ANTI-CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS IN THOMAS HARDY'S NOVELS

DISSERTATION

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A commonplace among Hardy critics is that as a young man Hardy lost his Christian faith and entered a serious religious disillusionment. The mainstream of Hardy criticism has followed the general consensus that Hardy suffered keenly as a result of this experience and looked back on Christianity with poignant nostalgia. If his view is not purely nostalgic, traditional criticism has insisted, then it seems at worst only ambivalent. The purpose of this dissertation is to argue that Hardy's attitude toward Christianity as revealed in his novels is not only not ambiguous, but, as a matter of fact, is specifically anti-Christian, often to the point of vehemence; that his treatment of various components of Christianity in his novels is aggressively anti-Christian; and that the feeling is so pronounced that the novels may be read as anti-Christian propagandistic tracts.

Although his earliest assumptions were based on the dogma of traditional Christianity, Hardy was unable to withstand the rational attack on Christianity. Scientific conceptions of the universe, skeptical analyses of theology, and the Higher Criticism of the Bible all contributed to the
destruction of Hardy's faith. Hardy rejected Christianity because he could not reconcile the idea of an omniscient God of absolute goodness with the fact of ubiquitous evil and inexplicable pain and cruelty in the universe.

Quite simply, then, Hardy became convinced that Christianity's "good" God theory had been vitiated by scientific evidence and that Christianity was no longer a viable approach to life. However, not content merely to reject Christianity, Hardy chose also to attack Christian dogma, especially its belief in a warm and personal deity. With the development of an attitude at best hostile to a prime doctrine of Christianity, it is only natural that evidence of this feeling should be exhibited in Hardy's creative thought. In fact, one can find an ironic contemplation of the ruins of the Christian faith depicted in Hardy's fiction, which, while denying the validity of traditional Christianity, is yet filled with the fixtures of it.

This dissertation evaluates Hardy's cynical view of and attack on Christianity by examining his treatment of its symbols, such as its architecture, and its practitioners, both clergy and laity. Furthermore, since Hardy's attitude is shown not only in specific comments and particular situations but also in general tone, attention is directed toward the pervasive irony with which Hardy regards the entire panoply of Christianity. Although a few short stories and poems considered particularly relevant receive passing
attention, this study is restricted primarily to a considera-
tion of Hardy's fourteen novels. Moreover, this study notes
the lack of continuity of development or logical intensifi-
cation of Hardy's attitude toward Christianity during the
twenty-four years spanning the time between the publication
of his first novel, Desperate Remedies, in 1871 and the
publication of his last novel, Jude the Obscure, in 1895.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When Matthew Arnold in his "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" spoke of himself as "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born,"¹ he provided a remarkably vivid image to reflect the dilemma of many Victorian intellectuals. If the "one dead" might be thought of as the world of the Christian myth, then it can be said that the dilemma was produced when nineteenth-century scientists, by utilizing earlier discoveries, established plausibility for organic evolution and simultaneously denied the orthodox view of man's creation.

In general, the Victorian period in English literature was an age of industrialism, of democracy, and, perhaps most important of all, of science. It was an era characterized by a growing democratic spirit that had been precipitated by industrial revolution and political reform. Scientific thought was increasing in importance at the same time that technology was employing steam and electricity to revolutionize the old way of life. Advancing technology seemed to bring the whole world closer together through such inventions as the railroad and the telegraph. The Industrial Revolution had inaugurated a population shift from the rural countryside
to the urban factory. With the growth of cities there arose a spirit of democracy that led to the Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, and 1884, legislative bills that extended voting rights to millions of Englishmen.

But it must be noted that the nineteenth century is not considered a scientific age simply because of the rapid growth in industrialization through increasing technology and the resultant social changes. For purposes of this study, at least, the most important factor was the advance made in the scientific knowledge of the physical world and the profound intellectual adjustment required by it. To be sure, it has been only in the last century and one-half that the entire conception of the universe has been modified to encompass man in that body of material available for scientific study. This innovation resulted from the recognition that since man is an integral part of nature and subject therefore to natural law, then he should be placed in context with his surroundings. This important conclusion led to the application of the scientific method in geology, an occurrence which enabled Charles Lyell and other paleontological researchers to explain how fossil remains of the earlier forms of life were found in layers. Since it was obvious that hundreds of thousands of years were required for the production of such formations, the biblical timetable became obsolete. Following up this evidence, the biologists suggested that such a discovery must indicate that through the
process of gradual mutation higher forms of life had developed from the lower ones. This theory received full treatment and solid substantiation when in 1859 Charles Darwin presented the world a mass of facts that demanded careful consideration. A major implication of his hypothesis was that it seemed an absolute contradiction of the Hebraic account of the creation as described in Genesis and accepted as the orthodox Christian view.

In the same way that devout believers were disturbed by the Copernican theory, which had flouted Church dogma in the sixteenth century by asserting that the earth rotates on its axis and revolves around the sun, many Victorians were confused and even angered by the heretical revelations of the geologists and especially of the biologists. The scientific interpretation of the universe, including man, operating according to physical law, apparently denied the existence of the benevolent, personal Deity, who had supposedly been in complete control of all life from the time He had originated it. Indeed, it is perhaps impossible for twentieth-century students to appreciate fully the devastating effect of the conflicting interpretations of theology and science on the English public in the 1860's. Never before in the history of the Christian world had the Bible, which was accepted as the infallible, divinely-inspired Word of God, been subjected to the doubt of scientific scrutiny. It seemed that the very foundation of religion was beginning
to crumble, and many persons feared that the doom of the entire structure of ethics and morals was imminent.

It is only natural, then, that for a time men stood dumbfounded, unable to cope with overwhelming scientific evidence that apparently required them to exchange traditional conceptions of a sympathetic God and His providential workings in the universe for the cold impersonality of a scientific hypothesis. As men began to perceive the implications in the collapse of the Christian myth, they reacted in strikingly different ways. John Henry Newman, for example, rejected the new ideas and held ever the more firmly to the traditional conception. Others followed Thomas Huxley in his agnosticism, an intellectual position that was to increase dramatically in popularity. Some, such as Arthur Hugh Clough, lost their faith altogether. Still others retained their faith and rationalized the moderate position that science was merely disclosing a more accurate description of the divine nature than theology was able to provide.

It was in this world of the conflict between ancient dogma and new knowledge that Thomas Hardy reached young manhood. Only nineteen years of age when the *Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* was published in 1859, Hardy was greatly affected by the disintegration of the old institutions, for, as David Cecil points out, "His aesthetic sensibility had found its first satisfaction in the ritual of the Anglican Church, in the eloquence of Scripture and
the venerable fantasy of the Gothic style. Instinctively he took for granted the Christian view of the supreme importance of each individual human being."³ On the other hand, deprived of the element of mysticism and a personal assurance of the spiritual world, he was unable to withstand the rational attack on Christianity. Scientific conceptions of the universe, skeptical analyses of theology, and the Higher Criticism of the Bible troubled the young Hardy as he struggled with religious doubt. In his biography of Hardy, Ernest Brennecke affords much insight into the problem when he writes that in the chaotic decade following Darwin's epochal publication Hardy felt a strong sentimental attachment to the "good old society that was falling to bits everywhere; but vividly and intellectually he found himself yelping with the enthusiastic youthful pack."⁴

The same spiritual struggle that Hardy felt personally at this time is reflected later in much of his creative work, and the same spiritual defeat later meted out to many of his fictional characters occurred in his own life to end his temporary hesitation to accept the new order. With the scientific objectivity of a laboratory researcher, Hardy came to view man as a mere passing phase in cosmic evolution. As he interpreted it, evolution ruled out man's flimsy hope to control his own destiny, since chance in nature played the dominant role. David C. Somervell reaches the crux of the matter when he says, "For Hardy [Nature] is a malign
Providence, and the Christian religion, with its pretence that Providence is not malign, is supremely irritating to him.\textsuperscript{5} Disturbed by what seemed to him the blindness of a traditional Christian dogma that optimistically advocated the presence of the warm, friendly hand of a personal, beneficent Power who lovingly guarded His children from evil, Hardy followed his intellect and rejected this belief which he considered as beautifully naive as it was incompatible with everyday observance of life. A. P. Elliott provides a somewhat poetic elucidation of this point:

It was not a fickle doubt of a specific dogma, but an honest questioning of the entire conception of a benevolent God, which caused Hardy to forsake Christianity. . . . It was too much for him to reconcile the idea of beneficence in an omnipotent and omniscient deity with the fact of omnipresent evil and the persistent tendency of circumstances toward the unhappiness of human beings. What mockery to call the ruler over this universal catastrophe "God," an unseen thing to be bowed down to and worshipped! Man's noblest aims and desires for happiness, when pitted against the war of chance, make freedom of individual will and responsibility for sin farcical interpretations. In the clutches of circumstance, men become puppets, Hamlets, a
conception by which Christianity is automatically ruled out.\textsuperscript{6}

Quite simply, then, Hardy became convinced that Christianity's "good" God theory had been vitiated by scientific evidence and that Christianity was no longer a viable approach to life. However, not content merely to reject Christianity, Hardy chose also to attack Christian dogma, especially its belief in a warm and personal deity. With the development of an attitude at best hostile to a prime doctrine of traditional Christianity, it is only natural that evidence of this feeling should be exhibited in Hardy's creative thought. In fact, one can find an ironic contemplation of the ruins of the Christian faith depicted in Hardy's fiction, which, while denying the validity of traditional Christianity, is yet filled with the fixtures of it.

It will be the intention of this dissertation, therefore, to evaluate Hardy's cynical view of and attack on Christianity by examining his treatment of its symbols, such as its architecture, and its practitioners, both clergy and laity. Furthermore, since Hardy's attitude is shown not only in specific comments and particular situations but also in general tone, attention will be directed toward the pervasive irony with which Hardy regards the entire panoply of Victorian Christianity. Although certain short stories and selected poems considered particularly relevant will receive passing attention, this study will be restricted
primarily to a consideration of Hardy's fourteen novels. Since one aim of this dissertation will be to show the connection between the religious doubt of the times and the development of Hardy's bitterly negative attitude toward religion, this study will deal first with Hardy's intellectual rejection of Christianity and then with his extremely negative reaction in his novels to various aspects of Christianity.

There are several other studies that take into account Hardy's religious and philosophic position. For example, in his *Thomas Hardy's Universe: A Study of a Poet's Mind*, Ernest Brennecke, Jr. treats the subject of Hardy's philosophy but is primarily concerned with the influence of Schopenhauer on Hardy. Albert P. Elliott, in *Fatalism in the Works of Thomas Hardy*, shows a peripheral interest in Hardy's religious ideas but deals specifically with the theme of fatalism in the novels. Likewise, Harvey C. Webster, in *On a Darkling Plain: The Art and Thought of Thomas Hardy*, takes only a general and passing interest in Hardy's religious attitudes as revealed in the novels.

Only one published study takes a positive stand on Hardy's anti-Christian posture in his novels. In his study of *The Return of the Native*, Paterson cites the differences between the manuscript and the final published form of *The Return of the Native*. In what Paterson notes as an apparent attempt on Hardy's part to "suppress the repudiation of the
Christian implicit in the novel's celebration of the pagan," attention is called to such changes as the substitution of "mediaeval doctrine" for "mediaeval Christianity" and the use of Fate rather than God. Paterson proceeds to make a detailed and plausible argument for *The Return of the Native* as an anti-Christian tract, but stops short of labeling Hardy's view in the novel as aggressively anti-Christian. He sees the novel as "more than a diatribe against Christianity." And indeed it is; however, Paterson's failure to accept the conclusion of his evidence seems rather illogical.

The uniqueness of the present study is that it will deal in detail with Hardy's religious anxieties and the resultant anti-Christian position as expressed in all fourteen novels. Moreover, this study will note the lack of continuity of development or logical intensification of Hardy's attitude toward Christianity during the twenty-four years spanning the time between the publication of his first novel, *Desperate Remedies*, in 1871 and the publication of his last novel, *Jude the Obscure*, in 1895.

It is a commonplace among Hardy critics that as a young man Hardy lost his Christian faith and entered a serious, even intense religious disillusionment. The mainstream of Hardy criticism has followed the general consensus that Hardy suffered keenly as a result of this experience and looked back on Christianity with poignant nostalgia. If his view is not purely nostalgic, traditional criticism has
insisted, then it seems at worst only ambivalent. The purpose of this dissertation is to argue that Hardy's attitude toward Christianity as revealed in his novels is not only not ambiguous, but, as a matter of fact, is specifically anti-Christian, often to the point of vehemence; that his treatment of various components of Christianity in his novels is aggressively anti-Christian; and that the feeling is so pronounced that the novels may be read as anti-Christian propagandistic tracts.
FOOTNOTES

1 The Poetical Works, ed. C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowery (London: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 302. Although the precise date of this important poem is unknown, it was apparently written between September 7, 1851, and March, 1855. Arnold and his new bride had visited the Grande Chartreuse on the earlier date, and the poem was first published in Fraser's Magazine in April, 1855. For purposes of the present study, the date is significant only insofar as it registers how early Arnold was able to foresee the intellectual despair of the 1860's.

2 Of course, by the time of Darwin's publication, the Higher Criticism had already moved into England with the publication in 1846 of George Eliot's translation of Strauss's Leben Jesu. But this scholarly activity was not so widespread or generally felt as it was to be during the 1860's.


4 The Life of Thomas Hardy (New York: Greenberg, 1925), p. 120.


CHAPTER II

HARDY AND HIS INTELLECTUAL MILIEU

Thomas Hardy has been appropriately described as representing the "culmination of an age of scepticism and of the storm and stress of religious doubt"\(^1\) that assailed traditional minds during the nineteenth century. Perhaps the word "culmination" affords the key to an understanding of this statement, for Hardy was by no means an isolated example. Rather, in his religious uncertainty Hardy might be described as the epitome of the many Victorians who found themselves unable to maintain their faith in rigid Church dogma, which had been proven by science to be at least in need of modernization. In his initial frustration and eventual rejection of certain medieval Christian concepts, the mature Hardy was a product of the forces of his time. All serious thinkers of the nineteenth century were being compelled at least to question traditional beliefs about the omnipotent, omniscient, ubiquitous Being thought to be exercising a positive energy of good for the well-being of mankind.\(^2\)

Influential factors such as the Higher Criticism of the Bible, which for many demolished the doctrine of infallibility, and the comparative study of early religions including
Christianity, greatly weakened the traditional assumptions. In addition, when biblical chronology was superseded by the scientific findings of geologists and biologists, many persons were forced to reexamine old ideas. A characteristic example was the reevaluation, in the light of the new science, of the account of creation as recorded in Genesis. Since Hardy was caught up in the midst of this intellectual atmosphere of skepticism, one who would arrive at an impartial judgment of Hardy's ironic contemplation of, and occasionally bitter sarcasm against Christianity in his fiction should see him in proper perspective against the background of an age that was having to readjust its thinking on fervently-held traditional beliefs. It will be the purpose of this chapter, therefore, to describe the intellectual climate of the nineteenth century by sketching a number of important events and ideas that eventually culminated in the mid-Victorian religious conflict. It must be kept in mind, of course, that much of the thought had in some form existed for hundreds of years. It was during the nineteenth century, however, that it assumed critical importance.

