THE SHORT STORIES OF THOMAS HARDY : A CRITICAL STUDY

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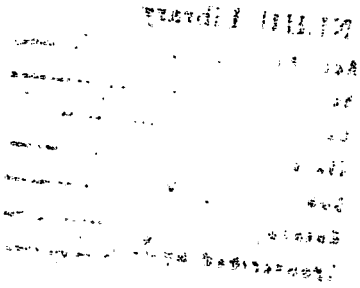

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation "The Short Stories of Thomas Hardy: A Critical Study" submitted by Jayashree Goswami in partial fulfilment of the degree of Master of Philosophy to the Department of English, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong is a record of bonafide research work carried out by her under my supervision and guidance. The results embodied in the dissertation have not been submitted to any other University or Institute for the award of any degree or diploma.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Thomas Hardy was a writer of a wide creative range. In his long literary career he produced work which varied greatly in kind and quality. He wrote essays, novels, poetry, drama and short stories. It is said that the better part of his biography written by his second wife Florence Emily Hardy was dictated by Hardy himself. Most of Hardy's writings have received scholarly attention and acclaim. His novels have been the subject of scrutiny ever since they first appeared. His poems have received the recognition he always wanted them to have. His philosophic poetic drama THE DYNASTS : A DRAMA OF THE NAPOLEONIC WARS has received its share of attention and is considered to be a major achievement in English literature for its technical competence. And as far Hardy, the man, his life and personality have been considered interesting enough to continue to be explored by critics and biographers.

Comparatively, Thomas Hardy's short stories have been treated rather gingerly. They have been ignored by readers and have received very little attention and dismissive treatment at the hands of most commentators. The fact

that Hardy wrote short stories is seldom quoted in the histories of literature. His short stories are not often read by the general reading public today. This is amazing as Hardy's short stories are very interesting and readable and can be easily obtained. So it is hard to understand why Hardy's stories are overlooked considering that the short story has established itself as a popular and an important form of literature. It is not that Hardy wrote sub-standard short stories undeserving serious attention. In fact, Hardy's short stories constitute an important and sizeable portion of his _ouvre_.

Then why is it that Hardy's short stories are hardly ever mentioned in studies of his fiction? During Hardy's time his short stories were much in demand although then the short story "was very unpopular" in England and "library customers would refuse collections of them with something like indignation or disgust".[1] But what is remarkable is that even during such times his stories were popular, especially in America, as is obvious from the fact that almost all his short stories were written in response to requests from the editors of well known magazines. That Hardy wrote so many short stories and got them published is proof enough of their quality and popularity. There has been a general tendency to consider Hardy as a short story writer _manqué_, a writer who was experimenting with an unfamiliar genre. This impression is entirely

baseless since some of Hardy's first attempts in fiction were short stories and he began to write more and more short stories as he felt increasingly free to write whatever he pleased after he had established himself as a novelist.

Hardy wrote over forty short stories of great diversity in length simultaneously with his major fiction in between the years 1874 and 1900. Most of the stories he later collected in four volumes of the Wessex editions. The four volumes are WESSEX TALES, A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES, LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES and A CHANGED MAN AND OTHER TALES. Hardy took great care in organising his stories into volumes. He did not choose stories at random and place them in different volumes. His collections demonstrate his awareness of the themes and techniques that draw together and unite his otherwise different narratives into artistic wholes. Commenting on the collection of the short stories into volumes, Hardy wrote in a cancelled prefatory note to A CHANGED MAN AND OTHER TALES :

> ".....They would probably have never been collected by me at this time of day if frequent reprints of some of them in America and elsewhere had not sent many readers enquiring for them in a volume".[2]

Hardy's comment is proof enough of the widespread popularity of his short stories.

Writing about his stories some critics have said that Hardy himself did not rate them very high. Irving Howe wrote that Hardy seemed to have regarded the writing of his stories as a means to earn a living and his sole desire in writing them was to please a large and varied audience.[3] He had to keep in mind the susceptibilities of his Victorian readers and exercise great caution so as not to offend their taste. He had to take care that the stories were not only commercially successful but also artistically satisfying to the creator in him. Hardy had to face a lot of difficulties initially in getting his stories accepted but not only did he overcome these difficulties and get his stories published but he also got intelligent response from the readers. Because Hardy wrote his stories in response to requests made by the editors of magazines and for money critics find them very hastily and carelessly produced. But a study of the history of the publication of his stories reveals that this is not true. Hardy was in the habit of sketching an outline for his stories which he would later expand. Besides he took great care in revising and arranging and re-arranging his stories. He took as much interest in writing his short stories as he did in writing his other works. He very reluctantly responded to the demands made on him by the "Grundyist" and readers to bowdlerize his stories. If ever he was asked to make alterations of any sort in his stories he spared no pains to tell his readers

that he had been forced to bring about the changes much against his will. Therefore, it would be wrong to treat the stories as mere hack-work. That Hardy did not take his short stories seriously is indeed a myth. On the contrary he rated his stories quite high as can be seen in the following information :

> "....with somewhat uncharacteristic aplomb Hardy inscribed copies of each of the four volumes of short stories to his literary friends. He presented copies of WESSEX TALES to Browning on his birthday and to Meredith. Similiarly, he inscribed copies of A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES in the first week of its publication to Edward Clodd, Sir George Douglas, Theodre Watts and Edmund Gosse; copies of LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES to Gosse, the Earl of Pembrooke and Sir Francis Jeune and of A CHANGED MAN AND OTHER TALES to Edward Clodd and Edmund Gosse. This at least establishes the respectability of the stories in Hardy's own reckoning".[4]

Irrespective of Hardy's own opinion of his short stories there has been a general tendency to ignore them. Hardy wrote nearly fifty short stories and most of these stories are entertaining and worth reading as imaginative and vivid comments on the human situation. But the stories are not uniformly good. No one can quarrel with the view that some of the stories "resemble anecdotes and others are like the synopses of full length novels"[5] and often there are to be found in them passages which have been carelessly written. Within his short stories there are subjects, images, themes, patterns and techniques which are repeated over and over again. His stories have been considered to be serviceable products for magazines only and not worth considering

in terms of literary merits. But if we approach them with an unbiased mind we will find that some of his stories - "Our Exploits at West Poley", "Old Mrs. Chundle", "An Imaginative Woman", "The Withered Arm" to name a few - are fine examples of this genre and deserve serious consideration. There are others like "The Son's Veto", "The Three Strangers" and a few of the sketches in "A Few Crusted Characters" which are masterpieces of this form. So it is rather regretable that Hardy's short stories have been ignored on the grounds that they are not uniformly good especially since some of them have found their way into anthologies of short stories along with the greatest writers of this form - masters like Chekhov, Poe, Maupassant, Hemingway and Joyce.

Why is it then that the short stories of Hardy have remained obscure ? One of the reasons could be that they have not received the critical attention that they deserve. They have been treated rather summarily. In contrast to the whole body of criticism in existence today on Hardy the man, novelist and poet there is very little on his short stories. His stories have never been seriously considered except as an annexe to his major fictional works. Ofcourse, references have been made now and then to his stories ever since they first appeared. One such comment reads :

> "....if he produced nothing but the stories what an abounding legacy of human histories he would have left behind him".[6]

George Wing, A.J.Guerard, Norman Page, Douglas Brown, Irving Howe, Kristin Brady and Dr. Nosrul Hasan are a few critics who have touched upon the short stories. But even their studies have certain limitations. They have restricted their discussions to the study of only a few of the more popular stories and they do not offer more than a few suggestive remarks. Their studies consist at best of a single chapter in an otherwise book length study of Hardy and his novels. Douglas Brown devotes a section to Hardy's short stories but sparingly refers only to "The Son's Veto", "Our Exploits at West Poley" and "The Fiddler of the Reels". A.J. Guerard has treated the stories illuminatingly and purposefully but he has not handled the stories systematically. His references to the stories are somewhat casual, random and scattered. While Norman Page, Douglas Brown, George Wing and Irving Howe have discussed the stories seriously and have pointed out their importance their discussions however are restricted to a detailed analysis of very few of the stories, leaving the majority of them untouched. Dr. Nosrul Hasan has treated with deference and very comprehensively the few stories that he has selected for discussion, but he has also restricted himself to only eight out of the forty odd stories that Hardy wrote, choosing five stories from WESSEX TALES, two from LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES and the uncollected piece of children fiction, "Our Exploits at West Poley" leaving completely

untouched the two volumes A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES and A CHANGED MAN AND OTHER TALES. Kristin Brady's THE SHORT STORIES OF THOMAS HARDY is the only book length study in existence today on this neglected sphere of Hardy's work.

Whatever be the attitude of the critics towards his stories, one thing is obvious - Hardy's stories deserve far more attention than they have been getting not merely on the basis of their individual merits but also because they throw a reflective light on the rest of his works. The influence of the novels which he was writing simultaneously with his short stories is distinctly visible in them. Themes found in the novels are repeated and Hardy's interest in the grotesque, macabre, ironic and supernatural is to be seen over and over again in the stories. Many of his stories foreshadow or echo his novels and they read like fragments off them. Sometimes they are like exercises in sketching the figures and locale of his more ambitious books. Even those stories which are considered to be failures are interesting because they have all the traits characteristic of Hardy and fail in such a typically Hardyan way that they contribute towards a better understanding of his art and technique. But this does not mean that we should read the stories only because they make us understand his other works better. The stories deserve to be read because they are good reading material and because they are good literature in their own right.

Hardy is a very good story teller and even in those stories where he fails he has an interesting narrative. His story telling capacity is such that he can hold the attention of children and adults alike. But what is best about Hardy's stories is that they do not intimidate the reader. The philosophising, the syntactical mannerisms, the archaisms, the convolutions and the abstract and learned references which are found in abundance in his novels are entirely absent from his stories. The thing he is concerned with most in his stories is telling a tale and he does this incredibly well, in a manner which is in keeping with his subject. The style is direct and lucid and is capable of captivating the reader's attention. Characterisation is as good as the short story form permits. There is to be found in these stories descriptive writing and scene painting which will compare with the best in English literature. The stories are marked by economy, restraint and simplicity. He tells stories of rural life, mostly, but with a kind of sophistication which is peculiarly his.

Hardy did not have to grope and struggle to establish himself as a short story writer as he had to do as a novelist. He wrote his first short story "Destiny and a Blue Cloak" as early as 1874 and his last "Enter a Dragoon" was written in 1900. Thus we can see that Hardy's career as a short story writer extended over a period of twenty six

years. Although his short stories are considered to be his "minor" works he did not write them towards the beginning of his career. Nor were his best stories concentrated towards the end of his career. We find good as well as bad examples of short stories scattered throughout his career. "The Distracted Preacher" (1879) one of the earliest of Hardy's short stories is also one of the most flawless. When Hardy was struggling to discover the art of writing novels he was writing authentic short stories. There are fine moments even in his most flawed stories.

In essence, Hardy's short stories are closer to the expansive and oral tradition than to the modern form. At the time when Hardy was writing his short stories this genre was just beginning to be accepted in England. Hardy was writing during a period which had just switched from the myths, legends, fables, parables, allegory, tales and ballads to what we have come to know as the short story proper. The short story as a literary form was still in the process of development. It is, therefore, only natural to find in Hardy's short stories elements of the tale and the ballad.

It is difficult to classify Hardy's short fiction. Are they tales, ballads or short stories ? Hardy himself used the terms story and tale interchangeably and he was not wrong in doing so for as Irving Howe says, "Between story and tale there is, of course, no inseperable barrier....." But for the sake of discussion Howe points

out the following differences. A tale is usually addressed by a speaker to "an audience that form a natural or social community". It is generally spoken while a short story is generally read. The mode of narration of a tale is more leisurely than that of a short story. A tale stops, starts up again and wanders. It usually evokes a spirit of wonder and awe before the strange and the marvellous. The story, on the other hand, is more inclined to the workaday and the realistic. The tale may end in moral or philosophical reflection about the inscrutability and mystery of life. The story ends in a climax of revelation. The tale compresses a lengthy or complicated action into a brief action.[7] According to the above differentiation laid down by Howe, we can see that some of Hardy's stories can definitely be called Tales. In fact, Hardy called his first published collection of short stories WESSEX TALES.

In some of Hardy's stories we find distinct characteristics of the ballad :

> "As in ballads, lovers are crossed and hopes destroyed, sometimes through impersonal agencies of fate or chance, sometimes through the inner unfolding of character. In the country world of Wessex what may seem to us extraordinary is looked upon with a credulous fatalism, as quite ordinary".[8]

"The Three Strangers", "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" and the sketches in "A Few Crusted Characters" are ballads in essence. They narrate cheerfully humorous incidents most of the time but they are enclosed within an elegiac framework typical of the ballad. The view presented

is usually ironic. The humour is wry and folk-like. While reading Hardy's short stories we feel as if we are hearing a ballad being sung by some ancient bards; we feel as if we have come to grips with life in a powerful way.

Then there are stories like "Our Exploits at West Poley", "The Son's Veto", "An Imaginative Woman", "Absent Mindedness in a Parish Choir" which are examples of the short story in the modern sense of the term. There is in these narratives a boldness and economy which is characteristic of the modern short story. But as Dr.Noorul Hasan puts it,

> "....Unlike most modern short stories they (Hardy's stories) are not exploratory but evocative. They do not take the reader forward into an unsuspected unique eventuality, but refer him back to local legend or tradition or actual history. The stories show Hardy fully engaged with the unwritten history of an old agrarian culture."[9]

Hardy was a very good story teller and in his short stories he is dedicated first and foremost to the task of telling a good, unusual tale as best as he can. Hardy had a keen sense of the fundamental qualities of a story. Like Henry James he believed that a story must be interesting to be worth telling. A tale is worth telling only when it is an account of something noteworthy that has occured and it is well and successfully told only when the author is able to convince the reader that the incident narrated did really come to pass. In other words, the author must be able to create what Coleridge called a "willing suspension

of disbelief". All tale-tellers according to Hardy are "Ancient Mariners" and they are "not warranted in stopping Wedding Guests" unless they have "something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of the average man or woman". The following passage by Hardy sums up the aims and achievements of his fiction :

> "A story must be exceptional enough to justify its telling. We tale tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests (in other words, the hurrying public) unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man or woman.
>
> The whole secret of fiction and the drama-in the constructional part-lies in the adjustment of things unusual to things eternal and universal. The writer who knows exactly how exceptional and how non-exceptional his events should be made, possesses the key to the art."[10]

The explanation of his ability to hold the readers attention thus lies in the nature of the stories he chooses to tell. We read Hardy so as to hear a rare tale, to be disturbed, intrigued and amazed and it is in his choice of the extraordinary that we find his stories deeply rooted in the past tradition of the tale and the ballad.

Although Hardy wrote such a large number of short stories, his work did not in anyway inspire or anticipate the works of Joyce, Hemingway and Chekhov, all masters of the short story form. Hardy was not as conscious a writer as these great masters of the short story form. But his stories do merit consideration. Besides yielding great pleasure and contributing towards a better understanding

of his works, Hardy's short stories have an important place in the development of the narrative powers of the short story form.

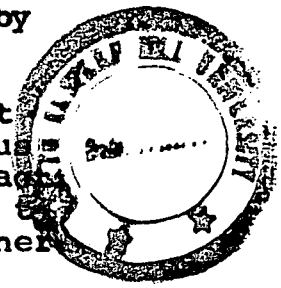
Nearly all the short stories of Thomas Hardy centre around the idea of life's little ironies. It is this theme that he explores continuously in his first two collections of short stories, WESSEX TALES and LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES. The anecdotes of long ago told by the ancients in A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES express Hardy's belief in the presentness of the past. He writes about things which are universal in nature - ambition, greed, love, jealousy, thirst for knowledge and conflict of wills guided by feelings. His central theme is man.

> "Man is the story and the story is man, man embracing woman both literally and figuratively, with his localised setting and universal problems is presented often satirically, occasionally benignly but always entertainingly".[11]

It is said of Hardy that he was essentially a country-man who wrote almost exclusively of country life and all his characters belong to the unlettered, unskilled, agricultural class. This, however, is not true of the stories. In the stories we meet the professional middle class consisting of teachers, lawyers, businessmen and the clergy. Often he wrote of the rise of the people from the humblee and more deeply rural origins to the professional classes. The reason for Hardy writing about these people so frequently may be found in his life itself. Hardy himself

rose from the agrarian class to the professional like most of his heroes and heroines and people of his time. This inclination towards an urban life was a result of the Industrial Revolution whose influence was being felt not only in England but also all over Europe. In "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions", he writes about this ambition for professional education, wealth and social status and the tensions and unhappiness which such ambitions gave rise to. So the belief that he wrote only about the uneducated agricultural class is false. Ofcourse, Hardy preferred to write about the uneducated working class because :

> "....The conduct of the upper class is screened by conventions, and thus the real character is not easily seen, if it is seen it must be portrayed subjectively; whereas in the lower walks, conduct is a direct expression of the inner life; and thus character can be directly portrayed through the ac... In one case the author's word has to be taken as ... the nerves and muscles of his figures; in the other they can be seen".[12]



The Wessex society portrayed in the stories consisted not only of the agricultural and middle class but also covered a complete group of the county aristocracy. Hardy wrote of the skeletons in the cupboards of these aristocrats in the form of illegitimacy, murder, insanity, incest. They have always been at the top of the social ladder and they continue there. A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES is from the first to the last about the Wessex aristocrats.

Hardy understood women intuitively and thus was able to reveal very convincingly not only their outward

appearance and behaviour but also their inner natures and psychological subtleties. He was very good at portraying women and this has been used to emphasize that his men are weak, 'flat', two dimensional characters existing in the shadow of their women. It is said that Hardy was really interested in women and thus wrote about women only. This may seem true if we concentrate on his novels only. If we look at the whole of his work the balance is restored, and the short stories contribute towards restoring this balance for they are dominated here by men and here by women of a large variety though there are certain types which keep recurring. Ella Marchmill, Lizzy, Edith Harnham are restless, lively, educated, intelligent and therefore bored. They are revolutionary in spirit and long to break out of the confines of limited and conventional rural society. They are familiar Hardy figures whom we encounter very often. Their personalities provoke a behaviour which leads to misfortune. Hardy also writes about single girls who become victims of clever but insensitive, sophisticated men. When Hardy is portraying men he very often paints their insensitivity and hypocrisy. In some stories he also writes about the plain good man in a beautiful way. In fact he does this as well as he does the rogue, the eccentric, the fool and the bully. Ned Hipcroft of "The Fiddler of the Reels" and Sam Hobson, the faithful and loveable lover of "The Son's Veto" both leave long enduring impressions

though they are not in the least like each other - the former a regular rogue and the latter a perfect gentleman. Hardy thus shows his skill in character portrayal.

The man-woman relation is the subject that Hardy is most pre occuppied with in almost all his stories. He writes about the affairs of the heart of men and women; of love returned and frustrated, fulfilled or doomed. He writes about meetings, partings, deceptions of lovers, the business of courtship, romance, disillusions, distress and tediousness of marriage. But what interests Hardy most is the evolution of "an incongruous love situation in a peculiar setting".[13] Hardy loved to set up

> "....couple after oddly assorted couple studying the perverseness of human nature in romantic and sexual matters from various angles and pursuing its outcome to many bitter conclusions".[14]

In these relationships there are always discrepencies of social class, age, temperament, character, intelligence, education and nationality.

Nature plays an important part in Hardy's work. It is not just the background to his works but is also a leading character. It sometimes exercises an active influence on the course of events. More often it acts as a spiritual agent and colours the mood and shapes the disposition of human beings. Human beings are mere microcosms moving around in the huge world of Nature. In the short stories Nature does not play as important a role as it does in his novels. It is noteworthy that even though

individual scenes may appear extremely peculiar, in general the backgrounds are less extraordinary here than in the novels. In describing his scenes Hardy is simply an observer who describes the natural background against which a fascinating human history occurs.

Hardy's fascination with the unusual, the bizarre, the grotesque, the morbid and the macabre is one of the outstanding characteristics of his short stories. This tendency of the writer and its implication in his work has been overstressed. Hardy's obsession is not unique. Almost all imaginative writers make use of the bizarre, the grotesque, the macabre and the unusual. What should be noted is his inclination towards the weird and his careful and successful handling of this. He inserts a grotesque and morbid incident or detail at the right moment so as to achieve maximum effect. It is only occasionally that he piles up horrors and peculiarities as in "Barbara of the House of Grebe" (A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES) and the uncollected "The Doctor's Legend", and it is when he does this that his stories become unbalanced and unsatisfactory. On the whole Hardy the writer of short stories is more balanced than he is made out to be.

It is not the occasional morbid touch that has alienated the critics and readers but rather the improbability of his stories in general, especially those with the strikingly unusual characters and plots. But I have already

explained Hardy's views regarding this matter. Hardy did not believe that a fiction writer should write about everyday life. Therefore, some of his stories do appear rather extravagant but if we think about what Hardy has written we will discover that the extravagance is more apparent then real. The extravagant action lies well within the bounds of both psychological and practical credibility. The secret of fiction lies in the adjustment of the exceptional to the universal. If a writer is able to create even momentary credibility he is successful. Even though Hardy wrote about rather exceptional and emotional things we must admit that most of the time he wins our assent.

The explanation of Hardy's ability to arrest and retain the readers attention lies partly in the nature of the stories he chooses to tell as also in his mode of narration. The success or failure of a short story depends a lot on its opening. If a story has a powerful, effective and gripping beginning it can be sure of success. A short story can rarely overcome a weak start. Most of Hardy's stories have apt and masterly openings as we shall see in the course of this dissertation.

When Hardy is writing a novel he uses a relaxed method for introducing his plot. He sets his story at an easy pace. He starts with a large description and slowly narrows his focus on the few central characters around whom the plot is to centre. He, however, has to avoid using this

relaxed method for writing his short fiction but he has an equally appropriate method for his short stories. With a few swift, economical and sparing strokes he describes a scene exactly and draws a satisfying picture leaving a certain gap for the reader to fill up with his own imagination. For some stories he uses the narrator figure taking a pipe out of his mouth or setting down his glass, or clearing his throat sometimes to introduce his tales. The third type of opening that he uses is in style and spirit like the modern short story. Instead of being led slowly from a distance towards the setting and characters he puts the reader straight down in the midst of the plot when events are already underway.

Another salient feature of Hardy's short stories is the introduction of an intruder who plays a pivotal role in the story. This character usually comes from outside in to the secure Wessex world in which the events occur and disrupts, disturbs, threatens and breaks up the established order of things.

Coincidence plays an important part in Hardy's fiction. It is so frequent in his fiction that it may be assumed to be a device by which he reaches a climax or brings about denoument. Hardy deliberately employs this method of using coincidences. Chance, bad luck and a malevolent fate alter life's courses, determine fates and resolve plots. The fact that Hardy uses coincidences has been the subject

of attack by many critics but there is in reality nothing unusual about this. Life has its share of coincidences and it is an important feature in the life of Hardy's people as it is in real life. The author has the licence to emphasize and underline any particular aspects of the raw material which he takes from Nature. As Hardy himself puts it in a note of August 5, 1890 :

> "Art is a disproportioning (i.e. distorting, throwing out of proportion) - of realities to show more clearly the features that matter in those realities, which, if merely copied or reported inventorially might possibly be observed but would more probably be overlooked. Hence 'realism' is not Art".[15]

The author has the prerogative to give the raw material which he draws from nature a characteristic stamp by imbuing it with his own creative vision and personality so as to bring out those features which appeal most strongly to his idiosyncracy.

Thomas Hardy has left behind a lot of short stories of all sorts - tragedies, comedies, romances and extravaganzas and one cannot deny their existence even if one is not particularly fond of them. In this dissertation I shall critically discuss the short stories for they contribute in their own way towards the making of Hardy the writer.

CHAPTER I

WESSEX TALES

WESSEX TALES

The publication of WESSEX TALES in 1888 is of great significance in Hardy's literary career. It is important not only because it proved that Hardy's short stories were beginning to be accepted and becoming popular but also because the publication of this volume represented "a step in his appropriation of Wessex as the exclusive precinct for his fiction". The name Wessex which Hardy was the first to use in fiction in his novel FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD was being taken up everywhere and Hardy thought that it would be a pity if he were "to lose the right to it for want of asserting it".[1] By using Wessex as a title for the first time Hardy asserted his right to the name as an essential reference to his works. The publication of this volume and the way it was received further paved the way for the publication of the three other volumes of short stories - A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES, LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES and A CHANGED MAN AND OTHER TALES.

The reasons why Hardy took the risk of collecting his short stories into a volume in a period when the short story as a literary genre was generally unpopular in England are many. By the end of 1887 Thomas Hardy with the publication of works like FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD, THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE and THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE was able to hold his own in the world of fiction. This

sense of success finally gave him the necessary courage to overlook the Victorian prejudice in favour of the three volumes novel and to publish a volume of short stories as legitimate fictional work. Hardy wrote a letter to Macmillan suggesting that they publish a collection of his short stories. He recommended the project by saying that some "well-known critics have often advised me to reprint them, informing me that they are as good as anything I have written (however good that may be)."[2] The well known critic mentioned here may be Leslie Stephen who had once written to Hardy suggesting "that you might write an exceedingly pleasant series of stories upon your special topic : I mean prose idyls of country life-short sketches of Hodge and his ways, which might be made very attractive, so as to make a volume or more at some future date".[3] And WESSEX TALES was the result.

The first edition of WESSEX TALES in 1888 appeared in two volumes. For this edition Hardy not only selected five of the best stories he had written to date but also those most closely related to the Wessex setting - "The Three Strangers", "The Withered Arm", "Fellow Townsmen", "Interlopers at the Knap" and "The Distracted Preacher". "An Imaginative Woman" was added to the 1896 edition. In 1912 Hardy reorganised the stories in WESSEX TALES and LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES in such a way as to give greater unity and coherence to both the collections. "An Imaginative

Woman" was shifted from WESSEX TALES to LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES because it was a contemporary tale whereas WESSEX TALES was a volume of traditional tales. For this same reason "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" and "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" were transferred to WESSEX TALES.

In writing his fiction Hardy depended mostly on his personal experiences, on first hand reports of incidents and events and on ancient traditions and legends and accounts in newspapers and church registers. This does not mean that Hardy's short stories are dry historical accounts or records. "The stories are but dreams and not records"[4], said Hardy. The actual facts instead of being presented as bare facts are brightened up by highly imaginative touches and beautiful, accurate description of the Wessex landscape. Hardy's special genius is fully manifest in this volume of short stories.

"The Three Strangers" the first story in WESSEX TALES gives us a fair idea of the kind of short story writer Hardy is. It is a typical Wessex tale in setting subject matter and mode of narration. It was written long before its appearance in this collection in 1888. The story appeared for the first time concurrently in Longman's Magazine in England and Harper's Weekly in America in March 1883. J.M. Barrie saw the tale as a compact little drama and at his suggestion Hardy dramatised it and called it "The Three

Wayfarers", which was first performed in London with other short plays in June, 1893 and judged by the Times critic to be the 'best piece of the evening' although in Hardy's opinion it was a mere trifle.

There is nothing finer in WESSEX TALES than "The Three Strangers". Here Hardy is writing about the lives of Wessex shepherds and artisans and the situation which develops in this story has endowed it with a lasting appeal.

The central event of this story occured during the agricultural unrest of the 1820's and 1830's. The action takes place in a setting described beautifully and realistically by Hardy in the few opening paragraphs.

