothing to say," observed Venn. In a few minutes he arose and wished the company good night.

' Meanwhile Wildeve and Christian had plunged into the
(6)
heath.'

To me it seems clear that Hardy means us to gather the fact that Venn has followed Wildeve and Cantle for one or other, and perhaps both, of two reasons: a desire to hover around Thomasin as she is escorted home by Wildeve, or (having overheard Cantle's conversation) a desire to see the money reach Thomasin's hands safely. Which one of these motives urges Venn to follow the two men is immaterial; what is material is that Hardy undoubtedly meant the reader to infer that Venn followed Wildeve and Cantle purposely.

Such being the case, can this incident still be termed a chance, an accident? Yes: for it is chance that Venn is at the inn at the moment when Cantle comes in. I do not think that anybody can have the slightest objection to this chance, however. To begin with, it is in itself, like the chance incidents in Mark Twain's story, an extremely probable fact, needing little embellishment from the author, that the reddleman would spend his evenings at the inn, if only for company. But there is an additional reason for the reddleman's

presence at the The Quiet Woman: it is the home of Thomas Wildeve, the one woman in all the world for whom Diggory Venn would walk an inch out of his way. Venn is unable to attend the dance at Mistover Knap owing to his uncouth appearance, and naturally selects the next best place, which is, as has been said, the inn. Here he can observe the movements of Thomasin's lucky husband, see him leave to call for Thomasin, and (perhaps) derive a melancholy pleasure from seeing that Thomasin came to no harm on the walk back from the dance. We may conclude that though this incident may appear to be a little far-fetched if read a trifle too rapidly, it is actually very plausible.

Clym Yeobright's attack of semi-blindness is not an initial chance, for by this time the plot of the book is in full swing. So, to render it plausible, the author is obliged to prepare us in some measure for this blindness. This is the manner in which the 'preparation' is done: 'Amid these jarring events Yeobright felt one thing to be indispensable --- that he should speedily make some show of progress in his scholastic plans. With this view he read far into the small hours during many nights.

'One morning, after a severer strain than usual, he awoke with a strange sensation in his eyes. The sun was shining directly upon the window blind, at his first glance thitherward a sharp pain obliged him to close his eyelids quickly. At every new attempt to look about him the same morbid sensibility to light was manifested,

and excoriating tears ran down his cheeks. He was obliged to tie a bandage over his brow while dressing; and during the day it could not be abandoned. Eustacia was thoroughly alarmed. On finding that the case was no better the next morning they decided to send to Anglebury for a surgeon.

'Towards evening he arrived, and pronounced the disease to acute inflammation induced by Clym's night studies, continued in spite of a cold previously caught, which had weakened his eyes for a time.'

Surely a little more trouble could have been taken with development having such a far-reaching effect as this one! One almost gets the impression that here is a point which Hardy would dearly love to overleap. In one sentence at the end of the passage quoted is information in retrospect which should surely have occupied two or three pages, not in retrospect, but in preparation. The uncritical reader may encounter no difficulty in accepting this chance incident, written as it is; but I cannot see how a reader with any perception can read this passage without inevitably feeling that things are being "pushed into place" in the shortest way possible. Even after reading it for the fourth or fifth time, I cannot evade the impression that the whole affair simply drops out of the skies in a way which happens too rarely in actual life for me to accept it. On the other hand, who would question Dick Helder's blindness in Kipling's The Light that Failed. Whatever this author's failings may be --- hardness,

super-sophistication, and so on --- lack of narrative preparation is not one of them. Helder's blindness is prepared for by hints dropped here and there in the space of more than twenty pages preceding the actual catastrophe. Thus, speaking to his dog, Helder says: "' What gives a man pains across his head and spots before his eyes, Binkie?" (7) and a little later: 'He (Helgar) would have answered, but at that moment there unrolled itself from one corner of the studio a veil, as it were, of the filmiest gauze. (8) He rubbed his eyes, but the gray haze would not go.' So he visits an optician: 'As he entered the dark hall that led to the consulting room a man cannoned against him. Dick saw the face as it hurried out into the street.

" That's the writer-type. He has the same modelling of the forehead as Torp. He looks very sick. Probably heard something he didn't like."

'Even as he thought, a great fear came upon Dick, a fear that made him hold his breath as he walked into the oculist's waiting-room ... ' (9) After the oculist had made an examination 'Dick found a glass of liquor brandy in his hand.

" As far as I can gather," he said, coughing above the spirit, "you call it decay of the optic nerve, or something, and therefore hopeless. What is my time-limit#, avoiding all strain and worry?"

" Perhaps one year."

"My God! And if I don't take care of myself?"

"I really could not say. One cannot ascertain the exact amount of injury inflicted by a sword-cut. The scar is an old one, and --- exposure to the strong light of desert, did you say? --- with excessive application to fine work? I really could
(10)
not say."

It is also worth noting that the sword-cut referred to is not, like Clym's cold, a fact told the reader long after its occurrence; the incident is related earlier in the book. (11) The result of all this careful detail is that there is not the least difficulty experienced in accepting the narrative. Conversely, in Hardy's work, lack of preparation too frequently raises a doubt in the reader's mind.

The circumstances leading up to the death of Mrs. Yeobright amount to a coincidence. There are four separate chances in this incident, the fact that Mrs. Yeobright saw Clym enter his house just before she reached it; that Clym was asleep when she called; that Wildeve had called on Eustacia; and that she sees Eustacia through the window. (This seems like numbering the streaks of the tulip with a vengeance, but is necessary in such a study as this one). Naturally there is no question, at this stage in the book, as to whether or not any of these separate chances are initial.

10. The Light That Failed, p.204

11. The Light that Failed, p.32.

It is clear, then, that the author should have made some effort to make them credible. This he has done. It is quite easy to understand that Mrs. Yeobright would see Clym going home at midday from his work, for we are told that she sets out from Blooms-End at eleven o'clock, (12) to avoid the heat of the sun early in the afternoon. As the (13) distance from Blooms-End is about two hours' walk, Mrs. Yeobright would be extremely likely to come in sight of Alderworth at the time her son was returning home for lunch. Then, to explain why Clym is asleep when she calls, Hardy inserts a small paragraph in Chapter 2 (three Chapters previous): Clym's 'custom was to work from four o'clock in the morning till noon; then, when the heat of the day was at its highest, to go home and sleep for an hour or two; afterwards (14) coming out again and working till dusk at nine.' But in this case the preparatory touch is too far separated from the scene itself. Certainly a little more might have been made of Clym's rather unusual habits. Wildeve's presence is easily accounted for: we have already learned that the innkeeper's nocturnal trysts with Eustacia have been (15) somewhat pointedly ended by Diggory Venn, and that Wildeve has (16) decided to meet Eustacia openly. Finally, the fact that Mrs. Yeobright sees Eustacia through the window is a type of chance which is in itself so credible that it needs no artistic effort on the part