The triumph of the theory of evolution through its acceptance by many intelligent thinkers of the day has often been thought of as the greatest intellectual achievement of the nineteenth century. Yet, this victory was brought about largely by the exercise of the same scientific habit of
thought with its emphasis on logical reasoning, observation, and experimentation which the ancient Greeks had employed in bringing free inquiry into the world. The application of this rational approach to the study of the Bible was a dominant factor in the acknowledgement of organic evolution. Since the only support for the popular narrative of creation in Genesis was biblical sanction, the Higher Criticism was able to make evolution credible by undermining belief in the "dictation theory"; that is, that God dictated the Bible to inspired men who took down His literal word for the edification of all men and all times.  

Although textual criticism of the Bible is generally thought of as a relatively modern innovation, one will find that the Jews themselves were constantly writing, editing, and reshaping the Old Testament. They seem to have had no misgivings in changing, rejecting, and rearranging the body of writings later held by Christians to be the infallible, inspired Holy Word of the Creator. On the other hand, it was not until the seventeenth century that a handful of European scholars had the courage to investigate closely the Holy Writ, which most people invested with the halo of divine inspiration. Strong prejudices in favor of scriptural infallibility opposed one who dared attempt a fearless and thorough criticism. The Bible, as the standard of faith and morals, was to be reverently and obediently followed, not subjected to the profane questioning of secular minds.
But in spite of this strong opposition there had appeared several critics who made important contributions in the area of biblical criticism. In 1624 Louis Cappel in *The Mystery of the Vowel-points Revealed* set forth his discovery that what had been regarded as ancient Hebrew characters was actually Aramaic script of a much later period. It was clear, therefore, that the Aramaic texts could not have been composed at the early date assumed by orthodox theologians. Although many churchmen doubtless recognized this disclosure as a devastating blow to the doctrine of verbal inspiration, they generally directed attention in another direction by rationalizing that textual variations in manuscripts had little to do with the true version, which God in his infinite wisdom had somewhere carefully preserved.6

A somewhat similar approach in linguistic scholarship was undertaken by Baruch Spinoza, who established that the first five books of the Old Testament, instead of all having been written by Moses, as the traditional view held, were really selected ancient literature. In addition, internal evidence showed that Joshua, Judges, Ruth, Samuel, and Kings were written long after the time of their supposed authors.7 Through this same method Richard Simon discovered that the Old Testament books had not been preserved in their original form; instead, they had been revised and rearranged over the early centuries by Hebrew scribes.8 These discoveries made an important contribution toward establishing the skeptical
tone of the Victorian intellectual climate. Since a major assertion of traditional Christianity is the infallibility of the Bible, that belief would have to be destroyed before other questions could even be considered.

Interestingly enough, during the latter part of the seventeenth century and the first half of the eighteenth, this application of scientific and historical methods to biblical study bogged down into a controversy over questions for which no final answers were possible. The precise date of the creation, for example, plagued many learned minds. Actually this matter had arisen in previous centuries. Now, however, the establishment of this timetable became highly important because it was to be accepted by the Christian Church as an integral part of its teachings. Although Greek and Hindu civilizations had thought of the age of the universe in terms of millions of years, Christianity tended to accept the Jewish belief that the world had been created in September, 3761 B.C. The calculation which received official Church sanction, however, was that of the Anglican Bishop of Armagh, James Ussher, who in 1654 set the beginning of time as October 23, 4004 B.C. Furthermore, Archbishop Ussher informed the world that God had created Adam and Eve on Friday of that same week. Acceptance of this date as dogma was later to prove disastrous since it was easily discredited by nineteenth-century geologists. Thus, the rejection of another traditional Christian teaching was to contribute to the skeptical aura during the Victorian period.
If these examples may be taken as characteristic, then it can be said in general that while theologians were resting upon the security of tradition, the endeavors of the Higher Criticism were adding support to a growing belief in the secular nature of the Bible. Preparation was being made for the eventual triumph of scientific thinking toward the Bible in particular and religion in general. More and more, scholars were demonstrating that "whatever its excellencies as a repository of religious doctrines, moral precepts and literary masterpieces," the Bible was still susceptible to all human fallibility as an essentially man-made document. One could hardly expect the Bible, therefore, to exhibit a greater degree of reliability than the human writers who provided its very existence. This recognition, though a long time in coming, was of central importance in establishing plausibility for the acceptance of the theory of evolution. For it was primarily the belief in the infallibility of the Bible and the tradition of its literal interpretation as the inspired Word of God that caused men to hold on to traditional Christian concepts of man, the universe, and the Deity. And it was this same narrow orthodoxy which considered the Bible a divine encyclopedia of science and which condemned as heresy all astronomy, geology, and biology that seemed to doubt a single word of it. It is easy to see, then, that much of the Victorian controversy between science
and religion can be attributed at least in part to this frame of mind.11

In the general intellectual climate of confidence and complacency which prevailed up until about 1859, there was little to shock a Victorian public that was sure of itself and of God. Aside from a few advanced thinkers, most of even the learned men of the day had little more than a second-hand knowledge of the tremendous changes that were taking form in Europe. "While Continental ... thinkers were advancing in Biblical criticism, England had been slumbering in orthodoxy: the indifference of her clergy ... and her traditional view of the Bible as directly inspired from cover to cover had ... preserved her in stagnant isolation."12 But there were movements underway in England that would change the intellectual climate drastically.

Even during the time that "Victorian decency had been tactfully closing its eyes to the havoc"13 that biblical scholarship had been making with the literal interpretation of the Bible, certain English scientists had continued to work quietly in an attempt to discover the truth about the origin of the universe and of man. When in 1859 Darwin presented the mountain of scientific evidence in his Origin of Species, he was but reaping—though deservedly—the labor of generations of scientists who had been slowly adding support to the theory of organic evolution.14 Actually the idea
of change with descent is as old as Greek civilization. Aristotle, for example, described a chain of living forms extending from lower types up to man. From the Roman world Lucretius depicted a completely godless and materialistic evolution of life. The doctrine of development and gradual mutation appeared during the revival of learning, but since scientists through the lack of data were unable to substantiate the hypothesis, the idea remained a philosophic one to be passed from Renaissance humanists to eighteenth-century rationalists.15 With the vogue of experimental science during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, however, evolution was taken up by geologists and biologists. Thus, even the history of the theory of evolution was an example of evolution in the sense that the idea was presented one part at the time as different scientists and branches of science made their contributions.

Several important scientific discoveries played dominant roles in the dramatic procedure that eventually led to the Victorian conflict between science and religion. The part of astronomy in the sixteenth century was one of the earliest in this series which finally led to the disillusionment of those persons who placed blind trust in traditional Christian concepts. Through his astronomical investigations, Nicholas Copernicus "displaced" the earth and man from the center of the universe with his great work On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres. By disproving the old Ptolemaic theory,
Copernicus aroused clerical antagonism, but his general findings and, even more important for present purposes, the implications of his discoveries, could not be disputed.

The traditional view was, of course, that God had created the earth as the center of the universe. This act was to allow man, as the crowning achievement of God's efforts, to be at his rightful place in the center of things. Sir Isaac Newton acknowledged the obsoleteness of this myth when he utilized the Copernican theory in stating the eighteenth-century conception of the static laws governing the orderly universe. According to Newton, the entire universe illustrated the absolute control of nature that had always been and would continue to be. It was upon this basis that the English divine, Paley, expressed his classic deistic simile of the world as a watch that had been carefully constructed by the Master Watch-maker and left to run its prescribed course to the end of time.

The concept of a static universe was not long unquestioned, however, for in 1799 Laplace published his *Treatise on Celestial Mechanics*, asserting the evolutionary hypothesis in astronomy. In contrast to Newton, a devoutly religious man who maintained that God had created the universe in a moment of time, Laplace advanced the nebular theory. This idea held that originally the solar system had been a mass of swirling gasses, which, upon cooling, condensed into the solid masses of the sun and the revolving planets. The
principle of gradual change was dominant, for as this cooling process slowly continued, organic life became possible. But eventually the earth would become so cold as to make life impossible. According to Laplace's theory, there was no need, indeed, no place, for a divine creative Energy in this mechanical universe.

Although astronomy had emancipated itself from the restrictions of the geocentric theory, sanctioned by sixteenth-century theologians, geology was hindered for a long time by Christianity's literal interpretation of biblical cosmogony. The key figure in the eventual rise of geology was Sir Charles Lyell. In 1830 he published his Principles of Geology, a volume that convinced his scientific contemporaries of the continuity of geological processes that had gradually produced the surface of the earth. To this influential publication of convincing data that asserted the changing nature of the earth were added other studies of the "record of the rocks" by geologists that give rise to paleontology.

This specialized branch of geology enabled investigators to prove by an examination of fossils, stratifications of rocks, and the remains of primitive man that the traditional chronology was impossible. It was found that the deepest and oldest formations contained very simple forms. Each successive layer contained increasingly complicated forms of earlier plant life until the uppermost and most recent layer
featured remains embarrassingly similar to modern plant and animal life. Of course, Genesis described all life as having been originated in one week by the Creator some six thousand years previous. Those who chose to think about it began to realize that the traditional six-day creation was no longer in harmony with reason because of indisputable evidence in the earth itself. Moreover, biological discoveries were fitting these new facts in with the theory of evolution in a way that was leading away from the biblical account of creation of each separate species. And, perhaps most important of all, this kind of thinking was enhancing the slowly-growing questioning spirit that was to develop into the mature skepticism of the Victorian period.

Nineteenth-century biologists were becoming increasingly fascinated with the idea of the developmental relationship existing among all forms of life. This general theme of evolution was set forth by Lamarck in his *Natural History of Invertebrate Animals*. Development from lower to higher forms of life was expounded by Robert Chambers in his *Vestiges of Creation* and again by Herbert Spencer, who advocated the passage from an "incoherent, disorganized homogeneity to a well-differentiated and thoroughly coordinated heterogeneity."

Scoffing was the general reaction they aroused, but when Charles Darwin brought forward his "profound array of confirmatory facts . . . fortifying at all points his theory of the survival of the fittest through natural selection,"\(^{18}\) an
amazed world was compelled to listen and to think. Darwin's thesis was that the thousands of various forms of plant and animal life, instead of being the static result of separate acts of special creation, were actually the changing natural outcomes of a common original source.

Darwin was not simply offering his bid for the validity of the theory of evolution—he was also explaining the how and why behind the process. It is not, however, the scientific importance that is of concern to this study; rather, it is the intellectual implication that dealt a devastating blow to traditional Christian conceptions on which attention must be concentrated. The early Victorian confidence disappeared as signs of fright began to appear in angry denials. As Woodward phrases it, "the general implications of the idea of evolution, supported by natural selection, could not fail to startle the public. The gulf between the Darwinian view of the development of created life and the view implicit in Christian doctrine seemed far greater than in the new theories introduced by geologists." In disproving the literalness of the Mosaic cosmogony, geology had provided Darwin with the millions of years necessary for the biological processes which organic evolution required. Darwin, however, in repudiating the Christian dogma of the instantaneous creation of man and by placing man in the scheme of organic development, was rejecting a prime doctrine of Christianity.
Few persons today consider the Bible an authoritative treatise on natural science, but in the mid-nineteenth century, tradition insisted on the literal truth of every word as divine revelation. Since Christian faith was based in large part on the indubitable accuracy of the Scripture, all belief would fail if the Bible were not true. The dilemma was epitomized by one theologian who said, "If the Darwinian theory is true, Genesis is a lie, the whole framework of the book of life falls to pieces, and the revelation of God to man, as we Christians know it is a delusion and a snare." Far more disturbing for Victorian Christians than the possibility of revised chronologies and the need for a somewhat less literal interpretation of the Bible is the apparent destruction of the myth of Eden. If the earthly paradise of Eden never actually existed, if Adam and Eve really were not our first parents, if Satan in the form of a serpent did not seduce Eve, then the implication is only too clear: There was no Fall--the Original Sin exists only as a convenient theological concept; without the Original Sin, man's need for atonement, and the resultant sacrifice of Christ, the whole structure of traditional Christianity is destroyed.

It is no great wonder, then, that the intellectual climate of the Victorian period changed from confidence to one of fear, anger, frustration--and for many persons to one of disillusionment and despair. In a vivid image White
expresses the chaos that erupted from the Church upon being confronted with evolutionary implications: "The Origin of Species came into the theological world like a plough into an ant-hill. Everywhere those rudely awakened from their old comfort and repose swarmed forth angry and confused." The Church factions—all of whom believed in the literal truth and inspiration of the biblical story of the creation and fall of man—set up a hue and cry: "Darwinism seeks to dethrone God!" It is perhaps impossible for one today to conceive of the magnitude of the controversy which raged in Victorian England during the 1860's and 1870's. The threat of a godless science to annihilate religion was quite real to the nineteenth-century believer in traditional Christianity.

Liberal-minded theologians, however, soon began to make an attempt to reconcile Christianity with science. In this process, the passing of time contributed much to the gradual reconciliation. As the heat of offended orthodoxy began to cool, men were able to be more objective than at first. The beginning of mutual understanding was illustrated in 1869 by the establishment of the Metaphysical Society. Through this medium, distinguished scholars from the ranks of both science and theology came to recognize a unity of purpose that had been impossible in former days of emotion and bias. In private discussions and personal meetings scholars such as Darwin, Lyell, and Huxley, on one hand, and Kingsley, Stanley,
and Colenso, on the other, gained the friendship and mutual regard that was of great importance in counteracting the former mistrust and antagonism.

With the passage of time and the growth of understanding, therefore, the idea of organic evolution became a rather common assumption about life. The influence of evolution had appeared at first to be purely destructive as an interpretation that flatly contradicted revealed truth. It seemed to destroy the belief in the supreme power of God and even to delete all need for religion. But eventually the balance was restored as the Church found it essential to accommodate the new thinking. Many churchmen decided that the acceptance of evolution did not necessarily rule out a belief in God as the power behind the whole process of life. Gradually it was acknowledged that everything possessing life is subject to change. Since the world itself constantly changes, then ideas in and about the world must be modified. After all, anything that becomes stagnant, including religious beliefs, is likely to perish in a changing world.