> "Among the few features of agricultural England which attain an appearance but little modified by the lapse of centuries, may be reckoned the long, grassy and furzy downs, coombs or ewe-leases, as they are called according to their kind, that fill a large area of certain counties in the south and south-west. If any mark of human occupation is met with hereon, it usually takes the form of the solitary cottage of some shepherd".[5](3)

This is the opening paragraph of the story - and as we read more and more of Hardy's short stories we will find this a typical Hardyan beginning. He sets his scene by a vivid description of an extensive landscape. Then he closes in to pick out and scrutinize smaller details, for example, one lonely cottage, Higher Crowstairs in "The Three Strangers".

> "Fifty years ago such a lonely cottage stood on such a down, and may possibly be standing there now. In spite of its loneliness, however, the spot, by actual measurement, was not three miles from a county-town. Yet that affected it little. Three miles of irregular upland, during the long inimical seasons, with their sleets, snows, rains and mists, afford withdrawing space enough to isolate a Timon or a Nebuchadnezzar; much less in fair weather to please that repellent tribe, the poets, philosophers, artists and others who conceive and meditate of pleasant things". (3)

And into this desolate scene one rainy night characters arrive one by one and depart in the manner of a theatrical production, and all that occurs, though rather melodramatic in essence, is interesting enough to give rise to a legend.

When the scene opens in Shepherd Fennel's lonely cottage we see a rustic celebration in progress, a genial scene full of good humour but with an underlying sense of mystery - this sense of mystery which runs through the whole story is one of the reasons for its great popularity. The atmosphere inside the cottage is one of great joy because Shepherd Fennel is "entertaining a large party in glorification of the christening of his second girl".(4) In contrast to the domesticity and cosiness of the scene inside the cottage the rainstorm outside

> "....smote walls, slopes and hedge like the clothyard shafts of Senlac and Crecy. Such sheep and outdoor animals as had no shelter stood with their buttocks to the winds; while the tails of little birds trying to roost on some scraggy thorn were blown inside out like umbrellas". (4)

With great inventive energy and delight and like an ancient teller of tales Hardy continues with his tale.

The familiar and the cosy scene at Farmer Fennel's cottage is suddenly interrupted by the alien and the unexpected. This is a theme which occurs repeatedly in many of Hardy's tales. Into the Wessex world represented by the gathering at Higher Crowstairs walk in the three strangers disturbing the peace of the Wessex people. The first stranger to walk in is the runaway convict, who is followed closely by the hangman actually on his way to string up Timothy Summers, the first stranger, the next morning. They come in out of the rough weather to the merrymaking round Shepherd Fennel's fire and make themselves at home. When the third stranger, the brother of the condemned man, finally appears - he is on his way to bid his brother a last farewell - he is thunderstruck to see his brother and the hangman, the most unlikely of partners singing together and hob nobbing over a flagon of mead. Seeing this he immediately takes to his heels for fear of his brother getting detected through him. When the King's men track down the third stranger, mistakenly identified by the Wessex crowd as the run away convict it is too late. Timothy Summers has already vanished and we the readers are glad to learn of this because Summers had committed the crime only because of need and because his ready wit and great self possession has gained him the readers' regards.

"The Three Strangers" is a gripping tale. The mystery of the condemned man's identify is not revealed till the very last. It is free of any moral or hidden meaning. It

is simply the story of an event that has occured to a certain set of people and which has been passed on from generation to generation, orally, and in this manner has acquired mythic perpetuity.

The narrative mode used in "The Three Strangers" is in keeping with the tradition of the tale. The story is told by an unidentified narrator in an instructional style which is both convincing and compelling. Wessex is described as a place with a distinct and living culture of its own. Hardy helps his readers to see below the romantic aura surrounding the tale and discover the real Wessex where the Shepherd and his friends manage to derive a living from their environment. Hardy presents a detailed picture of Wessex including a lot of local particulars such as the song "now nearly disused" (14) that the soldiers sang when leaving a town, the walls that formed the "field fences" (17) along the Ridgeway and the importance of the Sunday sermon to the people. Hardy not only portrays rural life but he takes great care to show the difference between the regional and the non-regional. The intrusion of the three strangers from outside upon the insular world of the countryside shows the discrepency between the Wessex people and the outsiders. There is some difference between the King's law and rural justice and Hardy says that at times the rural sense of rough justice is more right than the urban sense of law. It is because of this that Timothy

Summers who steals only to survive and who escapes death by hoodwinking the man who is to hang him is considered to be a "folk hero"[6].

Character portrayal in "The Three Strangers" is very vivid. The generous Shepherd Fennel and his frugal Shepherdess; the desperate, quick-witted and resourceful Timothy Summers; the arrogant, jovial and cosmopolitan hangman and the terror stricken third stranger are all painted as individuals very different from one another. Hardy exhibits skilful craftsmanship in bringing alive such a multitude of characters in such a short space.

The imagery in "The Three Strangers" is historical and cosmic in keeping with the pastoral mode of WESSEX TALES. Set in the downs of Wessex the story contains a few biblical, classical and medieval allusions but unlike the references in the novels which are sometimes misplaced the references here are appropriately placed and give a classical touch to the story. References to "Timon", "Nebuchadnezzer" and "Belshazzar" are made because their abuses of power can be compared to that of the hangman, whose action is lawful but derives from an inhuman sense of justice.

The merit of "The Three Strangers" has been recognised by collectors who have often included it in short story collections along with the best and most representative pieces of this genre.

One of Hardy's brief but well written and memorable stories is "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four", the next story in this collection. It appeared originally as "*A Legend of Eighteen Hundred and Four*" *in the December* 1882 issue of Harper's Chronicles. It was originally included in the 1894 volume of LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES but was transferred to WESSEX TALES in 1912 because Hardy thought it to be more suited to the earlier volume.

The story, briefly, is about how Solmon Selby as a Shepherd boy was roused from sleep at night by voices when he had gone to the Cove to watch over the sheep at lambing time. He was accompanied by his Uncle Job, sergeant of the Sixty First Foot. The voices, as he discovered later, were that of two Frenchmen who were seen discussing a map by the light of a lantern. Uncle Job recognised one of them as Napoleon Bonaparte, the Corsican 'ogre' and 'tyrant' and regretted that he had not brought with him his "new flinted firelock and that there man must live". (40) Napoleon had crossed over with another French officer from "the other side of the Channel, scarce out of sight and hail of a man standing on our English shore" (34) "to see where to land their army" (38). Though Hardy's "tradition" was wholly fictional he was astonished to discover years later that his story was in fact a "tradition".

> "The incident of Napoleon's visit to the English coast by night, with a view to discovering a convenient spot for landing his army of invasion, was an invention of the author's on which he had some doubts because of its improbability. This was in 1882, when it was first published. Great was his surprise several years later to be told that it was a real tradition. How far this is true he is unaware".[7]

But later Hardy discovered that it was his invented story which had given rise to this tradition and he worried that he had been "too natural in the art he could practice so well". Florence Emily Hardy further wrote that :

> "Had he not long discontinued the writing of romances he would, he said, have put at the beginning of each new one : "Understand that however true that this book may be in essence, in fact it is utterly untrue".[8]

What Hardy had to say regarding the tradition is interesting and the fact that he was able to pass off that which was based entirely on his imagination and creativeness as something that had actually come to pass goes to show his narrative power and his skill for story telling. Hardy uses a first person narrator in "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four". The story is told by a narrator who was actually present at the "yawning chimney-corner of the inn kitchen" when Solomon Selby who himself had witnessed the events was narrating it. Besides the two introductory paragraphs and the concluding last paragraph which are remarks made by the annonymous narrator the rest of the tale uses Solomon Selby's words. The framework Hardy uses is the traditional one which tellers of tales and balladists have been

using for ages. The story teller sits with a group of eager listeners around the fire, takes out his pipe and introduces his tale in an easy paced and amiable mode of narrative. Selby does not address his tale to the "maker of newspapers or printer of books" or to the "gentry who only believe what they see in printed lines" (36) but to a captive audience of naive Wessex people, people who as soon as they saw Solomon smile knew that they were going to hear some extraordinary tale and which they were eager to hear.

> ".... withdrawing the stem of his pipe from the dental notch in which it habitually rested, he leaned back in the recess behind him and smiled into the fire. The smile was neither mirthful nor sad, not precisely humorous nor altogether thoughtful. We who knew him recognised it in a moment ; it was his narrative smile. Breaking off our few desultory remarks we drew closer".(33)

And Solomon's "manner of narrating the adventure which befell him on the down" (41) with phrases such as "as you mid know" (33) and "you mid suppose" (40) thrown in, give the audience a sense of involvement. Both the teller and the listeners belong to the same Wessex background and therefore communication between them is easy and they can accept the story more easily than the gentry who would shake their head over such a story. Kristin Brady[9] questions the truth about the garrulous Solomon Selby's story. She says that details within Solomon's narration confirm the reader's suspicion that the story is the product of a frightened and fascinated imagination. Fed with Uncle Job's stories of "battle, smoke and flying soldiers" (36) Solomon falls asleep and has

romantic dreams only to be awakened by voices in a strange language at a place where it was more normal not to see human beings at night. So it is little wonder that he identifies the two strangers on awaking suddenly as Napoleon and a French Officer. Even Uncle Job's reaction "O that I had got but my new-flinted firelock, that man there should die! But I haven't got my new flinted fire-lock, and that there man must live" which is somewhat hilarious seems to be "a performance for the child's benefit". Brady says that Solomon most probably had witnessed men who were engaged in smuggling or as the uniform suggests in its detection. Smuggling was a common practice during those days in Wessex. The men could also have been members of the King's German Legion as they spoke a foreign language and wore uniforms which resembled the British Uniform of that time - "boat cloaks, cocked hats and swords" (38).

The episode can be interpreted variously and these interpretations are not important by themselves. What is important is Solomon's and thus Hardy's process of story telling. Solomon tells his story with such seriousness and so successfully that his audience believes in the existence of such a tradition.

What is refreshing about "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" and what makes it stand out among Hardy's stories is that it is one of those very few stories where Hardy is not working on his favourite theme of love,

courtship and marriage. Moreover, this story does not have the usual tensions between agricultural and city life; the bitterness arising from social ambitions; neither is it about the rural people troubled by circumstances. It is also free of the macabre, the gruesome, the grotesque, the morbid and the bizarre elements which sometimes make the reading of some of Hardy's novels and short stories a rather tedious task. Excessive use of coincidence which sometimes causes interesting developments of plot in some of his stories and at other times proves to be a major weakness in his works is totally absent from this short story.

In "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" we have a tale set in the past, a tale in which Hardy is preoccupied with ancient things. He begins by painting the backdrop against which the event occurs. The harmony between the plot and background is such that one feels the story could not have been told with any other geography. Exhibiting great economy in telling and with an eye for significant details Hardy describes the secluded Cove where Solomon lived as a child - there was no house within a mile and a half of Solomon's sheep farm house and the Cove where the house stood was "screened from every mortal eye" an ideal place for a secret landing. Inspite of the place being rather isolated there was something homely about the setting with Solomon's father going about his daily work not paying any attention to Napoleon and his men across the Channel, preparing themselves to attack England. It is in this homely

setting that the dramatic events unfold. Even as he is writing about the unusual Hardy takes great care to give a minute description of a Wessex Shepherd's life and Hardy's description shows his intimate knowledge of the country and its ways, traditions and customs. In describing Wessex life he very casually refers to the unconventional moral patterns and practices such as smuggling which is the theme of another short story in this collection, "The Distracted Preacher".

And as regards characterisation, with a few sure strokes Hardy silhouettes Uncle Job, Solomon Selby and the other characters who appear for a few moments. We have the romantic, highly imaginative and garrulous Solomon telling us the tale. He tells his story from a narrowly subjective point of view and in a matter of fact manner. He does not become nostalgic or sentimental while recollecting his experience. Then, we have Uncle Job, Sergeant of the Sixty First Foot, a man who was fond of a drink and who was in the habit of telling the young Solomon "strange stories of the wars he had served in and the wounds he had got"just to impress the young boy.

The story ends with the unnamed narrator winding up with a comment on the effective narrative of Solomon and the varied reactions of his audience. The narration is easy paced and enticing and the framework of the story resembles that of a tale. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why Hardy transferred this story from LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES to

WESSEX TALES.

The next story in WESSEX TALES is "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion". It is another transfer from LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES and it was included in the WESSEX TALES in 1912. Because the plot is a dramatic one and set in a homely scene and because it is historical in tone and its mode of narration resembles the tale it is more suited to the WESSEX TALES than to LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES. Hence it is only natural that it found its way into Hardy's first collection of short stories.

"The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" first appeared in the Bristol Mirror in October 1889 and in the Times the following January as "The Melancholy Hussar". It was reprinted in a collection, THREE NOTABLE STORIES together with "Love and Peril" by the Marquis of Lorne and "To Be or Not to Be" by Mrs. Alexander. In 1894 Hardy included it in LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES and in 1912 he transferred it to WESSEX TALES because it is emphatically a WESSEX TALE. It has a traditional basis. Hardy tells the tragic tale of a German subject of the English Crown, come over with his regiment from Hanover, and who has to face the firing squad for desertion. To give pathos to the bare facts Hardy interweaves the story of a young girl in love with the soldier. She has to abandon her lover at the last moment, much against her will, because of circumstances.

The story was written in 1897, at a time when Hardy was of the same age as the narrator. We have already seen from the two earlier stories that Hardy took great interest in local activities and that he made fictional use of things he saw and heard. He makes use of an eye-witness account of the execution of Bincombe Down which he found in the Morning Chronicle (4 July 1801) while making notes in The British Museum for his novel THE TRUMPET MAJOR. In a note of 1876 he writes :

> "July 27. James Bushrod of Broadmayne saw the two German Legions (of the York Hussars) shot (for desertion) on Bincombe Down in 1801. It was in the path across the Down, or near it. James Selby of the same village thinks that there is a mark".[10]

The story gives the actual names of the deserters and everything relating to their attempt to escape is based on the facts Hardy recorded in his note - book thus making the story a historical one. Hardy did a lot of research before the composition of this tale. He had talked with old people who had known Phyllis Grove, he had visited the place where the two Hussars were buried, he had spoken to two Broadmayne villagers one of whom had witnessed the execution and he examined old newspapers and church registers to find accounts of the execution and burial.

"Hardy's favourite theme is an incongruous love situation in a peculiar setting",[11] says John Bayley and this theme is explored repeatedly in tale after tale. This is a tale of sexual mischance which is a result of hostile

circumstance - the circumstance here is the impossibility of ever attaining a happy alliance.

Dr. Grove abandons his medical practice and moves to "a dilapidated, half-farm, half manor house" in an "obscure inland nook" to indulge in his "taste for lonely meditation over metaphysical questions". In the isolated countryside he realises that "he had wasted his life in the pursuit of illusions". He becomes "irritable" (47). As a result of this withdrawal Phyllis Grove, his daughter is forced to lead the life of a semi-recluse. Yet Phyllis was discovered here by an admirer and her hand most unexpectedly asked in marriage". (47) She accepts Humphrey Gould's proposal. After getting engaged Humphrey retires to Bath and maintains his engagement with Phyllis by means of erratic correspondence. With the withdrawal of her fiance from the scene Phyllis returns to the lonely, weary life which she was accustomed to before the arrival of Humphrey :

> "When a noise like the brushing skirt of a visitor was heard on the doorstep, it proved to be a scudding leaf; when a carriage seemed to be nearing the door, it was her father grinding his sickle on the stone in the garden for his favourite relaxation of trimming the box-tree borders to the plots. A sound like luggage thrown down from the coach was a gun far away at sea; and what looked like a tall man by the gate at dusk was a yew bush cut into a quaint and attentuated shape". (46-7).

The arrival of the colourful York Hussars soon brings about a change to her bored existence. Phyllis falls in love with Matthaus Tina one of the York Hussars. In spite

of his flashing appearance Tina is sad and homesick for his fatherland and misses his mother whom he has left all alone at Saarbruck his native town. Fully aware that she was being unfaithful to Humphrey, Phyllis falls in love with Tina. "Like Desdemona she pitied him and learnt his history" (51). She agrees to elope with her lover to Germany and on the eve of the day they agree to execute their plans, while waiting for Matthaus to join her, she spots her fiance Humphrey alighting from a coach. She overhears him tell his companion that he has brought her a present and hopes that it will please her. Humphrey's return makes her realise that she was about to perform a foolish deed and she decides to break her promise to Tina and marry Humphrey and "preserve her self respect. She would stay at home, and marry him and suffer". (60). But there was no going back for Matthaus and his friend Christoph for they had decamped and so must flee. They follow their seperate ways. Phyllis returns home to discover that Humphrey was already secretly married and had brought her a present as a kind of consolation prize. Matthaus Tina and his friend Christoph, in the meantime, are caught and identified as deserters and delivered to the authorities who decide that they must face the firing squad for desertion. From her garden Phyllis sees the execution of her lover and his friend. Their bodies are buried at the back of the church and near their graves Phyllis too is buried when she dies years later without ever having married.

Hardy tells this story through a narrator who had heard it first hand from Phyllis. His intention in telling the story is to set right the tale about Phyllis. It had been mistold countless times and it had thrown an unfavourable light on her character. He wanted to set right the injustice inflicted upon her memory. Hardy tells the story of Phyllis Grove with great compassion. The narrator tells the story many years after he hears it. His mode of narration is neither nostalgic nor sentimental.

"The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" is very melodramatic and it exhibits Hardy's inclination towards the bizarre and sensational. The memories that he links with the Dorset landscape are sombre and gruesome. But these are about all the weakness that one can detect in it which are negligible compared to its merits. "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" is a powerful tale of ironic mischance and human waste containing picturesque passages describing Wessex life. It has a period flavour. From the life of Shepherds which he writes about in the earlier two tales Hardy shifts to writing about the colourful life of the soldiers who were considered to be "monumental objects" and "glorious" things (45) by their contemporaries.

Hardy in this story expresses his views and the Wessex people's views about marriage.

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is concerned with a comparative study of Soso Tham and V.G. Bareh's poetry from the point of view of forms and themes.

The inductive methodology is used in this study.

The organization of the dissertation is in four chapters. The first chapter is an introduction. It gives a summary of views expressed about the origin and meaning of poetry.

The second chapter is on forms of poetry which are often classified according to their characteristics. Different forms of poetry can be found in Ka Duitara Ksiar of Soso Tham and V.G. Bareh's Ki Poetry Khasi. The widely used forms by these poets are lyric, ballad, ode and the dramatic monologue.

The third chapter is on themes of poetry as found in Ka Duitara Ksiar and Ki Poetry Khasi. The major themes are (1) Nature, (2) Love, (3) Suffering, and (4) Patriotism.

The fourth and last chapter is a conclusion summing up major findings.

> "In those days unequal marriages were regarded rather as a violation of the laws of nature then as a mere infringement of convention, the more modern view, and hence when Phyllis of the watering place bourgeoisie, was chosen by such a gentlemanly fellow, it was as if she were going to be taken to heaven". (48)

Phyllis having been brought up and confined to an isolated place (once again as in "The Three Strangers" and in "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" the place where all the action occurs is secluded. This shows that in Wessex during those days most country places enjoyed solitude) and with limited experience hardly took any time in accepting Humphrey Gould's offer because according to the standards of the Wessex people he was a good match. It also took her very little time to forget Humphrey and fall in love with Matthaus Tina because he represented the "golden radiance of the York Hussars which flashed in upon the lives of the people here and charged all youthful thoughts with emotional interest". (49)

Character portrayal in "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" is excellent. We remember all the characters who appear in this tale - even those like Christoph who make a fleeting appearance and do not occupy the centre of the action for long. Phyllis Grove's unhappiness is conveyed very successfully. She is unhappy because she had been forced to live away from the rest of Wessex society by her father who not only alienates her socially but also

emotionally from her lover because the latter is not acceptable to him. Susan Hill writing about this tale says that here Hardy has conveyed particularly well "the sense of freshness and optimism and the fatal rashness of youth, and the contrast between its impulsive innocence and the sourness and suspicion of those who have lived longer without gaining more than years".[12]

From this somewhat melodramatic tale we move on to "The Withered Arm" one of Hardy's most popular tales. Hardy believed that a tale must be unusual to be worth the telling and "The Withered Arm" is one of the most unusual and at the same time most striking tales ever told by Hardy. The story was first published in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine in January 1888. Even though the events recorded in this story appear impossible we must keep in mind that what is narrated here occured during a period when Wessex rustics commonly believed in supernatural agencies.

Rhoda Brook, the main character of the story, is a thin, hardworked, worn milkmaid who possesses all the qualities required of a village witch and she is fully aware that her fellow villagers look upon her as one. In the days gone by she had a clandestine love affair with farmer Lodge but now she is deserted. Farmer Lodge has instead shifted his affection to a "rosy cheeked tisty-tosty little body" (69), Gertrude, a girl who has been

brought up in the more refined urban areas and who is not cut out for the rigours of life on a farm. Rhoda, thus, lives alone with her illegitimate son by Farmer Lodge, not involving herself in village activities and it is only natural that, she bitterly resents Farmer Lodge's pretty, young wife. Her resentment grows till one night she dreams that she could feel the weight of Gertrude on her chest with features shockingly distorted. In her nightmare she sees Gertrude as an evil old hag, mocking her with her left hand thrust forward "so as to make the wedding ring it wore glitter in Rhoda's eyes". (77) After a desperate struggle she seizes the apparition by its left arm and hurls it to the floor. At exactly the same time, miles away, Gertrude awakes from her sleep experiencing a sharp pain in her left arm. In the morning Gertrude discovers that her left arm is bruised with fingers and thereafter her arm begins withering. The process is slow and takes many years. With the shrivelling of her arm, Farmer Lodge's love for his wife begins to wither as well.

Months and years pass by. Because of her affectionate nature Rhoda cannot avoid making friends with Gertrude. When Rhoda sees Gertrude's withered arm for the first time she sees in it a faint shadow of her own finger prints and when Gertrude departs after the visit she exclaims to herself : "O can it be that I exercise a malignant power over people against my own will ?" (81) Rhoda's sense

of guilt increases as Gertrude's arm grows progressively worse and it does not respond to any kind of treatment. As a last resort, accompanied by Rhoda she pays a visit to Conjuror Trendle, the white wizard of Egdon Heath. Conjuror Trendle explains to Gertrude the source of her trouble by showing her an image of that enemy who has brought this curse upon her. The image revealed is that of Rhoda. Soon after this visit to the Conjuror, Rhoda not wishing her friend any ill leaves the neighbourhood taking her son along with her.

Six more years pass by and Gertrude has to pay a second visit to the Conjuror as the arm gets worse. She is told that the cure lies in putting the withered arm to the neck of a man who has just been hanged. This would cause the "turning of the blood" in the withered arm which would subsequently cure the diseased arm. After much scheming, pleas and bribery Gertrude manages to get into the jail to accomplish her object and gains access to the body of a freshly hanged man. Coincidently, the corpse she puts her arm to happens to be the corpse of Rhoda and her husband's son who is hanged for having been present at a rick burning. So it is natural that Rhoda and Farmer Lodge are also present on the scene when Gertrude, unaware of their presence, goes through her therapy. Just as Gertrude touches the hanged man's neck Rhoda snatches away Gertrude from her son's corpse. The psychological impact of such

multiplied shocks is too much for Gertrude, "her blood had been 'turned' indeed - too far" (107) and she dies. Rhoda after a temporary absence returns to her parish and resumes her familiar way of life.

The thing that strikes us most about this story, as it did Leslie Stephen, is the high degree of improbability of the event. Leslie Stephen thought that the lack of a material explanation for its less believable aspects weakened the tale. In a letter to Hardy he wrote :

> "I don't think you have exactly hit off the right line of belief. Either I would accept the superstition altogether and make the wizard a genuine performer - with possibly some hint that you tell the story as somebody told it; or I would leave some opening as to the withering of the arm, so that a possibility of explanation might be suggested, though, ofcourse, not too much obtruded. Something, e.g., might have happened to impress the sufferer's imagination, so that the marks would be like the stigmata of papists.
>
> As it is, I don't know where I am. I began as a believer and end up as a sceptic".[13]

Even though Hardy generally paid heed to Stephen's suggestions this time he took no steps towards presenting the story as a superstition told by an unreliable narrator. For Hardy thought that : "a story dealing with the supernatural should never be explained away" and such a letter represented "a dull and unimaginative example of gratuitous criticism".[14] Hardy believed that the story would be more effective and artistic when presented as a believed folk tale, demanding of its reader the same degree of

respect and acceptance that it would receive from a local audience.

Whatever Hardy's expectations may have been, the readers in the 20th century consider the story highly improbable. It demands and elicits suspension of disbelief to a high degree. But we must keep in mind that "The Withered Arm" is not the record of a social historian. It is the creation of an imaginative artist who blends rural superstition with speculative psychology and has the tale told by an authoritative story teller. The narrator believes what he is narrating and it is not only he who believes in its validity but these who are listening to him as well. For in the country world of Wessex what may seem to us extraordinary is looked upon as quite ordinary.

In spite of the improbability of the story, "The Withered Arm" is still enjoyable reading for it is a very charming piece of short fiction. If the unrealistic element is the only reason which prevents the reader from enjoying the fine story based on a local lore he can regard it as a

> "Curious mixture of traditional folk belief and modern hypothesis and translate the events of this grotesque tale into an acceptable instance of character psychology, but the result of such gratuitous sophistication can only be a literary loss, a distraction from Hardy's boldness of narrative".[15]

It is the combination of the strange with the common place in the Wessex world which makes this story one of the best and gripping short stories. In the world of Wessex the

strange and the common place are not in conflict. They are different aspects of the samething. Our imagination is in the habit of looking for the 'uncanny' in human experience and it thus blurs the lines between imagination and reality.

In "The Withered Arm" one can find the typically Hardyan characteristics in abundance. In it Hardy builds up the macabre and grotesque details very effectively in scene after scene. When Gertrude Lodge arrives alone on the outskirts of Casterbridge, she looks first at the general view across the countryside towards the distant roofs of the town, and then her eye is gradually drawn towards the men moving about on the skyline and finally to the gallows they are erecting. Fascination and horror mount within her and within the reader when she is taken into the prison and brought close up to the body of the hanged man. When she touches the corpse's neck the tension of the scene reaches a powerful climax.

Dr. Noorul Hasan commenting on this scene writes that the story uses vindictive and violent sexual jealousy as its central motif

> "To illustrate this primal drive the story creates a condition in which it becomes so compulsive and implacable as to acquire a demonic power. "My art", wrote Hardy, "is to intensify the expression of things (as it is done by Crivelli, Bellini, etc) so that the heart and the inner meaning is made distinctly visible". In order to get at "the heart and inner meaning", he had to go sometimes beyond the limits of ordinary rationality and bring the occult and the irrational into the workings of primary human impulses. And he could do so without sacrificing plausibility. Hardy's ability to domesticate the occult is fully illustrated by "The Withered Arm".[16]

In "The Withered Arm" Hardy has conveyed the feelings and emotions of his characters very successfully. Rhoda Brook, Gertrude Lodge and Farmer Lodge are all striking individuals and they possess all the individuality that they require.Hardy has portrayed well the feelings of Farmer Lodge. The Farmer who is initially very proud of his young, beautiful wife does not take long to turn savage at this same wife as a mysterious blemish gradually begins to mar her beauty. Hardy has also given a very good description of the relationship between the farmer and the patient milkwomen, Rhoda Brook whom he has loved and deserted. Rhoda by the end of the story has unintentionally been able to take revenge on the Farmer for having betrayed her.