12. p.341. 13. p.342. 14. p.311

15. p.335 16. p.337

of the author to give it general credence. Certainly the separate chances are more or less credible. What disturbs one is their coincidence. Such a complicated incident may have actually occurred, but certainly not commonly enough to satisfy the critical reader's desire for verisimilitude. Wildeve's sudden inheritance is a chance which has been the stock device of the cheaper novelists for fifty years. It is therefore rather unfortunate that an author of Hardy's calibre should feel it necessary to resort to it. Not only has the Wessex Novelist done so, however, but he has done so without any attempt to make the intrusive factor seem plausible. Since there is no apparent alternative way of providing Eustacia with a means of escape from Egdon, I suppose the artifice must be accepted; but it strikes me as one of the most awkward bits of writing Hardy has done. Eustacia's grandfather, Captain Vye, meets her when on his way over to East Egdon: "I can't stay a minute, thank ye," he answered to her greeting. "I am driving to East Egdon; but I come round here just to tell you the news. Perhaps you have heard --- about Mr. Wildeve's fortune?"

"No," said Eustacia blankly.

"Well, he has come into a fortune of eleven thousand pounds --- uncle died in Canada, just after hearing that all his family, whom he was sending home, had gone to the bottom in the 'Cassiopeia'; so Wildeve has come into everything, without in the least expecting it." ' (17) It is an apt interjection that Wildeve's

pleasure at his good-luck is probably balanced by the reader's displeasure at reading of it: not because Wildeve does not merit the money(though that is perhaps true) but because the incident is sudden, adventitious, and consequently forced.

The final chance --- Eustacia's missing of Clym's letter --- is made so easy to believe that I cannot refrain from letting it speak for itself by quoting it; it will be remembered that the scene is Captain Vye's house, and the time is the night which Eustacia has determined for her escape with Wildeve: 'About ten o'clock there was a knock at the door. When the servant opened it the rays of the candle fell upon the form of Rairway.

"I was forced to go to Lower Mistover to-night," he said; and Mr. Yeobright asked me to leave this here on my way; but, faith, I put it in the lining of my hat, and thought no more about it till I got back and was hasping my gate before going to bed. So I have run back with it at once."

' He handed in a letter and went his way. The girl brought it to the captain, who found that it was directed to Eustacia. He turned it over and over, and fancied that the writing was her husband's, though he could not be sure. However, he deduced to let her have it at once if possible, and took it upstairs for that purpose; but on reaching the door of her room and looking in at the keyhole he found there was no light within, the fact being that Eustacia, without undressing, had flung herself upon the bed, to

rest and gather a little strength for her coming journey. Her grandfather concluded from what he saw that he ought not to disturb her; and descending again to the parlour, he placed the letter on the mantelpiece to give it to her in the morning.

' At eleven o'clock he went to bed himself, smoked for some time in his bedroom, put out his light at half-past eleven and then, as was his invariable custom, pulled up the blind before getting into bed, that he might see which way the wind blew on opening his eyes in the morning, his bedroom window commanding a view of the flagstaff and vane. Just as he had lain down he was surprised to observe the white pole of the staff flash into existence like a streak of phosphorus drawn downwards across the shade of night without. Only one explanation met this --- a light had been suddenly thrown upon the pole from the direction of the house. As everybody had retired to rest the old man felt it necessary to get out of bed, open the window softly, and look to the right and left. Eustacia's bedroom was lighted up, and it was the shine from her window which had lighted the pole. Wondering what had aroused her he remained undecided at the window, and was thinking of fetching the letter to slip it under her door, when he heard a slight brushing of garments on the partition dividing his room from the passage.

' The captain concluded that Eustacia, feeling wakeful, had gone for a book, and would have dismissed the matter as unimportant if he had not also heard her distinctly weeping.

"She is thinking of that husband of hers," he said to himself. "Ah, the silly goose! she had no business to marry him. I wonder if that letter is really his?"

'He arose, and threw his boat-cloak round him, opened the door, and said, "Eustacia! " There was no answer. "Eustacia! " he repeated louder, "there is a letter on the mantelpiece for you."

'But no response was made to this statement save an imaginary one from the wind, which seemed to gnaw at the corners of the house, and the stroke of a few drops of rain on the windows.

'He went on to the landing, and stood waiting nearly five minutes. Still she did not return. He went back for a light, and prepared to follow her; but first he looked into her bedroom. There, on the outside of the quilt, was the impression of her form, showing that the bed had not been opened; and, what was more significant, she had not taken her candlestick downstairs. He was now thoroughly alarmed; and hastily putting on his clothes he descended to the front door, which he himself had bolted and locked. It was now unfastened. There was no longer any doubt that Eustacia had left the house at this midnight hour; and whither could she have gone? To follow her was almost impossible. Had the dwelling stood in an ordinary road, two persons setting out, one in each direction, might have made sure of overtaking her; but it was a hopeless task to seek for anybody on a heath in the dark &c. Perplexed what to do he looked into the parlour, and was vexed to find that the letter still lay there untouched.'

(18)

Not very much can be said about this scene: It speaks for itself. Hardy has here made chance seem the most natural thing in the world.

To summarize: We have seen that the appearance of Venn on the heath was in itself probably not a chance at all, but that it depended on his chance presence in "The Quiet Woman," which was plausible in itself, and made more so by additional preparation on Hardy's part. Clym's blindness was, on the other hand, lacking in conviction because of too brief and perfunctory preparation, not to mention a tendency to treat the matter in retrospect. The incidents leading to Mrs. Yeobright's death, though acceptable in themselves, were hardly credible to even the most believing reader because of their strange coincidence. Wildeve's inheritance was a melo-dramatic device, and a rather awkwardly managed one to boot; while Eustacia's missing of Clym's letter was rendered seemingly most natural by skilful anticipation. Of the five incidents one is a coincidence, and extremely hard to credit; two are chances which are accepted without much difficulty; while two are chances made quite plausible by the author's efforts.