On the other hand, there were those who could not so easily abandon the security of the old faith, and it was these persons who were caught in the post-Darwinian climate of disillusionment and despair. A major problem was deciding on the creed which could replace the certainty of traditional Christianity. The obvious choice was science. But while science was able to offer rational explanations
for many aspects of life that had been a mystery, it had one painful shortcoming: Science could not tell one how to live—it could not supply standards and create values. Arnold's famous metaphor of the two worlds, one expired and the other paralyzed, describes the emptiness which many Victorians felt. David Cecil captures in a single sentence something of the bewilderment which these persons must have experienced: "The thoughtful person saw himself swept upwards from darkness to darkness, like a straw on a torrent, by a ruthless, mysterious and ignoble force." The loss of faith is expressed in many of Arnold's poems, a notable example being "Dover Beach," the third stanza of which explicates the basic image of the poem:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

Although Arnold's loss is apparently keenly felt and certainly vividly expressed, the despair seems to find relief in the existential suggestion which continues with the poem: "Ah, love, let us be true / To one another!" This escape was not open to all. In fact, some thinkers upon being
robbed of their ability to give intellectual assent to Christianity, turned with fierce scorn on the naïveté of traditional faith. Thomas Hardy was one of those remorseful beings who sought revenge and found relief only in the antagonism which he could exhibit in his art against traditional Christianity. Having concluded that the Christian promise of a "good" God is a lie, Hardy came to regard Christianity not with nostalgia but with the bitterness of one who discovers that he has been deceived.

It is well known that evolution has pessimistic as well as optimistic implications. While some persons are able to take a certain pride in the elements of harmony and progress inherent in evolution, others are obsessed with their inability to find consolation because of the prominent role of chance in existence. Literary expression of this feeling often presents man as "the product of chance that, having called him to life to strut his tiny hour upon this tiny stage, will usher him out--perhaps to be succeeded by another species."24

As science revealed a universe that seemed unlikely to be the love-motivated creation of a benevolent and just God, men were made aware of the cruelty and even the futility of life. Thomas Hardy has long been recognized as a major spokesman of this philosophic position. His writings are filled with the grim irony of man's being caught and held practically powerless in a whirlpool of natural forces that
are indifferent to his fate. In his dark picture of life, Hardy depicts the insensibility of nature that brings to pass on innocent victims the perils of chance, accident, coincidence, and circumstance. Apropos of this mood are these well-known lines from Shakespeare's *King Lear*:

"As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; They kill us for their sport."

Early Christian training had made young Hardy an orthodox believer in Church dogma. The findings of nineteenth-century science, however, coincided with his own observations of the inexplicable cruelty and pain in life. Although Hardy struggled to retain the emotional security of his Christian faith, intellectually he found it impossible to retain belief in the existence of a beneficent, sympathetic God, who sooner or later worked everything out for the best. Once his faith was gone, Hardy looked back on Christianity not simply with regret that the Christian myth is not true but with anger and contempt for the hollow promises.

In order to understand Hardy's hostile reaction toward Christianity, one must have knowledge not only of the age but also of its effects on Hardy personally. It will be the purpose of Chapter III, therefore, to consider specific, pertinent facts about Hardy's youth and especially the influences which played on his religious development and eventually produced the anti-Christian sentiment of the mature artist.
FOOTNOTES

1 Brennecke, p. 233.


6 Ibid., pp. 280-81.

7 Barnes, p. 815.

8 Ibid., p. 816.

9 Smith, I, 288-91.

10 Barnes, p. 957.

11 Smith, I, 292-98.


15 Cunliffe, pp. 144-45.

16 Somervell, p. 126.


18 Henkin, p. 45.

19 Woodward, p. 555.


21 Ibid., p. 70.

22 Henkin, p. 62.

23 Cecil, *Hardy the Novelist*, p. 31.

24 Henkin, p. 223.
CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF HARDY'S ANTI-CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE

In making a study of a writer who had little but contempt for traditional Christianity, it is perhaps only logical that one would seek evidence with an autobiographical approach. After all, one who attacked the Church with the bitter satire that Hardy frequently did in his writings might be to some extent reflecting an attitude that originated from alienating events and influences in his personal life. As a matter of fact, this pattern can be found in Hardy's development as a thinker and artist. But it should be recognized that his mature habit of religious cynicism contrasts rather sharply with his early orthodox background. It was not until after he had reached young manhood that Hardy rejected the traditional Christian teachings of his youth and turned upon them with the vehemence later found in his creative works. Certain latent melancholic characteristics of temperament, however, may be detected in the young Hardy. It was when these dormant traits were stirred to life by the forces of nineteenth-century rationalism that produced the Victorian disillusionment that the mature man began to turn with pessimistic rejection and at times even disgust on traditional faith and its innocent optimism.
For an examination of the influences that led to Hardy's renunciation of Church dogma, one must return to a pre-Darwinian society confident that God was in his heaven. No doubt the pessimistic old writer would have been a complete anomaly in the world of his youth. Some critics, however, maintain that even at that early age Hardy's mind contained the seeds of skepticism. McDowall,\(^1\) for example, cites one of the later poems as evidence of budding cynicism. In "He Never Expected Much," Hardy looks back from his eighty-sixth birthday and poses as a child in a conversation with the World, who says "I do not promise overmuch, Child; overmuch; / Just neutral-tinted haps and such.\(^2\) Unfortunately, the validity of this piece of information is significantly decreased by Hardy's having written it at eighty-six rather than twenty-six.

Hardy also refers to his early years as a time before he "had learnt that the world was a welter of futile doing."\(^3\) If one were to suppose that Hardy was reflecting--either consciously or unconsciously--his own youthful aspirations in his writings, one might find that many of Hardy's fictional characters, particularly Jude, enter maturity "full of faith in their capacity for realizing their illusions."\(^4\) Even after becoming disillusioned, they might still whisper with Hardy, "O Memory, where is now my youth, / Who used to say that life was truth? . . .

O Memory, where is now my joy, / Who lived with me in sweet
employ." On this basis, Hedgecock and Chew are of the opinion that originally Hardy was an idealist who later became disillusioned. Thus, it may be seen that Hardy himself in reminiscing about his youth has provided contradictory evidence which confuses the critics.

An examination of some of the facts of his life will give a reasonably explicit idea of the development of Hardy's religious thought. Actually, the events of his youth are for the most part nothing out of the ordinary. From the time of his birth on June 2, 1840, at Upper Bockhampton on the edge of a vast stretch of waste land later made famous as Egdon Heath in *The Return of the Native*, Hardy was immersed in conventional dogma. As the son of a moderately well-to-do building contractor, he lived the first sixteen years of his life under quite average circumstances as a country boy with fairly well-educated parents.

A frail child from birth, Thomas was not thought strong enough to attend public school until he was eight years of age. His early education, however informal it may have been, was not lacking. The great heath, which he learned to love, had a profound influence on him as he observed the rustics and nature. A more formal type of instruction was provided by his mother, who taught him the sweetest of the New Testament parables and the most moral of the Old Testament episodes. It is thought that "the latter attracted him more,
being more in harmony with the sad stern music of the Heath."^{10}

Although the Hardys were not conspicuous for their piety, they nevertheless were regular attenders of the Stinsford "High Church." Like other youngsters of his time and station, Hardy had instilled in him the Christian religion as established by the traditions of the Church of England. He, therefore, learned by heart the morning and evening services.\(^{11}\) If for no other reason, through a musical interest that extended back for several generations, the Hardys were strict church-goers. As a boy, Hardy was fond of sitting by the staircase in the evening and reciting hymns to himself.\(^{12}\) Also, the family took occasional trips to St. Peters in Dorchester where Hardy came in contact with "that queer pragmatic view of Scriptural authority which was peculiar to the Wessex mind."\(^{13}\)

As young Hardy grew older and stronger, he was allowed to walk the three miles to a Dorchester day school. Although the school was Non-conformist, Mrs. Hardy was evidently impressed with the ability of the head master. Mr. Last must have conducted his classes not only with a high degree of competence but also without religious bias in order to have gained his excellent reputation, for they were filled with children whose families were members of the Church of England. Such was the case that for some time Hardy did not know that the school was Non-conformist, though he did wonder about
the conspicuous absence of the "boring Church Catechism." Mr. Last did see fit once a week, however, to make his pupils proficient in the Ten Commandments. Although Hardy received only eight years of this formal instruction, plus sporadic tutoring at home, he must have made the most of his opportunities. Not only did he learn to read extensively in English, French, and Latin; in addition he became an expert in translating the book of nature.

It is significant that during this time Hardy never had an intimate friend. He was popular with his schoolmates, but occasionally he found their friendship burdensome. "He loved being alone, but often, to his concealed discomfort, some of the other boys would volunteer to accompany him on his homeward journey to Bockhampton. How much this irked him he recalled years after. This reluctance to associate closely with people followed Hardy throughout his life. Ellis remembers, for example, that "Rather than meet a stranger, in his last years, he would turn back at the approach of one and retrace his steps."

This peculiar passion for solitude was accompanied by another characteristic often identified with a melancholy person. Hardy was hypersensitive, particularly to inexplicable pain and cruelty. As an old man he told of a childhood experience, the horror of which had persisted throughout his life. One cold winter day as he walked with his father, the elder Hardy absent-mindedly threw a stone at a
half-frozen field-fare. The missile hit the bird and killed it. When the child picked up the little bundle of feathers, he was horrified to discover that the bird was practically starved to death. The feeling in his hand of this seemingly cruelly treated specimen of nature haunted his memory from that day forward.18

On another occasion he knew a young shepherd boy who actually starved to death in a destitute family. Hardy learned with indescribable horror that the autopsy revealed that the child had been eating nothing but raw turnips.19 With his hypersensitive nature, Hardy was deeply impressed at an early age with the miseries of man and beast in a struggle for existence. Although he was only too well aware of the existence of pain and apparent injustice, at this point in his life Hardy still "believed that a personal and just God was profoundly interested in the fate of human beings ruled the universe . . . [and] that the world and life were good."20

To be sure, it was probably only natural that Hardy should grow up holding to the traditional Christian belief in a good God. Although the peasants were embarrassingly unorthodox and placed their faith in superstitions, Hardy had few contacts with them. Instead, he associated with fairly well-educated middle-class people. Moreover, he was under the strong influence of his parents, who, though by no means fanatical, were certainly orthodox in their religious
views. Besides, although skepticism and disbelief were beginning to grow in the great outside world, "the general religious spirit from 1840 to 1860 [the first twenty years of Hardy's life] was both orthodox and devout."  

Hunt contends that the most characteristic nineteenth-century religious thought was exhibited in the important religious lectures of the period. Although the lecturers could not agree on the method for determining religious truth, they did harmonize in principle. According to Webb, the following beliefs represent the general consensus: "(a) the transcendence of God; (b) the origin of the material world in an act of creation in time; (c) the claim of Scripture to be an authoritative revelation of truth otherwise unobtainable by man; (d) the happiness and salvation of individual souls as the supreme concern of religion." It might be said, then, that the period in which Hardy grew up was conservative almost to the point of fundamentalism in its view of religion.  

Webster goes so far as to label this twenty-year period as the "last great heyday of fervent belief." Certainly the Oxford Movement had contributed to a revival of religious feeling and interest in doctrine. Men began to experience personally what they had previously only heard about. The importance of the spiritual life began to rise. As seldom before, men became convinced that an all-good, all-powerful God was ever present not only in the universe, but also in
the hearts and lives of believers. In one statement Webster characterizes the religious atmosphere which the young Hardy was breathing: "If most of the English were unable to embrace the lyrical feeling that all's right with the world, they were devoutly certain that a living God, watching from above, was conscious of their sufferings and troubles and would, in this or the next world, right all."  

It was only natural, then that Hardy should accept without much question the commonly-held traditional beliefs that had surrounded him from birth. It must not be thought, however, that Hardy was so naive as not to be cognizant of a certain hardness and cruelty in life. The two examples given previously are typical of his sensitive observations of the world about him. Apparently he was able at first to reconcile in some way the injustice he saw, perhaps with the conviction that a good God would someday balance the scales.

On the other hand, Hardy was aware of the way that the peasants took their religion lightly. And the older he grew, the more opportunities he had to observe. His knowledge of peasant mores is evidenced by his thorough and delightful presentation of rustic religious attitude in his novels. By the same token, he knew of their superstitions and of their fatalism which insisted on a malign force that was unsympathetic with man and his griefs. One is tempted at this point to conjecture as to the end result if Hardy had always remained in the security of traditional Christian
beliefs in his home environment. Perhaps Hardy would not have altered his thinking very much, even after the new thought penetrated to Upper Bockhampton. No doubt the fervent spirit held by his associates toward the established Church would have kept him from going to the extreme which he did. One must admit, however, that if Hardy had not been caught up in the forces of rationalism of his times, he probably would not have written the world-famous novels that he did. And if Jude and Tess and Eustacia had not been created, who would read or even know Thomas Hardy?

In the great outside world, however, powerful intellectual forces were growing. Darwin was collecting, assimilating, and organizing information to be published in a slender volume that was to change minds. The Higher Criticism was starting to be known in England. The Seven against Christ were developing a rationalistic creed, the standards of which were to be applied to Christianity. If and when the melancholy, hypersensitive young man came in contact with a rational attack on traditional Christian teachings which he only passively accepted, he would be subjected to much soul-searching and spiritual struggle.

The first major turning point in Hardy's life occurred when he reached the age of sixteen. His parents became concerned over a vocational choice for him. Since his early physical frailty had made a physically strenuous occupation impossible and because of his early interest in the Church
and its ritual, they thought that he might perhaps be inclined to enter the ministry. As a child he had employed great fervency in reciting hymns and church responses. His dramatic sense of the church services had often been depicted. For example, when the weather was too bad for him to attend church, young Tom would use a table cloth for a surplice and "preach a sermon" composed of various sentences he had heard the vicar use.25

Furthermore, at the age of fifteen he had taught a class in the Stinsford Sunday School. Not only did he learn about biblical characters, stories, and phraseology; he also associated rather closely with the vicar and his family, whom he came to regard highly. In spite of the favorable circumstances and even personal tendencies of their son becoming a parson, the Hardys decided against it. Probably the most important reason was that the necessary university degree was economically unfeasible since Thomas would not inherit sufficient income to make it possible.26 Consequently, when John Hicks, a Dorchester architect and church restorer, offered to take the young Hardy as an apprentice, Hardy's parents were delighted. Although his interest in Latin and French classics was just then becoming strong and although he continued secretly to nourish his desire for a Church career, Thomas nevertheless "cheerfully" turned aside and followed his parents' decision for him to become a draftsman.27
The importance of this decision should not be underestimated. By moving away from his parents' home, he was to confront beliefs that sharply contradicted those he had always accepted without question. Furthermore, he would be introduced to the rationalistic spirit of the mid-Victorian period. First of all, while the young Hardy was in Hicks's office, he met Henry Bastow, who not only encouraged Hardy in his classical studies, but also stimulated his thought with a vigorous defense of Baptist doctrine. The significance of this event is that "For the first time in his life Thomas Hardy found Church of England dogma questioned. The arguments that ensued, violent and noisy though they were, served to develop the intellectual fiber and independence of Hardy's mind." Moreover, when two sons of the local Baptist minister entered the debate, "it was as good as a college course in philosophy for Hardy." Since these youths were remarkably familiar with the New Testament in its original Greek, Hardy found it necessary to work late at night on his Greek studies.