The narration in "The Withered Arm" is closer to a folk tale than in any of the other stories. There is an oral quality to its prose style and the narrator has no personal motive for telling this story. He is in no way involved with the story and thus can report the story with total detachment. He tells the story using both dialogue and description. Where description is concerned it is one of the most visual of Hardy's stories. Hardy gives a series of vivid descriptions of the Wessex life experienced by him during his boyhood days. The language Rhoda uses while conversing throughout the story is the Dorset dialect. In "The Withered Arm" Hardy not only holds our

attention with the gripping, grotesque, unusual and supernatural story but also by his portrayal of a living, breathing Wessex.

From the superstitious world of "The Withered Arm" we move into Port Bredy, a town where a conflict is going on between the rural and the urban values and which is the scene of the next story in WESSEX TALES. "Fellow Townsmen" was published in the Spring of 1880 in The New Quarterly Magazine and Harper's Weekly. The version that we have in WESSEX TALES is, however, a considerably revised version of the original.

The plot of "Fellow Townsmen" is complicated and is more like a crowded synopses of events then anything else. It illustrate's Hardy's central creed that man is often at the mercy of chance and it shows the behaviour of a "whimsical God" operating through "blind Circumstance". Mr. Barnet, the main character of the story, has inherited a successful flax trade from his father. "Having acquired a fair fortune old Mr. Barnet had retired from business bringing up his son as a gentleman - burgher, and it must be added, as a well-educated, liberal minded young man" (112). Despite his position of wealth and respectability his personal life is not very happy. He is married to a haughty woman whom he detests. Lucy Savile is the woman he really loves. He does everything his wife desires just "to preserve peace in the household" (114) but he does not

succeed. His unhappy life makes him more and more aware of the mistake he had made regarding choice of wife and this sends him to seek out his old love Lucy. In the meantime, offering no explanations, his wife leaves him to lead a life in London from where she does not return. She dies in London. The moment he hears of his wife's death he decides to offer himself to his old love Lucy. But, alas, he is just half an hour too late. She has already accepted an old friend and fellow townsmen of his, Downe. He had introduced Lucy to Downe and recommended her name to this widower friend of his for the job of a governess to take care of his motherless children. Hardy writes :

> "The events that had, as it were dashed themselves together into one half-hour of this day showed that curious refinement of cruelty in their arrangement which proceeds from the bosom of the whimsical god at other times known as blind - circumstance" (159-160)

Nor is this the end. After wondering about the globe for several years Barnet returns to find Lucy a widow. They are both elderly people now, yet he asks her to marry him. She refuses and again he takes 'no' for an answer and returns to his hotel. But on second thoughts she alters her decision and drops him an affectionate line and hopes that he will pay her another visit. But once again the decision has been taken too late. Barnet had already left and she never sees him again.

The plot of "Fellow Townsmen" appears over contrived and too unrelievedly sombre. Mrs. Proctor, widow of

Barry Cornwall, wrote to Hardy concerning this story :

> "..... you are cruel. Why not let him come home again and marry his first love ? But I see you are right. He should not have deserted her. I smiled about the Tombstone. Sir Frances Chantrey told me that he had prepared fine plans - nothing could be too beautiful and too expensive at first, and the end was generally merely a headstone".[17]

And it is not only Mrs. Proctor who appreciated this story. His novelist friend Mrs. Henniker preferred it to "The Three Strangers" and Hardy considered her right in doing so.

It is difficult to classify "Fellow Townsmen" as a short story. It is more like a novelette. However, it is immaterial what genre this piece of fiction will come under. It is sufficient to recognise that it is a good piece of short prose fiction. Within the framework of this story Hardy is tackling once again his favourite themes of love, courtship, marriage, effects of industrialisation and urbanisation on Wessex society, workings of fate and the contrasts between the rural and urban ways of life represented by Lucy Savile and Downe on the one hand and Mr. and Mrs. Barnet on the other. Their different homes are presented as symbols of their different ways of life.

Using an analytical mode of narration Hardy begins his pastoral history by giving a description of the small provincial town, Port Bredy, in which the events occur.

> "The shepherd on the east hill could shout out lambing intelligence to the shepherd on the west hill, over the intervening town chimneys, without great inconvenience to his voice, so nearly did the steep pastures encroach upon the burghers' backyards. And at night it was possible to stand in the very midst of the town and hear from their native paddocks on the lower levels on greensward the mild lowing of the farmer's heifers, and the profound, warm blowings of breath in which these creatures indulge. But the community which had jammed itself in the valley thus flanked formed a veritable town, with a real mayor and corporation and a staple manufacture".(111)

And with this introductory paragraph Hardy portrays the complex, contrasting relationship between town and country in a place where they are contiguous and interconnected. This conflicting relationship is continued between Mr. Barnet and Mr. Downe, the two main characters in this story. This contrast has been evoked with great care and insight.

Now, regarding the placement of "Fellow Townsmen" in WESSEX TALES one might agree with Baker[18] that the plots' dependence on coincidence and ironic comparison suggests that it could qualify well for LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES, the third collection of Hardy's short stories. Even though it is the most ironic of WESSEX TALES and can qualify as a LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES story its presence in WESSEX TALES is not misplaced. As Kristin Brady says :

> ".... its presence in WESSEX TALES gives the volume a broader and more profound frame of reference by presenting a character who incorporates within his person some of the private crisis which can exist even within such a small and integrated world as Wessex. The

> detailed portrayal of Port Bredy as both a source and an image of Barnet's inner conflict gives "Fellow Townsmen" a specifically regional context, making it a pastoral history in a special but legitimate sense: the faults in Barnet's character are firmly grounded in his relationship with his local community and can only be fully understood when seen in this Wessex context".[19]

"Interlopers at the Knap" the next story in our collection has a themetic unity with "Fellow Townsmen". In this story as in the previous one, Hardy is writing about the chief male character, Darton, failing to make a proper marriage choice. This failure to make the correct choice is a result of his failure to properly understand his own self and Wessex culture. Onee again the story is that of a courtship with an ironical twist in it and we encounter the typically Hardyan characteristics all over again here - his preoccupation with ancient things, customs, beautiful descriptions of the countryside and his enjoyment of a tale well told. "Interlopers at the Knap" was written when Hardy was a well established novelist engaged in writing THE MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE. In this short story we see a brilliant handling of the favourite Hardyan theme of courtship. It was first published in May 1884 in the English Illustrated Magazine.

The plot of "The Interlopers at the Knap" is a complicated and crowded one. It is centred round the story of an unsuccessful courtship between Charles Darton, a farmer and Sally of the Knap. It is about Charles Darton's

attempt to be adapted to the way of life at the Knap, his failure to be adapted and his remaining an alien to that place forever. When the story begins we encounter Darton travelling towards the Knap on his way to marrying Sally. Charles' attitude towards his betrothed was most unromantic. He looked upon the union more as a practical necessity than as a romantic event. This can be seen from the attitude he adopted regarding a presentation of a dress to Sally. On the eve of his wedding he tells his friend Japheth Johns -

> "Not exactly a wedding dress, though she may use it as one if she likes. It is rather serviceable then showy - suitable for the winter weather" for "why should a woman dress up like a rope dancer because she's going to do the most solemn deed of her life except dying ?" (182).

But as we read on we discover that Darton had not always been unromantic for there was a time when he had loved Helena intensely. Helena was the young daughter of a deceased naval officer who was brought up by an uncle, a solicitor. His bitterness towards marriage was the result of Helena leaving him to marry Philip. He later discovers that Philip is Sally's brother.

At the beginning we see Darton advancing towards the Knap one misty night. He has a friend with him to give him company. The road which they traverse is not a very easy one. The brambles along the road "scratched their hats and hooked their whiskers as they passed" on their way to the Knap. Darton was making this journey in order to

marry Sally of the Knap. But in a Hardy story one does not expect things to end "happily ever after". Darton follows the wrong road, loses his way and a lot of precious time. By the time he reaches the Knap, events have occured which alter the course of his life.

Even as Darton is making his way towards the Knap Sally, a self reliant, independent and confident girl is awaiting the arrival of her fiance. The quiet of the Knap is suddenly broken with the arrival of Philip, her brother in a very sick state. He had left home years earlier to seek a fortune for himself but had returned home now without fortune. He had brought with him a wife and two children. Philip leaves his wife and children in the stable and goes on ahead to announce his marriage to his mother and sister. When Sally hears about them she goes to the stable to call in her nephews and sister-in-law and when she enters the stable she comes upon Helena, for that was Philip's wife's name, and Darton clasping [illegible] hands. Sally puts up a brave face and when her brother dies soon after she breaks off her engagement with Darton so as to enable him to marry his old love.

It is only after the marriage that Darton begins to realise the mistake he had made in marrying Helena for she was not a very good house-keeper and he begins to regret his betrayal of Sally. After a few miserable years of married life Helena dies and Darton goes to ask Sally to marry him again but she refuses and would not hear of

marriage again with him or anybody else.

Sally's character appears a bit rigid but inspite of her rigidity she remains an attractive lovable character whose resilence and independence are a contrast to Darton's personal weakness. The plot of the story goes a long way in illuminating characters and the best part of the story is the contrast shown between the two main characters in the story.

Besides good character portrayal Hardy has shown his powers of landscape painting and his knowledge of country customs. Describing country customs like the one regarding death he comments :

> "It was the universal custom thereabout to wake the bees by tapping at their hives whenever a death occured in the household, under the belief that if this were not done the bees themselves should pine away and perish during the ensuing year. As soon as an interior buzzing responded to her tap at the first hive Mrs. Hall went on to the second and thus passed down the row". (203)

"The Distracted Preacher" is the concluding story of WESSEX TALES. This is one of the best and most flawless of Hardy's short stories. It is one of Hardy's earliest short stories and was written just before THE TRUMPET MAJOR. It was published in The New Quarterly Magazine in April 1879 and also in Harper's Weekly in five instalments (19 April to 17 May 1879).

The plot of "The Distracted Preacher" is generally a love plot giving rise to moral issues. It is a light

satire upon a Wesleyan minister but though light there is no shabbiness of tone at any point in the story. Against a gay background of smuggling Richard Stockdale, the preacher about whom Hardy is writing, falls in love with an attractive young widow, Mrs. Lizzy Newbury, who is his landlady at Nether-Moynton. His moral orthodoxy is severely jarred when he finds out that the liquor with which she cured his cold is smuggled and he is further agonised when he discovers that she is herself actively engaged in smuggling and goes about her illicit business dressed in her farmer husband's old clothes. His moral orthodoxy is, however, overcome by a stronger and more overpowering sexual impulse, and in a series of comic episodes he keeps on returning to her. Ultimately Victorian morality wins and Lizzy discards her smuggling and her smuggler friends for the sanctity and safety of the life of a parson's wife. "She studied her duties as a minister's wife with praiseworthy assiduity. It is said that in after years she wrote an excellent tract called Render unto Ceaser; or The Repentant Villagers" (295)

But in 1912 Hardy, not satisfied with this forced ending added a postscript :

> "Note : The ending of this happy story with the marriage of Lizzy and the minister was almost de rigueur in an English magazine at the time of writing. But at this late date, thirty years after, it may not be amiss to give the ending that would have been preferred by the writer to the convention used above.

> Moreover, it corresponds more closely with the true incidents of which the tale is a vague and flickering shadow. Lizzy did not, in fact, marry the minister, but - much to her credit in the author's opinion - stuck to Jim, the smuggler, and emigrated with him after their marriage, an expatrial step rather forced upon him by his adventurous antecedents. They both died in Wisconsin between 1850 and 1860 (May 1912)" (295)

As George Wing puts it a woman with Lizzy's sense of fun and adventure would "have been inordinately bored as the leading moral lady in a nonconformist parish: perhaps her incarceration into respectability, besides being a sop to the magazine - readers marks the beginning of latter-day suburban neurotics".[20]

Hardy's satire on the Wesleyan minister was moulded by his own beliefs regarding the clergy and religion. Though he had lost religious faith early in adult life, Hardy remained a church goer throughout his life. But he could be a bitter denouncer of the clergy when he chose. However, his portrait of the young non-conformist minister here is relatively tender. The man is silly, but honest and decent and he is genuinely concerned with the role Lizzy is playing. He is not priggish and stuffy even though he disapproves of what Lizzy does and gives her advice, even while he is in love with her.Hardy deals with his pomposity in a gentle manner.

Lizzy inspite of her involvement in illegal activities, is inevitably loveable. Her involvement in smuggling does not trouble her. She is free from any self

questioning or qualms of conscience. She does not smuggle with an eye on profits but because of a deeper compulsion in her blood. She loves the dangers, secrecy and the very spirit involved in smuggling. "It stirs up one's dull life at this time o' the year, and gives excitement, which I have got so used to now that I should hardly know how to do 'ithout it."(289) Lizzy, like most women characters of Hardy is highly instinctive. Commenting on her character Dr. Hasan writes :

> "She can survive only as an outlaw. To ask her to adhere to a prescribed 'correctness of conduct' is to violate her authentic self. She is opposed to the precepts of civilisation."[21]

But within her own circle, consisting of the smugglers, she is good, kind and altruistic. In spite of all the immoral things that she does, Lizzy is the most moral character in "The Distracted Preacher"

Susan Hill commenting on this story says :

> "This early, long story is one of Hardy's most flawless, a perfect comedy with some noticeably Shakespearan touches. It is light-hearted, but like his novel UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE, in the same mood of comic pastoral, has a vein of sadness and seriousness underlying the often uproarious surface, which is reminiscent of TWELFTH NIGHT; there is the basic disparity of temperament and life style between the ill-matched lovers, Stockdale and Lizzy, the serious risk to their security, and to their lives, run by the smuggling villagers, and indeed, the whole moral issue involved".[22]

Strange, Lively, Commonplace was the sub title that Hardy had given to his first edition of WESSEX TALES and this describes well the nature of the stories encountered

in this volume. All the stories have the strange, lively and commonplace elements in them and this along with the Wessex setting is all that is common about the stories. Hardy's choice of stories for this volume was prompted by the settings, all events occuring mostly in Central Wessex. There are some themes which Hardy was fond of dealing with in his longer prose fiction and these we encounter repeatedly here but the treatment of these themes in each story is different. In spite of the sameness of theme and setting the book is not monotonous reading. The seven stories vary widely not only in length but also in character ranging from the humorous "The Distracted Preacher" to the tragical "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" and from the rather romantic "Interlopers at the Knap" to the more realistic and witty "The Three Strangers".

Some of Hardy's stories may appear rather strange but then Hardy has explained the reality behind their more extraordinary features in his preface. In his stories he has expanded anecdotes or traditional tales or the sort of good story that he has heard or read about during his lifetime but he has taken care to let us know that his "stories are but dreams, and not records".

Hardy thought of the exceptional as the richest source of interest in his fiction but all the exceptional occurances in his stories occur in a homely Wessex setting. In WESSEX TALES Hardy offers a revealing, comprehensive

microcosm of his fictional world. The stories may appear haphazard but it is this discontinuity and disjointedness of the volume which in the long run contributes towards the portrayal of a more complete Wessex life than any single novel of his. It depicts various ways of life that contribute to the economy and culture of Wessex and the way that the stories are told exemplifies the local modes of story telling. The mode of narration varies from story to story, from the narrowly subjective point of view of "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" to the distanced voice narration of "The Withered Arm" and from the instructional style of "The Three Strangers" to the analytical mode of "Fellow Townsmen". They are, therefore, very refreshing reading.

While writing his stories Hardy was well aware that the majority of his reading public would be urban. So in narrating his stories Hardy took great care to see that its specifically rural subject matter was comprehensible to the urban reader and this was not a very difficult task for him as he was well acquainted with both the rural life of Dorset and the urban life of London and he was well versed in the differences which existed in these two opposed ways of life. Wessex of the WESSEX TALES is the Wessex which was slow in adopting the changes brought about to the rest of Europe as a result of the Industrial Revolution. There was a big difference in the attitude towards things between the county people and the town people. So to convey a picture

of the rural way of life to the town dwellers Hardy converted the oral culture of his native region into a literary form which was comprehensive to those who lived outside it. Herein lies the modernity of the traditional stories of Hardy in WESSEX TALES.

Hardy's stories in WESSEX TALES are simple, direct and lucid in keeping with the traditional form he has adopted. He has exhibited great economy in telling his stories. Hardy is a meditative story teller, a romancer like Solomon Selby and he exhibits ready charm and pathes in telling his stories. His narrative voice is regional, that of a local historian speaking of people and events still within his living memory and he tells these stories stressing the accuracy and roughness of details as the ancient bards told pastoral tales. But unlike the pastoral tale which as Howe points out "stops starts up again and wanders"[23] Hardy's tales, even though long most of the time and with what appears to be digressions every now and then, are in reality tightly controlled narratives, whose digressions contribute to the overall pattern of meaning. His tales, in spite of the traditional framework, are consciously crafted and uniquely modern.

In WESSEX TALES the readers can appreciate the peculiar charm attached to Old Wessex country scenes. Hardy not only exhibits the country in its supine moods but also the elements of hostility and tension. The Wessex portrayed

is the Wessex of the mid-nineteenth century and the superstitions and traditional elements come through successfully and the reader becomes familiar with some of the complex substance of rural life in all its picturesqueness and variety.

The ironies of marriage, the family and the community which sustains country life constitutes a basic theme of WESSEX TALES. People are unhappy when they are alienated from their own society or from their loved ones and marriage is considered to be rather an arrangement of convenience than a union of two seperate souls or people. Those people who peacefully coexist with nature are the really happy ones like the characters in "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" and the houses where the people live are portrayed as the emblems of the peaceful existence of man with nature.

Inspite of the numerous merits pointed out in the above discussion Hardy's stories have not gained much popularity. Some people have alleged that this volume has stories which are repetitious. There is not much variety to hold the readers attention for long. In fact Hardy in the Preface to the 1912 edition of the WESSEX TALES wrote :

> "An apology is perhaps needed for the neglect of contrast which is shown by presenting two stories of hangmen and one of a military execution in such a small collection as the following".24

but as Hardy explains :

"..... in the neighbourhood of county-towns hanging matters used to form a large proportion of the local tradition".25

Though the collection contains some stories which are concerned with identical themes they are very different from each other in approach, subject matter and diction (dialects of the different counties have been used in different tales) and the similiarities only point to a coherent and self-explanatory rural ethos slow to change.

In conclusion, I would like to say that whatever one may think of the literary merits of the stories (and if one cannot recognise the merits it can be only for lack of sympathy) it is difficult to argue that the stories lack in pace, interest, readability even if at times a story or two does appear rather over-crowded with events. The WESSEX TALES exhibits all Hardy's merits and all his weaknesses. If we accept Hardy, the novelist, as 'great' there is no reason why we should not consider the tales as an integral part of his total achievement with all its specks and flaws.

CHAPTER II

LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES

LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES

LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES is the next volume of short stories which Hardy published. Hardy divided this volume into two parts. The first part consists of a "set of Tales" which he called LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES. The second part contains "some colloquial sketches" which he entitled A FEW CRUSTED CHARACTERS. In this volume Hardy moves from the rural stories of WESSEX TALES set in the Dorset of his childhood and the historical stories of A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES set in a period two centuries before his birth to incidents occurring in an unspecified present. This volume was first published in 1894. It then contained nine stories - "The Son's Veto", "For Conscience' Sake", "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions", "On the Western Circuit", "To Please his Wife", "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion", "The Fiddler of the Reels", "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" and "A Few Crusted Characters". "An Imaginative Woman" (which was added to the 1896 edition of WESSEX TALES) replaced "The Melancholy Hussar of the German Legion" and "A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four" in the 1912 edition of LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES. This repeated shuffling and reshuffling of stories from one volume to another shows that Hardy did as in his earlier two volumes, once again make a conscious attempt to arrange the stories so as to present them

as an united whole. The stories in LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES depend a lot on coincidence and ironic compulsion and the unifying principle of the stories in this volume lies, to quote Hardy's own words, in the stories turning "upon a trick of Nature, so to speak".[1]

In 1894 when this volume was published Hardy had almost reached the end of his writing career. Although Hardy in this volume once again shows his characteristic stance towards life, i.e. - that life is intrinsically unsatisfactory, that sexual attraction and romantic illusions are potentially destructive forces, that women who are forced into marriage by social and economic pressures often have to face a difficult situation, that the intrusion of education and sophistication into a peasant culture often upset old patterns, that in human life there is nothing to dislike but much to pity - he does it with much greater subtlety and poignancy than in his earlier tales.

It is not known when "An Imaginative Woman", the first story in this collection, was written but a note of December 1893 refers to this story as follows - "Found and touched up a short story called "An Imaginative Woman".[2] This story, based on a contemporary psychological fantasy was first published in the PALL MALL MAGAZINE in April 1894 and originally published in the first edition of WESSEX

TALES. It was, however, transferred to LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES in 1912.

> "as being more nearly its place, turning as it does upon a trick of Nature, so to speak, a physical possibility that may attach to a wife of vivid imaginings, as is well known to medical practitioners and other observers of such manifestations".[3] (p.v)

Ella Marchmill, the heroine, is a fanciful and ambitious woman. She is self-indulgent, spoilt and discontent with her lot. She is married to a commonplace and prosaic philistine who is indifferent to the emotional needs of his wife. Temperamental incompatibility leads to failure of their marriage. Ella's evasive tactic of "shrinking humanely from detailed knowledge of her husband's trade" (4) is part of her instinctive hesitancy in confronting problems. She is secretive about the events of her inner life as Marchmill is about his social activities. The two follow their individual ways of lives. Ella's attitude towards her three children is no better. She is generally indifferent towards them. She spends her time "letting off her delicate and ethereal emotions in imaginative occupations, day-dreams and night-sighs" (4).

Hardy cleverly manipulates this story in a modern way. Instead of a narrator gradually creating the atmosphere, in which the events occur, for his listeners in keeping with the ancient tradition of tales and ballads he puts us amidst this couple at a point when events are already under way.

> "When William Marchmill had finished his inquiries for lodgings at the well-known watering-place of Solentsea in Upper Wessex, he returned to the hotel to find his wife ...." (3)

After they shift to their new lodgings Ella discovers from the landlady that one of the rooms they are using is under the tenancy of a young poet, Robert Trewe who has gone away temporarily. Mrs. Marchmill, an aspiring poet herself falls in love with the image of this young poet and longs to meet him, all the while building for herself a dream world in which they meet and are happy together. But as luck is against her she never gets an opportunity to meet him even though on one occasion he had actually stood in front of her gate talking to a painter friend who later drops in to meet her. Then suddenly she reads in a newspaper that he has committed suicide and this distracts her with grief and she makes a surreptious visit to his grave. Her husband finds her here crouching beside the grave and suspects a liaison which she properly denies since she has never seen the poet. But she has in her possession a photograph of the poet and a lock of his hair which she puts away along with a lock of her own hair. Time passes and she is to have a child. She dies during childbirth and just before her death she confesses to Marchmill - "Will, I want to confess another lover". Ella had begun to believe what she had merely imagined and desired but the real irony lies in the incidents that follow.Marchmill begins out of his

own jealous imagination to believe Ella's imagination and becomes as imaginative as Ella. After Ella's death Marchmill one day discovers the photograph and the lock of Robert Trewe's hair and compares them to the features and hair of his child. By "a known and inexplicable trick of Nature" Marchmill detects a resemblance between the poet and his boy. His suspicions are confirmed and he spurns the child, saying "Get away, you poor little brat! You are nothing to me!" (31) Not only has Ella's attachment to an illusion brought her unwarranted grief and guaranteed her child a bleak future, but her husband who is a tolerant and long suffering man is denied the love for her child. And yet she has done nothing culpable. Even her imaginary love affair was perfectly platonic. All one can say is that this is one of life's little ironies. And as Dr. Noorul Hasan puts it

> "..... it expresses Hardy's oft repeated belief that the unexpected or the fantastic is co-present with the normal. A "sensational novel", Hardy wrote "is possible in which the sensationalism is not casualty, but evolution; not physical but psychial." "An Imaginative Woman" is an experiment in psychial sensationalism." 4

The story on the whole may be sensational but Hardy once again explores here one of his favourite subjects - the failure of a nineteenth century middle class marriage, a marriage which was made with no consideration of "tastes and fancies, those smallest greatest particulars"

but rather out of the thoughtless desperation felt especially by women, "of getting life leased at all cost".(4) Hardy also explains here the futility of imagination because life seldom conforms to private dreams and "imaginativeness - seemingly a harmless and even 'creative' escape from harsh realities - can itself become destructive.

With this introductory story Hardy sets the keynote of the volume as a whole. Ella, like most of Hardy's characters is the victim of circumstances. Hardy has portrayed the character of this whimsical woman in a clever, knowing and entirely credible way. Her inner life is made of conflicting forces - the romantic existing with the practical, the emotional with the physical, and the maternal and the platonic with the conjugal love. Ella is representative of many young women with poetic inclinations and flighty temperaments who attached themselves to famous artistic personality and blew up their scanty impressions by imaginative occupations, day dreams and night sighs" into all consuming passions.

The other characters that we encounter in this story are Robert Trewe and William Marchmill. Robert Trewe does not make an actual appearance in the story. Hardy deliberately keeps him just out of sight on the edge of the story, never allowing him to make a real entry into it, in

person, as he always fails to enter Ella's life. But the lonely life that he has led, the frustration he has felt and his innermost feelings have been very well depicted and even though like Ella we do not meet him personally we know him well enough.

Unlike the stories in his two previous volumes "An Imaginative Woman" has an urbane air. It does not have any reference to rural life or society or to the past. Although its setting is Victorian the event might well have occured during a much later period thus bringing Hardy forward in time. Even in his narrative technique Hardy has adopted a direct, abrupt and more modern technique abandoning the old fashioned balladic style of the earlier volumes.

"The Son's Veto" the next story in the collection once again is about an unhappy marriage but this time the miserable consequences are a result of the discrepencies of social class. This highly charged and touching story was published in The Illustrated London News in December 1891. Hardy confessed to Rebekah Owen, one of his American admirers, that he thought this to be his best story.

Sophy is a parlourmaid to Mr. Twycott, the vicar. After his wife's death the vicar discovers that he has grown more and more dependent on Sophy and not only

that, he has begun to care for her. One day when the vicar is ill, while attending to him Sophy trips, falls, hurts herself and becomes a cripple for life. Guilty that he is in some way responsible for the accident the vicar proposes to Sophy. Sophy has a lover already but overawed with the vicar's proposal she accepts it and assents to be his wife. But this hasty decision is not a wise one for the vicar. Marriage with a servant girl means social suicide. The vicar is obliged to take Sophy out of her native village to avoid causing a scandal there. They move to the anonymity of London where neither the vicar nor Sophy are happy. The vicar dies after fourteen years leaving behind a son who is now attending a Public School. Sophy thus lives on alone in London pining for her lost past and happiness. Even when the boy comes home for his vacation Sophy is not happy because her son finds her lack of refinement exasperating and reproaches her for her uncouthness of speech, and her country ways. Her only happiness lies in thoughts of her past Wessex life where she atleast had a place of her own. Her nostalgia is excited by the scene in which she sits at the window gazing at the vegetable carts, swaying with fresh country produce, lumber through the silent streets of the city at dawn. One day, on one of these carts she notices her old lover, Sam Hobson. She looks out for him daily that day onwards and as time passes they meet

and once again become friends. They even go for a ride and enjoy it finding comfort in each other's company. At first Sophy tries to maintain a distance in keeping with her status but she cannot keep this up for long. Sam proposes to Sophy but the latter cannot accept as Randolph, her son, is incensed at the idea of having "A miserable boor! a churl! a clown" (50) for a stepfather. She hopes that once Randolph becomes independent he would withdraw his objection. But he does not."His education had by this time sufficiently ousted his humanity to keep him quite firm, though his mother might have led an idyllic life with her fruiterer and green-grocer and nobody would have been anything the worse in the world".(51-2). He finally makes her promise in front of a cross and altar never to marry Sam Hobson without his consent. Sophy never gets to understand why Randolph objects to this marriage and she keeps murmuring to herself till her very end "Why mayn't I say to Sam that I'll marry him ? Why mayn't I ?" (52). She finally dies, an unhappy woman till her very end. In the last scene Hardy describes Sam Hobson standing in front of his half shuttered shop as a funeral procession crosses. He stands with tears in his eyes, hat in his hands as the vehicles move past him. And from the mourning coach a young smooth-shaven priest looks "bleak as a cloud at the shop-keeper standing there". (52)

> "Fate, chance, co-incidence - the notorious imponderables of Hardy's fiction - have nothing to do here. It is a story of man's callousness to man. More specifically, it is a story of the cruelty of social ambition".[6]

So one might wonder why Hardy had included this story in a collection called LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES. There is no dramatic irony and little verbal irony in this tale of a son educated above his mother, denying her the right to marry below his station and she dying of grief. This time the focus of the irony Hardy fixes in the fact that a natural woman is kept from marrying a devoted, rural lover by the selfishness and snobbishness of her son. Now, a person who believes that sons have the right to keep the mothers from remarrying if it injures their reputation in any way will see no irony in the story. But to Hardy who detests the selfishness and snobbishness of the son and who esteems the virtues of the mother, the irony lies in the fact that the son's choice should win out and the mother be destroyed by grief.

