

**Hardy's Philosophy of Life**

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Among the list of modern novelists may be inserted in large type the name of Thomas Hardy. Not so much for his superiority as a writer should he be distinguished as for his popularity—especially with the common people. His works do not reveal an ideal scheme of living, nor are his characters model citizens, but his realistic portrayal of human nature in its less appealing form and his powerful ability of vivid description account for his popularity.

Mr. Hardy was born in Bockhampton, England in eighteen hundred and forty, of intelligent parents, and proved to be, in his early boyhood, of a peculiar turn of mind. He received an architect's training for some years and for two years practised this occupation, but always in a sullen and unsociable manner. Not unnaturally, he was left almost entirely to his lonely thoughts, out of which he derived much pleasure, and from which he formulated the dark philosophy which he so clearly reveals in his works. He cleverly avoided professing his real views on life until such time as his ability was recognized. He then retired into a strictly private life in his pleasant country home to devote the remainder of his life to poetry and novel-writing.

Through his sympathetic touch and genius of description both as a poet and as a novelist, he has left behind him imprints on our hearts. In his poetry his cynical attitude towards life is plainly depicted, but even more is it apparent in his novels from which he has acquired a greater reputation, though his chief ambition was to become a poet.

He is of that rare fellowship of writers who are actuated in their portrayal of life by a spirit as disinterested and as seemingly unsympathetic as the spirit of nature itself. His realism is indeed less a realism of art than the raw material of every day existence. His straightforward account of the chances and changes of this mortal strife is unsoftened by optimistic prejudices. But precisely how far his creations are true to the facts of human experience is merely a matter of personal opinion.

He delights in revealing the inconsistency of thought, the insincerity of people in their most important occupa-



tions, and the hypocrisy of pride. Acknowledging no creed, this modern novelist and poet is practically fatalistic in his portrayal of men and women as pre-ordained to misfortune and failure; as being pulled and tossed about by the impish pleasure of the god Circumstance. Some foreordained events, for which man is in no way responsible, turn the tide of battle against him. Yet he is held accountable for his failure. He reaps what he has not sown and is overwhelmed by the sin of others. These pagan ideas have clearly formed Hardy's mind along the lines of utter hopelessness, irrationality and hatred for the uselessness of life. He regards human nature as a minor part of creation and the thought of a Superior Being or after-life is not simply doubted by him but entirely rejected and regarded as unnecessary and inhuman.

Man, depicted as a participant in an unceasing struggle against an adverse fate working to cause his downfall, leads a thoroughly miserable life. Life is portrayed as an insatiable melancholy in which Hardy himself acquires his happiness. One line from his pen would suffice to reveal this attitude when speaking of sorrow: "She is so constant and so kind." He apparently regards sorrow as his only companion in life and, through constant association, has grown to appreciate it far beyond any form of entertainment. He again states when speaking of public amusements: "There is nothing I enjoy quite so well as a good hearty funeral."

His pessimism with regard to the futility of life amounts almost to a thesis that man is pre-ordained to misfortune. His works are almost devoid of wit and of pleasant scenery, yet humor is disclosed unconsciously in the homely talk and actions, especially of his peasantry, whom he ridicules, and subjects to the most harsh criticism, although it was by winning their attention that he successfully strove to acquire his reputation.

The passion of love in the world of his representation practically does not exist and is regarded as chiefly imaginary and greatly exaggerated by modern writers, though he himself was married for the second time at the age of seventy-four. Women, in his imagination, are all of the same calibre and are not esteemed as a very high part of nature. Low as is his estimation of man, woman is regarded as very much lower. Consistency and truthfulness he pictures as absolutely unattainable in woman-



kind—their intelligence, modesty, and even decency being the chief subjects of his cynicism. He regards them as mere machines, capable of acting only in one way and possessing no will power or initiative. He does not consider them as wilfully corrupt but as being scarcely responsible for the cause of the remorse of conscience which he represents so many as bearing with them to the grave. Yet his women, as represented in his works, are attractive, and always resemble their maker in one way, they are all pagan.

His attitude toward men is that of pity in the struggle against adverse fate and "dicing time." Them he criticises for their impulsiveness and insincerity, yet he does not hold them as contemptible but strives to lash the force that manipulates them toward destruction. Man is not to blame for his lot, but his environment is the cause of his misery.

His hostility to society, in which he assumes the attitude of an embittered attorney for the plaintiff, unhappily brings it directly under his scourge as the chief reason for man's unfortunate lot.

He thoroughly understands human nature and the attitude of the people for whom he writes. He artfully holds in the background enough impurity to keep the unscrupulous or evil-minded public interested. Nature, he says, is non-moral, and, as he regards man as entirely guided by nature, he believes in humoring this phase of his disposition and, in this way, retaining his attention.

Yet with all his sarcasm and his pagan ideas, with all his moody despair and his melancholy descriptiveness, his works, both as poet and as novelist, should not be condemned since he was, in contrast to so many other pagan writers, strictly sincere in his revealed thoughts. At his death, he displayed no traits of the beaten dog cowering at the feet of his master for mercy, after having created all the mischief he possibly could. He did not suddenly turn Christian on his death-bed, entreating God's mercy for his ruthless life, and for his hypocritical attempts to force into the hearts of people what he did not believe himself. He died an utter pagan, in his wife's arms listening to her read, at his request, poems containing some of the darkest phases of his beloved philosophy.

He lives and will continue to live in the character of his novels. Every trait, idea, and failing is revealed in



them, as well as his masterful ability. For ability he surely possessed when even Tennyson, who was many years his senior, could exclaim that he would give his right hand to be able to write like Hardy. Had his ability been directed in the proper channels there is no doubt that his contribution to literature, great though it be, should have been scarcely surpassable.



Wealth I ask not, hope nor love,  
Nor a friend to know me;  
All I ask; the heavens above  
And the road below me.

—Stevenson

For if our virtues  
Did not go forth of us, 't were all alike  
As if we had them not.

—Shakespeare