A typical example of their heated discussions centered on the question of adult baptism. Hardy had come to regard Bastow with high respect; thus, when the latter was baptized, Hardy was so impressed with the earnestness that he seriously considered the possibility of such an experience for himself. Although he did not partake of this Baptist sacrament, he did temporarily discontinue his study of Homer in order to
intensify his study of the Greek New Testament to enable him to discuss intelligently and knowledgeably the religious matters with which he was becoming increasingly preoccupied. Hardy went so far as to consult with the vicar of his parish about the possibility of being "re-baptized" as an adult, but the bewildered Oxonian could offer no meaningful help. After reading all available material on paedo-baptism, Hardy was greatly distressed by the lack of biblical support for infant christening. Finally, however, he determined, but not without considerable misgiving, to honor this tradition of his own church. In spite of his reluctance to abandon even this relatively minor doctrine of the Church of England, Hardy's growing broad-mindedness in religious thinking is evidenced by his recognition that Christianity did not hinge on trifling points of dogma, but was based on one's entire outlook on life. All in all, the result of his acquaintance with Bastow was that Hardy advanced significantly in intellectual independence and religious toleration. More and more, he was adopting a rationalistic approach to life and was learning to evaluate objectively all ideas, including the teachings of traditional Christianity.

Perhaps the paramount influence on Hardy's religious development during his apprenticeship was his close friendship with Horace Moule. An advanced thinker, the young Cambridge graduate provided stimulation for Hardy's thought and was a factor in Hardy's conversion to rationalism. In
addition to guiding some of Hardy's readings and discussing Greek literature with him, Moule also encouraged in him a growing aspiration to write. Hardy had already begun to discover enjoyment in composing verse and had written some prose pieces, but he had not published anything. The most important aspect of this relationship, however, is that Moule was responsible for Hardy's first contacts with the intellectual currents of the time. Although he was a devout Christian, Moule admired the liberal theologians of the day and introduced Hardy to the new religious outlook.

Moreover, Brown points out the significant fact that Hardy's mental coming of age closely paralleled the publication of a number of powerful volumes that had an enormous impact on nineteenth-century thought. In addition to the *Origin of Species*, which supplied for Hardy unmistakable proof of the overwhelming, universal presence of cruelty and pain in the war for survival, Brown also cites the works of Thomas Huxley and John Stuart Mill.33

The reading of Huxley forced Hardy to accept, whatever the costs, the truth of the world as it was with all the suffering of mankind.34 Huxley's influence on Hardy's intellectual development may be best seen in Huxley's own statement regarding what he attempted to do in his own career: "to forward the application of scientific methods of investigation to all the problems of life [because] there is no alleviation for the sufferings of mankind except veracity of
thought and of action, and the resolute facing of the world as it is when the garment of make-believe by which pious hands have hidden its uglier features is stripped off."35 Huxley's insistence on rationalism is also seen in his refusal to acknowledge authority: "skepticism is the highest of duties; blind faith the one unpardonable sin."36

Following the same line of attack, Mill also insisted in On Liberty that the problems of a painful existence must not be avoided, even if the truth might not be welcome. That Hardy was quite familiar with Mill's ironic treatment of Christian theory and practice cannot be doubted. Late in life Hardy remarked on having read On Liberty in the early 1860's. He knew and apparently admired the essay so well that he boasted of knowing much of it by heart.37 Hardy's vital contact with these new ideas in this important decade of ferment provided an impetus to his serious struggle to reconcile his traditional Christian beliefs with the rational views of the advanced thinkers of his day.38

Hardy had a deep respect for Moule, both as a thinker and as a close friend. In their walks together the two often discussed their impressions of the "notorious" new books that were being published. Hardy's open-mindedness as well as his intellectual growth is illustrated by his being among the first to place his stamp of approval on the Origin of Species upon its publication.39 D'Exidueil correctly states that Darwin's ideas contributed much to the undermining of
Hardy's faith, but it should not be overlooked that Hardy was already moving in that direction. What the theory of evolution contributed to Hardy's intellectual development, as Stevenson points out, is evidence that blind chance prevailed in life. From personal observations that had begun early, Hardy was constantly aware of the relentless struggle for survival in nature. Thoroughly perplexed, he found it difficult indeed to continue in his belief in a benevolent Power for good. The greatest cruelty in the fact of evolution, as he interpreted it, was the eventual production of the human mind, which allowed man to set lofty goals and then made him conscious of his inability to accomplish them.

Through his readings and discussions with Moule, Hardy rapidly expanded his intellectual horizon. His doctrinal arguments with Bastow had at the time seemed highly important. He realized now that they were quite insignificant when compared with the problem of the new thought that was revolutionizing the whole basis of religion and philosophy. One of the most important publications of radical theological views was *Essays and Reviews*, which was singled out in later life by Hardy as having been of particular interest to him in his youth.

The *Essays and Reviews* (first published in 1860) was a collection of seven articles written by seven of the most distinguished clergymen of the day. Actually the publication contained little that was not already known, as it simply
presented the effects on thinking about the Bible of evidence from the Higher Criticism and scientific discoveries. An early 1861 review describes its contents as "nothing really new." The anonymous reviewer does admit, however, that the book had excited a considerable amount of interest, especially in its appeal to free-thinking young men. Hardy was most certainly among these. After all, here was the candid evaluation of the heart of the religious controversy by several of the best-educated and open-minded priests in the Church of England.

An examination of some of the typical arguments in the Essays and Reviews will disclose sufficient intellectual ammunition to have bewildered any orthodox believer of the decade and to have been genuinely disturbing to one like Hardy, who was already swaying in his religious convictions. For example, one will find Frederick Temple expressing the following rationalistic view:

If geology proves to us that we must not interpret the first chapters of Genesis literally; if historical investigation shall show us, that inspiration, however it may protect the doctrine, yet was not empowered to protect the narrative of the inspired writers from occasional inaccuracy; if careful criticism shall prove that there have been occasionally interpolations and forgeries in that book, as in many others; the results
should still be welcome. Even the mistakes of careful and reverent students are more valuable now than truth held in unthinking acquiescence (p. 54).

Furthermore, he reminds his readers that the pagan worlds of Greece, Rome, and Asia have had just as much influence on western man's development as Hebrew civilization and its Bible have had. "Thus the Hebrews may be said to have disciplined the human conscience; Rome, the human will; Greece, the reason and taste; Asia, the spiritual imagination" (p. 22). In this respect, then, Temple concludes that the Bible is little more than "a history: even the doctrinal parts of it are cast in a historical form, and are best studied by considering them as records of the time at which they were written, and as conveying to us the highest and greatest religious life of that time. Hence we use the Bible--some consciously, some unconsciously--not to override, but to evoke, the voice of conscience" (p. 50).

Of the same mind, Benjamin Jowett, in his dissertation, "On the Interpretation of Scripture," went one step further in stating with italicized urgency: "Interpret the Scripture like any other book" (p. 416). He encouraged men to accept the findings of the new science not as a destructive agency, but as a reanimating force for the old faith.

In his essay entitled "The National Church," H. B. Wilson enumerated several pertinent facts that were probably
rather disturbing for Hardy. Having always been a regular church attender, Hardy was no doubt shocked to read Wilson's statement that according to the 1851 census forty-two percent of the English people (all of whom being able and having opportunity) did not attend church services at all (p. 169). No less disconcerting was the disclosure that many of the early Christians did not believe in immortality, a dogma central in traditional Christianity (pp. 182-83).

C. W. Goodwin in his "The Mosaic Cosmogony" described Genesis as being in sharp conflict with the findings of science. Declaring the falseness of the biblical account of creation, he then proceeded to label the Mosaic narration as "the speculation of some early Copernicus or Newton" whose personal theory has been accepted as universal fact (p. 271).

The great importance of Hardy's contact with the ideas presented in Essays and Reviews is epitomized by one critic as follows: "Within the covers of this single volume of Essays Hardy met the full force of the period's rationalistic criticism of the conventional Christian faith." Exposure to this volume served to accelerate Hardy's conversion to rationalism and eventual rejection of traditional Christianity.

While many Victorian scientists and even clergymen were able to reconcile religious views with science, Hardy could not. The question arises as to why Hardy was unable to console his spirit and satisfy his intellect at the same
time with a solution similar to that of the minister whom Darwin quotes in *The Origin of Species*. This religious man wrote that "he has gradually learnt to see that it is just as noble a conception of the Deity to believe that He created a few original forms capable to self-development into other and needful forms, as to believe that He required a fresh act of creation to supply the voids caused by the action of His laws." 47

The most obvious answer to this question is that Hardy followed the pessimistic interpretation of evolution. He could not reconcile the all-pervading destructiveness necessary to and inherent in the concept of the survival of the fittest with the traditional Christian concept of a beneficent God. Rationalism led him to the conclusion that the grim view of life was the true and proper one. Thus, one can see Hardy's concern with the permeating presence of evil in a world that he had always supposed was controlled by a sympathetic Deity. It was truly the "honest questioning of the entire conception of a benevolent God, which caused Hardy to forsake Christianity." 48

Cecil allows one to arrive at the same conclusion from a slightly different angle when he says that "Christian teachers have always said that there was no alternative to Christianity but pessimism, that if the Christian doctrine was not true, life was a tragedy. Hardy quite agreed with them. But he could not think the doctrine true, all the
same. He found it impossible to believe in the Christian hope." As much as he may have wished that it might be so, he was convinced that it was not.

A painful and grievous process was this loss of religious faith for Hardy, and it was necessarily accompanied by deep struggle. For an impassioned account of his reluctance to desert his faith in traditional Christianity, one need only turn to "The Impercipient." While attending a cathedral service Hardy experiences the feeling

That with this bright believing band
I have no claim to be,
That faiths by which my comrades stand
Seem fantasies to me,
And mirage-mists their Shining Land,
Is a strange destiny.

Hardy's inability to believe and the resultant alienation are clear in these lines, and these feelings were apparently not so difficult for Hardy to accept as the reasons for his spiritual desolation. He seems to have been singled out for this misery:

Why thus my soul should be consigned
To infelicity,
Why always I must feel as blind
To sights my brethren see,
Why joys they've found I cannot find,
Abides a mystery.
Since heart of mine knows not that ease
Which they know; since it be
That He who breathes All's Well to these
Breathes no All's Well to me,
My lack might move their sympathies
And Christian charity!

The poet's personal isolation as a result of his spiritual unbelief is expressed in the simile of the next stanza:

I am like a gazer who should mark
An inland company
Standing upfingered, with, "Hark! hark!
The glorious distant sea!"
And feel, "Alas, 'tis but yon dark
And wind-swept pine to me!"

Although his inability to perceive the reality of the spiritual world is keenly disappointing and frustrating, the most painful matter is that he is said by some not to see simply because he chooses not to see. His answer is appropriate if not eloquent: "0, doth a bird deprived of wings / Go earthbound willfully!"

Even late in life, Hardy was still concerned about the spiritual world and desirous of evidence for its existence:

I am most anxious to believe in what, roughly speaking, we may call the supernatural--but I find no evidence for it. People accuse me of skepticism, materialism, and so forth; but, if
the accusation is just at all, it is quite against my will. For instance, I seriously assure you that I would give ten years of my life—well, perhaps that offer is rather beyond my means—but when I was a younger man, I would cheerfully have given ten years of my life to see a ghost—an authentic, indubitable spectre.52

To say that Hardy wanted to believe in a spiritual world is not to say that his feelings toward his faith were, therefore, nostalgic. Indeed, it was his perception of the promises of Christianity as hollow and false that caused him to attack it with the vigor that may be found in the novels.

While in London during the summer after his twenty-fifth birthday, Hardy realized that he would not be able to live by poetry alone, since his verses were constantly being rejected by editors. Hence, he decided that if he could not mix his poetry with architecture, then he would try to combine it with the Church. This decision is an excellent indication of the ambivalence which characterized Hardy during the long and trying period when he was struggling to maintain his faith in traditional Christianity. No doubt his classical studies would have secured his admission, and he even went so far as to write to a friend at Cambridge for information on entering the university.53 Although he had always loved the Church and even at this late date was still considering the ministry for a career, Hardy was also aware
of and severe on its shortcomings. After reading for a time in theology, therefore, he had in all honesty to drop the idea. The passage of time made him even more certain of the validity of his conviction. "The more Hardy himself meditated on the views of the Church, the more he was impressed by the fact that ecclesiastical dogma seemed in complete disagreement with the laws of nature which he had been observing for nearly fifty years."  

The full extent of the "divorce between religion and the conception of a world unheeding and of evil intent, utterly void of providence" may be seen in some of the poetry that Hardy wrote the next year. "Hap," for example, based on the heretical assumption that the world is not under the control of a beneficent God, argues that the sorrows of this life cannot be attributed even to a wrathful spirit. After all, cosmic malice might be considered superior to cosmic indifference:

If but some vengeful god would call to me  
From up the sky, and laugh: "Thou suffering thing,  
Know that thy sorrow is my ecstasy,  
That thy love's loss is my hate's profiting!"

Then would I bear it, clench myself, and die,  
Steeled by the sense of ire unmerited;  
Half-eased in that a Powerfuller than I  
Had willed and meted me the tears I shed.
If man cannot have a "Good" God, the one insisted on by traditional Christianity, then he would find a "Bad" God preferable to no god at all. At least there would be some kind of cosmic design that would provide the framework for human life and perhaps through this context supply meaning for human suffering and failure. If nothing else, there would be some supernatural being to blame, and man could withdraw to his own existential shell. However, this possibility is crushed by the turn of the sonnet and the poet's answer:

But not so. How arrives it joy lies slain,  
And why unblooms the best hope ever sown?  
--Crass Casualty obstructs the sun and rain,  
And dicing Time for gladness casts a moan...  
These purblind Doomsters had as readily strown  
Blisses about my pilgrimages as pain."

In a world with neither a good nor bad God, a world subject totally to chance, man is confronted by the ultimate absurdity of the chaotic, meaningless void of eternity.