The tragic events which occur in Sophy's life are not unique. The tragedy of Sophy is the tragedy of many Wessex people. There is a new thrust which upsets the old pattern of life. Education and sophistication are disruptive forces. It turns Sophy's son against her and makes him ashamed of her. It ousts his humanity. Hardy says that Wessex people can do without that vicious

education which makes a boy forget his affinities with nature and changes him into a horrid snob. Randolph looks at everything from the point of view of social decorum. His values are a vindication of the values of Sophy - the values of the rural Wessex people. Through the story of the alienation of mother from son, Hardy tells us about the distance and seperation between city and country, between the conventional values of the Twycott men and the pure instincts of Sophy. Sophy is a country girl brought up amidst the picturesqueness and dense complexity of Wessex and when she moves to London she misses "their pretty country home, with trees and shrubs and glebe" and the fine peel of bells. Neither her husband nor her son understands her misery and she suffers all alone. When we first meet Sophy we are in the midst of a crowd admiring from behind her nut-brown hair which she has woven into an intricate design. The story is offered as a response to the reader's curiosity about this interesting woman who looked young and sat on a wheel chair and braided, twisted and coiled her long locks of hair like the rushes of a basket.

This innocent Sophy is thrown between the urban world represented by her immediate family members and the happy Wessex world of Sam Hobson, her lover. Hardy has portrayed both the worlds very successfully. The Twycotts in spite of all their formal education are in reality very deplorable characters deprived of any culture whereas Sam

Hobson is a plain, good, loveable man and we feel genuinely touched by his unselfish love for Sophy. Sam Hobson, though not educated in the formal way that the Twycotts have been educated is more respectable. He has been educated by Nature and is close to it. He has a masculine assertiveness which is seriously lacking in the vicar, Sophy's husband. Sam is one person who understands Sophy's position and thus he tries to bridge the gap for Sophy between the seclusion of the rural life of Wessex and "the rhythm and racket of the movements called progress in the world without"(50). He brings into the city the life giving resources of the countryside. But in spite of all his efforts he could not make life happy for Sophy. Sophy in a way is to be blamed for this for she never tries to assert herself on Randolph and it is the helplessness she feels which makes this story so touching. It is the depiction of the distance and seperation - between city and country, Sophy and her husband, Sophy and her lover and her son and finally between her lover and herself firstly because of circumstances and finally by death - in a very sympathetic manner which makes "The Son's Veto" one of Hardy's best pieces of short fiction.

"For Conscience' Sake" was first published in THE FORTNIGHTLY REVIEW in March 1891. In this story Hardy "undermines one of the most sacrosanct of Victorian tenets"[7] - a man who has wronged a woman should make amendments by

marrying her. Hardy, in a most unorthodox manner, is going against those conventions of which the literature of his time was so supportive. Hardy drew inspiration for this story from a real life account he heard in 1882 of a girl who had been "betrayed and deserted" by a lover and who refused to be "made respectable" by her lover when the latter for consciences sake wanted to make amendments by marrying her. Hardy was impressed by this woman's spirit. He admired her for not becoming a slave of her seducer and saw in her the "first glimmers of woman's enfranchisement".[8]

In "For Conscience' Sake" Hardy tells us the story of Mrs. Frankland through a narrator. The narrator uses a rhetorical way of recounting the story and he tells it with rational and compassionate objectivity. The narrator begins his story -

> "Whether the utilitarian or the intuitive theory of the moral sense be upheld it is beyond question that there are a few subtle-souled persons with whom the absolute gratuitousness of an act of reparation is an inducement to perform it; while exhortation as to its necessity would breed excuses for leaving it undone. The case of Mr. Millborne and Mrs. Frankland particularly illustrated this and perhaps something more". (55).

The story is about Mr. Millborne, a Victorian gentleman who had abandoned his pregnant sweetheart twenty years earlier after trifling with her feelings, in spite of the fact that he had promised to marry her because as he puts it "it was represented to me that it would be beneath my

position to marry her". (58) Now with the passage of time he begins to feel guilty and his conscience keeps pricking him till he reaches a sense of dissatisfaction at the recollection of his unfulfilled promise. He, moreover, learns that his sweetheart now lives on at Exonbury under the name of Mrs. Leonara Frankland, a widow along with their daughter. They run a Music and Dancing School and are respected by the neighbourhood for what they are.

Mr. Millborne out of a sincere though belated desire to salve his conscience desires to marry Mrs. Frankland and with this intention he proceeds to Exonbury to court the very sweetheart whom he had seduced twenty years earlier and whom he had abandoned subsequently. When he encounters Leonara he discovers that she is not too keen to marry him.

> "I appreciate your motives Mr. Millborne; but you must consider my position; and you will see that, short of the personal wish to marry, which I don't feel, there is no reason why I should change my state, even though by so doing I should ease your conscience. My position in this town is a respected one; I have built it up by my own hard labours, and in short, I don't wish to alter it". (64).

Millborne, however, ignores all oppositions because he begins to believe that the only way to peace of mind lies in his marriage to this girl whom he had wronged and he continues courting her with the hope that she will someday change her mind. And luckily for him, he one day discovers that a young curate desired to marry his daughter but was

hesitating because his friends were objecting to the match because of the Frankland's vocation. So like many of Hardy's characters Rev.Percival Cope was also choking his natural instincts to further his ambition. Millborne persuades Leonara to leave her school and start a new life with him, as his wife. Not willing to stand in the path of her daughter's happiness Leonara marries him. But Leonara is not destined to be happy. Soon after the marriage the curate accidentally discovers resemblance between Miss Frankland and Mr. Millborne and he guesses that Frances had been born out of wedlock. On this discovery Mr. Cope's attitude towards Miss Frankland cools. Mr. Millborne soon realises that his return to the life of these two women has ruined the life and prospects of his daughter. He leaves them finally having made them financially secure - and having ruptured the nice routine of his bachelor's life.

"For Conscience' Sake" is one of Hardy's short stories for here Hardy tackles a situation in a manner which was unconventional by Victorian standards and hence not to be found in Victorian literature. Leonara Frankland's sexual behaviour, as portrayed in this story, may have appeared unconventional to the Victorian readers but to us it is this very unconventional attitude of the protagonist which makes her all the more admirable. Leonara refuses to be made respectable by the lover who had earlier

betrayed her and she capably performs male roles. Because of the courage she shows in the face of all her troubles she is well liked and respected by her neighbours. She is well dressed, moderately attractive, dignified and cheerful. She is, in fact, most unlike the traditional seduced and wronged woman. On the other hand, Mr. Millborne is in a state of self-imposed exile and leads a solitary life, unknown in the anonymity of London.

The courtship of Frances Frankland and Percival Cope is in a way parallel to that between Millborne and Leonara twenty years earlier. Both of them put their ambition above everything else. While Millborne says "it was represented to me that it would be beneath my position to marry her", Percival Cope hesitates to marry Frances because his friends object to her vocation and when he decides not to marry her (the decision is reversed later) it is because of her questionable relationship to Millborne.

The general atmosphere of unhappiness which encages this story like most other Hardy stories, is this time, not caused by the forces of circumstance but by human meddling. Millborne, urged on by moral impulse and with all good intentions enters the world of the Franklands and disrupts their stable equilibrium which they have achieved by hard labour. Millborne's conventional attempt to right a wrong leads not to happiness but to unhappiness, not to respect but to the loss of it. Hardy here formulates

a new and complex moral for his Victorian readers."Past wrongs cannot be rectified by acts of formal morality in the present",[9]

The basic irony of "For Conscience Sake" lies in the title of the story itself.Kristin Brady says that the word 'conscience' was an important word in the enforcement of Victorian social conventions and that the theme of "For Conscience Sake" perhaps is

> ".... the moral 'bewilderment' that accompanies conventional life, in which 'intuitive' and 'utilitarian' judgements about matters of conscience are often confounded. Both Millborne's belated marriage to Leonara and the attempt to convert 'happy savages' to Christianity are symptomatic of moral short-sightedness. By depicting a situation in which an act of conscience leads to 'the reward of dishonourable laxity' Hardy formulates a more complex moral for his Victorian audience : that past wrongs cannot be rectified by acts of formal morality in the present".[10]

So far we have discussed stories where ambition has caused much unhappiness but in "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" we see ambition as the cause of irreparable damage. We see that the ambition to rise above one's class can leave little time for love. It can even be so strong as to lead to crime. "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" was sent to H.Quiller, on request in August 1888 for publication in his magazine. It appeared in THE UNIVERSAL REVIEW in December 1888. On New Year (1889) Hardy received a letter from Mr. Gosse which said that he thought "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" to be

> "....one of the most thrilling and complete stories Hardy had ever written .... I walked under the moral burden of it for the remainder of the day.... I am truly happy - being an old faded leaf and disembowelled bloater and wet rag myself - to find your genius ever so fresh and springing."11

"A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" once again throws the clergy into a not too favourable light. Joshua and Cornelius Halborough are two brothers who have struggled and scrimped in order to realize their ambitions to enter the church and to see their sister properly educated and married. But the path of their ambition is not very smooth. Their handicap lies in the form of a boorish, drunken and disreputable father who does everything possible to ruin their happiness. As a result of the circumstances in which they find themselves in they become harsh and self-centred. The only time they show any concern is when they are making plans for their much loved sister Rosa. They love her and have a genuine desire to see her educated and well established in the world by contracting a good marriage. But before looking for a suitable match for her they send her to a school at Brussels.

By dint of sheer hard work Joshua and Cornelius make some progress in the world. Joshua becomes a successful curate and Cornelius a school master. They also manage to get rid of their troublesome father and his gypsy wife by borrowing some money and sending them off to Canada. But the father is not too happy in Canada and so returns on the

eve of Rosa's marriage to a wealthy Squire who is a widower. The father in the meantime, having spent all his money on drinks does the last part of his journey on foot. He is determined to take revenge on his sons for having him shipped to Canada. He threatens his sons by telling them that he will stop Rosa's marriage and will ruin their souls for preaching. However, fortunately for Joshua and Cornelius their father, completely out of his senses, looses his footing and falls intoa a weir where after a fruitless struggle he drowns calling out for help and all the while calling out Rosa's name. Joshua and Cornelius look on. The sons allow their father to drown because they think that if their father is saved from this situation he will definitely ruin their sister's life and happiness and their reputation. By the time good sense prevails on them and they begin to think that they should try to save their father it is already too late. Their father's body has already gone under the culvert. The only trace left of him is his walking stick which they thrust into the river bank. When his body is finally found too much time has already passed. He cannot be identified and so his corpse is buried as that of a person unknown.Joshua conducts the service all the while feeling a deep sense of remorse and guilt.

Rosa is married and lives on happily with the Squire. On the day of her father's death she hears someone

call her name in a voice resembling her father's but she dismisses the incident because she thinks it could only be a fancy or it could be the voice of someone who had a wife or a child with a name like hers. Rosa is very different from her brothers who have lost their humanity in the pursuit of their ambitions. Joshua and Cornelius ultimately do achieve their ambition but this they do under rather tragic circumstances. They have lost their peace of mind and they see the vision of their drowning father everynight. The father has got his revenge. The souls of Joshua and Cornelius are spoiled for preaching or for anything else. Their personal ambitions become considerably weakened and the world, once so promising now becomes flat and unprofitable even though now it is rid of the person whose presence had threatened their success. Ofcourse, knowing the situation we cannot blame Joshua and Cornelius for not helping their father. Their hesitation is inevitable as they know that if their father lives on them all their years of struggle and sacrifice would go a waste. Moreover, the Victorian society being what it was the two brothers had little or no choice. Hardy gives a beautiful explanation of the difficult position that the two brothers were in through the lips of Joshua.

> "The case as it stands is maddening. For a successful painter, sculptor, musician, author, who takes society by storm, it is no drawback, it is sometimes even a romantic recommendation, to hail from

> outcastes and profligates. But for a clergyman of the church of England! Cornelius, it is fatal. To succeed in the church, people must believe in you, first of all, as a gentleman, secondly as a man of means, thirdly as a scholar, fourthly as a preacher, fifthly, perhaps as a Christian, - but always first as a gentleman, with all their heart and soul and strength. I would have faced the fact of being a small machinist's son, and have taken my chance, if he'd been in any sense respectable and decent. The essence of christianity is humility, and by the help of God I would have brazened it out. But this terrible vagabondage and disreputable connection."(87)

The two brothers are but victims of circumstances and they take the only way open before them for progress - the path of hypocrisy. Because they are victims of circumstance we sympathise more with their problems then we did with Randolph in "The Son's Veto" although all three characters face the same sort of a problem - the problem of the ambitious son embarassed by an unrespectable parent. The father, an insensitive, boorish man has ruined his sons' chances of education by spending the money his wife had saved for their education. But in spite of all these despicable qualities Hardy enlists our admiration for him in his

> "Splendidly, incongruous, rumbustious appearance in the Cathedral Close with a gypsy woman on his arm, and we relish his over-familiar accosting of the Dean, and Joshua's horror". 12

Here Hardy shows his great skill at portraying characters. Mr. Halborough is a man with a great zest for life. In contrast Joshua and Cornelius are mean spirited. Even as boys they are single minded and cold and refuse to diverge

for even half an hour from their studies which they treat as a means to material profit. The brothers have little interest in or true commitment to the Christian religion. They see the Church only in terms of their future material and worldly advancements.

Joshua and Cornelius are both sons of the same parents, nursing the same ambitions and struggling to achieve their ambitions under the same circumstances. But Hardy shows subtle differences in their characters which goes to make "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" one of Hardy's better if not best stories. "The anger of the elder was reflected as simple sadness in the face of the other" (79) writes Hardy. Throughout the story we see that it is Joshua who is always calculating and wanting to rise in the world pulling his brother and sister along with him lest they prove to be disgraces like their father. Cornelius is just the half willing follower who would have been satisfied to be a school master without his brother's influence. Cornelius is more humane, more warm, more innocent than his elder brother.

Like so many of Hardy's characters Cornelius and Joshua cause a major event like their father's death to occur not by what they do but by what they fail to do. They have been extremely provoked by their father. But it is their suppression of feeling, their ability to stand by and listen to their father as he drowns without extending

a helping hand which is very inhumane and which makes them akin to cold blooded murderers.

"A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" "is a dark intensely moral parable with innumerable biblical overtones and everything in it works towards the central point, including the fact that, for once, the female characters, though interestingly and roundly conveyed, remain in the background."[13]

In the next short story "On the Western Circuit" Hardy once again returns to his favourite love-courtship-marriage theme and his pessimism about the married state is very apparent in this rather bleak short story. This story bears distinct resemblance to other stories in this collection, stories like "The Son's Veto", "An Imaginative Woman" and "For Conscience Sake". This story was published for the first time in HARPER'S WEEKLY and THE ENGLISH ILLUSTRATED MAGAZINE at the end of 1891.

Edith Harnham is a frustrated woman and in this story Hardy illustrates a mild instance of sexual frustration. Edith is married to a rich wine merchant but she is not happy in her married life. She is bored and discontented with her husband. He in turn is irritated by her. Edith had agreed to marry him not out of any love that she felt for him but because she was getting on in age and no better match presented itself before her.

> "Edith Harnham led a lonely life. Influenced by the belief of the British parent that a bad marriage with its aversions is better than free womanhood

> with its interests, dignity, and leisure, she had consented to marry the elderly wine merchant as a pis aller, at the age of seven and twenty - some three years before this date - to find afterwards that she had made a mistake. That contract had left her still a woman whose deeper nature had never been stirred". (125)

Hardy, however, does not blame Edith for the way things are going. He just states in a matter of fact manner the condition of things.

Mrs. Harnham has a girl called Anna brought to her house in Melchester from a village on the Great Plain to train her as a servant if she showed any aptitude. Anna is poor, illiterate, artless and ignorant of worldly ways. Soon after her arrival at Melchester she falls in love with Charles Raye, a barrister. Raye intrudes upon her rustic simplicity, seduces her and leaves her because he is afraid that his life will prove miserable in the future if he marries this girl who is his social inferior. She will definitely be a social embarrassment and an emotional burden to him. On the other hand Anna is anxious to marry Raye. Not knowing what to do she confides her state of affairs to her mistress who promises to help her by writing letters to Raye in Anna's name, Anna being illiterate. Edith writes to Raye and the latter is enamoured with the image of Anna created through the letters. The deception is carried on while Raye occasionally meets Anna as he does the Western Circuit.

Anna soon discovers that she is pregnant. Edith's crowning touch is in the letter she writes to Raye convincing him that he must marry her. What the situation amounts to is that Edith, who has been married for years has come to love Raye through these letters and Raye also reciprocates this love. But when they realise this it is already too late. Raye has already married Anna and it is only after the marriage that he finds out that Anna is in reality a vulgar, country lass incapable of writing her name. She is not the vision he had thought her to be . Edith at last confesses her role in the deception to Raye and with one kiss they acknowledge their love and part each with a secret knowledge of his ruined life.

As we come to the end of the story, we feel sorry for Edith and Raye. We sympathise with them for these people have been made unhappy not because of any bad motives but because they have misapplied their good ones. Edith, agrees to write letters for Anna, because she wants to help her and Charles Raye agrees to marry Anna only because he wanted to do that which was right because Anna was carrying his child. The story has about it the sense of inevitability that one usually associates with tragedies. We the readers feel right from the beginning that things will not end happily for any of the characters. Hardy's pessimism about the married state is nowhere more apparent than in this story. But this does not mean that "On the

Western Circuit" is all painful reading. It has funny moments in it. Hardy shows his great skill in blending the funny moments in the story with the most painful. Hardy is here narrating situations which are funny but the consequences of these situations on the lives of the characters are painful. He mixes laughter with compassion.

Hardy's portrayal of characters is also very noteworthy in this story. Raye is an "end-of-the-age young man" (118); "Anna is a pretty rural, maiden" (119) innocent and illiterate and Ella is a "lonely, impressionable creature" (118) and an unhappy wife. None of the characters in the story see the others in proper light. Each character's image of the loved one is a distortion of fact. Instead of recognising in the frivolous conversation of Anna her real nature Raye believes what he wants to believe that it is her letters which show her real character. Edith's emotional interest in Raye is aroused after he has idly touched her hand. She chooses to forget that Raye had seduced Anna without nursing any intentions of marrying her. Both Edith and Anna have an inflated opinion of Raye's professional status. Anna adores him as if he were a god. This difference between the characters' appraisal of each other and the more objective and comprehensive view that the reader has of each of them makes the story complex and interesting reading.

First published in BLACK AND WHITE in June 1891 "To Please His Wife" has once again got female jealousy and ambition,

and their capacity for the destruction of self and family, for a theme. Joanna and Emily are two friends of very different looks and temperaments. Emily Hanning is a "slight and gentle creature" and Joanna Phippard is "a tall, large-framed, deliberative girl".(143) When we see them for the first time we find them conversing with deep interest about Shadrach Jolliffe, a young sailor who has freshly returned to Havenpool after a narrow escape from a ship wreck. With the passing of time both girls develop an interest in the sailor and the latter in turn shows a liking for both the girls with a distinct preference for Emily. Joanna's jealousy is aroused and being a proud and ambitions woman she contrives as to marry the sailor, whom she does not love, in order to keep him from marrying Emily. Sexual jealousy makes her abandon her plans of "mating considerably above her" (144). She also prevails upon Shadrach to leave the sea and start a grocer's shop. The successful achievement of her plans instead of bringing her triumph over Emily, dishes out more misery. Emily is discovered by a rich wine merchant who marries her. Joanna becomes intensely envious of Emily's prosperity and to make matters worse we find that the Jolliffe fortune is steadily declining because of Shadrach's ineptitude at shopkeeping. As a result she persuades him to return to sea, in search of riches. He returns after a partly successful voyage but the fortune he brings back is not sufficient to enable her

to compete socially with Emily. So she asks him to venture out a second time this time taking along with him their two sons in order to increase their profits. They never return and Joanna is finally forced to become the object of Emily's charity. Thus by her own act she becomes miserably indebted to one whom she intended to out do.

The conclusion of the tale is terrible in its pathos. Joanna waits on hoping in vain that they would come back. Eventually she has to live with Emily because of her poverty. In the final scene she dreams that she hears the footsteps of her husband and sons and she runs out into the street in her nightgown. Nothing is there but the mist swirling up the street, she wanders up and down barefoot, distracted, until eventually she knocks on the door which had once been hers - they might have been admitted for the night, unwilling to disturb her till the morning. "Nobody has come", she is told by the young man who keeps the shop. We leave her standing in the misty street with nothing but emptiness and despair before her.

The narrative mode of the story changes along with Joanna's stand towards life. From an intensely confident woman sure of all that she does Joanna suddenly becomes a typical sailor's widow of the ballad. She goes about lamenting the treachery of the sea and haunts the scenes of happier days. But then she has no one but herself to blame. As a personification of ambition and the means she adopts to

achieve this ambition she comes to her deserved end. Yet she does not recognise her own contribution to the working out of her destiny. She puts the blame on everything else but herself - on Emily, Providence and the sea - and her final state is heart rending.

Richard Carpenter writing about Joanna says :

> "Joanna's pitiful rationalizations, her persistence in a fruitless hope, are pathetically human. It might be argued that she does not deserve to be crushed in this manner for the simple fault of vanity and a desire to best her rival in love, but that is the essence of tragedy as Hardy sees it. A radical disproportion exists between our flaws and the punishments meted out for them, it just happens that things turn out the way they do. Joanna loses her family, her position and is losing her mind, not simply because she wanted too much and took satisfaction at another's discomfiture but because, when she did so act, she made possible a conjunction of circumstances which would not have otherwise occured. Thus character and fate become ironically intertwined."14

In contrast to the over ambitious Joanna we have the two other characters, Emily and Shadrach. They are happy because of their lack of ambition for social advancements. Emily is more resourceful than Joanna and is able to face the situation she finds herself in successfully. When living with her father she kept a stationery shop to fill in the "gaps of his somewhat uncertain business" (143) and unlike Joanna's grocery shop hers was a success. Even when she had to loose Shadrach she manages to get used to her disappointment and is able to make a good and prosperous marriage.

Shadrach, married to Joanna is more like Emily in character. He is direct and naive. He has great trust and faith in God and submits to the workings of Providence. Jolliffe's integrity and rigid adherence to principle make him but malleable stuff in the hands of the world and of worldly women like Joanna. Being most of the time away at sea he is unaware of the ways of men on land. His purity and simplicity are inappropriate for life in the small nineteenth century town of Havenpool, with its wealthy merchants and genteel society. He is an unsophisticated hero and unfit for this highly complex and competitive world.

"The Fiddler of the Reels" is alone among Hardy's short stories which has been singled out time and again for critical attention and universal praise, often being held up as the only example of a story of real merit. The story was written for the Exhibition number of the SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE published in May 1893 to mark the Chicago World Fair.

Wat Ollamoor, musician, dandy, "company man in practice", "veterinary surgeon in theory" had come to Mellstock village from nobody knew where. He was much favoured by the unsophisticated maidenhood and he had a "weird and wizardly" power over them. His fiddling perhaps had the most to do with the fascination he exercised.

> "While playing he invariably closed his eyes; using no notes, and, as it were, allowing the violin to wander on at will into the most plaintive passages ever heard by rustic man. There was a certain lingual

> character in the supplicatory expressions he produced, which would well-nigh have drawn an ache from the heart of a gate-post. He could make any child in the parish, who was at all sensitive to music, burst into tears in a few minutes by simply fiddling one of the old dance tunes he almost entirely affected - country jigs, reels, and 'Favourite Quick Steps' of the last century ..... Occasionally Mop could produce the aforesaid moving effect upon the souls of grown-up persons, especially young women of fragile and responsive organization". (167-68).

Wat Ollamoor goes around fiddling and casting spells over the villagers like the Pipe Piper. Amongst those who are charmed by the demonic, "heart-stealing melodies of "Mop" (as Ollamoor is popularly known) is Car'line Aspent. She is mesmerised by the music and the personality of Mop and abandons her faithful village lover, Ned Hipcroft, in favour of Mop. Disappointed, Ned leaves Wessex and goes to London. But things do not move smoothly for Car'line. Mop after seducing her disappears without a trace. Many years later Car'line realising the mistake she had made in not marrying Ned, goes to join him in London. She takes along with her, her child by the Fiddler. Ned who still nursed a certain tenderness for Car'line excuses her for her past mistakes and they get married. Ned grows to love his step daughter and life would have been perfectly happy for them had they not begun to miss the home simplicities of Wessex life. They decide to return to Wessex. On the way back home they seek rest at an inn where Mop reappears and with his music once again mesmerizes Car'line. She jigs and dances

to his music till she falls unconscious in a fit of exhaustion. While she lay unconscious Mop vanishes with the child, the symbol of their union. They are not heard of again. Perhaps, Hardy concludes

> "Mop, no doubt, finding the girl a highly desirable companion when he had trained her to keep him by her earnings as a dancer. There, for that matter, they may be performing in some capacity now, though he must be an old scamp verging on three-score-and-ten and she a woman of four-and-fourty" (185).

"The Fiddler of the Reels" appears highly improbable and Hardy does not bother to offer a rational explanation to the tale except to say that

> ".... music in such masterly hands as Mop's has an Orphic influence; to counter balance this implication he says that Mop's power over "unsophisticated maiden-hood .... seemed sometimes to have a touch of the weird and wizardly about it". On the whole Hardy breaks with the realistic tradition quite definitely here and gives us a story that belongs with folk tales of witches and warlocks".15

The story may be improbable but the story is gripping and Hardy is at his best in the portrayal of his characters. Its central character, Wat Ollamoor has great power and memorability even though he is not at all likeable. He is repellent, swarthy, greasy, 'weird and wizardly, a mad, diabolic and siren figure. He is disliked by man and highly attractive to women. Hardy goes out of his way to describe him physically to show how perverse and magically induced the women's passion for him was

> "Personally he was not ill-favoured, though rather un-English, his complexion being a rich olive, his rank hair dark and rather clammy - made still clammier by secret ointments, which, when he came fresh to a party, caused him to smell like 'boys'-love' (Southern-wood) steeped in lamp-oil. On occasion he wore curls - a double row running almost horizontally around his head. But as these were sometimes noticeably absent, it was concluded that they were not altogether by Nature's making. By girls whose love for him had turned to hatred he had been nicknamed 'Mop' from this abundance of hair, which was long enough to rest upon his shoulders...."(166)

Ollamoor is the embodiment of evil. He has power and he revels in it. Its effect amuses him. A total contrast to Ollamoor is Ned Hipcroft, a honest Wessex artisan. He is reliable, lovable but a far from romantic figure. Car'line turns to him when her real needs become very strong. She knows that he will never refuse her help. She however, has no hesitation in dancing to the fiddler's tune the moment he reappears. We have by now become familiar with this situation which we have repeatedly encountered in story after story - the rivalry of the good and honest Wessex man and the attractive but villainous intruder.