This approximately represents the ratio between easily credible chances and more or less incredible ones in the earlier works of Hardy. But it is necessary to add that, in these, a more than usually remarkable chance is generally equivalent to the coincidence in The Return of the Native: there are no other coincidences

(in the Archerian sense of the word) in Hardy's novels. Of the three major chances in Desperate Remedies: Miss Aldclyffe's engagement of her former lover's daughter; her engagement of her son; and the sudden revelation of the porter at the railway station --- the first is pure chance, without any attempt to make the matter plausible; the second is more or less credible; while the third is again hard to believe. In Under the Greenwood Tree the chance that Parson Maybold has never seen Dick Dewey and Fanny Day together, or heard of their affair, is quite incredible --- but we must not examine an idyll too closely. In A Pair of Blue Eyes the chance that Swancourt marries the one woman in whose power it lies to effect an introduction between Elfride Swancourt and Knight is very far-fetched and inadequately dealt with. Mrs. Jethway's unfortunate presence at the railway station on the return of Smith and Elfride is also unconvincing. In Far from the Madding Crowd Oak's second meeting with Bathsheba Everdene strikes one as a very unusual chance: and no effort is made to make it seem commonplace. Fanny Robin's mistake about the churches is well prepared for by a preliminary explanation of the fact that the names of the churches are confusing. Troy's sweeping out to sea is a chance which is plausible in itself: many are drowned on the dangerous Dorset coast. In The Hand of Ethelberta Chickerell's failure to prevent Ethelberta's marriage to Mountclere is sufficiently well accounted for; and Mountclere's chance observation of Sol Chickerell on the latter's visit to Ethelberta is quite plausible in itself.

The inference is, that though Hardy only once in these earlier novels uses an incredible coincidence, he frequently arouses doubt in the reader's mind by failing to prepare for the chance incidents. It is also perhaps fair to say that chance (whether prepared for or not) occurs rather too frequently in this early work to be palatable. From this it may be supposed that in a form which relies little upon chance for its development, the Hardian novel will be more convincing. This indeed turns out to be the case; for in the epic form which, dealing as it does with a single protagonist instead of three or four, requires proportionately less circumstantial accident for its development, Hardy almost entirely neglects chance. A device which further does away with necessity for chance is Hardy's treatment of the protagonist as the determinor of his own fate, instead of a being whose fate is determined by external forces.

Of the three epic novels, The Mayor of Casterbridge is the best, considered simply as an epic. It is my intention to summarize this story, interjecting remarks at certain points to show how Hardy has, by his changed method of treatment, avoided the use of chance to a very great extent. The introductory part of the book runs as follows: Michael Henchard, a young hay-trusser in search of work, is nearing Weydon Priors, in company with his wife and child. On gaining the town he finds a fair being held, and takes his family into a booth kept by a certain Mrs. Goodenough, who sells furmity, and is not above

furnishing, for a consideration, run to "lace" it with. Henchard has several basins of this furmity "laced", and becomes drunk. Then, irritated at his wife's endeavors to get him away from the place, he offers to sell her to anyone who feels disposed to buy. Edward Newson, a sailor, buys the wife and child for five guineas, and takes his new-bought family away. When Henchard wakes up, the following morning, he makes every effort to locate his lost wife and child. Unsuccessful, he swears not to touch drink for twenty years from that day.

This is the end of the prologue. Eighteen years later Mrs. Henchard and her daughter, having lost Newson the sailor (he has been reported lost at sea) seek out Henchard and find him mayor of Casterbridge. (This incident may be compared with the second meeting of Gabriel Oak and Bathsheba. It is chance which brings together these protagonists of an earlier novel: it is the will of Mrs. Henchard which brings Henchard and herself together in the latter book. The second method of effecting a reunion is far more commonplace and effective than the first). They discover that, besides being mayor of the town, Henchard is an affluent corn dealer, and is furthermore engaged to marry a young lady, Lucetta, with whom he has been carrying on an affair. Henchard, however, realizes his prime obligation to Mrs. Henchard, and breaks his engagement with Lucetta in order to re-marry his wife.

On the same evening on which Mrs. Henchard arrives at

Casterbridge, a young Scotchman named Farfrae makes his appearance there. He is instrumental in getting Henchard out of a business difficulty, and Henchard, grateful, offers him a position which the corn-dealer has already half-promised to another. Farfrae accepts, and when Jopp (the other man) arrives he finds that his place has already been filled. Jopp departs, vowing vengeance on Henchard and Farfrae.

Under Farfrae's management Henchard's business prospers, but the Scot's popularity becomes so great that the mayor is galled, and dismisses him. Farfrae sets up a business for himself at Durnover Hill.

Henchard marries his wife, and they live happily for some time. After a few months, however, Mrs. Henchard dies. She leaves behind a letter which she states is to be opened by Henchard after the marriage of Elizabeth-Jane, her daughter. The letter happens to be badly sealed, and Henchard, who is nothing if not inconsequential when so inclined, opens it, and finds that Elizabeth-Jane whom he has cherished as his daughter, is not his at all, but the child of Newson, his own daughter having died when an infant. (Here again it is seemingly Henchard's will which decides future events: not chance, as in the case of Eustacia's missing of the letter from Clym. There is no doubt, however, that the Clym-Eustacia incident is extremely well done, and is quite as convincing as the catastrophe which arises out of Henchard's action). This information embitters Henchard against

Elizabeth-Jane, and he treats her so badly that the girl decides to go and live elsewhere. She accepts an offer extended by Lucetta, and takes up lodgings with her. Farfrae, who has been courting Elizabeth-Jane, thus meets Lucetta, and transfers his affection to her. They marry.

Henchard conducts his business rashly, and is ruined. Farfrae purchases most of his effects and removes his business to Henchard's old premises: he employs Henchard as a hay-trusser. The former mayor is now living with Jopp, the man whom he erstwhile refused a half-promised position. His daughter is in lodgings.

After her marriage with Farfrae, Lucetta is anxious to get possession of the letters which she has written to Henchard, and asks the hay-trusser for them. He sends Jopp with the letters. Jopp unscrupulously opens the packet to see what is contained, and so becomes acquainted with the relations which have existed between Henchard and Lucetta. He pays a visit to a low inn called "Peter's Finger", where the scum of Casterbridge are in the habit of meeting. To some of these he tells the story of Lucetta and Henchard, and in order that he may revenge himself on Farfrae he arranges a Skimmington Ride, which is duly carried out. Lucetta sees the leading figure is intended for herself, and the shock of the public revelation kills her. (Again it is noticeable that Jopp's will decides the catastrophe, and not, as in The Return of the Native, Diggory Venn's ignorance about the ownership of the money).

One day Newson, who was erroneously reported drowned, comes to Casterbridge to claim his daughter. He interviews Henchard, who tells him she is dead. Too much shocked to linger and further pursue his enquiries, Newson departs.

Farfrae renews his attentions to Elizabeth-Jane, and marries her. Henchard goes to the marriage-feast, but receives a cold welcome from his daughter, who has discovered the deceit he practised on her father. Stung to the quick, Henchard leaves abruptly. Some two months later he is found dead on the lonely heath. (This last incident may be compared to the estrangement between Mrs. Yeobright and Clym. While Henchard voluntarily leaves his daughter's house and wanders about, careless of life, eventually to die, Mrs. Yeobright's death is caused by a chance misunderstanding.)