The same vein of insult reaches the point of blasphemy in "Panthera." Based on a second-century legend, this poem recalls some of the military campaigns of Panthera, a Roman army officer who warns of the folly of bringing a son into the world, for "A son may be a comfort or a curse, / A seer, a doer, a coward, a fool; yea worse-- / A criminal... That I could testify!" To illustrate his point, Panthera
reminisces on the time when at the age of fifty he commanded the Roman garrison in Jerusalem. For the most part he had only the monotonous responsibility of preserving law and order among the restless Jews. A break in this mundane routine came with the spring execution of condemned criminals. Some three or four of the doomed men (in his yawning lack of concern, he did not even note the exact number) were delivered from the court and crucified. Except for a minor incident Panthera would hardly have remembered the day. "Among the tag-rag rabble of either sex / That hung around the wretches as they writhed," there was a weeping woman (the mother of one of the criminals, he heard) whose face seemed hauntingly familiar. Then, much to his chagrin, Panthera recalled a youthful indiscretion.

More than thirty years before that day, Panthera remembered, he had been a sub-captain on an expedition that had halted on a rest stop in a village called Nazareth. While the company was idle for several days, there was little to occupy time other than observing the townspeople. When the young women came to draw water, Panthera offered his assistance to one who appealed to him. "Young and hot, readily stirred to quick desire," the youthful soldier amused himself with this tender, innocent maiden. "We met, and met, and under the winking stars / That passed which peoples earth--true union, yea, / To the pure eye of her simplicity."

Shortly thereafter, the troops resumed their march. Panthera
left with them, making no rash promise to return, in fact, thinking that he would never see her again.

Indeed, he did not, until that day one-third of a century later. She did not recognize him, and Panthera most certainly did not wish to reveal himself and have to acknowledge the dying criminal as his son. His curious inquiry, however, discovered that years before, an old man had married Panthera’s former lover upon learning that she was pregnant. No one knew the father, but the old man devoted his life to caring for this unfortunate woman and her child.

And now, much to his mortification, Panthera recognized this doomed one was of his own "ardent blood." During his lifetime the accused man had called himself God and had stirred up strife among the Jews. Labeling himself as their king, he had been a troublemaker and had incited riots. With a chillingly neutral view of the execution, Panthera focuses scornfully on the personal embarrassment that arose from his having fathered a son who died the criminal’s death. Thus, in a presentation made even more effective by its indirection, Hardy poured forth his contempt for conventional dogma by maliciously treading on the idea of the virgin birth, a prime doctrine dear to the hearts of those who subscribe to traditional Christianity.

The transformation in Hardy’s religious attitude required a process that spanned a number of years, and the final decision was not made until intellectual maturity.
According to his own statements, as late as his twentieth year, Hardy was an orthodox professor of the Christian faith. He still maintained the Church sympathies of his youth and faithfully studied his Greek New Testament. But as he encountered the new thought and its rational attack on Christianity, he found his religious beliefs increasingly difficult to retain and at the same time preserve his intellectual integrity. At twenty-five he put aside a cherished ambition that he had held from his youth up: conscious of his unorthodox theological opinions, he renounced his desire to enter the ministry, and at twenty-six he was already writing poetry typical of what has been cited. Hardy's conversion to rationalism was complete, but his attack on the tenets of traditional Christianity had just begun.

Hardy's five-year tenure in London ended in 1867 when he took a leave of absence from Blomfield and returned to Dorchester to work for Hicks. Although poor health was the ostensible reason, other factors which probably necessitated the change included mental depression, dissatisfaction with architecture as a profession, frustration in his attempt to publish poetry, and perhaps most important of all disillusionment over the loss of his faith. Since he was seriously interested in literature, Hardy carefully and realistically assessed his possibilities: "Almost suddenly he became practical, and queried of himself definitely how to achieve some tangible result from his desultory yet
strenuous labours at literature during the previous four years. He considered that he knew fairly well both West-country life in its less explored recesses and the life of an isolated student cast upon the billows of London with no protection but his brains.60 This practical course led to the decision to write prose fiction, the most popular literary form of the day.

Hardy's initial effort required ten months and produced The Poor Man and the Lady, which was not published and, in fact, was eventually either lost or destroyed. Parts of the novel appear as chapters here and there in other novels, and considerable reconstruction has been possible.61 The important point for present purposes, however, is that according to Hardy's own description of its aim and contents, this novel satirizes, among other subjects, Christianity.62

With Desperate Remedies in 1871 Hardy finally achieved publication, although he chose to issue the novel anonymously. However, the career was launched, and the first major production, Far From the Madding Crowd, was published in 1874. Hardy was to continue until 1895 to express his creativity in prose fiction, and in these novels one may find evidenced Hardy's negative attitude toward traditional Christianity.

Hardy's success enabled him in 1874 to marry Miss Emma Lavinia Gifford, whom he had courted for the previous four years. From a highly orthodox background with churchmen in her immediate family, Mrs. Hardy was rigidly conventional.
in her Christian convictions. At first she believed her husband to be of the same mind. After all, he knew the Bible, loved church music, and had worked as a church architect. Indeed, most of his life had been in some way related to the Church. As the years passed and anti-Christian sentiments appeared in his novels, Mrs. Hardy saw to her dismay "his complete rejection of the doctrine and dogma of the Established Church." Although the Hardys maintained at least on the surface a respectable marriage until Mrs. Hardy's death, their religious incompatibility prevented any type of really meaningful intellectual exchange.

The one person who was to influence Hardy both as thinker and writer during this period was Leslie Stephen, one of the most popular and outspoken proponents of rationalism of the day. The exchange between the two served to strengthen Hardy's own belief in rationalism. Hardy and Stephen had first met in 1873 when as editor of the *Cornhill* magazine Stephen had negotiated with Hardy for the serial rights to *Far From the Madding Crowd*. Their friendship grew, and in later years Hardy was to recall that it was Stephen "whose philosophy was to influence his own for many years, indeed, more than that of any other contemporary." When Stephen decided on renunciation of Holy Orders in 1875, he asked Hardy to serve as witness. Hardy recalled the event: "The event was executed with due formality. Our conversation then turned upon theologies decayed and defunct, the origin
of things, the constitution of matter, the unreality of time and kindred subjects. [Stephen] told me that he had 'wasted' much time on systems of religion and metaphysics. . . ."65

As he occupied himself with writing his novels, Hardy became increasingly aware of the limits of rationalism. After he had given up fiction and returned to poetry, Hardy wrote that "Rationalists err as far in one direction as Revelationists or Mystics in the other; as far in the direction of logicality as their opponents away from it."66

Stephen also sensed this deficiency. Hardy recalled Stephen as saying, "The old ideals have become obsolete, and the new are not yet constructed. . . . We cannot write living poetry on the ancient model. The gods and heroes are too dead, and we cannot seriously sympathize with . . . the idealized prizefighter."67 Whatever the limitations of Hardy the rationalist, Hardy the novelist was able to explore in depth human feelings and responses. In particular, he addressed himself to the inadequacies of traditional Christianity as a viable code for life. It is precisely Hardy's attention to the inadequacies of Christianity with which this study is concerned. Even a complete intellectual repudiation was unsatisfactory for Hardy. Feeling that he had been deceived by the Christian Church and its teachings, he sought revenge and found it by holding various aspects of Christianity up for ridicule in his novels.
FOOTNOTES


8The primary biographical reference is Florence E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy* (New York: St. Martin, 1962), hereafter cited as *Life*. This work was originally published in two volumes as *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891* and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928*, issued in 1928 and 1930 respectively. In his *Thomas Hardy: A Bibliographical Study* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1954), Richard L. Purdy argues convincingly that the *Life* is actually an autobiography which Hardy himself wrote for posthumous publication. See pp. 262-67 and 268-73.

10 Brennecke, p. 78.

11 *Life*, p. 18.

12 *Life*, p. 15.

13 Brennecke, p. 78.

14 *Life*, p. 18.


16 *Life*, pp. 24-25.


18 *Life*, p. 444.

19 *Life*, p. 312.

20 Webster, p. 26.


24 Webster, p. 16.

25 *Life*, p. 15.


27 *Life*, p. 27.


29 *Life*, pp. 29-30.

31 Weber, p. 15.
32 Life, pp. 33-34.
37 Life, p. 330.
38 Brown, p. 4.
39 Life, p. 198.
43 Life, p. 33.
45 Living Age, LXVIII (March, 1861), 643.
Webster, p. 40.


Elliott, p. 20.


Collected Poems, pp. 59-60.

William Archer, "Real Conversations," *Critic*, XXXVIII (January-June, 1901), 313.

Life, p. 50.

Weber, p. 120.

D'Exideuil, p. 43.

Collected Poems, p. 7.

Collected Poems, pp. 262-68.

Life, pp. 53-54.

In *Providence and Mr. Hardy* (London: Hutchison, 1966), Lois Deacon and Terry Coleman offer the interesting and highly circumstantial speculation that a major factor contributing to Hardy's depression was his secret five-year engagement to his cousin (possibly niece) Tryphena Sparks.

Life, p. 56.
Carl J. Weber has made a partial reconstruction of *The Poor Man and the Lady* by locating parts used by Hardy in other works, for example, chapter five of *Desperate Remedies*, the first eight chapters of *Under the Greenwood Tree*, chapter fourteen of *A Pair of Blue Eyes*, and "An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress."

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64. *Life*, p. 100.
CHAPTER IV

HARDY'S TREATMENT OF CLERGYMEN

An examination of the works of Thomas Hardy will disclose a strong motif of scorn for the conventional dogma of Victorian Christianity. It has been argued that the basis for Hardy's cynical and sometimes bitter treatment of the Church and its components rests upon his intellectual rejection of the effectiveness if, not indeed, the very existence of a "good" God. The depth of this conviction is demonstrated by one of Hardy's remarks in 1917 when he commented, "I might say that the Good-God theory, having after some thousands of years of trial, produced the present infamous and disgraceful state of Europe--that most Christian continent!--a theory of a Goodless-and-Badless-God [as in The Dynasts] might perhaps be given a trial with advantage."¹

Hardy had been increasingly aware of man's helplessness in the circumstances of life from the early years when he observed the Wessex laborers at the mercy of an apparently unconcerned and possibly even malicious nature. Because of the frightening presence of much pain and anguish in the world, Hardy was driven by a desire to reconcile optimistic Christian teachings with the inexplicable cruelty of life. Finding it "impossible to accept either Fitzgerald's bland
resignation or Browning's illogical faith," Hardy broodingly lived on, unable to find solace in traditional beliefs.² Indeed, he came to abhor the Christian religion for what he considered its child-like trust in a beneficent Providence.

In spite of the rather obvious religious hostility in much of Hardy's works and in contrast to opinions of the Hardy scholars already cited, some critics have attempted to gloss over Hardy's anti-Christian sentiment. Maxwell,³ for example, thinks it "curious" that some readers have found in Hardy an "antagonism to the Church." Citing Hardy's orthodox background, he insists that there was "no antagonism from Hardy the man"; Maxwell does concede, however, that "there seemed . . . to be indifference to religious forms in Hardy the writer."⁴ One might wish to take exception to Maxwell's observations and particularly his choice of such a mild term as "indifference" to describe Hardy's attitude toward Christianity, but a more important point is that admittedly, Hardy possessed an early devotion to the Church--indeed, this feeling when reversed provided a strong impetus for the anti-Christian reaction. Moreover, it is well known that Hardy had a high respect for the supreme value of the individual; in addition, he cherished the Christian principles of virtue and brotherly love. But one very basic fact remains: Hardy's writings reveal a mature thinker who, unable to believe in the Christian hope, did not hesitate to demonstrate his contempt for traditional Christian teachings.⁵
Pilkington, another critic who would prefer to retain and preserve Hardy's childhood orthodoxy, argues that Hardy's "defection from the simplicity of the Christian faith was never final" and that "the Wessex Novels embody a desire to retain the Christian faith as a satisfying philosophy." He has to admit, however, that one cannot overlook the fact that Hardy depicts a "'Blighted World,' where no loving Providence cares for helpless innocents" whose good intentions are almost always overwhelmed. Once one has made this admission, then he has no grounds to attempt an argument in favor of Hardy's holding an essentially Christian feeling.

Cross maintains that although Hardy's dark view of life is in accord with most thinking during the latter part of the nineteenth century, "on the other hand, he is out of joint with the codes of conduct sanctioned by a Christian civilization. His cynical thrusts at Sunday-school teachers and well-intentioned gentlemen in black we must pass by." Unfortunately, Cross does not attempt to explain the reasons why one should ignore the negative reaction to religion in Hardy's writings, and to refuse consideration of this integral part of Hardy's creative thought seems a curious oversight indeed.

As was shown in Chapter III, by the time that he was twenty-six, Hardy had already begun in his poetry the expression of his negative answer to the affirmations of traditional
Christianity. He never departed from this philosophical position, and when Hardy turned his attention to fiction, he continued to exhibit the same view. Though unpublished in its original form, The Poor Man and the Lady, according to Florence Hardy, was "a sweeping dramatic satire" on almost all phases of English life during the nineteenth century. In criticizing London society all the way from the pretentiousness of the nobility to the vulgarity of the middle class, the young novelist also recorded his early disgust with the shortcomings of modern Christianity in general.8 Since Hardy never released the manuscript, it is, of course, impossible to know in detail the exact nature of this first assault on religion in general and traditional Christian teachings in particular. The loss of this immature effort, however, is of small concern in light of the abundance of evidence available in Hardy's subsequent, published literary efforts.

Of the various approaches to an examination of Hardy's treatment of Christianity in his fiction, one of the most meaningful and rewarding is to focus on individual categories, such as clergymen, church architecture, or God. Hardy's attention to and presentation of various components of Christianity make it possible to isolate any given one for specific consideration. For example, Hardy's portrayal of clergymen in his writings is fairly extensive and affords considerable insight into his attitude toward nineteenth-century Christianity. Brennecke points out that "Throughout
his literary career . . . Hardy continually recognized the
great power of the parson for both good and evil in the
community."9 In remarking on the country clergy in particu-
lar, Hardy himself said that "Great credit is due to the
parson, who, in my opinion, does much to keep up the interest
in these quiet villages. It would be a thousand pities that
such men, educated, sympathetic, original-minded as many of
them are, should be banished by looming difficulties of
dogma, and the villages given over to the narrow-mindedness
and the lack of charity of some lower class of teacher." He
concludes that if the parson were to be liberated from his
theology, then he would do a greater work among the rural
people.10 Most rustics, it seems, were like Hardy in reject-
ing theological teachings that contradicted obvious facts of
life.