In this story, Hardy besides telling us the story of the beguilement of Car'line by Mop also tells us about the intrusion of science, technology and modern concepts into the Wessex world. Hardy tells us of the reaction of the Wessex people to the introduction of the railroads and the setting up of the Great Exhibition and in keeping with this theme of progress Hardy makes the narrator

use a scientific imagery in his narration. The narrator describes Carline's "Compelled Capers" in these words - she jumps "as if she had received a galvanic shock" and in describing the invocation of contemporary medical authority to describe her condition he writes "The next evidences of his influence over her were singular enough and it would require a neurologist to fully explain them".(169)

But inspite of the introduction of scientific inventions into the world of Wessex Hardy says that human nature has something mysterious and uncontrollable in it which cannot be overcome by scientific advancement of any sorts. As Kristin Brady says

> ".... Images of progress are defeated by the forces of nature : the women arriving in London on the " "excursion train" - an absolutely new departure in the history of travel", are "blue-faced, stiff-necked, sheezing, rain-beaten, chilled to the marrow" by nature's "wind and rain" (174); after the Exhibition, the park trees "that had been enclosed for six months (are) again exposed to the winds and storms, and the sod (grows) green anew" (177); and neither the civilizing influences of "London life" nor the veil which Car'line has worn "to keep off the wind" (179) can shield her from the glance or the music of Mop Ollamoor."16

But even as one appreciates and recognises the merits of "The Fiddler of the Reels" one wonders if there is not some element of truth in Susan Hill's comment on the story.

> "Yet I believe the story has been over praised, and for the very obviousness of its virtues. It is rather too well made, rather over-neat, and it somehow lacks the subtleties and depths of others which are much better and quite unjustly neglected. Like Wat

> Ollamoor, its slickness is seductive but somehow ultimately shallow."17

"The Fiddler of the Reels" is the story with which Hardy concludes his first part of "LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES, a set of Tales". The second part of this volume as has already been mentioned consists of "some colloquial sketches" entitled "A Few Crusted Characters". The most conspicious difference between the 'tales' and the 'sketches' is that the latter narratives are of limited scope and length and the narrators of these incidents use a more casual tone in narrating their stories. The stories are less sombre then those included in the first section, almost humorous but mixed in with the laughable is as Douglas Brown has said "an elegiac framework".[18] As in his 'tales' in the sketches too we find Hardy dealing with the same themes and superstitions, country customs, ceremonies, gaieties and village band.

"A Few Crusted Characters" appeared for the first time as "Wessex Folk" in both the American and European editions of HARPER'S NEW MONTHLY MAGAZINE from March to June 1891. Douglas Brown describes them as

> "..... buoyant and humurous anecdotes for the most part .... (relating) to the figure of the returned native, dismayed by his experience of the outer world, longing for the agricultural certainities and simplicities and much possessed by death and the passing of things."19

The mode of narration that Hardy uses for "A Few Crusted Characters" is an interesting variant of that

employed by Chaucer for THE CANTERBURY TALES. John Lackland returns after thirty five years as an emigrant to Wessex (Longpuddle) with the intention of settling there. He makes the final part of his journey to his native village in a carrier van. The other occupants of the carriage not recognising him took a natural interest in him as a stranger. He introduces himself and is soon asking about people he had known as a child. Most of the people he enquires about are no more but the fellow passengers know their histories and are only too willing to tell him all that they know. One reminiscential story leads to another by association and curiosity until Longpuddle is reached. Here, however, John Lackland discovers that things have so greatly changed that he does not belong here anymore. Instead of feeling at home he feels like a stranger so after a few days stay he leaves to start life elsewhere.

Tony Kytes, the Arch-Deceiver is the first Wessex folk whose history John Lackland hears of. Although all present in the carriage are well acquainted with the history of Tony it is. Burthen, the carrier who tells the story. Burthen's knowledge of Tony's exact route gives him the right to tell the story. The incident narrated is farcical, comical and charming. Hardy once again explores his favourite theme of love, courtship and marriage but the treatment this time has a comic turn and a happy ending. In the brief span of an afternoon Tony Kytes, a countrylad accepts and rejects three women as marriage partners and

finally when the decision is made he does not have the opportunity to exercise his choice.

Tony Kytes, is engaged to be married to Milly Richards, "a nice, light, small, tender little thing" but this does not prevent him from loving other women. One day while driving home from the market on his father's waggon he meets Unity Sallet, a woman to whom he had been very tender before he had got engaged to Milly. She asks him for a lift and he does not refuse. They drive on, Unity trying to make Tony realise that she would be better suited for him then Milly. Just at this point they catch sight of Milly walking ahead of them along the road. Fearing Milly's reaction Tony asks Unity to hide under the tarpaulin till they pass by Milly, promising to marry her if she agreed to do so. But Tony has completely forgotten that he had asked Milly to meet him so that they could discuss their future as they travelled towards their home in the carriage. So instead of passing her Tony is forced to offer Milly a lift. They travel on thus with Unity hidden under the tarpaulin till they see Hannah Jolliver, "the very first woman that Tony had fallen in love with - before Milly and before Unity, in fact - the one he had almost arranged to marry instead of Milly." On seeing Hannah, Tony asks Milly to hide under the sacks telling her

> "I see a young woman a - looking out of window, who I think may accost me. The fact is, Milly, she had a notion that I was wishing to marry her, and since she's discovered I've promised another, and a prettier than she, I'm rather afeard of her temper if she

> sees us together. Now Milly would you do me a favour my coming wife, as I may say ?" (197)

But luck is against Tony. Instead of letting Tony pass by Hannah asks for a lift. Tony and Hannah travel and in the course of their conversation Tony almost promises to marry Hannah. Milly is ashamed of the position she has placed herself in and not wanting to be humiliated by exposing herself, often lets out squeaks from under the sacks where she is hiding whenever the conversation becomes too intimate between her fiance and Hannah.

As Tony is approaching Longpuddle he becomes anxious. He begins wondering how to get out of this ticklish situation. Even as he is wondering about his plight he spots his father and handing over the reins of the horses to Hannah, he walks over to his father with the idea of escaping. Pandemonium breaks out. Milly discovers Unity hiding under the tarpaulin and the two girls abuse each other in loud whispers. This surprises Hannah so much that she is unable to control the horses. The three girls are thrown out of the waggon. Tony is caught in a dilemma. He has to face the anger of three girls. But not for long and things work out smoothly for him in the end. Hannah's father comes and takes Hannah away; Unity walks out on Tony not wanting to marry someone whom Hannah had rejected. This leaves Milly and Tony is happy to marry her as she is the least imposing of the three and the best suited for him.

The incident narrated in this sketch is rather farcical and incredible and hardly logical. But things do follow such a pattern in real life. Human beings are often faced with the dilemma of choosing and often choose through a process of elimination.

Within a few pages Hardy has described three women who have distinctive traits. Unity Sallet is forward, Hannah is dashing and Milly demure and faithful. They are jealous of each other and each craves for Tony's attention just to be one up on the other. Tony is an arch-deceiver but there is nothing vicious or villainous about him.

> "His story is a farcical summation of two conflicting attitudes towards sex : a male desire to have all women with no complications, and a female inclination to competition and exclusiveness".20

A more sober look at marriage is presented in "The History of the Hardcomes". Steve and James Hardcomes, two cousins are engaged to be married to Olive Pawle and Emily Darth respectively. They are very well suited to each other but on the night of Tony's wedding they are infected by Tony's fickle nature and acting on impulse they not only decide to get married but they get married to each other's partners. Despite their higher social standing they are not unlike Tony in their fluctuating sexual preferences. As is to be expected the new partners are not very happy and they

get more and more drawn towards their original partners. Things continue in this manner till one day Steve and his cousin's wife go out on a boat, forget their commitments and responsibilities, even self preservation and they die due to drowning. As a result of a momentary whim Steve and Olive face a terrible end. If they had married as they had planned, things would have ended happily for them as James' second marriage to his original partner proves. The fickleness of their nature made these lovers do things which were against that planned by nature - result an unhappy end.

The very title of the next story makes the reader question the credibility of the occurences that the seedsman describes for in "The Superstitious Man's Story" Hardy, the historian of rural superstition blends with Hardy the story teller to tell us about a few supernatural occurences which preceeded the death of William Privett.

One night while staying up late to finish some ironing Mrs. Privett hears her husband putting on his boots, crossing the room in which she is ironing and being a silent man by nature leaving the house without exchanging any words with her. After finishing her work she writes a message for her husband on the door asking him to "mind and do the door" (217) and goes to bed. To her great surprise, and alarm on the way to her bed Mrs. Privett finds her husband's boots in the very place where they always

stood and her husband sleeping soundly in bed. This is beyond her comprehension because the only way into the house lay in the room she was working in. Unable to unravel the mystery and feeling queer and uncomfortable she goes to bed. Next day with the intention of solving the mystery she asks her husband about his going out the night before. But his answer disturbs her all the more for William Privett tells her that he had not left the room after going to bed the previous night.

Later in the day she meets Nancy Weedle and Nancy tells her that on Midsummer Eve she had seen William Privett entering the church but had not seen him coming out of it again. The seedsman here explains to John Lackland a popular superstition of Wessex.

> "(You may not remember, sir, having gone off to foreign parts so young, that on Midsummer Night it is believed here about that the faint shapes of all the folk in the parish who are going to be at death's door within the year can be seen entering the church. Those who get over their illness come out again after a while, those that are doomed to die do not return)".(218)

This incident is followed by another peculiar one. One day while Mr. Privett is mowing with John Chiles, they sit down to have their "bit o'nunch" and "empty their flagon" (218) and go to sleep. John Chiles gets up first and looking towards his fellow mower he sees "one of those great white miller's souls as we call 'em - that is to say, a miller moth - come from William's mouth while

he slept, and fly straight away" (218-19). On trying to wake him John discovers that his friend had died in his sleep.

On that day and at that very time Philip Hookhorn is surprised to see William, "looking very pale and odd" coming down to Longpuddle Spring. Hookhorn is surprised because William did not only avoid going to the Spring but was in the habit of going "half-a-mile out of his way to avoid the place" (219) because at this very Spring, William's only child, while at play, had died from drowning.

> "On inquiry, it was found that William in body could not have stood by the Spring, being in the mead two miles off, and it also came out that the time at which he was seen at the Spring was the very time when he died." (219)

On hearing this story by the seedsman, Lackland dismisses it as being rather melancholy. But the Seedsman's father, who had heard the story from his father says that his father had had an air of satisfaction while telling the story for he was happy with the

> ".... perfect correspondence of the supernatural occurences with the copious circumstantial details surrounding them. He is a spokesman for a particular rural attitude, eager to see a pattern in the mystifying course of life and to replace an instinctive fear of death by a fascination with its inevitable but always startling suddenness."21

Although "The Superstitious Man's Story" is anti realistic the story has a traditional tone about it which makes it popular and interesting not only to the audience

who hear the story directly but also to us twentieth-century readers for whom the story is not purely an inventive and imaginative piece of work but is a true record of the superstitions associated with death that were prevalent during Hardy's time amongst the country folk. Even though it is a record of five superstitions associated with death it is not in the least bit like a documentary for it has the stamp of the narrator's personality and his own mode of expression.

There is a shift in Hardy's treatment of the next three sketches - "Andrey Satchel and the Parson and Clerk", "Old Andrey's Experience as a Musician" and "Absent-Mindedness in a Parish Choir". From the rural attitudes towards marriage and death with which he is concerned in the first three sketches Hardy turns to a more specific theme

> "..... the simultaneous opposition and interdependence, especially strong in the feudal society of a rural village, existing between the common people and those authorities of church and property who formalize and organize their lives."22

Andrey Satchel is engaged to be married to Jane. Jane being a little older then Andrey is "anxious to get the thing done with before he changed his mind"(220-21) and she manages to get Andrey to Church one morning so that she could get married. But Andrey who is fond of a drop of drink was not in a very sober state that morning and the

Pa'son Billy Toogood refuses to marry the couple.Jane who was afraid of loosing Andrey altogether if they returned home without getting married asks the parson to lock them up in the tower of the church for a few hours till Andrey sobered down. The Parson agrees. He locks them up within the church and is about to go home when he catches sight of a party of hunters and being fond of hunting he joins the group of hunters, completely forgetting the couple he had locked up in the church. Here Hardy gives a ridiculous account of hunting for Hardy was not at all fond of this sport. He remembers Andrey and Jane the next morning only and feeling guilty he goes and marries the couple without raising any further objection. Hardy, we know, did not hold a very high opinion of the clergy of his time. He ridiculed them time and again and never missed an opportunity to show their ineptitude and their lack of a good character. Although the parson refuses to wed Andrey and Jane on account of the former being drunk, drunkenness was not something foreign to Toogood. We learn that at Christenings the parson "never failed to Christen the chief over again in a bottle of port wine" (224). Hardy shows us that though the parson was free of the sexual passions of young Andrey he was no better because the passionate obsession he nursed for fox hunting was equally bad. The humour of the story is accentuated by the skill with which he shows the contrast between the forthright passions of Andrey and

the sublimated ones of Toogood.

On hearing the story of Andrey Satchel, Mr. Profitt, the schoolmaster is reminded of Old Andrey, the father of Andrey Satchel of the previous story - of his first hand observations as a choir boy and Old Andrey's embarassing experience at the Squire's.

Old Andrew was a jovial man, fond of eating and drinking. It was this love for eating and drinking which landed him in trouble one Christmas. The village band were to appear at the manor house to play and sing in the hall to the Squire's people and visitors. In return for entertaining his guests the squire treated the members of the village band to a good supper. Old Andrew was aware of this custom and wanted to join the band so that he could share the meal of beef, and turkey and plum pudding and ale. He knew that one more or less would make no difference to the Squire. But then he also knew that he was "too old to pass as a singing boy, and too bearded to pass as a singing girl". (230) So he decided to borrow a fiddle and join them as a bandsman. It being christmas time no one wanted to be hard upon Old Andrew and although they knew that Andrew knew no music they did not have the heart to refuse him. So "armed with the instrument he walked up to the Squire's house with the others of us at the time appointed and went in boldly, his fiddle under his arm". (231) He tried to act as naturally as he could -

"opening the music-books and moving the candles to the best points for throwing light upon the notes" (231) - and he almost carried the show off till "the Squire's mother, a tall gruff old lady who was much interested in church music said quite unexpectedly to Andrew : "My man, I see you don't play your instrument with the rest. How is that ?" (231)

Andrew tried to pull himself out of this situation by saying that on his way to the manor he fell down and broke his bow. But he was not to escape so easily. The old lady brought a replacement for Andrew's broken bow with the hope of hearing the full accompaniment. At this "Andrew's face looked as if it were made of rotten apple" (231). However, he tried to escape from this tight situation by keeping a little behind the next man and making "a pretence of beginning sawing away with his bow without letting it touch the strings, so that it looked as if he were driving into the tune with heart and soul" (231-32). However, luck was against him that day. The archdeacon "noticed that he held the fiddle upside down, the nut under his chin, and the tail piece in his hand, and they began to crowd round him, thinking 'twas some new way of performing" (232). This revealed everything. Andrew was thrown out of the house as a vile imposter. However, things did not end that badly for him in spite of the embarassing situation he had to go through. He got what he had come for. The squire's wife took pity on him and had him let in through the

back door after being turned out at the front. But Andrew had learnt his lesson. He never repeated his performance in public as a musician.

Both this sketch and the next are pictures of the kind of band that Hardy's father and his grandfather and he himself used to play in as a child. Hardy was fascinated with this kind of a band and it left a deep impression in his mind. He writes about this sort of a band in greater details in UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE. Hardy has sketched the band lightly, farcically and flippantly in "Old Andrey's Experience as a Musician" but the next sketch "Absent Mindedness in a Parish Choir" in spite of its being a farce possesses a special elegiac quality that lends it a seriousness and pathos. These local musicians appear foolish in the presence of high society and authority but they are well loved by the common people of Wessex and they have a dignity of their own and it is not surprising that we feel rather sorry to hear that this band is no more

> "..... they've been done away with these twenty years. A young teetotaler plays the organ in church now, and plays it very well, though 'tis not quite such good music as in old times, because the organ is one of them that go with a winch, and the young teetotaler says he can't always throw the proper feeling into the tune without wellnigh working his arms off".

So we find that change has been introduced into the world of Wessex music. The old choir, with their fiddles

and bass viols were no more and this was partly due to fashion and partly due to a "sort of scrape" that they had got into. The village band had "lost their character as officers of the church as complete as if they never had any character at all". (232-33)

The incident which resulted in the village band being thrown out of the church occured on a sunday afternoon after christmas. The band was a good band and in great demand during christmas and on that eventful christmas they had performed through out the night and had got next to no sleep. Then came that fateful sunday after christmas. It was very cold that year and the members of the band could hardly sit in the gallery because of the cold. So Nicholas smuggled into the church a gallon of hot brandy and beer, readymixed, in Timothy Thomas' bass viol bag. As they sat in the gallery they drank the brandy and beer and as the long sermon continued they all fell asleep "as sound as rocks". The sermon ended and the parson asked the quire to sound the tune to the Evening Hymn. As no music came the people turned round to see what the matter was. Levi Limpet, seeing the sleeping band nudged Timothy and Nicholas and asked them to begin.

On suddenly awaking and not knowing where he was Nicholas started playing "The Devil among the Tailors" a favourite jig thinking that he was still at the party that

he had played at the whole of the previous night. The others followed their leader as was to be expected. The pa'son's "hair fairly stood on end when he heard the evil tune raging through the church" (235) and he tried to stop them. But due to the sound of their own playing they did not hear and they continued playing louder. The congregation walked out wondering at the wickedness of the village band. It is needless to add this was the last performance that the village band put up at the church.

Out of all the sketches in "A Few Crusted Characters" the group containing the three Andrey Satchel stories and the village band are the best. They are, to quote Kristin Brady

> ".... the most inventive and 'colloquial' in "A Few Crusted Characters", not only for the hilarity of their content, but also for the richness of their hyperbolic language and metaphor. They contain a wealth of local dialect, in both their expository accounts and their quoted dialogues, and the liveliness of the thatcher's own mind is apparent in his descriptions of the parson slapping the Bible together "like a rat-trap" (222) and of the young couple bursting out of the tower "like starved mice from a cupboard."23

In "The Winters and the Palmleys" Hardy once again uses sexual jealousy between two women and the great attachment that can exist between a widow and her child as the theme.

There were two women in a parish who were rivals in good looks and as a result of this they were at "daggers

drawn" with each other. To make matters worse, both of them loved the same young man, Winter. One of them finally stole the young man's love for the other, married him and they had a son. The other lived singly till about the age of thirty. Then she married Palmley. She had a son born to her who was of rather weak intellect but none the less the apple of his mother's eye. Palmley died when his son was about eight years of age. Mrs. Palmley and her son were left in great poverty. Mrs. Winter seeing her former rivals' condition offered to help Mrs. Palmley by making young Palmley her errand boy. Although Mrs. Palmley did not approve of this arrangement she was forced to agree with it. One day in December while running an errand for Mrs. Palmley the boy received a shock which made him a drivelling idiot and as a result of this shock he died soon after . Mrs. Palmley vowed to take revenge. Her opportunity came with the arrival of her niece, Harriet, from the city of Exonbury, "a proud and handsome girl, very well brought up and more stylish and genteel" then the rest of the villagers. Mrs. Winter's son, Jack fell in love with Harriet. Harriet was flattered by the young man's presents and looks of admiration but did not like the way he wrote letters. "Jack Winter's performances in the shape of love letters quite jarred her city nerves". Herlove for Jack Winter gradually diminished and disappeared and she developed a tenderness

for a road contractor who wrote a better hand. She wrote to Jack that being town bred he was not sufficiently well educated to please her. Jack who was a very sensitive boy in spite of his "want of pen-and-ink training" was ashamed and grieved that he could not write with the beautiful flourishes that was the pride of his days. He feared that Harriet and her new found lover would laugh at his letters. He asked Harriet to return his letters and she refused to return them. So he crept into Harriet's house one night and stole the box containing his letters. On reaching home he found buried under the letters several golden guineas. Next morning he was arrested on a charge of night burglery and was given death sentence. He refused to seek help from the only person who could have helped him. Mrs. Palmley had got her revenge. As for Harriet she got married to her road contractor and left Longpuddle for good because of its close associations with Jack. Mrs. Palmley soon left Longpuddle to join them.

This story is the most grim of all the sketches in "A Few Crusted Characters". Jack, is an innocent and helpless victim of his mother's jealousy and anger and the intrusion of sophistication and pretension into the not very large world of Longpuddle and the uncomprehending power of an authority that can hang a man for petty burglary.

The story of the hanging of Jack Winter brought to the minds of the passengers in the carrier coach the story of Georgy Crookhill. Ofcourse Georgy never got so far as hanging but he had a very narrow escape.

Georgy Crookhill was a shady person. One day as he was "ambling out of Melchester on a miserable screw" (247) he saw a fine looking young farmer riding out of the town in the same direction. He was mounted on a good strong horse. Not wanting to ride on alone Georgy overtook him and jogged alongside this stranger. They soon became friends and they even decided to share a room at an Inn when night drew on. Early next morning while the tall young farmer was still asleep Georgy stealthily crept out of bed, dressed himself in the farmer's clothes and helping himself to a little bit of the farmer's money to pay the rent, he left the inn on the farmer's horse. When the farmer awoke he was happy to find that although cheated of his clothes and horse he still had left with him the money. He took the whole incident in a surprisingly good spirit dressed himself up in Georgy's clothes and quietly left the Inn.

Georgy proceeded with his journey on the farmer's horse. On the way he was arrested by some constables who were on the look out for a deserter who was dressed the way that Georgy was. Georgy tried to explain to them how he had come about his attire. They refused to believe him. Even as

he was giving his explanation the young farmer with whom he had shared the room at night and whose clothes he was wearing came by. Georgy told the constables that this was the man they were looking for. But they refused to believe him. They discovered that Georgy was telling the truth when the corporal to whom they took Georgy told them that Georgy was not the absconder. He was released. When the constables realised the mistake they had made and started looking around for the real deserter it was already too late. He had made good his escape and was never traced.

"Incident in the life of Georgy Crookhill" is like "The Three Strangers" of WESSEX TALES a story illustrating the virtues and vice of cunning resourcefulness. In keeping with the farcical tone adopted for the sketches in "A Few Crusted Characters" Hardy steers away from violence of any kind and the irony lies in the humorous turn of the plot whereby Georgy is almost convicted not only for theft but also for desertion. The story has a happy ending but then it is not happy throughout. The threat of hanging for another man's offense - something which was common in the Wessex of those days - runs through out the story increasing its suspense.

In "Netty Sargeants Copyhold" Hardy once again tells us a story of deception but this time the deception is of a harmless sort. Netty lived with her uncle in a house built by her great, great grandfather. But the house was

copyhold, that is to say, "granted upon lives in the old way, and had been so granted for generations" (252). Her uncle's was the last life upon the property unless a small fine of a few pounds was paid so as to entitle Netty to live on there. Netty had developed a tenderness for Jasper Cliff, a selfish man who had an eye on Netty's house more then on Netty herself. Netty knew that Jasper would marry her only if she could make her uncle pay the required fine and make the house her own. But unfortunately her uncle dies before she can get the deed done. But being a determined girl and not wanting to accept defeat so easily she makes her uhcle's corpse sit on a chair near the window and deceives the people who come to get his signature into believing that her uncle has signed the documents when it is actually she who guides her uncle's dead hand in signing the papers. The deed done she undresses her uncle, puts him to bed and the next morning she declares before all that her uncle had died in his sleep. It is only after she is married and her husband begins ill-treating her that she discloses the deception she had exercised for the sake of one whom she loved and who now did not hesitate in beating her.

In this story Hardy once again portrays the Wessex aristocracy and once again it is not done in a very favourable light. The squire hated those who possessed copyholds, leaseholds and freeholds and missed no opportunity

to acquire land from these people. Even though Netty gets the better of the squire by exercising deception we do not frown down on her action because the villainous Squire gets what he deserves and Netty in the process proves her great pragmatism and nerve. But then it is rather ironic that she fails to get a perfect husband. The only thing which is in her favour is that she is secure of her cottage.

"Netty Sargent's Copyhold" is the last sketch in "A Few Crusted Characters for by the time that this story is told the coach on which the stories are being told has reached its destination. The stories exchanged in the course of the journey are miscellaneous in subject matter and highly entertaining and readable and comic in tone. The comedy turns on the genial farcical humours of village life. Hardy shows in the sketches a sharp perception of the ludicrous and odd in human situation and behaviour but this he does in a convincing manner and with validity. The Wessex presented here, unlike the Wessex of his other stories and novels is free of the frustration which is a consequence of social ambition, free of despair and the fear of invasion and intrusion of alien objects from the outside world. But there is a sense of nostalgia one feels when reading the stories. There is a strong feeling for decay. There is an anxious feeling for local ties and traditions. There is a sense of grief that a thing so traditional as the Wessex band is no more.

The stories told in "A Few Crusted Characters" have miscellaneous themes and do not follow any chronological pattern as can be seen by the story of Andrey Satchel's father preceeding the story of Old Andrew the father. They are randomly arranged but inspite of this there is a themetic coherence. The unity lies in the fact that all the stories are told in the Canterbury tales fashion - on a journey by the carrier coach to Longpuddle. Even though the stories are miscellaneous there is a common trait in them. They are all shared memories of the local people, of the various experiences of particular Wessex people spread over a long time. "A Few Crusted Characters" presents a small composite picture of Wessex life in the past. It may thus seem inappropriate for "A Few Crusted Characters" to be included along with the set of sombre and contemporary stories of LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES. Commenting on this Kristin Brady says that both sections of the volume treat the same fundamental human problems

> " .... Shadrach Jolliffe's confusion about which woman to marry anticipates that of Tony Kytes; deception in love is a theme both of "On the Western Circuit" and of "Tony Kytes"; clerical hypocrisy is a subject of "The Son's Veto", "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions", and "Andrey Satchel and the Parson and Clerk", female jealousy produces tragedy in both "To Please his Wife" and "The Winters and the Palmleys", and the irrational side of the sexual instinct allures Car'line Aspent and the Hardcomes alike away from domestic happiness. These links make the sketches in "A Few Crusted Characters" a fitting conclusion to the whole volume. Just as the longer "Tales" of LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES expose the

> tragedies that can underlie a comically absurd sequence of events, so these small narratives portray the same phenomenon, by embodying the peculiar combination found in oral village culture of the burlesque and the pathetic, the humane and the cruel. These "Colloquial Sketches" are life's little ironies writ smaller."24

LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES the third collection of Hardy's short stories contains some of Hardy's best short fiction. It gives us an extended picture of the Wessex society that Hardy wrote about. In this volume Hardy moves from the rural society of the past presented in WESSEX TALES, and the aristocracy of the eighteenth century Wessex to the respectable middle classes of an unspecified present living in urban areas. Although the class of people Hardy deals with in LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES is different the problems which face them are the same as those faced by the people in WESSEX TALES and by the group of noble dames. The stories again deal with the failure of the institution of marriage to stabilize sexual relationships which leads the readers to question the desirability of marriage for women. Where Hardy is not dealing with marriage, as in "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions" he is writing about the evil consequences of social ambition. Sometimes as in "On the Western Circuit" Hardy combines both these themes.