This story, depending as it does, not on chance, but on the various voluntary movements of the characters, has a conviction not found anywhere in his earlier novels. One can say without reservation that the tale is credible; there is no necessity to avoid scrutinizing any of the parts of the novel. What has been said of this may also be applied without reservation to Jude the Obscure, and (to a large, but not so great, extent) to Tess of the D'Urbervilles. Jude Fawley, for instance, goes back to Arabella Donn because he desires her: his actions are not governed by chance, like those ^{of} Eustacia, who elopes with Wildeve because he has suddenly come into a fortune. So, too, with Tess: she goes back

to Alec D'Urberville because she is apparently afflicted with a certain form of hereditary sexual weakness. There is naturally, some element of chance in all these novels, especially in Tess of the D'Urbervilles (for instance, her meeting with Alec D'Urberville on her return from Emminster) but not sufficient to oppress the reader with a sense of unreality. I do not think any one can deny that these three epic novels strike one as being less far-fetched than what have been termed the dramatic novels.

To sum up. It has been shown that Hardy did not use coincidence to any extent in his novels, only one example of this device being found. It was further seen that Hardy impaired the verisimilitude of his earlier books by his somewhat casual way of employing chance: by not always preparing for it sufficiently. Lastly, it has been seen that when Hardy adopts a form which does not necessitate the use of chance, he at once becomes more convincing; his novels have greater verisimilitude. It seems a safe conclusion to make that though much of the chance which Hardy uses in his earlier work is credible, enough is incredible to mar the total effect of his stories to some extent. And so, along-side Dr. Chew's statement: "Frankly, it must be admitted that Hardy often follows his natural bent towards the mysterious and improbable to the point where he overreaches himself in the employment of coincidence," may be placed an additional one: "While there is no objection to Thomas Hardy following his natural bent towards the mysterious and improbable,

he should realize the demands of narrative technique,adequate preparation. Since he has not done so consistently in his earlier novels, it is just to say that these are weakened somewhat. The later novels, owing to the fact that their structure does not demand so much pure technique, do not fall under this criticism."

This seems to be the fairest answer to the question:
"Does Hardy's use of chance and coincidence impair the verisimilitude of his novels?"

THE GROWTH OF HARDY'S METAPHYSIC IN HIS NOVELS.

That the frequent use of chance in Hardy is not due merely to lack of structural ability on his part has already been suggested. What it does chiefly owe its existence to is a very interesting study. Dr. Chew suggests Hardy's reason for utilizing chance in the concluding sentences of a passage already quoted in this essay: '... Hardy senses and in the endeavor to bring it home to the reader exaggerates the chance factor. His indictment against life is that it is so ordered that such chances as occur again and again in the novels dictate often the misery or happiness of human creatures. (1) Dr. Chew is simply saying here that chance is an integral part of Hardy's philosophy. Now the question arises: Where is Hardy's philosophy, or metaphysic expressed in his novels? Most readers of the Wessex novelist know a good deal about his view of life from reading The Dynasts; but how many have ever troubled to study the growth of that philosophy through the novels to its fullest expression in this last great work of Hardy? If we now do this, we may be rewarded, not only with the pleasure of watching a great mind fluctuate back and forth in its search for truth, but also with an explanation of the ubiquity of chance in his work.

1. See page 12.

Before beginning this study, however, a few remarks as to the method of study requisite are necessary. It is, in the first place, quite clear that we may find implicit in the various developments of plot contained in his books this philosophy of life. The fact, for instance, that Gabriel Oak chances to fall asleep in a wagon which passes by Bathsheba Everdene's burning hay-rick contains in itself a phase of Hardy's metaphysic: but ^{there is} nothing sufficiently definite about this. What we desire is a more or less explicit statement by the author himself as to what he believes to be the forces which govern this world. Statements of this kind we shall find, first, in philosophical interpolations; secondly, in passages where though no direct statement is expressed, the idea within Hardy's mind is quite obvious; thirdly, in many, but not by any means all, of the remarks which the writer's characters pass upon the riddle of existence. It is the intention in this essay to use passages of the first and second type exclusively, leaving those of the third rather severely alone. The reason is this: frequently the views expressed by the characters have a differentiating quality about them, as, of course, should be the case in all good characterization. Thus, though a character may express a view somewhat similar to the one we believe Hardy to hold, yet that character may have been made to vary that view to a very material degree, for the simple reason that Hardy naturally does not wish to have it said of

him that he uses his characters as his mouthpiece. On the other hand, in Jude the Obscure (and sometimes in Tess of the D'Urbervilles) Hardy quite obviously uses his characters to express his own particular view. But the great and almost insurmountable difficulty is to tell, even in Jude the Obscure, when it is Hardy speaking, and when Jude or Sue Bridehead. For this reason it is safest not to quote expressions of the characters themselves as examples of Hardy's metaphysic.

The difficulty in that novel in which Hardy quite frankly admits that 'the principles observed in its composition are, no doubt, too exclusively those in which mystery, entanglement, surprise, and moral obliquity are depended on for exciting interest, namely, Desperate Remedies, is to discover any passage at all which contains even the vaguest hint of Hardy's metaphysic. There is, however, a single descriptive passage near the middle of the book which contains a few ^{shadowy} ~~vague~~ but encouraging hints. The fire which is subsequently supposed to have caused the death of Manston's wife, is described thus: ' By eleven, everybody in the house was asleep. It truly seemed as if the treacherous element knew where had arisen a grand opportunity for devastation.

' At a quarter past eleven a slight stealthy crackle made itself heard amid the increasing moans of the night wind; the heap glowed brighter still, and burst into flame; the flame sank, another breeze entered it, sustained it, and it grew to be first continuous and weak, then continuous and strong.

' At twenty minutes past eleven a blast of wind carried an airy bit of ignited fern several yards forward, in a direction parallel to the houses and the inn, and there deposited it on the ground.

' Five minutes later another puff of wind carried a similar piece to a distance of five-and-twenty yards, where it also was dropped softly on the ground.

' Still the wind did not blow in the direction of the houses, and even to a casual observer they would have appeared safe. But Nature does few things directly. A minute later yet an ignited fragment fell upon the straw covering a long thatched heap or 'grave' of mangel-wurzel, lying in a direction at right angles to the house, and down toward the hedge. There the fragment faded to darkness.

' A short time subsequent to this, after many intermediate deposits and seemingly baffled attempts, another fragment fell on the mangel-wurzel grave, and continued to glow; the glow was increased by the wind; the straw caught fire and burst into flame. It was inevitable that the flame should run along the ridge of the thatch towards a piggery at the end. Yet had the piggery been tiled, the time-honoured hostel would even now at this last moment have been safe; but it was constructed as piggeries are mostly constructed, of wood and thatch. The hurdles and straw roof of the frail erection became ignited in their turn, and abutting as the shed did on the back of the inn, flamed up to the eaves of the main roof in less than

, (2)
thirty seconds.