Chew points out, on the other hand, that Hardy's fic-
tional portraits of ministers often caused adverse comment
by many Victorian readers and that Hardy was certainly
hostile toward the "Establishment, vested with social,
political, and intellectual prestige, and containing traces
of former persecuting privileges."11 Since there are some
notable exceptions, Chew's statement is so broad as to re-
quire qualification. Toward individual members of the
clergy, both real and fictional, Hardy was both reasonable
and impartial in recognizing worthy ministers. For example,
while at Hicks' office as a young architect, Hardy often
visited a Baptist minister named Perkins, and his family.
Florence Hardy describes Mr. Woodwell, the Baptist minister in *A Laodicean*, as a "recognizable drawing of Perkins."  
Hardy does present Mr. Woodwell in a sympathetic light, but not without a certain reservation. Even Miss Paula Power, the principal to whom the title refers and a lady who has made the mistake of arousing Mr. Woodwell's righteous indignation, speaks of this sincere and conscientious minister in terms reminiscent of those applied to Chaucer's Parson: "He gives away nearly all he has to the poor. He works among the sick, carrying them necessaries with his own hands. He teaches the ignorant men and lads of the village when he ought to be resting at home, till he is absolutely prostrate from exhaustion, and then he sits up at night writing encouraging letters to those poor people who formerly belonged to his congregation in the village, and have now gone away."  
While this devotion is indeed extraordinary, it is not allowed to stand without a certain dilution by Hardy. For example, in his candor Mr. Woodwell "always offends ladies, because he can't help speaking the truth as he believes it," (p. 69) and on one occasion addressed his sermon on excessive finery directly to Miss Power, who sat with a new dress as the object of everyone's attention (p. 37). Although there is no question about Mr. Woodwell's sincerity, there might be considerable doubt regarding his discretion. Hardy also remarks that "The neighbouring rector
could eclipse Woodwell's scholarship, and the freethinker at the corner shop in Markton could demolish his logic" (p. 233). This observation is illustrated in Mr. Woodwell's involvement in a debate on church baptismal history, theory, and practices. When unable to match and answer the erudition of his opponent, Woodwell rejects the arguments simply as contentious and insincere and the opponent as one who prefers fables to the truth (p. 66). Thus, even in his most admirable fictional portrait of a clergyman, Hardy carefully tempers his praise with the sobering recognition of the minister's fundamentalistic narrow-mindedness.

Angel Clare's father in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* is also described in somewhat admiring but considerably less glowing terms as one of the last of the old-school clergymen: "a spiritual descendant in the direct line from Wycliff, Huss, Luther, Calvin: an Evangelical of the Evangelicals, a Conversionist, a man of Apostolic simplicity in life and thought." Mr. Clare's greatest virtue, according to Hardy, was his sincerity, but he was absolutely closed minded: "he had in his raw youth made up his mind once for all on the deeper questions of existence, and admitted no further reasoning on them thenceforward" (pp. 202-3).

In sharp contrast to the sincerity of Mr. Clare and the devoted pastoral care and self-denial by Mr. Woodwell, one is much more likely to find in Hardy's fiction a less flattering if indeed not a bitter treatment of clergymen. Although
Hardy's short stories are not within the scope of this present study, it is advantageous to note how a statement in one of them, "A Tragedy of Two Ambitions," epitomizes Hardy's evaluation of nineteenth-century clergymen. Motivated by an obsession to become ministers, two brothers fail miserably in the first test of Christian love and compassion. By shunning their alcoholic father and eventually leaving him to drown after he fell into a pond, they return evil for the embarrassment and hindrance he has been and even worse, might continue to be, to their clerical aspirations. As one brother rationalizes to the other, "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." It is both interesting and enlightening to consider not only the items enumerated but also the order of the requisites for success in the Church. In Hardy's estimation, a successful member of the nineteenth-century clergy must be recognized foremost as an example of social leadership, next as one financially responsible and secure, then as an intellectual authority, then as a religious speaker, and, finally, perhaps as a spiritual exponent.

For an even more sardonic glimpse of the clergy, one might look at the following lines in the "Satires of Circumstance":

...
"And now to God the Father," he ends,
And his voice thrills up to the topmost tiles!
Each listener chokes as he bows and bends,
And emotion pervades the crowded aisles.
Then the preacher glides to the vestry-door,
And shuts it, and thinks he is seen no more.

The door swings softly ajar meanwhile,
And a pupil of his in the Bible class,
Who adores him as one without gloss or guile,
Sees her idol stand with a satisfied smile
And re-enact at the vestry-glass
Each pulpit gesture in a deft dumb-show
That had moved the congregation so.16

After the vignette is presented, the poem ends without comment, moralizing, or criticism on such matters as the perversion of great talent. Thus, the bitterness of Hardy's exposure of this minister's hypocrisy and complacency is intensified not only by the poet's choice of an admiring little girl as the object of disillusionment but also by his abrupt, objective conclusion of the poem.

Although Hardy uses ministers as characters in all of his novels, he pays varying amounts of attention to these representatives of the clergy. Occasionally the treatment is extensive, and sometimes there is only a passing reference, but one factor is common: Hardy finds it difficult indeed to pass up the opportunity of at least making a disparaging
remark about these men whose words and deeds are supposed to reflect the ideals of traditional Christianity, but, at least in Hardy's works, usually fall painfully short.

The casual remark might be in the form of an authorial comment, such as the description of Richard Crickett, the parish clerk in *Desperate Remedies*, as "a kind of Bowdlerized rake."

A similarly brief reference to a member of the clergy occurs in *Jude the Obscure* when Hardy laconically observes that on the occasion of the schoolmaster's moving day, the rector absented himself for the day because he was a man "who disliked the sight of changes. He did not mean to return till the evening, when the new school-teacher would have arrived and settled in, and everything would be smooth again."

The significance of this example derives in large part from Hardy's criticism of the Church's refusal to adapt itself to the modern scene.

In *The Hand of Ethelberta* Hardy briefly views a vicar's home life. The vicar's wife is converting an old surplice "which had been excommunicated the previous Easter" into a pillow case for the children. The vicar is in his study, the place where he should be, according to Hardy. However, rather than spending his time in study and meditation, the vicar is preoccupied with attempting to rig a toy schooner. When a visitor arrives, he pretends to have been concerned with working on a sermon at the time. Hardy cannot resist making the observation that the sermon preparation that had
taken place was nothing more than a slight up-dating of one prepared during the vicar's early years of ordination (p. 412).

Mr. Torkingham, a parson in *Two on a Tower*, is presented while involved in leading the practice of the church choir, a singularly inept group. In spite of his instruction and example, they are incapable of acceptable diction. Nevertheless, Hardy has the parson compliment them on their improvement, but in the "strenuously sanguine tones" according to Hardy, of one "who got his living by discovering a bright side in things where it was not very perceptible to other people." Hardy was most certainly one of those persons who had difficulty in discovering the favorable turn of life, especially the kind promised by Christianity.

One other typical illustration of Hardy's passing remarks about members of the clergy is found in *The Hand of Ethelberta*: "Ethelberta breathed a sort of exclamation, not right out, but stealthily, like a parson's damn" (p. 219). Hardy's further interest in the non-pulpit language employed by ministers is demonstrated in a number of the novels. Reverend St. Cleeve, a curate in *Two on a Tower*, took exception to community criticism of his marriage to a farmer's daughter and turned from preaching to farming. One of his congregation recalls the incident and the reaction: "Then he [the minister] dropped a cuss or two, and said he'd no longer get his living by curing their twopenny souls o' such
nonsense as that . . ." (p. 12). The unidentified clerk in The Hand of Ethelberta reveals only a formal interest when he objects to the use of damn inside the church building: "I am afraid I cannot allow bad words to be spoke in this sacred pile," he said. "As far as my personal self goes, I should have no objection to your cussing as much as you like, but as a official of the church my conscience won't allow it to be done" (p. 433). Incidentally, this contrast between professional and personal standards is further illustrated as the clerk concludes his reprimand on the inappropriate language with a rather earthy remark about one of the young women who had earlier been at the church: "The prettiest maid is left out of harness, however," said the clerk. "The little witness was the chicken to my taste—Lord forgive me for saying it, and a man with a wife and family!" (p. 433).

Hardy does not restrict his satiric attention to ministers; in Desperate Remedies, he introduces the twice-widowed Mrs. Crickett, a scandal-loving woman who happens to be the wife of the parish clerk. One of this remarkable woman’s attributes is that according to some persons in the parish, she is able to see what is going on behind her without ever turning her head. Needless to say, she takes great delight in putting this talent to good use and then sharing the information that she gains. Even so, she is well matched,
for her husband likewise has a reputation for engaging in gossip (p. 286).

In *Two on a Tower* Hardy goes beyond criticizing clerks and ministers and attacks a bishop. The Right Reverend Cuthbert Helmsdale, D.D., ninety-fourth occupant of the episcopal throne of the diocese, is treated in a style hardly becoming his dignity and importance. Blinded by pride and arrogance (p. 322), he is cleverly manipulated by the desperate young widow, Lady Constantine, who marries him in order to provide a cover of respectability for her untimely pregnancy. Bishop Helmsdale is such a fool that not only does he believe that the lady regarded him as a gift from heaven (p. 308), but also he never registers suspicion when in only seven months Lady Constantine produces a fully developed and completely healthy but, of course, "premature" male child.

In other novels Hardy is bitterly direct in his criticism of ministers. For example, the unidentified preacher in *Two on a Tower* is a pathetic figure whom Hardy describes as a "sorry clerical specimen" (p. 148). When this inept parson was late in arriving to perform a marriage, his clerk had to go find him and explain to the impatiently waiting couple that "The poor gentleman's memory is a bit topsyturvy. . . . He had got in his mind that 'twere a funeral, and I found him wandering about the cemetery a-looking for us" (p. 148). The clerk had earlier made the observation that
incompetence had become a fact among the clergy: "The best men goes into the brewing, or into the shipping now-a-days, you see, sir; doctrines being rather shaddery at present, and your money's worth not sure in our line" (p. 146).

An equally bitter example of temporal wealth encroaching on spiritual values may be found in *Jude the Obscure*. To accompany and enhance his divinity studies, Jude Fawley becomes interested in church music and actually participates in a church choir. Greatly moved by a new Easter hymn entitled "The Foot of the Cross," he inquires about the composer, who turns out to be the minister of music in Kennetbridge, a town a considerable distance away. Confident that this man must be a deeply spiritual being with a sympathetic Christian soul, Jude decides to seek his advice. After all, the intensity of the music seemed to indicate a soul that like Jude's must have "suffered, and throbbed, and yearned" (p. 234). This minister of music would, therefore, be able to advise Jude in realizing his own frustrated religious aspirations. Using time and money that he could ill afford, Jude travels half a day by train comforted only by the belief that he is "a hungry soul in pursuit of a full soul" (p. 235). When Jude finally gains the audience he desires, he discovers, much to his chagrin, that this churchman is primarily concerned with his failure to make money with his music, and, as a result, is turning aside from it in order to become a wine merchant. He even provides
Jude with an advance copy of his booklet of wine lists. Crushed by this prostitution of divine talent, Jude departs without ever disclosing his mission.

Hardy's belief that the clergy was simply unable to relate to the real world of human beings and everyday problems is especially well illustrated in his depiction in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* of Angel Clare's two brothers. Presented as typical products of Cambridge, Felix as all Church and Cuthbert as all College are non-evangelical, well-educated, and shortsighted. Their slavery to fashion and convention, as well as their problems in vision, appears in their choice of style in spectacles, a decision made without reference to the particular defect in their own sight. As a result, neither was able to perceive life, literally and figuratively, as it was really lived (p. 204). Moreover, as Angel himself determines, "Neither had an adequate conception of the complicated forces at work outside the smooth and gentle current in which they and their associates floated. Neither saw the difference between local truth and universal truth; that what the inner world said in their clerical and academic hearing was quite a different thing from what the outer world was thinking" (p. 205).

A number of churchmen outside the Clare family are the objects of Hardy's satiric scrutiny in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. For example, early in the novel the antiquary of
Stagfoot Lane reveals to John Durbeyfield, Tess's father, that the Durbeyfields are the descendants of the great d'Urberville family (p. 4). In a sense, this incident precipitates the events that eventually destroy Tess. Ironically but by no means accidentally, Hardy assigns this dubious distinction to a minister, Parson Tringham, who, after making the announcement of the glorious and noble d'Urberville past to Durbeyfield, rides away "with doubts as to his indiscretion in retailing this curious bit of lore" (p. 6).

Another example of Hardy's angry satire of the clergy in *Tess* involves the parson of her parish. Having been sent out into the world in her innocence of life and having soon returned seduced and pregnant, Tess gave birth to a child who unexpectedly died shortly afterward. Unable to have the infant officially baptized before his untimely death, Tess had administered the sacrament herself. Somewhat skeptical about the doctrinal validity of her performance, she asks the parson's reassurance. "Having the natural feelings of a tradesman at finding that a job he should have been called in for had been unskillfully botched by his customers among themselves, he was disposed to say no. Yet the dignity of the girl, the strange tenderness in her voice, combined to affect his nobler impulses—or rather those that he had left in him after ten years of endeavor to graft technical belief on actual skepticism" (p. 121). Although the parson
reluctantly assured her that the baby was "safe," he would by no means go so far as to allow a public Christian burial. Consequently, the baby was buried at night in a grown-up section of the cemetery where drunkards, suicides, and others of the damned were laid to rest (p. 122).

Two other persons who contributed to Tess's unhappiness and even tragedy were associated with the ministry. Although they could have been anything else--dairymen, merchants, even school masters--Hardy apparently will not miss the chance of emphasizing the shortcomings of ministers. To be technical, Angel Clare was not a minister; however, like his older brothers, he came from a family of ministers and had been intended for the ministry and had been carefully prepared by his father to study at Cambridge. Only his inability to accept the narrow theology of the Church prevented his becoming a member of the clergy. His liberation from tradition and the "double standard" was apparently not complete, however, since he rejected Tess on moral grounds shortly after their marriage.

Tess's original seducer, Alec d'Urberville, while not a minister at the time he compromised Tess, became a fiery Methodist evangelist. Ironically, Angel Clare's father was responsible for this conversion. However, when after four years he again looks on Tess's form and gazes into her eyes, his lust is so great that he deliberately misses an appointment to deliver a sermon and instead pursues Tess. Even
after learning that she is married, he turns aside from preaching and hounds her until she becomes his mistress. As Reverend d'Urberville explains to Tess, "I do believe I ought to preach it, [Christian doctrine] but like the devils I believe and tremble, for I suddenly leave off preaching it, and give way to my passion for you" (p. 410).