The fact that most of Thomas Hardy's stories end tragically led critics and Victorian readers to say that Hardy was a pessimist. But this is not at all true. Hardy

did not let his stories end happily ever after simply because the ghastly unreality of such endings raised in him a greater horror than the honest sadness that came of logical and inevitable tragedy. The fact that he went against the conventions followed by the Victorian writers and had the courage to question the Victorian conventions and morality goes to prove how great a writer he was. Although Hardy points out the evils of the Victorian society through his stories he does not want to take the role of correcting the moral convictions of the people. In his stories he is neither didactic nor satirical. He just gives a frank and realistic portrayal of the Wessex that he knew.

In keeping with this goal of merely narrating his events Hardy's narrators merely play the role of observers of Nature, adopting a posture of worldly wisdom and philosophical distance. There are times when the narrator in keeping with the tradition of the ancient bards deviates from the main stream of these stories to make a general comment. This gives the story an air of rational and compassionate objectivity. In keeping with the title of the volume the narrator assumes a rhetorical and ironic stance.

The colloquial sketches which follow the 'set of tales' called LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES are a happier set of stories although tragedy strikes these characters also. It

is this realistic portrayal of life which makes this volume not only one of the best of Hardy's collection of short stories but of short stories by any writers. The volume is best described in the words of Kristin Brady as

> "..... an impassioned depiction of man's inevitable failure to impose upon the chaos of his being. Only the ironic perspective with its simultaneous muted acceptance and compassionate regret, can accomodate what is both farcical and tragic about this perennial contradiction in the nature of life."25.

CHAPTER III

Selected Stories from A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES and A CHANGED MAN AND OTHER TALES

Selected stories from A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES and A CHANGED MAN AND OTHER TALES

A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES and A CHANGED MAN AND OTHER TALES are chronologically the second and the fourth volume of short stories that Hardy published. Although both these volumes contain short stories which Hardy could boast of, it is the two volumes WESSEX TALES and LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES that are better known as they contain the better lot of Hardy's short stories. However, as Hardy the writer of short stories is the sum of all his short fiction - the successful ones as well as the failures - so in this chapter I shall discuss a few selected stories from each of these volumes so as to show a fair cross section of both of them.

A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES appeared for the first time in the Christmas issue of THE Graphic in 1980. It then contained only six of the present collection of ten short stories. The stories included were "Barbara of the House of Grebe", "The Marchioness of Stonehenge", "Lady Mottisfont", "Squire Petrick's Lady", "Lady Icenway" and "Anna, Lady Baxby". The rest of the stories in this volume appeared seperately in different magazines. "The Duchess of Hamptonshire" appeared as "The Impulsive Lady of Croome Castle" in The Light, April 1978; "The

Honourable Laura" as "Benighted Travellers" in Bolton Weekly Journal, December 1881; "The First Countess of Wessex" in Harper's New Monthly Magazine, 1889 and "The Lady Penelope" in Longman's Magazine, January 1890. It was in 1891 that A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES was published in the form that we have today.

Like in his earlier volume WESSEX TALES Hardy in A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES continues telling stories from the Wessex past. Here he deals with the same themes of marriage, nature of women and the pre-occupation of his characters with class. Although the themes of his stories are the same and Hardy is dealing with the history and the tradition of the Wessex people the two volumes are very different from each other. History and tradition of a very different kind from WESSEX TALES enter most of the stories in A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES. In the 1912 Wessex editions of his works Hardy had categorised WESSEX TALES under the title "Novels of Character and Environment" but included A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES under the title "Romances and Fantasies". Another conspicuous difference between the two volumes is that Hardy has here moved from the world of the Wessex farmers, labourers, shopkeepers, craftsmen and land owners to the county aristocracy, living in the great houses of Wessex standing aloof from the villages. His reason for writing about the aristocrats Hardy

explains in the 1896 Preface to A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES:

> "The pedigrees of our county families, arranged in diagrams on the pages of county histories, mostly appear to be at first sight as barren of any touch of nature as a table of logarithms. But given a clue the faintest tradition of what went on behind the scenes and this dryness as of dust may be transformed into a palpitating drama".[1]

Hardy in A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES writes about the deep dark secrets in the lives of the aristocrats - secrets of illegitimacy, murder, insanity, incest and every possible scandal that he can think of that transforms the otherwise dry as dust life of the aristocrats into palpitating dramas. The stories that Hardy tells are very gripping and the reader's interest is so aroused that he wants to read throughthe stories to find out what finally happens to the group of noble dames. But inspite of the gripping nature of the subject matter A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES happens to be one of the least popular of Hardy's works. Susan Hill commenting on the stories says:

> "They seem to be almost entirely failures, written with little commitment, the plots groaning and over-laden with far fetched events with wooden two dimensional characters and little entertainment value."[2]

Hardy undoubtedly is not at his best in A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES but then it would be wrong to pass off the stories as "almost entirely failures" Susan Hill's comment about Hardy writing these stories with little commitment is not true for Hardy revised some of these stories and rewrote them several times and if he did bowdlerise some of these stories it was done at the request of the editors. Susan Hill says that the plots are groaning and over laden with far fetched events but isn't it true that in real life the true is often as inexplicable as the fictional? And as for the entertainment value of the stories they were good enough to hold the attention of the storm bound club members and not only good enough to hold their attention but to leave them craving for more.

Another allegation made against A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES is that it is the least heterogeneous of his collections of short stories. As we read through the volume we discover that this is not entirely true, for A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES forms a strange assortment from the grim and startling "Barbara of the House of Grebe" to the amusing "Anna, Lady Baxby". It is true that Hardy lingers for an unnecessarily long time over the scandals in the life of the aristocrats but we must keep

in mind the occasion on which the stories are being narrated.

A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES is organised round the core provided by a meeting of the South Wessex Field and Antiquarian Club at which the storm bound members take turns in telling tales drawn from local

> "legends and traditions of gentle and noble dames, renowned in times past in that part of England, whose actions and passions were now, but for men's memories buried under the brief inscription on a tomb or an entry of dates in a dry pedigree."[3]

And as the members themselves observed that "a storm bound club could not presume to be selective"(49) so they are content with the stories told to them. The exchange of scandals creates a cosy atmosphere amongst the members which is only possible in a small place like Wessex where everybody knows everybody and all are acquainted with the history of the place. Under such circumstances it is only natural that in this get together of "inclusive and intersocial" people with a range of types including a malster, a gentleman, a spark, a churchwarden, a colonel, a surgeon, a dean and a historian, they turn to discuss their social betters.

"The first Countess of Wessex" is the first story in this collection. This story is partly narrated and partly read from a manuscript by the Local Historian. This story introduces us to the character types and situations we are going to encounter in the rest of the stories in this volume. "The First Countess of Wessex" is as the Local Historian summarises it, an instance of the "small count taken of the happiness of an innocent child in the social strategy of those days, which might have led, but providentially did not lead, to great unhappiness."(48).

Eversince she was a mere girl Squire Dornell and his wife Susan quarreled over the marriage of their young and innocent daughter Betty. The fact was that her manipulative parents had in mind a suitor each for their daughter and as later events prove, their choice in no way was based on her future happiness but was directed by their own interests, aims and their desires for her future above her welfare. While Susan Dornell had in mind a certain Stephen Reynard, a poor but titled man with good connections and older than Betty by many years, the squire favoured Charles Phelipson, a youthful and attractive lad a couple of years his daughter's senior. After one such quarrel

the squire left his wife and child and went to live in a house which he owned some distance away. During her father's absence, Betty was taken to London by her mother and quietly married to Stephen Reynard. When she returns home her father knows that she is married but not willing to admit defeat at the hands of his wife he creates a few situations by which Betty can meet his favoured suitor. This results in Betty falling in love with Charles and she is reluctant to join Stephen when he comes six years after the marriage to claim her. She deliberately contacts small pox to escape him and in so doing she puts her husband and lover to the supreme test. It is, however, not the expected Charles Phelipson, young, physically attractive and an ideal romantic hero who proves equal to the situation but the pale, tall, sedate and self possessed Stephen Reynard.

On hearing of Stephen's return to claim his wife, the squire had risen from his sick bed, for he had fallen sick ever since he had first got the news of Betty's secret marriage. He rode to Bristol to waive Stephen's rights but the mission fails and the Squire's exertions hastens his death.

In deference to her late husband's wishes, Susan now urges Betty to postpone the union with Stephen only

to discover that they have been meeting frequently and at several places and now it had become necessary for them to join hands publicly as soon as possible. They were united and lived very happily. Stephen became an Earl and Betty the First Countess of Wessex.

Betty's situation illustrates the central theme of most of the stories in A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES - the necessity of a woman to make a good match may prevent her from ever making an independent decision. In this theme lies the tragic irony. The story of Betty has been repeated often in Wessex history. Perhaps Betty's parents had to go through a similar crises before getting married to each other. Inspite of their incompatability of temperament and background Susan had married Squire Dornell. As a result the feelings and motives of the Dornell's always flew in contrary directions even when it came to such an important issue as their only daughter's marriage. Susan forces Betty into marriage with Reynard simply because the places wealth and prestige ever affection and sexual passion. Initially it may appear that Squire Dornell is more concerned for their daughter's welfare but he is a violent man and his instincts

sometimes lead him to actions destructive of his own happiness and the happiness of those whom he loves. His "uncalculating passionateness"(5) towards Betty is more harmful then her mother's ambition because her mother's self-interest takes a practical form. Susan wants to find for Betty not a romantic mate but a man who has prestige at Court and thus the potential for a title. She is seeking, in short, the qualities which her husband lacks - perhaps in order to enjoy vicariously her daughter's social triumph.

But it is Betty who finally transcends the selfish machinations of both her parents by choosing her true suitor. Until the elopment, Betty and the readers perceive Phelipson as the ideal romantic hero. He is young and attractive hence he is seemingly a more appropriate mate for Betty then the not so young and attractive Reynard. But the small pox incident reveals things as they really are. Phelipson hitherto judged as so appealingly frank and impulsive" is in reality a coward. Reynard appears in a new and more flattering light. The very qualities which had seemed villainous - his cunning, self-possession and apparent distance from events become the attributes of a hero. Betty is safe in his hands. Reynard combines the

calculating qualities of Mrs. Dornell, without her self-absorbed coldness and the loving attributes of the Squire, without his selfishness and impulsiveness. Embodying the virtues of Betty's parents he can act in her best interest and become her ideal mate.

"Barbara of the House of Grebe" repeats the dramatic configuration of character types in "The First Countess of Wessex" - an heiress too young to know her own mind, her ambitious parents, an attractive admirer of modest descent, and a titled suitor who seeks by a series of calculated moves to conquer her affections. But this is where the similarity ends. In the earlier story the young attractive suitor is exposed as a coward as the events progress but here it is the other way round. The earlier story ends happily for our noble dame but life is not very promising for Barbara at the point where Hardy leaves us.

An young Earl, Lord Uplandtowers was bent on marrying Barbara Grebe, but she eloped with Edmund Willowes. Such was her father's love for Barbara, and so pleased was her mother with Edmond's attractiveness that they were soon reconciled to the marriage and decided to send Edmond abroad with a tutor to complete his education. He was shockingly disfigured at a fire at a

Venetian theatre, while rescuing people from the flames. When he returned home Barbara was so horrified at his appearance that he could not think of staying with her, but decided to go abroad for a further year before testing her feelings again. He died six months later and Lord Uplandtowers married Barbara. However Barbara's second marriage was not a very happy one. Uplandtowers was irritated at Barbara's lack of warmth and discovered that Barbara's love for Edmond had revived with the arrival of a beautiful statue of him which Edmond had commissioned for her while he was at Pisa. Lord Uplandtower's jealousy was aroused. After making enquiries he discovered from Edmond's tutor exactly what form his disfigurement had taken and had the statue hacked so as to take on the form of the human remnant which had confronted Barbara when Edmond had removed his mask before her. With heartless and relentless insistence, he made Barbara face this image night after night until she broke down in terror and revulsion and promised the Earl that she would love him forever. She became utterly dependent on him and submissive to his will, and bore him eleven children in nine years. At length she was taken by her husband to try the effect of a more genial climate on her wasted health. She died at Florence, a few months after her arrival in Italy.

This then in short is the story of "Barbara of the House of Grebe". Ever since the story came to be written it has received much adverse criticism. T.S. Eliot[4] in AFTER STRANGE GODS has commented that Hardy in this story has portrayed" a world of pure evil". Eliot's remarks on the story are not lengthy, but they are sufficiently weighty and damning. He said that Hardy had written this story "solely to provide a satisfaction for some morbid emotion." F.B. Pinion commenting on this story and Eliot's attitude to it writes:

> "How far the story was based on historical research or imagination is not known, but Hardy's motive in presenting it was his horror at man's inhumanity to woman, one of his avowed themes. Eliot's attitude is that of a Grand Inquisitor, he deplores heterodoxy, and translates the horror which the story rouses into the diabolical operating through Hardy."[5]

T.S. Eliot is not the only critic who is disgusted with the ghoulish atmosphere surrounding this story. A reviewer of the Spectator had written that it is "as unnatural as it is disgusting."[6] But inspite of the morbid background "Barbara of the House of Grebe" is a fine story and whether we like the story or not we must yet admit that Hardy has in the writing of this story exhibited admirable skill. Susan Hill writing on this story writes:

> "It is like some lurid, brightly lit tableau, set within a hard-edged black frame, gothic in its trappings, melodramatic, gruesome, cruel - and, in those terms, utterly successful. What makes it seem horrible and not at all - as such tales often become - risible, is a certain restraint Hardy exercises; there are enough unpleasant images but not too many. It is quite different, in its heartlessness and coldness as well as its gothic style, from anything else he wrote, but inspite of ourselves, we are affected by it and forced to admire the skill with which it is done."[7]

Although the story had not been very well received by Hardy's contemporaries it has begun to be looked upon in a more favourable light in recent times. Stewart has tried to explain and justify the story's grotesqueness by seeing it as written" in a consciously Gothic mode"[8] and it has been interpreted as a fable having affinities with myths and fairy tales. Kristin Brady says that:

> "Barbara's predicament recalls "Beauty and the Beast", a tale about appearance and reality and the maturing of a young woman as she comes to accept the bestial aspects of sexuality. Barbara, however, fails to learn what Beauty learns, that in sexual love ugliness can become beauty".[9]

Although the atmosphere of the story is morbid the events occur in a natural environment and Hardy in this

story once again repeats all that he has been saying- that Barbara's moral weakness is not embedded in her nature but is a natural outgrowth of her position in society. She is, as is other heroines of Hardy, a victim of circumstance.

In "The Marchioness of Stonehenge" Hardy once again writes about class-consciousness and how it can stifle and corrupt normal human emotions. Lady Caroline, courted and flattered by many young noblemen and gentlemen fell in love with the son of the parish-clerk and married him secretly. Soon after her marriage she discovered that she had little in common with her husband and anxious about her position she grew critical. Her husband was a sensitive youth with a weak heart and her sharp words to him provoked a spasm from which he died. It was past midnight when this incident occured in her room. To prevent her secret marriage being discovered Caroline conveyed the dead body from her room and her house all the way to his house. Here she finally laid his corpse at the doorstep, placing the doorkey in his hand to make it seem as though the young man had died just as he was about to open the door. Soon afterwards Lady Caroline met Milly, the girl he had admired, told her what had

happened and persuaded her to pretend that she and the young man had been secretly married, and that she had carried him home to prevent discovery by her parents. Milly agreed, appeared in widow's weeds and took delight in tending his grave. The posthumous romance became a reality to her and Lady Caroline grew jealous. Finding herself pregnant she felt that the truth must be told. Milly would not give up her 'husband'. Finding herself in a helpless situation Lady Caroline confided in her mother and they left for London, Milly leaving soon afterwards apparently for the North of England but in reality to London. When she came back she had with her an infant.

Two or three years later, Lady Caroline married the Marquis of Stonehenge. Milly was devoted to her son who grew up to become a soldier. He attained the rank of quartermaster when he was still young. Lady Caroline left a childless, solitary widow now wished to claim her son. Milly objected but was fair enough and said that it would be her son who would decide. When the story was told to him the young man was not altogether surprised at the Marchioness' disclosures. However, he rejected her overtures.

She had neglected him while Milly had always been a good mother to him. Bitter disappointment at what appeared to be unrequited love was the beginning of death to the unfortunate Marchioness of Stonehenge. She died of a broken heart.

This story like all the other stories in "A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES" is highly melodramatic and improbable but inspite of this the story is very gripping and skillfully written. Hardy throughout the story portrays the radical shifts between jealousy and pride in Caroline's emotions. When she realises that her husband is dead her feelings change with unnatural speed from passionate grief to concern at her own position as the daughter of an earl. Caroline overlooks nothing when she drags her husband's corpse to his father's cottage. She leaves the sash of the window open in order to return undetected, lifts the body across the gravel to avoid leaving traces on the road and even remembers to find the key to the cottage and places it in the dead man's hand. Caroline's self-possessed and level headed manner is a cold reversal of Barbara's intense and tempestuous embrace of Willowes' statue. Caroline can without flinching lay the arms

of her dead husband "round her shoulders" in order to "gain immunity from the social consequence of her rash act",(99) while Barbara looses all contral in seeing even the image of her former husband.

In Milly, Hardy has portrayed the ideal wife. Although never married Milly's love for the youth makes her imagined marriage a living truth. Although from a poorer background Milly too has her social pride and when the occasion arises her pride outmatches that of the lady as can be seen on the occasion when Caroline finding herself pregnant tells Milly that she will reveal the truth. Milly replies "My character is worth as much to me as yours is to you!.....
No such dishonour for me! I will outswear you, my lady, and I shall be believed. My story is so much the more likely that yours will be thought false." For the first time Lady Caroline's rank fails to gain her the triumph she desires. Lady Caroline's will is subverted by the equally vehement feelings of another.

The rest of the stories in A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES like the three stories that we have just discussed are fairy tales gone wrong, or as Kristin Brady puts it are "a perverseness of the convention in which princess and prince finally discover each other and live happily

everafter."[10] Four of the stories in this collection are about desperate elopements and the remaining six depict the various ways in which the family as a group can be damaged by class pressures. Most of the stories can be seen as a repatterning or ironic refutation of the moral of the preceeding story. Because of this A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES has never been a particular favourite with critics. But even as we are reading the stories we must remember that Hardy never published seperately the stories in this volume but as a single piece of work. So when we are reading the stories we should read them as parts of a single, large work and take particular note of the pattern of repetition and subtle contrasts which structures the book. Hardy has exhibited great craftsmanship in bringing out these similiarities and differences and because of this although none of the stories are superlatively good they are worth studying as a volume.

In A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES Hardy comments on chronicled families and emphasizes the destructiveness of class consciousness. Although from the title the reader expects to encounter in this volume women

having high moral qualities and ideals or women who are titled what he really encounters are common women finding themselves in uncommon situations. Like the Wessex rustics these socalled aristocrats of Wessex are vain and fickle. Like all women they too are incapable of making unsexed judgements and so usually choose the wrong men. They are rather unintelligent but neither selfish nor perverse. They too are vulnerable and fall easy victims to the rakes but they make the good and unaggressive men their victims.

A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES is the most sombre of Hardy's collection of short stories. Here it is difficult to find any sort of comic relief. This volume was particularly unpopular amongst Hardy's older generations of critics. They termed it "extremely nasty" or overlooked it completely. They had even less sympathy with his experiment in the macabre and the supernatural because this kind of stories clashed with the portrait of Hardy they had painted in their minds - of Hardy the realistic chronicler of Wessex. What these critics had closed their mind to is the fact that the truth is often as inexplicable as the fictional and that though the

stories may appear rather absurd and unrealistic Hardy was not writing about non existent people living in a fictional land. His settings are Wessex settings and his people real flesh and blood Wessex people.

There may be a morbid and bizarre touch to these stories but Hardy's aim is not to evoke "a world of pure Evil". The stories supply examples of life's abundant strangeness. The people are not as astounding as the situations they find themselves in. We might find it hard to accept these unbelievable situations but we must recognise that it is these situations which arouses Hardy's powers as a dramatist and stylist which nothing else could.

With the passage of time A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES has begun to be regarded more favourably. As Richard Carpenter puts it :

> "To contemporary taste, however, these often seem the most intriguing of his stories reaching down as they do into Kafkaesque depths of the unconscious and showing clearly Hardy's affinity with folk and mythic tradition."[12]

A CHANGED MAN, THE WAITING SUPPER AND OTHER TALES, CONCLUDING WITH THE ROMANTIC ADVENTURES OF A MILKMAID[13] is the complete title of Hardy's fourth and last volume of short stories. This volume was published in October 1913 by Macmillan. Unlike the earlier three volumes of short stories this volume does not have any themetic unifying principle as the title of the volume shows. In this volume Hardy collected those stories of his which remained uncollected so as to make them easily accessible to the readers. In a Prefatory Note to this volume Hardy wrote:

> "I reprint in this volume, for what they may be worth, a dozen minor novels that have been published in the periodical press at various dates in the past, in order to render them accessible to readers who desire to have them in the complete series issued by my publishers."[14]

Another reason for his collecting the stories in a volume was that many of his stories were being frequently reprinted and these printed editions often misprinted his stories. Considered as a volume this collection is uninteresting but the stories being significant examples of his style are worth studying. Here I will discuss Hardy's three presumable favourites from this volume - A CHANGED MAN, THE WAITING SUPPER

and THE ROMANTIC ADVENTURES OF A MILKMAID.

A CHANGED MAN the first story in this volume is also the last story to have been written by Hardy. It was published in The Sphere and The Cosmopolitan in the spring of 1900. Hardy has in this story used as a basis the cholera outbreaks of 1849 and 1854. In its traditional mode of narration this story resembles the stories in WESSEX TALES. Like in "The Melanchdy Hussar of the German Legion" Hardy has once again made a point of explaining the special picturesqueness that military men had in the eyes of the Wessex inhabitants of those days taking great care to point out local details. Hardy has the story partly told through the eyes of an invalid who silently watches the drama unfolding from his oriel window for, he was the "person, who, next to the actors themselves chanced to know most of their story"(3)[15]. Like in the stories from WESSEX TALES the voice of the narrator in A CHANGED MAN is an embodiment of the communal point of view.

Laura, a gay young thing from Casterbridge and "a born player of the game of hearts"(7) is captivated by Captain Maumbry of one of the Hussar regiments. Captain Maumbry was a dashing and "handsome man of twentyeight or thirty, with an attractive hint of wickedness in his

manner that was sure to make him adorable with good young women" (4). The two marry and at first abandon themselves to the social whirl and in the winter following their marriage they are the most popular pair in South Wessex. They were present at all smart dinners in the country houses. They were the most prominent figures at the country balls and when an amateur dramatic entertainment was put by the garrison it was just the same. "The acting was for the benefit of such and such an excellent charity-nobody cared what, provided the play were played-and both Captain Maumbry and his wife were in the piece, having been in fact, by mutual consent, the originators of the performance" (8).

However, Captain Maumbry soon makes a friend in Mr. Sainway, a curate whose "persuasive and gentle eloquence .... operated like a charm" and he suddenly and unexpectedly becomes aware of the more sober realities of life and retires from the army and reads for the ministry for he has begun to believe that a curate is also a soldier - a soldier of the church militant. When Captain Maumbry gives up his worldly interests to become a curate and plunges into good works he expects Laura to get used to her new role of a parson's wife unquestioningly.

But Laura, who loved the social life associated with the army is bitterly disappointed. She seeks an outlet for her sexual energy and her desire for a gay life by having an affair with Lieutenant Vannicock while Reverend Maumbry is busy helping the victims of a cholera epidemic. Unaware of the danger that her husband was facing Laura plans to elope with Vannicock even as the plague becomes worse. It is only when she is in the process of eloping that she catches a glimpse of Maumbry toiling among the stricken and realising that he needed her she abandons her plan to elope. However, Maumbry does not live long to appreciate this voluntary act of his wife. He catches the infection and dies. Laura's desire of desertion which she had momentarily felt was never revived again. "The insistent shadow of the unconscious one"(23) kept coming back to her and she lived and died a widow.

In a letter to Sir Frederick Macmillan Thomas Hardy had written about "A Changed Man" that it is "the best .. .. of the tales" in this collection. The story raises a moral question which Hardy leaves unanswered. Is it right for Laura to have an adulterous relationship with Vannicock ? Ofcourse, we know that Laura had married a man who she presumed would remain a social and

worldly being like herself. But she suddenly finds that the terms of her marriage have been drastically altered by an unexpected reversal in her husband's personality. She feels betrayed. Her adulterous relationship with Vannicock is an infidelity not to the man whom she married but to the incompatible person into which Maumbry suddenly transforms. This ofcourse does not justify Laura's taking a lover but Hardy explains in compelling terms her emotional state when she does so."Do you think .....that a woman's husband has a right to do such a thing, even if he does feel a certain call to it ?"(15) However well Hardy portrays Laura's emotional state "A Changed Man" fails to achieve the sharp satirical quality that characterize the best of the LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES stories. It also lacks the density of social content or the dramatic force characteristic of the best of the WESSEX TALES.

Trumpery, parochial snobbery, class conflict were some of the things which angered Hardy and this he showed repeatedly in stories after stories. In the Wessex society where he lived and which he wrote about Hardy saw marriage's being hindered between lovers because of class consciousness and he spared no pains

to show how severely he disapproved of this practice. However, in "The Waiting Supper" Hardy tackles this class conflict with comparative restraint, even with light hearted mockery.

"The Waiting Supper" was first published in two parts in Harper's Weekly (31 Dec 1887 and 7 January 1888 and later it appeared in Murray's Magazine (January and February 1888). Hardy revised this story considerably for inclusion in A CHANGED MAN.

Nicholas Long, an honest farmer but an "untamed, uncultivated man, who has never seen London and knows nothing about society at all"(30) woos squire Everard's daughter, Christine. Christine had promised to marry Nicholas since she was a little over sixteen and, when the story begins she had been Nicholas' promised one for three years. Because of prevelant class prejudices she is unable to claim her lover publicly but desiring to marry him she asks him to

> "go away and travel, and see nations, and peoples and cities, and take a professor with you, and study books and art, simultaneously with your study of men and manners and then come back at the end of two years, when I should find that my father would by no means be indisposed to accept you as son-in-law."(31).

But Nicholas does not want to take this venture because he feels uneasy, (though he has Christine's promise) lest somebody should come and "snap" her up away from him. He prevails upon her to marry him secretly before he departs and he even gets a special marriage license with this purpose in mind. However, Christine was known to the rector of the Parish Church to which they go to get married and knowing that she was underage refuses to marry them specially since he did not in anyway want to contribute towards the "tragedy of marriage". Here Hardy expresses his view for considering marriage a tragedy. As the rector says, marriage "is full of crises and catas-trophes and ends with the death of one of the actors."(39) He believed in the proverb "Marry in haste and repent at leisure."