Apart from the descriptive excellence of the above passage, there are three facts worth noting: first, that there is a tentative, yet nevertheless obvious suggestion that behind this incident may be the conscious malevolent will of a Prime Cause: 'It truly seemed as if the treacherous element knew where had arisen a grand opportunity for devastation.' Secondly, the sentence 'Nature does few things directly' seems to hint that this First Cause and Nature are one and the same. It is possible, of course, that Hardy (if, indeed, the idea has as yet any conscious form in his mind) means us to understand that Nature is simply the agent through which the Prime Cause works; but, on the face of what is written, we may suppose that the two - the Prime Cause and Nature - are one and the same. Thirdly, the fact that the sparks are 'successful' in eventually setting fire to the inn despite several failures, suggests that the Prime Cause, whether it is identical with Nature or not, is not only conscious and evil, but is in addition indefatigable, remorseless, inevitable.

There is little other philosophical comment, direct or indirect, - certainly none of any greater significance than the passage just quoted - in this, the earliest of Hardy's novels. Nor, for that matter, is there very much in the idyll which followed it, Under the Greenwood Tree. In this book Hardy is completely concerned in relating the story, and only once or twice draws attention to the undercurrent - most notably in this excerpt:

2. Desperate Remedies, p.204.

' A single vast grey 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 fields and plantations writhed like miserable men as the air wound its way swiftly among them: the lowest portions of their trunks, that had hardly even 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 .⁽³⁾ One is inclined to think that Hardy has now definitely made up his mind as to whether or not Nature (that is, natural phenomena collectively) is identical with the Prime Cause. Here is a fairly explicit passage showing that the trees are troubled by a force superior to them. It may be said with justice that the wind is a natural phenomenon itself, and that, rather than show that Nature is subject to a supernatural force, this excerpt merely shows the conflict between two natural phenomena. But I believe that Hardy, like all other men, has a sub-conscious feeling that the wind is the special agent of a superior Prime Cause, and not to be regarded merely as one of the phenomenons of Nature. There is something intangible, ghostly, about the wind which produces almost irresistibly the feeling that it has nothing in common with trees, rocks, and the earth. It is worthy of remark that another note is lightly touched upon in the sentence: '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.' Hardy, for the first time, suggests that there may be mutual sympathy between Nature, the sufferer, and Man, the sufferer. Thus the first link in Hardy's chain of philosophy is forged; though not very firmly forged, of course, and quite likely to become broken at the imposition of the slightest pressure.

Peculiarly enough, the fact that Hardy's metaphysic had not only failed as yet to become formalized, but was even an inconsistent quantity, is evinced in his third book which is really his first notable work - A Pair of Blue Eyes. The book is written in an easy and rather delightfully swift style, and this is, as will be obvious, not particularly suitable for philosophic reflection. So we would hardly expect to receive much help in a study of Hardy's metaphysic from a reading of this book and this indeed is the case. But there is one particular scene which suggests that the various phenomena of Nature instead of being subject to the rule of the First Cause, consciously struggle the one against the other for superiority. 'The inveterate antagonism of these black precipices to all strugglers for life is in no way more forcibly suggested than by the paucity of tufts of grass, lichens, or confervae on their outermost edges. (4) Here the shrubs are described as fighting against a fellow - phenomenon, the precipice, for their lives - not against a superior force which controls both the precipice and the shrubs. Shortly after this passage Hardy seems to go back to the original concept - that the Cause controls the fate of all natural phenomena: 'Nature seems to have moods in

other than a poetical sense; predilections for certain deeds at certain times, without any apparent law to govern or season to account for them. She is read as a person with a curious temper; as one who does not scatter kindnesses and cruelties alternately, unpartially and in order, but heartless severities or overwhelming generousities in lawless caprice. Man's case is always that of the prodigal's favorite or the miser's pensioner. In her unfriendly moments there seems a feline fun in her tricks, begotten by a foretaste of her pleasure in swallowing the victim.⁽⁵⁾ As a matter of fact, there is no inconsistency between the two views. Hardy's vision, assisted perhaps by a perusal of the evolutionist theories which so profoundly affected the later Victorian literature, has widened: he sees that not only may there be a Cause controlling the phenomena of life, but that the phenomena themselves may also have a certain amount of will. They may, though in a far less degree, be imbued with power to fight for their existence. And there is a further point to be noted in connection with the second passage: Hardy is quite obviously becoming struck with the seemingly lawlessness of life and all its concomitants: 'Nature seems to have v.. predilections for certain deeds at certain times, without any apparent law to govern or season to account for them.' This is an entirely new and contradictory note; it is the expression of a view quite the opposite to what is implied in the rest of the passage - in fact, quite different from anything Hardy has as yet said in connection with what Meredith terms ~~his terms~~ his 'twilight view of life.' It is the expression

of a doubt as to whether the Prime Cause has really any very definite idea as to what it is doing with the world. That this doubt develops into a further embellishment of the Hardian philosophy we shall see in due time.

There is perhaps less philosophic interpolation in that most delightful book, Far from the Madding Crowd, than there is in Under the Greenwood Tree. Hardy, as also in a later work, The Trumpet Major, devotes little time to his philosophical asides. It is the story which concerns him primarily. What little metaphysical interjection occurs in the book marks no advance in thought on that which we find in A Pair of Blue Eyes.

The Hand of Ethelberta is written with rather too rapid a pen to tend itself to direct philosophic reflection. The novel was submitted serially to a magazine and, except for a rather delightful opening, is almost as poor stuff as is found in the average magazine of to-day. Only once is there a faint hint of the undercurrent: This occurs when Ethelberta has made, and failed in, her attempt to escape from Lord Mountclere, her somewhat ancient and very disagreeable husband. As Ethelberta drives home in the carriage with Mountclere 'the large trees on either hand became interspersed by a low brushwood of various sorts, from which a large bird occasionally flew, in its affright at their presence beating its wings recklessly against the hard stems with force enough to cripple the delicate quills.' (6)

With a little imagination the action of the bird may be compared to that of Ethelberta, who has, in her distress and affright, attempted unsuccessfully to beat her way out of a virtual prison. The element of sympathetic suffering between man and Nature at the hands of a malevolent First Cause is seemingly still Hardy's concept of the universe.

The difference in tone between The Hand of Ethelberta and the book which followed it is almost too great to be comprehensible.