Since *Tess* is one of Hardy's last novels and a product of Hardy's maturity as an artist, the extensive and highly uncomplimentary treatment of the clergy might be thought to suggest some kind of progression in Hardy's anti-Christian sentiment. In other words, it is easy to speculate that as the years went by and as Hardy became more severe in his indictment of Christianity, he reflected his increasing disillusionment and bitterness in his treatment of those ideas and persons closely related to the Christian Church. As tempting as this thesis is, there is no evidence to support it. Not only are some of the earlier novels more severe in their criticism than are some of the later ones, but *The Well-Beloved*, the last novel Hardy published and the next to last one he wrote, does not even touch the subject except in one cursory remark on architecture. Certainly in the consideration of ministers and other related officers of the Church, there is no progressive intensification in Hardy's ironical treatment.

One of Hardy's acknowledged masterpieces, *The Return of the Native*, is a product of mid-career, yet the only specific
and detailed treatment of the clergy is the rather mild, even pathetic and touching presentation of Clym Yeobright. To be sure, Yeobright is not an ordained minister; rather he is a young idealist who gives up his prosperous position as a diamond merchant in Paris and returns to Egdon Heath to minister to the spiritual and intellectual needs of his rustic neighbors. His dedication to preparation through a rigid schedule of reading and study is so intense that he almost loses his sight. At the end of the novel he has become "an itinerant open-air preacher and lecturer on morally unimpeachable subjects." Though not quite thirty-three, Yeobright with his thinning hair, lined face, and dim eyesight has the decaying features of a much older man. While this portrait is somewhat touching, for the dedication to spiritual calling if for no other reason, even here Hardy does not miss the chance of injecting a bit of irony. The curiosity-seekers who attend Yeobright's moral lectures on the hilltop discuss pro and con both the man and the message and conclude that "it was well enough for a man to take to preaching who could not see to do anything else" (p. 455). The pun on see in this context seems not only to reduce Yeobright's story from the tragic to the pathetic but also to indicate Hardy's negative attitude toward the worthiness of Yeobright's decision.

Apropos of the assertion that several of the earlier novels are often more severe in their treatment of Christianity
in general and the clergy in particular than are many of the later novels, one need only turn to *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Published in 1873 as Hardy's third novel, *A Pair of Blue Eyes* contains the fullest if not the most bitterly-drawn portrait of a minister. Although a few of the later novels have some harsh commentary on the clergy (*Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and *Jude the Obscure* are good examples), not even these can equal the amount and the tone of the treatment in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. Consequently, an argument for any kind of progression or development in Hardy's attitude toward the clergy in his fiction is without foundation. Rather it would appear that his concern with ministers reflects nothing more than the mood of the moment and the natural development of the plot.

Whatever the case, Hardy's most devastating clerical criticism is that of Mr. Swancourt in *A Pair of Blue Eyes*. This petty dignitary, Hardy notes, is always "either biassed in favor of a thing, or prejudiced against it."Actually, this comment is made by the person who knows Mr. Swancourt best—his daughter Elfride, and the occasion is an interview with her lover, a man whose social station is too low to be acceptable to Mr. Swancourt. Even Hardy's description of Mr. Swancourt suggests a man who would not be thought given to weighing sides of an issue: "His face was of a tint that never deepened upon his cheeks nor lightened upon his forehead, but remained uniform throughout; the usual neutral
salmon-colour of a man who feeds well—not to say too well—and does not think hard" (p. 24).

Mr. Swancourt's lack of intellectual depth and breadth as well as his shortage of interest in theological study is further illustrated by the collections in his study. While his shelves contain a few titles such as Dr. Brown's "Notes on the Romans" and Dr. Smith's "Notes on the Corinthians," items actually dominating the study shelves are bottles of horse, pig, and cow medicines; stuffed specimens of owls and gulls; bunches of wheat and barley ears labeled with the year of production; a doll's house; and a marine aquarium (p. 25).

As if he had not already done enough to expose Mr. Swancourt's tenuous regard for clerical interests, Hardy proceeds to relate how Elfride, the vicar's clever daughter, often writes his sermons.24 After preaching her sermons better than he does his own, Reverend Swancourt then discusses them with church-goers, including Elfride, as if they were his own creations. No small part of the success of these sermons may be doubtlessly attributed to the stage directions which Elfride includes: long sections toward the conclusion are enclosed in brackets with the annotation, "Leave this out if the farmers are falling asleep." Also there appears the occasional warning "Keep your voice down" (p. 29).
Mr. Swancourt's lack of spiritual depth and moral example is illustrated in other ways. For example, he frequently cursed in his mind (p. 30), sometimes under his breath (p. 2), and occasionally out loud. The audible epithets were sometimes poorly-concealed profanity, such as "Od plague you" (p. 4) but more often were slang terms such as "damn" in reference to dissenters. The Reverend Swancourt usually hastened to add that he was using the term "in its scriptural meaning, of course, not as an expletive" (pp. 26-27).

Also, on occasion this minister would forget temporarily his high spiritual office and begin to tell a smutty story. Then he would remember himself (p. 90) and stop, chuckling privately at his joke and either saying that it was "too bad to tell" (p. 16) or conveniently substituting an irrelevant illustration from the Scripture (p. 201).

It comes as no surprise then that family prayer and devotional were not customary in the Swancourt home. In fact, Reverend Swancourt remarks candidly that this "ordeal" is usually held only when guests are present and even at that time only for sake of appearance (p. 37).

Because of Swancourt's selfish propensities, Brennecke cites him as an excellent target "for a cynical presentation of the futility and occasional malignity of the representatives of the Church." Hardy's presentation might certainly be interpreted as cynical if not also malign. Also there
can be little doubt regarding Reverend Swancourt's selfishness. Aside from the relevance of some of the detail already discussed, one of the best examples of Swancourt's true nature is the use of his position as minister to enable him to marry a portly, noble widow twenty years his senior—all done for Elfride's sake, according to Swancourt's rationalization. In announcing his surreptitious courtship and marriage, this minister admits that love had nothing to do with his decision—the widow had more important things to offer: a great deal of money and a title. The longer Swancourt discusses his bride, the clearer it becomes that she is a member of the *nouveau riche* and has even "purchased" her pedigree, not to mention her new husband (pp. 141-42).

In the course of developing his narratives, Hardy frequently makes use of Church officers, usually ministers. Although these characters exhibit a certain range in their actions and attitudes, they differ not so much in kind as in degree. And this difference in degree ranges from a qualified admiration, as in Mr. Woodwell and Mr. Clare, to a strongly satiric condemnation, as in Mr. Swancourt. If Hardy's treatment of clergymen, clerks, deacons, and other official representatives of the Christian Church is less than sympathetic, it is at least a reasonable indication of Hardy's negative attitude toward traditional Christianity. If Hardy's clergymen are characterized by narrow-mindedness, incompetence, arrogance, or even hypocrisy, they are being
criticized severely if not appropriately because they and their institution, the Christian Church, fall painfully short, in Hardy's judgment, of their divine mission.
FOOTNOTES

1 *Life*, pp. 375-76.


4 Since a clear-cut distinction between Hardy the man and Hardy the writer has never been established and since Maxwell offers no real evidence for his hypothesis, one would be on more substantial critical ground by accepting a conclusion of a foremost Hardy scholar, Brennecke, who in his excellent biography of Hardy says that Hardy's "life was a concrete illustration of what he believed in" (p. 231). On this basis, it seems quite logical to assume that Hardy reflected in his creative thought the ideas to which he personally subscribed.

5 In the *Life* (pp. 332-33) is a 1907 note which contains Hardy's jottings for an article (never published, probably never written) in this connection. Maintaining that the old creed with its affirmations and supplications was dead, Hardy proposed that religion be modernized to encompass the "nobler feelings towards humanity and emotional goodness and greatness, the old meaning of the word--ceremony, or ritual--having perished, or nearly.
"We enter church, and we have to say, 'We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep,' when what we want to say is, 'Why are we made to err and stray like lost sheep?' Then we have to sing, 'My soul doth magnify the Lord,' when what we want to sing is, 'O that my soul could find some Lord that it could magnify! Till it can, let us magnify good works, and develop all means of easing mortals' progress through a world not worthy of them.'

"Still, being present, we say the established words full of the historic sentiment only, mentally adding, 'How happy our ancestors were in repeating in all sincerity these articles of faith!' But we perceive that none of the congregation recognizes that we repeat the words from an antiquarian interest in them, and in a historic sense, and solely in order to keep a church of some sort afoot—a thing indispensable; so that we are pretending what is not true: that we are believers. This must not be; we must leave. And if we do, we reluctantly go to the door, and creep out as it creaks complainingly behind us."


8 Life, p. 61.

9 Brennecke, p. 58.

10 Life, p. 30.
"In Church," Collected Poems, pp. 391-92. Perhaps the idea for this poem developed from one of Hardy's youthful experiences recorded in the Life (p. 22). Once as a child when Hardy was listening to a sermon in church, "Some mischievous movement of his mind set him imagining that the vicar was preaching mockingly, and he began trying to trace a humorous twitch in the corners of Mr. S__'s mouth, as if he could hardly keep a serious countenance. Once having imagined this the impish boy found to his consternation that he could not dismiss the idea. Like Sterne in the pulpit, the vicar seemed to be 'always tottering on the verge of laughter,' and hence against his will Thomas could scarcely control his merriment, till it became a positive discomfort to him."

Desperate Remedies (New York: Harper, 1896), p. 146. All future references to this source are from this edition and will be textually documented.
18 Jude the Obscure (New York: Modern Library, 1923), p. 4. All future references to this source are from this edition and will be textually documented.

19 The Hand of Ethelberta (New York: Harper, 1896), p. 411. All future references to this source are from this edition and will be textually documented.

20 Two on a Tower (New York: Harper, 1895), p. 22. All future references to this source are from this edition and will be textually documented.

21 The Well-Beloved (New York: Harper, 1897). All future references to this source are from this edition and will be textually documented.

22 The Return of the Native (New York: Macmillan, 1928), p. 454. All future references to this source are from this edition and will be textually documented.

23 A Pair of Blue Eyes (New York: Harper, 1895), p. 104. All future references to this source are from this edition and will be textually documented.

24 Apropos of ministers' not writing their own sermons is Hardy's 1868 comment noted in Life, p. 59: "The village sermon. If it was very bad the parish concluded that he [the vicar] wrote it himself; if very good, that his wife wrote it; if middling, that he bought it, so that they could have a nap without offending him."

25 Brennecke, p. 58.
CHAPTER V

HARDY'S TREATMENT OF RUSTIC SUPERSTITION, CHURCH ARCHITECTURE, AND GOD

It has already been established that Hardy grew up in an environment that clearly exhibited the hardships of existence, the inconsistencies of life, and seemingly, the absence of a beneficent Power. Although Hardy experienced no intimate contact with the "Egdon" rustics, he was nevertheless quite familiar with their unsophisticated views and their religious beliefs. As Webster notes, "About [Hardy] lived the peasants, who took their religion lightly, whose superstitious practices apparently concealed a belief in a malign force, whose fatalism suggested a ruling Power that cared little for man's fate."\(^1\) Hardy's religious development and intellectual enlightenment eventually indicated to him that perhaps the rustic view of the universe was closer to the truth than was his own orthodox faith. That is not to say, of course, that Hardy the thinker believed in witchcraft or black magic. But he certainly became convinced of the absurdity of a belief in an omnipotent, sympathetic God whose existence, power, and concern for individual human beings was insisted on by traditional Christianity.
Not surprisingly, then, a part of Hardy's negative reaction to Christianity as evidenced in his fiction is presented in the attitudes, actions, and statements of his peasant characters. Johnson defines the "fetichistic" tenor of rustic religion as "a primitive superstition about places and things, persons and practices, or a pagan original, and only disguised under a Christian nomenclature." He proceeds to remark upon the natural rustic tendency to keep something primitive and pagan in religion. "The country parson, the parson's clerk, the Sunday service, became official, legal, and conventional, in the eyes of the rustics: but for stirring converse with unseen powers, for trembling emotion and awful fear, better the haunted places, the oracles of nature, the books of magic, the woodland solemnities and divinations, than the cold correctness of authorized religion."²

An excellent illustration of this rustic preference for pagan superstition may be found in The Mayor of Casterbridge. Since these rural people were wheat farmers, their very existence depended upon seasonably hot, dry weather conducive to good crop production. Their understandable concern about weather conditions, in conjunction with nature's innately superstitious, often drove them to request a weather forecast from Mr. Fall, a quack weather prophet. Most people outwardly laughed at the so-called prophet's predictions, saying "There's nothing in 'em." Actually, however, many of the farmers were secret believers in the eccentric old man's
prognostications, since he lived rather well on food and money strangely provided him by "unknown" benefactors. Although Mr. Fall was apparently satisfied with his ironic situation, "he was sometimes astonished that men could profess so little and believe so much at his house, when at church they professed so much and believed so little."³

Thus, on the basis of such typical incidents from the dim chambers of conjurors, Brennecne concludes that "Fetichism ran far ahead of traditional ritual and dogmatism."⁴

In a passage in Tess of the D'Urbervilles, Hardy exercises his option as Victorian omniscient author in order to make an explicit statement on the power and prevalence of the pagan tradition in the rural population. The case in point involves Tess's resurgence of happiness when she turns her back on her home and more important on her disgrace at the hands of Alec d'Urberville in order to start a new life as milkmaid at Talbothy's farm. As she travels toward her second attempt, Tess experiences a feeling of youthful joy and optimism that is finally vented in the old Benedicite chant: "O ye Sun and Moon... O ye Stars... ye Green Things upon the Earth. Children of Men... bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever!" Then Tess halts abruptly with the thought that she doesn't really know God; i.e., she has found in her own unhappy life up to this point no evidence of God's power or interest. Hardy's own explanation follows immediately: "And probably the half-unconscious
rhapsody was a Fetichistic utterance in a Monotheistic setting; women whose chief companions are the forms and forces of outdoor Nature retain in their souls far more of the Pagan fantasy of their remote forefathers than of the systematized religion taught their race at later date" (pp. 134-35).

Of the various examples of superstition throughout Hardy's fiction, one of the most noteworthy is the type in which orthodox religion takes on added respect because of the incorporation of the pagan supernatural element. For instance, in describing an ancient, abandoned, possibly haunted manor house, a servant says, "'Tis jest the house for a nice ghastly hair-on-end story, that would make the parish religious" (Desperate Remedies, p. 66). That superstition could add to the authority of the Christian Church, at least among the rustics, would seem to support Hardy's contention of the grip of pagan fantasy still remaining in the naive minds of the rural characters.