The marriage of Christine and Nicholas is stalled temporarily but this attempt of theirs to get married set the rumour going that Nicholas and Christine were secretly married and they were man and wife. When squire Evarard hears of this rumour he insists that Christine should marry Nicholas. This insistence acts as an incentive for Nicholas to go on the educational trip that Christine had so long been

insisting upon. He leaves on his journey and does not return for fifteen long years. When Christine saw no signs of Nicholas returning she marries a Certain James Bellston, a man who is socially more acceptable to her father. However, Mr. Bellston is not the best of husband. When her father dies he deserts her after having spent all that she possessed and leaving her in comparative poverty.

Fifteen years later Nicholas returns with a fortune. When he learns that Mr. Bellston had left Christine he asks her once again to marry him and she once again accepts. But Nicholas' plans to marry Christine breaks down on the eve of their marriage as a messanger arrives with her husband's portmanteau and announces his arrival. But Mr. Bellston never arrives. Seventeen years after this the skeleton of her husband is found in a waterfall. But now it is too late and they do not marry. The two of them have aged considerably and the relationship which has developed between the two is too comfortable for them to want to disturb it. The conclusion of the story is at once pathetic and abject. "But occasionally he ventured to urge her to reconsider the case, though he spoke not with the fervour of his earlier years."(83)

Hardy in "The Waiting Supper" once again is writing about the Wessex people's concern with class prejudice. Nic's lower social status and lack of sophistication are an embarrassment to Christine, but this artificial disparity between them "in little things" is insignificant because there is actually little real financial difference in their family assets. Squire Everard is the head of a "Countrified household of the smaller gentry, without much wealth or ambition"(27). Nic's family, on the other hand, has considerable ambition and entrepreneurial skill behind it, and is described in solid mathematical terms : his uncle rents an impressive total of 1100 acres of land. The supposed difference in status between Christine and Nic therefore lies in the fact that Nic is a yeoman and the nephew of a tenant farmer. Therefore the difference between Christine and Nic lies more in their expectation of each other than in their actual circumstance and it is because of this apparent difference that they keep postponing their marriage till Nic leaves Christine to go and educate himself so as to measure up to his beloved's expectations.

In the second half of the story there is a reversal of the social position of the two lovers.

Christine now lives in relative poverty while Nicholas has amassed a fortune and is "a man of the world"(61). But as far as their relationship goes it is as of old. Nic crosses the meads to meet his sweet-heart in Froom-Everard House, and once again Christine promises her hand and has to recant because fate will not let them marry. Hardy does not round off the story by making the two elderly people marry. The conventional manner demanded that Hardy rounded off the histories of Christine and Nic but Hardy's refusal to round off shows him to be the great master that he is. "The Waiting Super" anticipates the irony of his best LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES stories which refuse to resolve conflicts in the best machine made conventional manner.

"The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" is the most supernatural tale that Hardy ever told. It is quite simply a fairy tale with the archetypal theme of the innocent maid in love with a mysterious visitor from another world. Margery Tucker, the milkmaid saves Baron Von Xanten from committing suicide - the motif of innocence triumphing over the evil. In gratitude the Baron grants her any one wish. Margery in a

proper Cinderalla manner lets the Baron know that what she wants most in life is to go to a ball. The Baron grants her wish. On the day of the ball the Baron asks Margery to meet him at a particular place. To this place he brings a beautiful ball gown for her, which she wears in the hollow of an ancient tree. This event is only the beginning of the fairy-tale elements. Margery has a lovely time at the ball. She dances divinely with the Baron under his mysterious influence. After the ball she is whisked back to change into her ordinary clothes.

Margery has a lover called Jim. After the night at the ball Margery wanted that Jim should be able to provide her with silver candlesticks and furniture to enable him to win his suit. The Baron provides Jim and Margery with all these wanting the two of them to be happy together. On the day of the wedding the Baron unwittingly disrupts the ceremony by calling for Margery to come to him. Because Margery had promised the Baron that she would always go to him if he needed her she has to go leaving Jim behind waiting for his lover to come and marry him. The Baron arranges that Jim and Margery are to be secretly married and then disappears.

A good deal of everyday Wessex life supervenes in these events but eventually the Baron returns in his black carriage with the black horses to take Margery away with him on his yacht. Margery does not, despite the temptation, leave on the Baron's yacht. She suddenly realises what may happen to her if she goes with him. Perhaps she is remembering that the Baron had told her before he went away that she was to answer no more appeals from him because her "salvation may depend on it". The Barson releases her and she is reunited with Jim. The mysterious nobleman disappears from Wessex forever.

In "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" Hardy has used conventions from melodrama and romance to serve the larger purpose of presenting an accurate picture of life in rural Wessex. Although this story has been described by Guerard[16] as the most unrealistic prose narrative that Hardy ever wrote, here Hardy is doing nothing but describing the distinct and living culture of Dorset - a culture which is often misinterpreted because of the inability of the people to see below the surface of things. Here Hardy helps

his readers to see below the superficial by basing the romance elements firmly in the real. Wessex life is presented in detail and where it is necessary Hardy has even interpreted things for the readers. Hardy has through the contrast in the attitude towards life of both the Baronet and the Milkmaid brought out the contrast between the urban and the rural way of life. The Baronet appears mysterious to Margery because she has never encountered his kind of people before. To the Baronet Margery seems to be"Nature's own image"(305) because he has no knowledge of milkmaids.

The dark-mustachioed Baronet is a mixture of the villain from melodramas, the demon lover of the ballad who can lure a woman away from her simple and devoted husband and the repentent Byronic hero who regrets past sins. Margery is also a mixture of Cinderalla of the fairy tales who is transformed for a single night into a princess and the maiden of ballad and romance who is drawn from the safety of simple domesticity by a demon lover.

"The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" was written in the early part of Hardy's fiction writing career. This story anticipates the emphasis that Hardy laid on

the theme that sexual attraction and romantic illusion are potentially destructive forces. Margery's enchantment by the Baron is similiar to Carline Aspent's enchantment by Mop Ollamoor in "The Fiddler of the Reels. The attraction between the innocent Margery and the urban sophisticated Baron is the same sort of magnetism as in "On the Western Circuit", "The Romantic Adventures of a Milkmaid" would have fitted in perfectly in Hardy's collection LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES. Perhaps Hardy did not include it because the story's unusual length made it difficult for him to classify the piece. It did not fit into either of the conventional Victorian categories of short story or novel. However, Hardy's inclusion of this short story in A CHANGED MAN and his mentioning the story on the title page, shows that he did consider it to be, atleast in comparison with most of the other narratives in this collection of some interest in importance.

Writing about A CHANGED MAN AND OTHER TALES to Mrs. Henniker Hardy wrote that he did not "take kindly to publishing (his) stray short stories" because they did not seem" to be worth reprinting"[17] and would

gladly have left uncollected these stories had not Macmillan prompted the suggestion that he assemble in one final volume all of his still uncollected works. The result was a collection that is miscellaneous in every sense-in length, kind, quality and in content. Unlike the three previous volumes of short stories this book is not concerned with any single historical period or theme and employs no consistent narrative technique - it is as Hardy roughly categorised it in the Wessex edition, a collection of "Mixed Novels" and its general heading describes accurately the miscellaneous quality of its contents.

CHAPTER IV

THE UNCOLLECTED STORIES

THE UNCOLLECTED STORIES

Besides the short stories contained in the volumes which I have discussed in earlier chapters Hardy had left behind six uncollected short stories - "Old Mrs Chundle", "Destiny and a Blue Cloak", "The Doctor's Legend", "An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress", "The Thieves who Couldn't Help Sneezing" and "Our Exploits at West Poley". One can only guess as to why Hardy had not collected these stories into a volume or include them in the already existing volumes. Perhaps Hardy had lost all track of some of the stories after their first publication, or perhaps, like in the case of "The Doctor's Legend", a story so obviously written for inclusion in A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES he feared that he might offend a local family, or again he might have thought that by publishing stories like "Old Mrs. Chundle" he would be offending the Victorian reading public. The stories may have remained uncollected but they are all good and far from negligible as examples of the short story. F.B. Pinion recognised the merits of the stories and collected them together posthumously in 1977, along with Hardy's epic drama THE FAMOUS TRAGEDY OF THE QUEEN

OF CORNWALL and the outlines for five short stories which he never completed. Pinion has followed a certain pattern in arranging the stories. He has arranged the short stories in three parts. The first part consisting of "Old Mrs. Chundle", "Destiny and a Blue Cloak" and "The Doctor's Legend" is for adult readers. The second part contains the story or novelette "An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress" adopted from his first unpublished novel THE POOR MAN AND THE LADY. The third part is meant for children and has the two stories "The Thieves Who Couldn't Help Sneezing" and "Our Exploits at West Poley."

"Old Mrs. Chundle" the first story in Pinion's volume is perhaps the only story to have remained unpublished during Hardy's lifetime. It was published posthumously by his wife Florence Emily Hardy in the Ladies Home Journal (Philadelphia) in January, 1929 and in the Crosby Gaige Edition (New York). Though not published till after his death this story was written as early as 1888 - 1890 and Hardy had probably made no attempt to publish it because "too many readers would have deemed him guilty of irreverent designs."[1] This meaningless concern for the sensibilities of his Victorian reading public delayed the publication of

one of Hardy's best and touchingly amusing stories by many years. Behind, what the Victorian readers might have considered to be the disrespectful attitude of Hardy towards the clergy there is a deep reverence for humanity.

One autumn morning, the new curate of Kingscreech was engaged in painting a distant view of Corvsgate Castle ruins. When the lunch hour drew on he discovered that he was feeling hungry and spotting a respectable and substantial looking old stone built cottage he called there and asked for a meal. An old woman prepared one for him. During lunch, in the way of conversation, the old woman told the curate that she seldom ventured out of the house but when she did she visited only two places - Anglebury, once a fortnight for marketing and the Kingscreech parish once a week.

When discussing Mrs. Chundle (for that was the old woman's name) with the rector later on in the week, the curate discovered that Mrs. Chundle had exaggerated her travels for in reality she had not visited the church for thirteen years. The new curate revisited Mrs. Chundle to reproach her for her falsehood and to see if he could persuade her to come to Church. By way of explanation old Mrs. Chundle said that she had been in

the habit of attending services ages ago but now saw no use in continuing with this practice since she was too deaf to hear anything. The zealous curate not to be defeated so easily and wanting to do everything possible to bring this stray sheep back into the fold brought her an ear trumpet. But all his efforts were in vain for Mrs. Chundle attended the service but was unable to hear a single word. Disappointed she told the curate:

> "Twasn't a mossel o' good, and so I could have told 'ee before. A wasting your money in jimcracks upon a' old 'ooman like me.....you might as well have been mouthing at me from the top of Greech Barrow."[2]

Not wishing to accept defeat at the very first attempt the curate promised her that he would have a speaking tube installed to the pulpit at his own expense and the lower mouth of the tube would be placed opposite her.

At the next sunday service everything was set according to plans and Mrs. Chundle attended placing herself immediately under the pulpit. The curate began his service but soon after beginning his sermon

he noticed vapour arising from the bell mouth of the speaking tube and detected in it the smell of onion stew. This was obviously caused by Mrs. Chundle's breathing. When he could no longer endure the odour he dropped his handkerchief into the bell of the tube and had the satisfaction of breathing in comparatively fresh air. But this sense of satisfaction he could not enjoy for long. He soon heard a fidgeting followed by a hoarse whisper "The Pipe's Chokt!" This was repeated more loudly and hoarsely as the handkerchief continued blocking the flow of words into Mrs. Chundle's deaf ears. Suddenly there was a violent puff of warm air and the handkerchief rose from the tube and floated to the pulpit floor. Mrs Chundle had successfully cleared the blockade by blowing with all her might. Seeing this little boys laughed thinking that a miracle had happened. The curate once again began to feel uncomfortable as the odour of peppermint, cider and pickled cabbage oozed out of the tube but he did not dare to block the tube again for the fear of causing a greater disturbance. He continued with his sermon till being unable to bear it any longer blocked the bell-mouth with his thumb and brought the sermon to a premature end.

He avoided meeting Mrs. Chundle during the next week but accidentlly encountered her at a friend's cottage that he was visiting. She told him that she could hear beautifully except when he had absent mindedly dropped his handkerchief into the speaking tube. She told him that she would attend church every Sunday now onwards. The next Sunday the ordeal was repeated. The curate found himself entirely at a loss and as a means towards solving his problem he had the tube removed.

A day or two later the curate received a message from Mrs. Chundle asking him to see her. Expecting to be attacked by the irrate old woman, he delayed going to her and when he finally trudged to her cottage in a vexed mood he found the curtains of her cottage drawn. Mrs. Chundle had died. The previous Sunday finding herself late for Church, she had run up the hill. As a result she had over strained her heart and been ill. She sent for him thinking that he was anxious about her spiritual welfare she had refused to send him a second message thinking that he was busy with people who were in greater need then herself. She died with the idea that she had at last

found somebody who was genuinely interested in her welfare and left him all her possessions - "her bureau, case-clock, four-post bedstead, and framed sampler - in fact all the furniture of any account that she possessed."(18).

The curate went out with tears in his eyes. He was a meek, young man after Mrs. Chundle's death. He walked on thinking of Mrs. Chundle's death till he reached a lonely place where

> ".....kneeling down on the dust of the road he rested his elbow in one hand and covered his face with the other.
>
> Thus he remained some minutes or so a black shape on the hot-white of the sunned trackway; till he rose, brushed the knees of his trousers and walked on."(18).

The story is very touching in its conclusion and one feels a lot of sympathy for Old Mrs. Chundle's situation. The pent up irony with which the story ends is powerful. The rejection which is Mrs. Chundle's lot due to no fault of hers makes the reader angry with the curate. The story ends on a reverential note with the curate repenting for the harsh treatment he had handed out to Old Mrs. Chundle. But it is too late for him to make repairs. Mrs. Chundle has already died

leaving behind all her property to a man who had initially shown a little concern towards her but deserted her the moment he found something in her which he disliked. It is, therefore, with her death that the curate awakens to the realities of life.

"Old Mrs. Chundle" is one of Hardy's best short stories. Even though the story has an elegiac note in it, it is on the whole amusing. There is a very clever mixing of humor with tragedy. This story also shows that Hardy had a thorough understanding of human nature and its conclusion exhibits the deep reverence that Hardy felt for humanity.

The next story in the collection "Destiny and a Blue Cloak" is of particular interest to us for it is Hardy's first short story. As is usual with the first of most writers, this story is a disappointment to the readers especially since Hardy had written it during a time when he had already become famous in England and in America as the author of the serialised FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD. Hardy was himself aware of the limitations of this story and was least hesitant in admitting it. He called "Destiny and a Blue Cloak" "an impromptu of a trivial kind."[3]

His wife, Florence Emily Hardy considered it to be unsatisfactory. The reason for this story not coming through successfully may lie in the fact that Hardy had hurriedly written the narrative and dispatched it a week before his marriage. He had written it in response to a request made by the editor of The New York Times. It was published for the first time on Sunday 4 October, 1874. From reading this story one might get the impression that Hardy had not taken the short story form seriously in 1874 and had not then thought of experimenting with this form. However "Destiny and a Blue Cloak" is like all other works of Hardy interesting reading and there are brilliant Hardyan touches to be found scattered throughout the story. The conclusion makes a strong impact and reveals an intuitive understanding of women and female rivalry arising from jealousy.

Frances Lovill and Agatha Pollin lived at Cloton. Of the two girls Frances was more beautiful and somehow with her beauty she managed to eclipse all the other girls. When the story begins, we are told that one day Frances and Agatha had travelled together to Maiden - Newton, Agatha going from there by train to

Meymouth. She wore a blue Autumn wrap like Frances' which "she had bought in a spirit of emulation rather than originality" and because of this was mistaken for Frances by Oswald Winwood, the hero of this story. As she had already lost her heart to Oswald, Agatha did not correct the young man for fear that he might leave her and go off if he were to discover his mistake. They spent the day together and in the evening he accompanied her home. The final part of the journey they did by the carrier van which they caught just in time. By the time they reached their journey's end Agatha perceived that Oswald loved her and cared for her and for what she was and confessed her deception. He kissed her, said he liked her now that he knew her but admitted that it was Miss Lovill he had been looking for in the morning. At Beaminster, a person whom they had not noticed in the darkness of the van stepped out. They later learnt from the driver that their co-passanger all this while had been none other than Miss Frances Lovill and she had heard all.

Agatha and Oswald continued to love each other. The uncle with whom Agatha lived did not object to this relationship and so they continued to meet till Oswald

had to leave for he was soon to take a competitive examination for a post in India and he had as good a chance as the best of them. Then there follows an interesting bit of conversation between Oswald and Agatha

> "Thanks to Macaulay, of honoured memory, I have as good a chance as the best of them, he said with ardour, "What a great thing competitive examination is; it will put good men in good places, and make inferior men move lower down; all bureaucratic jobbery will be swept away."
>
> "What's bureaucratic, Oswald ?"
>
> "Oh I. that 's what they call it, you know It is well, I don't exactly know what it is. I know this, that it is the name of what I hate, and that it isn't competitive examination."
>
> "At any rate it is a very bad thing," she said conclusively.
>
> "Very bad, indeed; you may take my word for that." (23)

Hardy through this bit of conversation has brilliantly exposed to his readers the basically innocent and naive nature of the Wessex folks who were gradually being introduced to new concepts of competitive examinations and bureaucracy and who were beginning to accept these concepts without understanding what they in reality were.

Oswald Winwood appeared for the examination, topped the list of successful candidates and left for

India. From there he corresponded with Agatha and told her that he was doing well professionally and would return home to marry her. Meanwhile Agatha's uncle, Humphrey announced that he would marry Frances Lovill.

A merry old bachelor named Lovill, a distant relative of Frances fell in love with Agatha. To Agatha this "aged old youth was positively distasteful"(26) and she had reasons to be repelled by him for

> "He was an old man - really and fairly old - sixty five years of age at least. He was not exactly feeble but he found a stick useful when walking in a high wind... His face was not shrivelled, but there was unmistakable puckers in some places. And hence the old gentleman, unmarried, substantial, and cheery as he was, was not doted on by the young girls of Cloton as he had been by their mothers in former time..... They might have liked him as a friend had he not shown the abnormal wish to be regarded as a lover."(25)

Inspite of her dislike for Lovill, her uncle asked her to marry him for the miller owed Lovill a large sum of money and wished to emigrate with his family to Australia. She refused and explained her position. Eventually with a lot of persuasion from

her uncle and advice from the parson Mr. Davids she signed a contract to accept Lovill if Oswald did not return to marry her by November. She wrote to Oswald at once, was assured that he would return, and was happy.

By the evening of her wedding day when Oswald had not returned she decided to run away from home in order to avoid marrying Lovill. She had a young friend named John who worked at her uncle's mill. She planned a means of escape with him. On the day of her wedding she concealed herself in a cart loaded with sacks of flour for local delivery. When it began to move she concluded that all was well and went to sleep. Suddenly she woke up and realised that the cart was returning. She then discovered that the driver was not John but old Lovill disguised in a miller's smock-frock. He was highly amused at the joke. Agatha knew that she was defeated and married Lovill.

In the evening her uncle's wife, the former Frances Lovill came to her room wearing the blue cloak which had meant so much in Agatha's destiny.

She revealed that Mr. Davids was an old admirer of hers, and that she had persuaded him to advise Agatha as he had done. She had heard Agatha making plans with John the previous evening, told Mr.Lovill to avenge her deprivation of a lover and subsequent marriage to a man she did not love. She informed Agatha that Winwood had arrived,his delay having been caused by illness. She had told him that Agatha had gone out with the man she was to marry. Agatha did not flinch 'in face of her adversary' but said that the information was 'interesting' and that she was her husband's darling and would not make him jealous for the world.

> "The bride though nearly slain by the news, would not flinch in the presence of her adversary. Stilling her quivering flesh, she said smiling : "That information is deeply interesting, but does not concern me at all, for I am my husband's darling now, you know, and I wouldn't make the dear man jealous for the world. And she glided downstairs to the chaise".(40)

This then in brief is the interesting story of "Destiny and a Blue Cloak". Although the story is gripping and typically Hardyan it did not find its way into any of the volumes of short stories. This is because Hardy's

judgement on this story was a negative one. He considered it to be of "no literary value"[4], Kristin Brady commenting on the story writes:

> "Hardy fails to see beyond plot and technique to the human emotions they are meant to dramatise."[5]

No one can deny that Hardy is not at his best in "A Destiny and a Blue Cloak". But then this story is an important part of Hardy's literary career and merits study for it is here that Hardy experimented with and made a crude sketch of the themes that he explored over and over again in his later major and minor prose fiction. Here he writes about sexual jealousy leading to rivalry, the important role played by destiny in human lives and the inability of the heroine to make her own choice of partner because of pressure put on her by family and society. In its conclusion the story is melodramatic and it is this which makes a strong impact on the reader's mind.

Like other stories by Hardy the action of "A Destiny and a Blue Cloak" appears contrived but here they are more implausible because factors like characterisation, painting of Wessex scenes and the skills which Hardy otherwise exhibits play a subordinate role. All said and

done inspite of its negative points "Destiny and a Blue Cloak" is an important landmark in Hardy's literary career.

Although "The Doctor's Legend", the next story in the collection appeared on print in THE INDEPENDENT (New York) on 26 March 1891 from its narrative technique, subject matter and date of composition one can easily detect that it was written for inclusion in A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES. Its exclusion from this volume and its publication in America may have been in order to avoid offending the living descendents of Joseph Damer, Lord Milton, the eighteenth century original of the story's cruel and ambitious squire. He might have also excluded it because he did not consider Lady Cecilia's role important and major enough for inclusion in A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES. This is one of Hardy's not so well written story and its "wormy circumstance and general gloom"[6] generally keeps the readers off. But inspite of its dark points like the other bad stories by Hardy it narrates an interesting incident and stands out as a typically Hardeyan work.

Hardy begins his legend in the manner in which he begins most of his stories from A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES

> "Not more than half a dozen miles from the Wessex coast" (said the doctor)" is a mansion which appeared newer in the last century than it appears at the present day after years of neglect and occupation by inferior tenants. It was owned by a man of five and twenty, than whom a more ambitious personage never surveyed his face in a glass. His name I will not mention out of respect to those of his blood and connections who remain on earth, if any such there be. In the words of a writer of that time who knew him well, he was "one whom anything would petrify but nothing would soften."(41)

After quickly building up a rapport with his audience the narrator continues with his story.

The young squire kept a jealous eye on his property and was annoyed because a little girl, the daughter of a widow living in the neighbour hood, trespassed on his lawn in search of flowers. One day he pursued her with a cane and so terrified her that she fell down in a apoplectic fit. She was carried home by the gardener, who had silently been observing this scene. It seemed that fright had deprived her of her reason. Her hair came off, her teeth came out, and everyone around her started calling her "Death's Head".

In the course of time, the young squire married Lady Cicely, the daughter of an ancient and noble family. One evening Lady Cicely was returning home by the light of the harvest moon when the widow and her child were on the churchyard. As the lady was passing the churchyard, the mother hurried her child to the wall, pulled off her hood and told her to grin. Lady Cicely, who was then expecting a child, shrieked with terror but no evil consequence seemed to result.

On the death of his uncle, the squire inherited a large fortune and with this he bought an abbey and its estates. A year later he was made a peer. His son who was exceedingly timid and impressionable grew up and married a beautiful woman who was a sculptress of great skill. In the meantime the widowed mother seemed to have been "blasted out of existence" by the success of her long time enemy. She died, her death having happily been preceeded by that of her child.

The Abbey was too small for the wealthy lord and the village was close to his very doors. He had it removed to make way for extensions and built a new village with convenient cottages a mile or more away so as to get maximum privacy. But the villagers still intruded. They loved to ring the bells. He sold them.

Soon afterwards Lady Cicely died. The renovation work continued and the abbey was pulled down wing by wing. The cloisters and the tombs of the abbots were removed, and it seemed there never would be an end to the removal and reburial of bones. The lord told the workmen to throw the 'wormy rubbish' into any ditch they could find. His son's wife asked if she could have a skull to copy in designing a marble tomb for a church in London. The son was much depressed by what he saw.

One evening he returned to his home in London much the worse for liquor. He entered the studio to look for his wife, and, by the light of a candle which he held unsteadily above his head, caught sight of a sheeted figure with a death's head above it - the draped dummy which his wife had set up to copy. Next morning it was discovered that he had shot himself at a tavern. People said that his death was a retribution for his father's wickedness. Few could know how his mother had been terrified almost to death by the sight of "Death's Head" at the time when she was expecting him. A fearless dissenter preached a sermon on the Sunday after the funeral, taking as his text Isaiah xiv. 10-23[7].

Whether as a Christian moralist he was justified in doing so, the doctor left others to judge. His listeners continued gazing thoughtfully at the fire at the conclusion of the story.

"The Doctor's Legend" is a weak example of a characteristic mode of telling stories which we have already encountered in Hardy's second volume of short stories, A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES. This story can be studied as an example of his style of telling stories and it shows Hardy's usual love for the unusual and the gruesome.

"An Indiscreetion in the Life of an Heiress" is of particular interest to all scholars and students of Hardy for it contains the remnants of Hardy's first novel THE POOR MAN AND THE LADY which he wrote in 1867 but never published in its original form. However, he used long passages, sometimes whole chapters from it in other early novels of his, like UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE and THE HAND OF ETHELBERTA. Much the largest fragment to survive, perhaps a third of the whole original novel is his piece of short fiction, "An Indiscretion in the Life of An Heiress". This story was sold to an English and an American magazine. It was never published in book form in Hardy's lifetime. Terry Coleman writing

about the history of its publication writes:

> "His second wife, Florence, did publish it privately in 1934 in an edition of one hundred copies, of which thirty five still remained at Max Gate at her death. They were bound in limp vellum, printed by the Curwen Press, and numbered and initialled F.E.H. by Mrs. Hardy in her own hand. Sydney Cockerell did not approve of this publication. In a letter to the Times Literary Supplement of March 14, 1935, he said that as one of the literary executors of Hardy, the other being Mrs. Hardy, he had not been consulted about it. He had read "An Indiscretion" some years before in an American magazine' and come to the conclusion that Hardy had some reason for not reprinting it and that it would be a mistake to do so. He said Mrs. Hardy had been of the same opinion as recently as 1929, when she had refused permission for it to be reprinted (in Cleveland, Ohio). Cockerell did not say what Hardy's reasons might have been for not wishing it to be reprinted. Later in 1935 it was published in book form in America, by the late Carl Weber of Colby College, Maine, and this edition was reprinted in facsimile in 1965 by Russel and Russel, New York."[8]

In "An Indiscretion in the Life of An Heiress" Hardy returns to the social theme he had first explored in THE POOR MAN ANDTHE LADY and which he later repeatedly explored in stories after stories. It involves a marriage entirely based on the social and financial ambitions of the heroine's father. Hardy here dramatises the evils of class feeling as in many of his

other stories. Here he shows how honest human affection becomes shame faced and mean because of social prejudices and class divisions.