The Return of the Native is a work full of sombre deep thought, some of it suggested, and some of it directly expressed. A great deal of time could be spent on the frequent philosophic passages of this work, but the purpose of this essay is served in studying one or two characteristic and significant passages. The first of these is contained in the magnificent organ-like opening of the book: 'The place became full of 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 waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis - the final overthrow.

' It was a spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it with an aspect of peculiar and kindly congruity. Smiling champaigns of flowers and fruit hardly do this, for they are permanently harmonious only with an existence of better reputation as

to its issues than the present. Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity. The qualifications which frequently invest the facade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the facade of a palace double its size lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting. Fair prospects wed happily with fair times; but alas, if times be not fair! Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings over-sadly tinged. 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.

' Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Temple may be a gaunt waste in Thule: human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing **sombreness** distasteful to our race when it is young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind, and, ultimately, to the commonest tourist, spots like Iceland may become what the vineyards and myrtle-gardens of Southern Europe are to him now; and Heidelberg and Baden be passed unheeded as he

hastens from the Alps to the Sand-Dunes of Scheveningen

' It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature - neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like 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 lonely face, suggesting
(7)
Logical possibilities.

It will be seen that Hardy's philosophy is now reaching a fully coherent stage. Egdon is described as being the epitome of all natural phenomena, and for that reason embracing man in its sufferings. There is sympathy, harmony, between Nature and Man: Man receives the impulse for all his moods from Nature. When Nature is gay, Man is inclined to be happy; when Man sees Nature sombre, he tends to become thoughtful, morose: and Hardy conjectures that Man of the present day is perhaps more contented in this sombre heavy frame of mind. But no matter what Man's mood, he is always dependent upon Nature for its inspiration; he is an integral part of Nature.

So far there is nothing radically different in Hardy's view. Nature and Man are co-sufferers at the mercy of the Prime Cause. But there is a sentence which shows that the germ of the idea which first appeared in A Pair of Blue Eyes is growing slowly but surely: ' 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 could only be imagined to await one last crisis - the final overthrow.' The significant word, of course is 'unmoved.' Hardy, at this stage in his search for the truth concerning the Prime Cause, is imbued with the idea that this great force must be conscious of the weal and woe which its impulses produce, yet quite impassive, quite unmoved, as to this tragedy. This idea is emphasized further on in the book: Clym Yecbright, in the midst of his trouble, is seized with a strong consciousness of vast impassivity' (8) in all which lies about him on the Heath.' This slowly-developing idea is, when carried a little further (as it is later) the final and complementary phase of Hardy's philosophy. He has shown by this time that he is quite convinced that Man and Nature suffer together under the dictates or impulse of an inexorable First Cause; he is now attempting to arrive at some logical and satisfactory conclusion as to the nature of that Cause. In The Return of the Native his philosophy is coherent, but not quite as fully developed as it is destined to become.

The Trumpet Major again displays Hardy in a non-reflective mood. The book proceeds in a vigorous and attractive manner to its end: not once does Hardy stop to draw conclusions; not once does he write a sentence in which any part of his philosophy is implicit. He is concerned with writing a narrative, and from this point of view alone, he never wrote a better: The Trumpet Major is the best-told of

all his books - but it is not characteristically Hardian. The reflective mood, though it has many opportunities to insinuate itself, notably when Bob and John Loveday kill sheep in the garden, (9) and when Anne is on the Beal alone, (10) - does not make its appearance.

On the other hand, the book which follows The Trumpet Major gives the reader the impression, in its first pages, of being dedicated to philosophy. The first chapter of A Laodicean contains a good deal of Hardy's reflection on life in general. There is, however, only one passage which is really significant for our examination, and to this too much importance cannot be attached: 'It is an old story, and perhaps only deserves the light tone in which the soaring of a young man into the empyrean and his descent again, is always narrated. But as has often been said, the light and the truth may be on the side of the dreamer; a far wider view than the wise ones have may be his at the recalcitrant time, and his reduction to a common measure may be nothing less than a tragic event. The operation called lunging, in which a haltered colt is made to trot round and round as horsebreaker who holds the rope, till the beholder grows dizzy in looking at them, is a very unhappy one for the animal concerned. During its progress the colt springs upward, across the circle, stops, flies over the turf with the velocity of a bird, and indulges in all sorts of graceful antics; but he always ends in one way - thanks to

9. The Trumpet Major p.164.

10. The Trumpet Major p.314.

the knotted whipcord - in a level trot round the lunger with the regularity of a horizontal wheel, and in the loss forever to his character and the bold contours which the find hand of Nature gave it. Yet the process is considered the making of him.' " It seems as if Hardy has again reverted to the idea that the destiny of Man is controlled by a consciously malevolent force, and not a merely indifferent one. But it is not desirable to pursue the argument too far. It is quite possible that Hardy at this stage in his career had little conscious idea of what his philosophy really was. The idea was there, and was fairly consistent, but like all ideas of the kind, did not demand a mathematical exactitude of interpretation. Hardy's simile seems to me a rather striking one, however, and deserves mention in connection with his metaphysic. Far more significant is a sentence which comes a good deal further on in the book: Referring to some storks which are flying about above Charlotte de Staney and Panla Power, Hardy writes: 'The birds were crossing and recrossing the field of the glass in their flight hither and thither between the Strassburg chimneys, their sad grey forms sharply outlined against the sky, and their skinny legs showing beneath like the limbs of dead martyrs in Crivelli's emaciated imaginings. The indifference of these birds to all that was going on beneath them impressed her: to harmonize with their solemn and silent movements the houses beneath should have been deserted, and the grass growing in the streets.'⁽¹²⁾ In this passage the storks are of course

symbolic of the First Cause, which is so indifferent (in Hardy's view) to all the desolation, sorrow, and agony of the world beneath. What is worth noting is that this idea is not in any way different from that which is expressed frequently in The Return of the Native. The passage, which is the only one of its kind in the book is proof that Hardy had proceeded no further as yet in his philosophic development, he still imagines the Prime Cause as a conscious, if indifferent, force.

Nor is there any perceptible advance in Two on Tower.^a Actually, Hardy seems to have gone back in no uncertain manner to his original idea of Prime Cause. In this book he treats it as conscious and malevolent, not conscious and impassive as he does in The Return of the Native. An excerpt which shows Hardy quite definitely conceiving the Unknown to be malevolent occurs fairly early in the book; Swithin St Cleeve and Lady Constantine are in the Rings-Hill Speer one windy night, when a strong wind springs up. Swithin, by way of calming any fears that Lady Constantine may have as regards the safety of their position, informs her that the wind can do the tower no harm. 'And, as if to stultify Swithin assumption, a circular hurricane, exceeding inviolence any that had preceded it, seized hold upon Rings-Hill Speer at that moment with the determination of a conscious agent. The first sensation of resulting catastrophe was conveyed to their intelligence by the flapping of the candle-flame against the lantern-glass; then the wind, which hitherto they had heard rather than felt, rubbed past them like a fugitive. Swathin beheld around and above him, in place of the concavity

of the dome, the open heaven, with its racing clouds, remote horizon, and intermittent gleam of stars. The dome that had covered the tower had been whirled bodily off; and they heard it descend crashing upon the trees ...