Egbert Mayne, a young schoolmaster at Tollamore, fell in love with Squire Allenville's daughter, after saving her life. She had gone to see a threshing machine, had inadvertently stepped backwards and had drawn so near to the band which ran from the engine to the drum of the thresher that in another moment her dress would certainly have been caught, and she would have been whirled round the wheel as a mangled corpse. She visited the school to thank him for saving her from imminent death. On this visit Egbert asked Geraldine to do him a favour. Mayne's grandfather, farmer Broadford, with whom he lived, was worried because his house and farm had lapsed to the squire who needed the land for extensions to his park. He asked Gereldine to talk to her father on this question. After this Gereldine and Egbert met frequently. The latter was relieved to hear that the scheme of enlargement had been postponed indefinetly. She visited the school often and on one of these visits after the children had been dismissed,

he kissed her. Gereldine left in a hurry. A week later it was announced that the Squire would go ahead with his plans of extending the park. Soon afterwards Farmer Broadford had an accident and died. Before his death, Egbert told his grandfather that he was in love with Geraldine. Gereldine anxious to make it clear to Egbert that she was in no way to blame for her uncle going back to his original plans of extension visited the house of the dead. They were reconciled Geraldine was on the verge of committing the most horrible social sin - that of loving beneath her and owning that she so loved. Eventually Egbert decided to go to London so that he could rise to her social level by years of sheer exertion.

Five years had passed. Egbert had become famous as an author. Geraldine had gone abroad with her father, but one day Egbert caught sight of her in a carriage in Piccadilly. Later he had reason to believe she would attend a performance of the "Messiah" and booked a seat as near as possible to the seats reserved for the Allenville's. At the concert, the opportunity came to hold hands and they arranged to meet at her front door at midnight. At the appointed hour, a letter was slipped under the door. It was from Geraldine. She wrote that since circumstances had

changed they must forget each other. Next morning he saw the papers announce her engagement to Lord Bretton. A letter from Geraldine intimated that the announcement was premature. Egbert's ambition left him, as he saw no possibility of an union with Geraldine. He retired to a cottage at Fairland, a village near Tollamore.

He learnt that the wedding was to take place shortly. He decided to face the 'sacrifice' and visited the church to see the preparations for the ceremony. Here he met Geraldine and learned from her that she was not in love with Lord Bretton. In the early hours of the morning she ran away from her father's house and came to Egbert. They decided to marry at once. He borrowed a horse and rode off to procure a license. They were married the same day and set off for London via Melport where they stayed three days. It was agreed that her father should be seen before they left. They reached Tollamore House in the evening. Geraldine was ill with anxiety before she entered. It was arranged that Egbert should wait outside while Geraldine went in to break the news to her father. Half an hour later Egbert, saw a man gallop off from the stables. This was followed by the arrival of a carriage.

Ten minutes later Egbert was summoned into the house. Geraldine was very ill. On meeting her father she had fainted with anxiety. A blood vessel had been ruptured. Her life was in danger. Egbert remained for three days but neither did Egbert's relationship with Geraldine's father improve nor did his wife's health. On the third day Geraldine had another attack and she died.

The story in "An Indiscretion in the Life of Heiress" is told chiefly from the perspective of the poor man but Hardy also shows a considerable amount of compassion for the heiress who complains that to be woven and tied in with the world by blood, acquaintance and tradition and external habit is a terrible thing for it compels a woman to be utterly at the beck of the world's customs. It is in this narrative perspective - where Hardy recognises the lady's as well as the poor man's plight - that the stories of A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES takes its shape.

"The Thieves who Couldn't Help Sneezing", the first of the two stories meant for children, is one of the earliest short stories to be written by Thomas Hardy.

He wrote this story simultaneously with THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE. It was published for the first time as the opening story for the December 1877 issue of FATHER CHRISTMAS, a children's annual brought out by the ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS. Like many tales of long ago, this event occurs "Many years ago, when oak trees past their prime were about as large as elderly gentlemen's sticks"(31). This story may appear incredible to modern adult readers but with its hilariously comic climax it is very appealing to young readers. It possesses all those elements which they look forward to encountering in stories meant exclusively for them. It has the romance like atmosphere, the right amount of adventure which children look forward to having and enjoy and does not have any sermons to preach. Hardy gives the child hero ample opportunity to exhibit his presence of mind, wit and bravery. Being a christmas tale it evokes the christmas spirit with its merry-making, good food, good drink, good company and christmas carols and the story ends happily for our child hero.

While on the way home one cold christmas Eve, after executing an important errand for his father,

Hubert is robbed of his horse by some robbers (who had artificially blackened their faces), his arms tied behind him, his legs tightly bound and he is thrown into a ditch. The robbers leave Hubert to his fate. Not to be defeated so easily Hubert struggles, bravely, to free himself and after a great deal of exertion manages to free his legs. With his hands still tightly bound behind him he walks on till he comes to "a large mansion with flanking wings, gables, and towers."(132) Finding the door standing wide open he enters to find himself in a dining room in which a large table was spread with a sumptuous supper as yet untouched. All was silent in the house and Hubert could see no one. To Hubert it seemed as though something had occured to interrupt the meal.

Even as Hubert was wondering what he should do the silence was broken by hasty footsteps and the words "Be quick" uttered in a deep voice, a voice which he immediately recognised as the voice of the man who had robbed him of his horse. Hubert darted under the table for protection and well hidden by the table cloth he was in a position to overhear the conversation of the three robbers. From their conversation he learnt that the

three thieves had tricked the owner of the house, accompanied by his guests to leave the house and search for a man whose distressed shouts for help they had heard just as they were about to sit down for supper. Needless to say they found no one in distress. One of the thieves had imitated the criss of a man to draw out the inmates so that they could hide within the house and wait for an opportunity to steal all the valuables from the house while all its inmates were sleeping. The thieves hid inside a closet when they heard the host and his guests returning and Hubert took this opportunity to escape from the house least he was mistakenly taken by the inmates for a thief. However, once the family had settled down to dinner Hubert returned to the house this time being led in by the butler.

The people found it hard to believe his tale of misfortune but being in a happy, generous mood they invited him to share their meal. After dinner the men took out snuff and offered some to Hubert asking him to say something about himself. Hubert introduced himself as a travelling magician and he said that his

speciality lay in being able to "conjure up a tempest in a cupboard"(135). With these words he led every one present up to the cupboard where the thieves were hidden, locked it and poured in snuff - a little at a time. This caused the thieves to sneeze a little at first but as Hubert poured in more and more snuff a tempest of sneezes was created within the cupboard. By then, the host realised that Hubert could not possibly be creating the tempest within the cupboard through magic. There must be people hidden inside the closet. By now the thieves within the cupboard were begging for mercy. The thieves were captured and Hubert thanked. After this little adventure Hubert returned home to the normal routine of everyday life.

This tale is a great favourite with children. They simply love the idea that a seemingly invincible foe is defeated by the skill and guile of a young boy. Young readers like to identify themselves with Hubert. The child hero has no moral choice to make except to oppose an externalised evil.

"The Thieves who Couldn't Help Sneezing" shows that Hardy would have made an excellent children's story writer if he chose to be one. This fact is further proved by the story which follows."Our Exploits at West Poley" is a more sophisticated story and it is written for children a little older. Even though this story remained uncollected it is one of Hardy's best stories.

"Our Exploits at West Poley" was written for the YOUTH'S COMPANION, an American magazine of wide appeal, in the summer of 1883. In a letter of 5th April, 1883 to the editors Hardy wrote that he had agreed to provide a story for serial publication "not later than the end of the present year". He then continued in his letter:

> "I have roughly thought out a plan which at present seems promising. But I shall prefer not to commit myself to a title till later on in the year. The general scope, or sub-title, however, might be announced as "A rural tale of adventure in the West of England". You may depend upon my using my best efforts to pleasure your numerous readers; and that the story shall have a healthy tone, suitable to intelligent readers of both sexes."[9]

By November of that year Hardy had finished writing his story and he sent the manuscript on 5th November under the title "Our Exploits at West Poley". In a letter accompanying the manuscript Hardy wrote:

> "In constructing the story I have been careful to avoid making it a mere precept in narrative - a fatal defect, to my thinking, in tales for the young, or for the old. That it carries with it a sufficiently apparent moral, will I think be admitted. The important features of plot and incident have received my best attention."[10]

However, the story did not meet with the editor's approval and it was sent back to Hardy for correction. On 14 March, 1884 Hardy returned the copy with the following words:

> "The story seems to be to go naturally enough now and I hope you will think the same - still more that your numbrous young readers will think so. I shall be much obliged if you will send the numbers of the Companion in whichthe story appears, as I have no correct copy from which it could be printed in England afterwards, should I desire to do so."[11]

The story remained unpublished for another couple of years as we can gather from another letter dated 13 December 1886 where Hardy wrote:

> "With regard to the short story I wrote for the Companion please do not pay any attention to the fact that I cannot avail myself of it here as long as you keep it unpublished. The proprietors of the Companies treated me very courteously in the matter, and I should much prefer that you hold it back as long as there is any chance of your having room for it, to your publishing it elsewhere to oblige me. Possibly if you have no space for it at length you may someday think fit to produce it in a somewhat abridged from - it being a story of an imaginative kind suitable for a Christmas number, or such like. Our children here are younger for their age then yours; and possibly the story is too juvenile for your side of the sea. I fancy you may be mistaken in that; but of course I do not know as well as yourselves."[12]

This story thus remained filed away with many others in the office of the YOUTH'S COMPANION. It was by sheer accident that the editor's son-in-law recovered this story and got it published. In a letter to Purdy he wrote:

> "I did not join the staff of the Youth's Companion until 1890, and consequently have no first hand knowledge of the serial story by Thomas Hardy. All that I can tell you is what I heard about it later (from Rideing) for the action that Mr. Daniel S. Ford, then editor and

> proprietor of the Companion, took in regard to it amazed his sub-editors and became an office legend. Mr.Ford's daughter [illegible]ried a Mr. Hartshorn, for whom Mr. Ford bought a small story - paper entitled THE HOUSEHOLD. I think that it never prospered greatly, and, to help things along, Mr. Ford would now and then give his son-in-law MSS. from the ample stock of the YOUTH'S COMPANION in Boston, was an obscure and unsuccessful magazine which described itself as "Devotedto the Interests of the American Housewife". There in six monthly instalments between Nov. 1892 and April 1893, Our Exploits was first printed....."[13]

Thus, it is by sheer accident that this delightful adventure story for children was rediscovered and published.

"Our Exploits at West Poley" being written for slightly older readers then the earlier "The Thieves Who Couldn't help Sneezing" is more serious. In it Hardy tells the youthful adventure that two boys, Steve and Leonard, encounter while exploring Nick's Pocket, a cove in the Mandip Hills, through Leonard's eyes. While telling the story Hardy pays special attention to the plot and incident and takes care

to see that the story has the right amount of surprise, wonder, alarm and the thrills of escape and heroism to make the story appealing for the young readers. Yet the story is not all fun. It has a "sufficiently apparent moral to give its young readers food for thought.

While exploring Nick's Pocket, Steve one day finds a mysterious subterranean stream and when his cousin Leonard comes to visit him the two together decided to explore this stream. Their exploration provides them great amusement for they discover that they could divert the course of the river running through West Poley to their rival village East Poley. When they divert the river for the first time they do it unwittingly but as time passes the boys turn the river one way or the other at their own discretion. They do not know and cannot decide which of the two villages has a greater right to the river for they see the sudden disappearance of the stream from West Poley causes great distress to the West Poleyites but at the same time it relieves the villagers of East Poley from years of waterlessness. Seeing this Steve realises that

"it is next to impossible in this world to do good to one set of folks without doing harm to another." So what had started as an innocent sport soon proves a threat not only to the villagers but to the boys themselves for one day while turning the river course they direct the water into a cul-de-sac and they soon find themselves trapped within the cave with the water slowly rising and death just a few minutes away. However, they manage to escape only to find that they had caused more harm then good by tampering with the river source for no one could say which village had more right to the water source.

Hardy concludes the story by describing a clash between the two villages. Steve sits through all this with the increasing belief that West Poley had more right to the river because he felt that had he not tampered with the river East Poley would never have had the river flowing through it. Thus convinced, Steve in a last outburst of heroism blasts the inner cave, where the river source lay, with gunpowder thus terminating the possibility of human interference

for good and restoring the river to West Poley. While executing this feat he nearly perished in the explosion. Because of this experience Steve becomes more aware of his responsibilities and he goes on to become "the largest gentleman farmer of those parts, remarkable for his avoidance of any thing like speculative exploits."

As Hardy had said the moral in this story is "sufficiently apparent". He discourages rashness because it often leads to consequence beyond one's control. Kristin Brady commenting on the moralistic point of view writes:

> "The moral issue here .....is the danger of tampering with the "most fragile" order of nature. The diversion of the river is potentially a form of the original sin - involving serious consequences not only in the present but also, by the transmission of this knowledge from one generation to the next, for the future."[14]

Hardy in "Our Exploits at West Poley" has definitely got a moral to preach but even as he is doing it he takes care to see that the story does not sound too didactic. In this story, as in all other stories by

Hardy, it is the artist who stands out more than the propounder of moral views. Hardy in this story once again gives a delightful picture of the rural life and characters of Wessex. He describes the basic problems of the rural people, problems like the frustration that is born out of a seeking to rise in the world and the tragedy of the countryman exiled from the agricultural world. These problems he portrays through the sombre, shadowy figure of "The Man who has Failed", a typically Hardyan character, who is oddly out of place in West Poley. When Leonard encounters him for the first time he is introduced by Steve as

> "Oh-he's nobody", Said Steve. "He's a man who has been all over the world, and tried all sorts of lives, but he has never got rich, and now he has retired to this place for quietness. He calls himself the man who has Failed."

There is nothing amusing about this 'nobody'.

He is a man

> ".....who has failed not from want of sense, but from want of energy, and people of that sort, when kindly, are

> better worth attending to than those successful ones, who have never seen the seamy side of things."

In the words of Douglas Brown

> "This saddened returned native presides at a distance, throughout a potential interpreter never called upon. He might have unfurled the image, we feel; and through him at its end, the tale points lightly but deliberately to the agricultural stoicism 'quiet perseverence in clearly defined courses'".[15]

The other characters who appear briefly in the story are the miller, the baker, the diaryman, the blacksmith and the Shoemaker. Hardy presents them as "stock characters of rustic comedy" who "help to form a lively and rustic community but remain indistinct individuals"[16] It is amongst these people that our two children protagonists live. Leonard and Steve have been drawn by Hardy as two distinctly different individuals going through the same experience. Leonard is an impressionable and morally sensitive boy in contrast to Steve who is less thoughtful but older and more masterful.

Even though F.B. Pinion has categorised "Our Exploits at West Poley" as a story for children "it does

not exclude an adult perception of things."[17] It is a story which has been enjoyed by children for quite some time now but it includes more than what children are expected to know. It has many scholarly references which suggests that Hardy expected his readers to be as well read as he was during his school days. There are scholarly references to history, literature and philosophy which most children will pass over without understanding. Inspite of this children respond well to the general atmosphere of rollicking comedy which expresses itself in incidents like the fateful encounter of the two rival villages and the scene where Steve and Leonard go dressed as Wizards to East Poley, to impress the children there with white magic shows. Children love the spirit of adventure in the story and love to identify themselves with Leonard and Steve. Adults find in it enough material to give it a second thought.

Like the stories in A CHANGED MAN AND OTHER TALES the remaining six short stories by Hardy which we have

discussed in this chapter do not have much interest when discussed as a volume for unlike WESSEX TALES, A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES and LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES, there can be found no unifying principle running through these stories. But the volume of stories collected by Pinion contains stories which are most varied in subject matter and the usual allegation against Hardy that his stories are repetitions does not hold good here. The first four stories could have gone into his earlier volumes had he desired to include them and the two stories for children show that had he so desired and had he pursued his career as a children's story writer he would have become as immortal as Mark Twain did with his Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Adventures of Huckleberry Finn for OUR EXPLOITS AT WEST POLEY and "THE Thieves who Coundn't Help Sneezing" are very good and popular examples of children's short story today.

But because of unfavourable and severe criticism Hardy abandoned his career as a prose fiction writer earlier than he would have otherwise done. Perhaps because of this, these stories of his remained uncollected. However, these are typically Hardyan stories and merit study because they are good and because they are examples of his style and concerns at particular points in his development as a prose fiction writer.

CONCLUSION

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As a short story writer Thomas Hardy has a unique status. Although he wrote so many good short stories his merits as a short story writer have never been widely acclaimed. Critics have accused him of tedious self-duplication[1] because he frequently repeated certain subjects, themes, patterns and techniques in his short stories. John Berryman said that Hardy "wrote one thousand pages of the worst short stories that the world has ever seen"[2] and critics such as Canby, Dashiell and Bates[3] cannot see any merit in Hardy's short stories because they do not conform in structure and economy of expression to the qualifications for a modern short story. Another complaint against Hardy's short stories is that "their matter does not dictate their form."[4] However, this allegation as all the others is not true. Hardy considered form to be an important quality in any piece of writing. As he wrote in "The Profitable Reading of Fiction".

> "to a masterpiece in story there appertains a beauty of shape, no less than to a masterpiece in pictorial or plastic art, capable of giving to the trained mind an equal pleasure. To recognise this quality clearly when present, the construction of the plot, or fable, as it used to be called, is to be more particularly observed than either in a reading for sentiment and opinions or in a reading merely to discover the fates of the main characters. For however real the persons, however profound, witty, or humorous the observations, as soon as the book comes to be regarded as an exemplification of the art of story telling, the story naturally takes

the first place and the example is not noteworthy as such unless the telling be artistically carried on".[5]

Hardy did have great concern for beauty of shape. Then why is it that critics have commented unfavourably on his attitude towards form ? This discrepency between the allegations of critics and Hardys own ideas about beauty of shape may be the result of the definition that the term 'short story' has taken in recent times - of the importance of 'single effect'.[6] When we read Hardy's short stories we must remember that Hardy was writing at a time when the short story was trying to establish itself as a literary form, when the influence of the fables, legends and ballads was still working on writers attempting to write short stories. Hardy's short stories may not conform to the form required of a modern short story but we must remember that "the best form is that which makes the most of its subject".[7] In his short stories Hardy invented forms which were suitable for his subjects and these forms changed along with his material so that the methods used by him in WESSEX TALES, A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES and LIFE'S LITTLE IRONIES differ significantly from one another.

If there are critics who have spoken against Hardy the short story writer there are also critics like Howe who have a good word for him. But Howe's attitude towards Hardy's short stories is rather condescending. Howe

says that Hardy has little to do with the main line of the modern short story and his work ought to be considered as an example of the older form, tale. A tale, according to Howe is "a more easy-paced and amiable mode of narrative".[8] However, Hardy's shorter fictions are not tales in the conventional sense of the term for they are consciously crafted and modern. One of the characteristic of a tale is that it stops, starts up again and wanders, seemingly unconcerned with the effects of accumulation or foreshortening".[9] Hardy's stories are longer then the conventional short stories but they are tightly controlled narratives and even if they digress occasionally these digressions are a part of the overall pattern of meaning.

A flaw which is often pointed out to undermine Hardy as a short story writer is his tedious tendency of self duplication, of the themetic sameness of his stories. It is true that Hardy in most of his stories repeats the themes of ambition, greed, sexual jealousy, love, courtship, unhappy marriages class difference and the difference between the rural and the urban ways of life. But then we must remember that the themes which Hardy so often deals with in his stories are all universal themes and no matter how one may want to avoid them there is no escape from them. But just because Hardy often repeats themes it does not mean that his stories are not entertaining and gripping.

In fact Hardy's repeated treatment of the same themes over and over again goes to show what a great writer he was. Although Hardy deals with the same theme story after story he has taken care, as we have seen in our discussion of his stories, to provide us with different situations and treated them variously. It is because of this that his stories warrant serious attention.

Another reason why people want to read more and more of Hardy's works is that they want to know more and more about Wessex and its people. In his short stories as in his novels Hardy presents a very descriptive and comprehensive picture of life in his native Dorset, which he called Wessex. Hardy scrupulously observed life and the actual particularities of rural life in England and he wrote about them. Each story embodies as we have seen his personal understanding of the local past and he communicates this vision by a narrative technique that makes it comprehensive to his non native readers. In his short stories Hardy presents details of the social, economic and cultural diversity of Wessex life. Hardy does not preach or moralise, praise or condemn. He simply presents life as he sees it through the mouth of a narrator. He avoids social and philosophical generalisation. Hardy writes about all the Wessex people and within the forty odd short stories that he wrote he portrays a complex hierarchy from

the shepherds, artisans of "The Three Strangers" to the relatively wealthy tradesmen of "Fellow Townsmen" and "Interlopers at the Knap" to the aristocrats and gentry of A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES. And these people live the personal drama of their lives in Wessex. Wessex of the stories as Wessex of the novels is no fictional land. The places in which the events occur are actual places and when we observe each of these places closely we find that they vary surprisingly in their culture, agricultural economics, ways of life, moral points of view and language. Although Nature does not stand as an eternal presence in the stories as in the novels nevertheless it has an important role to play. The places in which the events occur do not exist simply as a setting but the place invariably carries a power of suggestion that links it with the events and the personalities of the story's characters.

Unlike longer forms of fiction, the short story does not allow a writer much space to develop his characters. It is therefore necessary that the writer establish the main traits of his principal characters as quickly and as economically as possible. Because he is bound by a limit of a several thousand words he cannot reveal any character completely. He must content himself with showing how one or two aspects of personality undergo change or only those aspects of the personality which are responsible for the precipitation of the events. This limitation of space in no

way hampered Hardy in the portrayal of his characters. With a few sure and swift strokes he draws his characters so as to make them appear as living breathing creatures. It is said of Hardy that he is better at portraying women characters then his men. But after reading his short stories we cannot judge either one way or the other. To us Lizzy, Sam Hobson, Mop Ollamoor, Car'line Aspent are all well drawn figures although two of these characters are male and two female. Hardy was good at portraying all character types strarting from the perfect gentleman and the educated selfish gentleman to the wicked rake.

Hardy's style of writing has a distinctive characteristic. It is colloquial, fluent, simple and full of regional Wessex dialect. Nevertheless, no one should find any difficulty in reading Hardy's short stories. Hardy once wrote that in his works he wanted to show mainly the character of the speakers and only to give a general idea of their linguistic peculiarities. In a letter to the Spectator, 15th October 1881 he claimed that his method was that of "scrupulously preserving the local idiom, together with the words which have no synonyms among those in general use". Hardy knew the dialects of his native place well because as a child he had lived with the Dorset Labourers and tried to know them intimately. This he could only do after he had mastered their dialect.

Although a well educated man Hardy greatly believed in superstitions omens and predictions. He believed that in real life the true is often as inexplicable as the fictional. He never thought of superstition as a sign of ignorance. He once wrote "I believe (in the modern sense of the word) not only in the things Bergson believes in, but in spectres, mysterious voices, intuitions, omens, dreams, haunted places etc. etc. " And because of this belief Hardy's stories are often unbelievable as a result of excessive supernatural touches. Although Hardy's short stories were the subject of adverse criticism he did not bother much about it because he believed that a writer had no right to write unless he had some really unusual tale to tell his readers. Hardy is not the only one during his times or our times to believe in such supernatural things. The belief that certain gifted individuals have special powers to see into the future and effect cures still persists and this belief does not persist only in the country areas.

Education is something which Hardy gave much thought to during his time and he nursed two strangely differing attitudes to education - education as a source of betterment and education as a source of discontent and personal bewilderment. These two different attitudes are shown in two stories - In "A Tradition of Two Ambitions"

Hardy shows education as a source of social advancement and somewhat differently in "The Son's Veto" he shows education as one of the forces that has divorced man from his village community and the intuitive knowledge gained from a life working on land.

Hardy was cynical in his attitude towards love, romance and marriage. In most of his short stories Hardy writes about love and unsuccessful marriage. It is only in "A Mere Interlude" that Hardy shows us signs of a marriage which could possibly end happily for the hero and the heroine. "The First Countess of Wessex" and "The Honourable Laura" in A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES also have happy endings. The rest of the stories are all about the tragedy of marriage.

This cynical attitude of Hardy results from the fact that he often sees fate as playing cruel jests on mankind. The Gods are invariably malicious in Hardy. But the bitterness which develops in the characters of Hardy's novels is absent in the characters of the short stories. The characters in Hardy's short fiction accept all their misfortunes in their natural stride. They accept the fact that there is a power above them which thwarts their love, causes cruel coincidence or unhappy chance. This power is expressed in nature as much as in human affairs and nothing can be done about it. Because the characters in the short stories have accepted this fact they are not as depressed

as Jude gets when things do not go his way.

Most of Hardy's stories have a distinctive speaker telling us the story. This narrator is often an elderly rustic who has good knowledge of the story he is narrating. He is often well acquainted with the social and geographical range of the events he is narrating. Most of the time the narrator has been in some way or the other connected with the events he is narrating. He either wants to put a wrong right or has himself gone through the events he is narrating. The stamp of his personality is often to be found in the narration as in the case of "A Few Crusted Characters" and A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES. Sometimes even as he is telling the story he gets nostalgic for old times. At other times he maintains an impersonal distance. At times the narrator is portrayed like the bards of ancient times, surrounded by an eager audience ready to listen to the story. Whatever the attitude that the narrator adopts one thing is certain - the reader is eager to listen to the unfolding of the story.

From all that we have discussed so far we find that there is very little justification in the allegations against Hardy's stories . Critics who have made these allegations have approached the stories with a biased mind and have studied these stories as foreshadows or echoes of his major and better work. It is true that all of Hardy's short stories do not come up to the standard of his better novels

but this is no reason why we should overlook them. Some of them are immensely good pieces and the rest all deserve to be studied. Even if a person is not well acquainted with Hardy's novels he can get a very good and comprehensive picture of a fictional Wessex from the reading of these stories. The short stories of Hardy give us a good, imaginative history of Wessex and its people, of the myths, legends, faiths, beliefs and wisdom of the people of Wessex. They also give us a better understanding of Hardy the novelist and poet, who interprets us to ourselves.

NOTES

NOTES

Introduction

1. George Saintsbury, THE ENGLISH NOVEL, London: J.M.Dent, p.264.

2. Quoted by Noorul Hasan, Thomas Hardy: THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION, Macmillan India Limited, 1982, p.104-105.

3. Irving Howe, THOMAS HARDY, New York, Collier Books, 1973, p. 78.

4. Noorul Hasan, p. 105.

5. Wilfred Gibson, "Hardy's Short Stories", THE BOOKMAN LXXIV, JUNE 1928, p. 148-149.

6. Ibid, p. 148.

7. Irving Howe, p. 78.

8. Ibid, p. 80.

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7. Isaiah xiv, 10-23.

10. All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become as weak as we ? art thou become like unto us ?
11. Thy pomp is brought down to the grave, and the noise of thy viols : the worm is spread under thee, and the worms cover thee.
12. Howart thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations.
13. For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God : I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north :
14. I will ascend above, the height of the clouds; I will be like the most High.
15. Yet thou shall be brought down to Hell, to the sides of the pit.
16. They that see thee shall narrowlylook upon thee, and consider thee saying. Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms;
17. That made the world as a wilderness and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners ?
18. All the kings of the nations, even all of them, lie in glory, every one in his own house.
19. But thou art cast out of thy grave like an abominable branch, and as the raiment of those that are slain, thrust through with a sword, that go down to the stones of the pit; as a carcase trodden under feet.
20. Thou shall not be joined with them in burial, because thou hast destroyed thy land, and slain thy people: the seed of evildoers shall never be renowned.
21. Prepare slaughter for his children for the iniquity of their fathers; that they do not rise, nor possess the land, nor fill the face of the world with cities.
22. For I'will rise up against them, saith the Lord of hosts and cut off from Babylon the name, and remnant, and son, and nephew, saith the Lord.

23. I will also make it a possession for the bittern, and pools of water : and I will sweep it with the besom of destruction, saith the Lord of hosts.

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