' Having executed its grotesque purpose, the wind sank to
(13)
comparative mildness.'

And again, towards the close of the book, of Lady Constantine in her embarrassment Hardy says: 'Nature was forcing her hand at this game; and to what will not Nature compel her weaker victims, in extremes?' 'Nature' is obviously synonymous with the 'First Cause' here. In both passages the dominant idea is that the First Cause, working through a natural medium in each case, is not merely conscious of the woe it inflicts upon Man and Nature, but is desirous of inflicting this pain: a concept which varies a shade or two from metaphysic expressed in The Return of the Native. The fair conclusion to draw from this vacillation between the First Cause as active or passive is that Hardy was gradually approaching the stage when, consciously or more or less consciously, he was about to accept the one idea or the other: the belief either that the First Cause is sentient or that it is impassive. It is quite probable that from now on Hardy will definitely adopt the one view or the other: at this particular stage it seems as if he is inclined to adopt the view of the Prime Cause sentient as final.

Strangely enough, The Mayor of Casterbridge, which appeared some four years after Two on a Tower, shows a trend of philosophic thought seemingly different from that of the book immediately preceding it; seemingly different, in fact, from anything Hardy had as yet done. The novelist had evidently decided that his next work would be an innovation; so he formed it on the Aristotelian principle - 'Man is his own destiny.' Naturally the evil influence of the Prime Cause is somewhat neglected in such a work, unless the faults of the protagonists (which cause their downfall) be attributed to this force: an entirely logical proceeding, of course, but not very perfectly appreciated by even the most fatalistic mind. We do not often connect a drunkard's drunkenness with weaknesses that God has placed in the man, but rather to weakness which the drunkard in question has encouraged by his lack of effort. So it is with Michael Henchard: (14) although the Prime Cause has a good deal to do with his fall, Hardy never mentions the force in this connection. For instance, when owing to adverse weather conditions, Henchard is ruined, Hardy says not a word about a conscious and malevolent Cause which brings about this catastrophe. It may be inferred that Hardy really does believe that the Prime Cause is responsible, but that he does not wish to emphasize the point - for a particular reason. The reason is that he wishes to draw attention to the significance of the weaker will, the will of Man in life. The will of the Prime Cause is still very

14. The Mayor of Casterbridge, pp.220-230.

much in evidence, but in no specific way; the will of man, far weaker, is emphasized. The result, of course, is terrific irony; for we see Man choosing his own fate, and we feel that he is really not doing anything of the kind: that he is still obeying the dictates of a superior Will. The lash in the tail of the following passage effects Hardy's ironic purpose finely: Henchard awakes to the fact that his wife has really left him for Newson, the sailor - ' He rose and walked to the entrance with the careful tread of one conscious of his alcoholic load. Some others followed, and they stood looking into the twilight. The difference between the peacefulness of inferior nature and the wilful hostilities of mankind was very apparent at this place. In contrast with the harshness of the act just ended within the tent was the sight of several horses crossing their necks and rubbing each other lovingly as they waited in patience to be harnessed for the homeward journey. Outside the fair, in the valleys and woods, all was quiet. The sun had recently set, and the west heaven was hung with a rosy cloud, which seemed permanent, yet slowly changed. To watch it was like looking at some grand feat of stagery from a darkened auditorium. In the presence of this scene, after the other, there was a natural instinct to abjure man as the blot on an otherwise kindly universe; till it was remembered that all terrestrial conditions were intermittent, and that mankind might some night be innocently sleeping when these quiet objects were raging loud.'

(15)

For a moment one is led to believe that Hardy conceives Man to be the chief disturbing factor in this world; and immediately afterwards that belief is shown to be ill-founded: The Prime Cause is the dominant factor - first, last, always.

It is clear that in varying the stress of his philosophy Hardy does not actually add anything to it. Although he has struck a somewhat different chord, the instrument is keyed in exactly the same fashion as it was before he played the philosophical fugue of Two on a Tower; there is no change in Hardy's metaphysic, or at least there is no expressed change. We shall have to proceed to his next book to see if there has been any divergence in his view of the relation of things.

The Woodlanders shows no farther development in the basic ideas of Hardy's philosophy. It does, however, develop a certain phase of it to the full: the close relation between Man and Nature is very beautifully and very emphatically shown. The tree-planting scene (16) has more than the obvious purpose of displaying the close sympathy between Giles Winterborne and Marty South through a common medium; it also makes the man, who is not inclined to study natural phenomena very closely, conscious of the extraordinary harmony between himself and what he had hitherto considered as practically inanimate forms of life. Such a passage as the following shows that Hardy, at least, has managed to identify himself with Nature to an extraordinary degree: 'The casual glimpses which the ordinary population bestowed upon that wondrous world of sap and leaves called the Hinlock woods had been with these two, Giles and Marty, a clear

gaze. They had been possessed of its finer mysteries as of commonplace knowledge; had been able to read its hieroglyphics as ordinary writing; to them the sights and sounds of night, winter, wind, storm amid those dense boughs, which had to grace a touch of the uncanny, and even the supernatural, were simple touches, occurrences whose origin, continuance, and laws they foreknew. They had planted together, and together they had felled; together they had, with the run of years, mentally collected those remoter signs and symbols which, seen in few, were of runic obscurity, but all together made an alphabet. From the light lashing of the twigs upon their faces, when brushing through them in the dark, they could ^{on}pronounce upon the species of the tree whence they stretched; from the quality of the wind's murmur through a bough they could in like manner name its sort afar off. They knew by a glance at a trunk if its heart were sound, or tainted with incipient decay, and by the state of its upper wings the stratum that had been reached by its roots. The artifices of the seasons were seen by them from the conjuror's own point of view, and not from that of the spectators.' So, too, could Hardy see from the conjuror's point, though perhaps he could not have been so familiar with the forest as these two children of nature; and, seeing, he realized to the full the close connection between human life and all other earthly life.

But apart from this amplification of a particular phase of his philosophy, Hardy adds nothing to the metaphysic expressed in Two on a Tower. Indeed, the similarity between one passage already-quoted in the above book and another in The Woodlanders is quite

striking. The wind, which blows round the poor shelter Giles has surrendered over to Grace Melbury when she gets lost in her flight from Fitzpiers, is given the same personality, is described as having much the same conscious and vindictive attributes as that which tears the roof off Rings-Hill Speer: 'No sooner had she retired to rest that night than the wind began to rise, and, after a few prefatory blasts, to be accompanied by rain. The rain grew more and more violent, and as the storm went on, it was difficult to believe that no opaque body, but only an invisible colorless thing, was trampling and climbing over the roof, making branches creak, springing out of the trees upon the chimney, popping its head into the flue, and shrieking and blaspheming at every corner of the walls. As in the old story, the assailant was a spectre which could be felt but not seen.' (17) And not only the wind has been seized by that devil with another name - The First Cause - but the boughs of the trees also fall under its malignant spell: 'Sometimes a bough from an adjoining tree was swayed so low as to smite the roof in the manner of a gigantic hand smiting the mouth of an adversary, to be followed by a trickle of blood, as blood from the wound.' (18) The description just quoted is of course far more vivid and gripping than its parallel in Two on a Tower, but the idea at the root of it is in no way different: the metaphysic has not changed. It seems after all, as if Hardy, when he had finished The Return of the Native, did not arrive at any definite conclusion as to which metaphysic

17. The Woodlanders p.327.

18. The Woodlanders pp.304-305

seemed to be most characteristic of life - the idea of Man and Nature suffering together under a sentient First Cause, or as suffering together under an impassible First Cause. That he momentarily inclined to the former interpretation in Two on a Tower has already been suggested. But it is fairly clear that he gave over attempting to solve the question while writing The Mayor of Casterbridge and The Woodlanders. It may be that he has now reached the end of his tether in his search after a true philosophy; and again it may be that there has been, in the mean time, a slow but sure development in his mind of the full metaphysical bloom. Whether this is so or not remains yet to be seen in this essay.

But Tess of the D'Urbervilles gives no inkling of new development in the Hardian philosophy. The only noticeable feature in this great book is that the philosophy, or rather, the view of life becomes more impassioned, more bitter, more vehement. Hardy, leaving quiescence, protests against the great Cause which forces us to come into this world against our will through the agency of our parents: 'All these young souls were passengers in the D'Urbeysfield ship - entirely dependent upon the judgment of the two D'Urbeysfield adults for their pleasures, their necessities, their health, even their existence. If the heads of the D'Urbeysfield house chose to sail into difficulty, disaster, starvation, disease, degradation, death, thither were those little captives under hatches compelled to sail with them - six helpless creatures, who had never been asked if they wished for life on any terms, much less if they wished for it on such hard conditions as were involved in being of the shiftless house of D'Urbeysfield.'

Some people would like to know whence the poet whose philosophy is in these days deemed as profound and trustworthy as his song is sweet and pure, gets his authority for speaking of "Nature's holy plan" (19) Nature, of course, in the Wordsworthian sense being equivalent to Hardy's First Cause - a term which, incidentally, he uses for the first time, in this book: 'This consciousness upon which he had intruded was the single opportunity of existence ever vouchsafed to Tess by an unsympathetic First Cause - . ' (20) It will be seen quite clearly that there is nothing radically different in the view which Hardy expresses in the first-quoted paragraph. The point of view happens to be similar to that in the Mayor of Casterbridge, - a view which reveals mankind responsible to a large extent for the trials and tribulations of the world: the parents of the D'Urbeyfield children are blamed as being the immediate cause for the unhappy existence of the latter, but impulse is, as always, attributed to the First Cause.

We may pass over The Well-Beloved, which is not significant in regard to this essay, and proceed to Hardy's much-criticized, and too frequently maligned Jude the Obscure. The first part of this novel shows no new trend of philosophic idea. The tone is much the same as that in 'Tess.' Hardy seems at times to lose his Olympian point of view and criticize mankind for those very weaknesses which, he has taken the trouble to show mankind is not responsible for: the creation of a human, and therefore fallible, social fabric.

19. Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p.21

20. Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p.174

Thus Hardy spends much time in commenting upon the anomaly of Nature and Man-made laws. But this digressive trend on Hardy's part is not what concerns us nearly so much as that, towards the end of his book, he arrives at the full close of his metaphysical enquiry. Instead of continuing to see Man and Nature as sufferers under a malignant and percipient First Cause, he suddenly comes to the conclusion that they are fellow-sufferers under the yoke of an impercipient force, which is naturally, being impercipient, not malevolent: 'The First Cause worked automatically like a somnambulist, and not reflectively like a sage; ... at the framing of the terrestrial conditions there seemed never to have been contemplated such a development of emotional perceptiveness among creatures subject to those conditions as that reached by thinking and educated humanity. But affliction makes opposing forces loom anthropomorph^ous ...' (21) Here is the final, triumphant expression of Hardy's philosophy, a view of life towards which he has been progressing inevitably from the writing of his first novel. It is truly a philosophy, for there is nothing antagonistic about it: all has now been perceived to be the result of the impulse of forces unseeing, unknowing - of what use to complain? They will not hear: they cannot hear; neither can they feel. Then, protest being futile, let us be resigned: this is the true philosophic theory and mood.

And now to summarize: Desperate Remedies lightly touches the idea that Nature, which is apparently cognate with the First Cause,

21. Jude the Obscure, p.431.

is malevolent and percipient. This idea is changed a little in Under the Greenwood Tree: Nature (natural phenomena) is linked with man under the sway of the First Cause. This idea remains undisturbed through the next three volumes, except for a passage in A Pair of Blue Eyes remarking the lack of order in the universe. In The Return of the Native the relation between Man and Nature is more strongly emphasized, and the idea contained in A Pair of Blue Eyes - that the First Cause seems to have no order about its impulses - is carried a little further along its way by the suggestion that the First Cause is perhaps impassive. For several books after The Return of the Native this idea is apparently relinquished, and it seems as if Hardy is content to believe in the First Cause as active and malevolent rather than impassive. But towards the close of Jude the Obscure a great light breaks upon him; and he realizes that the true logic of his philosophy is expressed in the view that the First Cause must be not only impassive, but insentient and impercipient.

The final and supplementary question arises: what is there in Hardy's metaphysic which sanctions the use of chance in the Wessex novels? The answer is not very difficult: it is not hard to see that, as far as the novels are concerned, the philosophy which lies at the base of their structure is that which conceives the First Cause to be more or less active, and certainly malevolent. It is quite clear, in other words, that the philosophy expressed in

the latter part of Hardy's last book could hardly be
effect in the working-out of these novels which have been
If then, the structure of the novels is influenced by a conception
of the First Cause as active and malevolent, the use of chance in
them is a most natural artistic device. For it is apparent that if we
mortals are ruled, not by a kindly but by a malevolent First Cause,
the smooth course of our lives will be constantly troubled by the
machinations of this malignant ruling force; and this is precisely
the idea which Hardy, by his use of chance, conveys to the reader.

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