Although many of Hardy's rustic characters are possessed of a rather strong if somewhat suppressed strain of paganism, they do on occasion pay fairly serious attention to matters of church affiliation and attendance. In expressing their concern, they seem to vacillate between the extremes of the grimly humorous and the pathetically serious. Indeed, at times one has difficulty distinguishing between the two levels. For example, Joseph Poorgrass in Far From the Madding
Crowd, while carting the body of a dead servant girl to her funeral, halts his wagon at an inn to refresh himself. Persuaded to stay longer and to drink more than he had intended, Poorgrass becomes involved in a discussion of religious thought and Church significance:

"Well, I hope Providence won't be in a way with me for my doings," said Joseph, again sitting down. "I've been troubled with weak moments lately, 'tis true. I've been drinky once this month already, and I did not go to church a-Sunday, and I dropped a curse or two yesterday; so I don't want to go too far for my safety. Your next world is your next world, and not to be squandered offhand." 5

One might conclude that while Poorgrass is not willing to be seriously inconvenienced by requirements of and participation in the Church, neither is he willing to run the risk of a Hereafter really existing.

Moreover, Joseph has a kind of loyalty to his Church and its tradition. When accused of being a chapel-member because of his apparent religious enthusiasm, Poorgrass denies the charge: "Oh, no, no! I don't go so far as that." Like his associates, he is "staunch Church of England" (pp. 327-28), the superiority and necessity of which for these rustics is beyond question. As one says,
"But I've stuck like a plaster to the old faith I was born in. Yes; there's this to be said for the Church, a man can belong to the Church and bide in his cheerful inn, and never trouble or worry his mind about doctrines at all. But to be a meetinger, you must go to chapel in all winds and weathers, and make yerself as frantic as a skit. Not but that chapel-members be clever chaps enough in their way. They can lift up beautiful prayers out of their own heads, all about their families and shipwracks in the newspaper."

"They can--they can," said Mark Clark, with corroborative feeling; "but we Church-men, you see, must have it all printed aforehand, or, dang it all, we should no more know what to say to a great gaffer like the Lord than babes unborn."

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

"Yes," said Coggan. "We know very well that if anybody do go to heaven, they will. They's worked hard for it, and they deserve to have it, such as 'tis. I bain't such a fool as to pretend that we who stick to the Church have the same chance as they, because we know we have not. But I hate a feller who'll change his old ancient
doctrines for the sake of getting to heaven" (p. 328).

Whatever question one may have about these staunch members of the Church of England referring to God as "a great gaffer" and questioning anyone's chances of going to heaven, he must admit that Poorgrass and his associates maintain unswerving loyalty to the Church of England. Hardy seems to be pointing out in this ironical passage that this kind of blind devotion is not very much of a recommendation for these rustics or for traditional Christianity.

Other rustic characters have considerably less regard for or loyalty to any particular church; in fact, their membership, if indeed they consistently maintain one, is determined by momentary convenience. For example, in *A Laodicean*, one country character, when asked whether he is a Churchman (i.e., a member of the Church of England) replies that while he is at present, for a two-year period he had held membership outside the Church:

"I was a Methodist once--ay, for a length of time. 'Twas owing to my taking a house next door to a chapel; so that what with hearing the organ bizz like a bee through the wall, and what with finding it saved umbrellas on wet Zundays, I went over to that faith for two years... Howsomever, when I moved into this house I turned
back again to my old religion. Faith, I don't 
zee much difference" (p. 42).

If choosing a church on the basis of its location and 
in order to save the expense of rain apparel seems to indi-
cate a superficial faith, the attitude is at least consistent
with general attendance patterns. In describing the Sunday
habits of many of his rustic characters, Hardy emphasizes
the large numbers in some communities who seldom if ever find
their way to the church service. For example, in The Return
of the Native Hardy wryly observes, "The day was Sunday; but
as going to church was exceptional at Egdon, this made little
difference" (p. 95). Also in The Return of the Native
several of the Heath residents in recalling an unusual ex-
perience at church remark on the uniqueness of their presence
in the service at that time:

"Ah, well, I was at church that day," said
Fairway, "which was a very curious thing to
happen."

"If 'twasn't my names's Simple," said the
Grandfer emphatically, "I ha'n't been there to-
year; and now the winter is a-coming on I won't
say I shall."

"I ha'n't been these three years," said
Humphrey; "for I'm so dead sleepy of a Sunday;
and 'tis so terrible far to get there; and when
you do get there 'tis such a mortal poor chance
that you'll be chose for up above, when so many
bain't, that I bide at home and don't go at all" (p. 20).

It would seem, then, that distance, fatigue, and long odds on being a member of the elect make faithfulness to the church something less than a top priority item among these country characters.

Many of Hardy's rustics had more than adequate reason to rest on Sunday rather than attend church. Not only had they worked hard all week, barely to earn their bread, but they frequently over-indulged in alcoholic beverages on Saturdays in order to free themselves of the previous week's pain. Unfortunately, Sundays brought a different kind of discomfort and a genuine need for a day set aside for recovery (The Return of the Native, p. 23; Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 75). Apparently some persons were able both to drink and to attend church and were at least in the holy place while finishing their naps. As one inebriated young man remarked at a Saturday night dance to the nervous and reluctant Tess, "What's yer hurry? To-morrow is Sunday, thank God, and we can sleep it off in church-time" (Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 78).

Apparently, strong drink had little, if any, ill effect upon the worshippers. In emphasizing the point that old John Durbeyfield had not drunk much in celebrating the discovery of his relationship to the ancient and powerful
d'Urberville family, Hardy cynically estimates that it was "not a fourth of the quantity which a systematic tippler could carry to church on a Sunday afternoon without a hitch in his eastings or genuflections" (Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 30).

Hardy calls into serious question the motives of those persons who do attend church service. For example, in describing Sunday, he labels it the "day of vanity, this Sun's-day, when flesh went forth to coquet with flesh while hypocritically affecting business with spiritual things" (Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 181). Another more specific example concerns the conversion and church attendance of a male protagonist. All of a sudden Manston becomes religious but only because church-related activities provide him with excellent opportunities to associate with the woman whose love he is trying to win. Hardy remarks, "It is commonly said that no man was ever converted by argument, but there is a single one which will make any Laodicean in England, let him be once love-sick, wear prayer-books and become a zealous Episcopalian--the argument that his sweetheart can be seen from his pew" (Desperate Remedies, p. 255).

Hardy calls further attention to what he considered a general lack of piety among the parishioners in church attendance with remarks surrounding Tess's first visit to church after her seduction and its embarrassing aftermath. From her seat at the rear of the church, she is able to
observe the people as they enter. Upon this occasion Hardy states that the "Parishioners dropped in by twos and threes, deposited themselves in rows before her, rested three-quarters of a minute on their foreheads as they were praying, though they were not; then sat up, and looked around" (Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 107). These same persons, as soon as they became aware of Tess's presence, occupied themselves during the service with whispering the details of the conception, birth, death, and burial of Tess's illegitimate child. Tess's discomfort and resultant decision to attend church no more comes as no great surprise to the reader.

Of the congregations engaging in non-spiritual concerns during the service, none can equal the gallery of Mellstock Church in Under the Greenwood Tree: the gallery was closely acquainted with the habits and actions of those persons in the nave. For example, according to Hardy's catalogue, "the clerk was always chewing tobacco except at the moment of crying amen; that he had a dust-hole in his pew; that during the sermon certain young daughters of the village had left off caring to read anything so mild as the marriage service for some years, and now regularly studied the one which chronologically follows it; that a pair of lovers touched fingers through a knot-hole between their pews"—not to mention that one old saint did her weekly money counting and bookkeeping during the sermon. ⁶
Although Hardy never includes a sermon in his novels, one might draw an interesting inference from an ironical reference in *Far From the Madding Crowd*. In describing Gabriel Oak's faithful old sheepdog, Hardy calls attention to the passive nature of this ancient beast, who paid no heed whatsoever to an excited cat in his path:

The dog took no notice, for he had arrived at an age at which all superfluous barking was cynically avoided as a waste of breath—in fact, he never barked even at the sheep except to order, when it was done with an absolutely neutral countenance, as a sort of Commination-service which, though offensive, had to be gone through once now and then to frighten the flock for their own good (p. 28).

One would be relatively safe to conclude, then, that the vast majority of church-goers, in Hardy's judgment, are like Gabriel Oak, "who felt himself to occupy morally that vast middle space of Laodicean neutrality which lay between the Communion people of the parish and the drunken section,—that is, he went to church, but yawned privately by the time the congregation reached the Nicene creed, and thought of what there would be for dinner when he meant to be listening to the sermon" (*Far From the Madding Crowd*, p. 1).

If the rustics' attitude of external acceptance and inward uncertainty and possibly even disbelief is typical and
widespread (a view which Hardy seems to insist on in his fiction), then the attitude held by common characters toward their ministers might well prove enlightening. Although a significant section of this study has been devoted to ministers in Hardy's novels, the point of view taken was Hardy's. Approaching the same subject from a different angle is useful in supporting the argument that Hardy's rustics took all aspects of their religion lightly, if indeed, they took it at all. Since even the faithful spent but "one hour a week wi' God A'mighty and the rest with the devil" (Two on a Tower, p. 98), one could hardly expect better of them.

In the first place, the minister was seldom even seen by most rustics except during the church service. As a result the conditioning made the parishioners think of religion when they did see the minister. The response was automatic. A rather humorous example involves a rare meeting between a minister and one of his flock: Whenever Parson Thirdly said "Good-morning, Mr. Everdene; 'tis a fine day!" Mr. Everdene's response was "Amen" (Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 70).

Even the rustic conception of the attributes and education necessary for the ministry gives an indication of the failure to appreciate men of the cloth. When a proud mother announces her intention to make her son a parson, she cites as evidence of his probable success his knowledge of Greek
and Roman love stories. Then she concludes, "if you could hear how beautiful the boy tells about little Cupid with his bow and arrows, and the rows between that pagan apostle Jupiter and his wife because of another woman, and the handsome young gods who kissed Venus, you'd say he deserved to be made a bishop at once!" (The Hand of Ethelberta, p. 478).

As for the congregation's expectations of a minister, one particularly interesting and typical example occurs in Under the Greenwood Tree. Several members of the parish recall the virtues of a former parson, Mr. Grinham, who was warmly remembered because he remained inconspicuous, except of course at church, during his tenure. As one member says, "Why, he never troubled us wi 'a visit from year's end to year's end. You might go anywhere, do anything: you'd be sure never to see him." Another recalls that this "right sensible parson" came to his home only once and that was to tell the wife that because of her age, health, and the distance to the church, she did not have to come to service anymore. A member of the church choir reminds everyone of Mr. Grinham's lack of interference in the selection of the hymns and psalms for Sunday services: "Confound ye," the minister would snarl; "blare and scrape what ye woll, but don't bother me!" He was also quick to excuse from christening those babies who were inclined to cry violently and otherwise create a commotion. The conclusion of this congregation is that "There's virtue in a man's not putting a
a parish to spiritual trouble." The consensus seems to be that like many other things in life, a parson comes by fate. If he is good, that is to say if he does not expect much of a spiritual life from them or otherwise intimidate them with his presence, then they are grateful. If, however, he visits, meddles, and exhorts, then they simply must be content that he is no worse than he is and wait until he is replaced (pp. 91-92).

The time that a minister is allowed to remain in one parish often seems to depend upon just how closely he chooses to live and work with his congregation. This point is illustrated by the answer to a stranger's question on how long the present minister has served the community: "Maybe about a year, or a year and half: 'tisn't two years; for they don't scandalize him yet; and, as a rule, a parish begins to scandalize the pa'son at the end of two years among 'em familiar" (A Pair of Blue Eyes, pp. 8-9). In other words, if the parson makes the mistake of getting to know too well the lives of his members (and they his), then he is not likely to need to settle in very comfortably.

Exactly what the minister was able to do for the spiritual needs of the parish is difficult to say. Hardy's rustic characters prefer not to be inconvenienced by personal visits by their minister, and they certainly have no interest in the sermons. In fact, the high point of the sermons at one church was the arrival of the Sunday wagon at the
wagon-office providentially located next to the church building. The attraction of the dismounting, unloading, and swearing just outside occurred opportunely as the dry, metaphysical sermons had lasted to the point that children were wiggling and sleeping adults were beginning to snore audibly.  

Even with the apparent lack of interest and the obvious sources of distraction, some church-goers heard at least parts of the sermons. A favorite activity in certain communities was to dissect the sermon after church. For example, one group noted that the sermon on a given Sunday was excellent—the problem was the parson "hadn't been able to get it past his pen." The quality of the sermon, however, seems to have made little difference because, as one person fatalistically observed, "I don't believe 'twill make a penneth o' difference to we poor martels here or hereafter whether his sermons be good or bad" (Under the Greenwood Tree, p. 89).

In Casterbridge there existed a particularly interesting after-sermon tradition. At the conclusion of the sermon each Sunday afternoon, a large part of the male congregation would meet in a near-by inn and discuss the sermon. Each person thoughtfully smoked his pipe and religiously limited himself to a half-pint of liquor. Hardy remarks of these men, often forty in number, that "They invariably discussed the sermon, dissecting it, weighing it, as above or below the average—the general tendency being to regard it as a scientific feat or performance which had no relation to their
own lives, except as between critics and the thing criti-
cized" (The Mayor of Casterbridge, pp. 297-98).

Since these theological critics restrict themselves to
theoretical considerations of the sermons and never make any
kind of practical application of the precepts to their per-
sonal lives, then they can hardly be considered superior to
those persons who seldom, if ever, attend church at all. In
fact, one such group of non-attenders assemble in a tavern
in order to drink. Rather than feigning interest in matters
theological, they express a kind of anti-Christian fatalism
which is well summarized in a remark made by one of their
number: "Your lot is your lot, and Scripture is nothing;
for if you do good you don't get rewarded according to your
works, but be cheated in some mean way out of your recom-
pense" (Far From the Madding Crowd, p. 119). Rather than
piously limiting themselves to a half-pint, they drink to
their satisfaction (or inability) from a tall two-handed mug
facetiously called a "God-forgive-me." Although no one knows
the exact reason for such an unusual and apparently inappro-
priate name, Hardy suggests that it is "probably because its
size makes any given toper feel ashamed of himself when he
sees its bottom in drinking it empty" (Far From the Madding
Crowd, p. 62).

If it is true, as Hardy insists, that the rustics do
take their religion lightly, if at all, then one might still
assume that characters who rank higher on the socio-economic
scale hold a contrary view. It has already been shown in copious detail that even Hardy's ministers are anything but deeply religious. Although Hardy does not deal fully or often with "the better folk," he does make one damaging comment: When Angel Clare, the prodigal son and husband finally returns home, Mrs. Clare, wife and mother of ministers "cared no more at that moment for the strains of heterodoxy." Hardy goes on to say, "What woman indeed, among the most faithful adherents of the truth believes the promises and threats of the Word in the sense in which she believes in her own children, or would not throw her theology to the wind if weighed against their happiness?" (Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 470). According to Hardy's view, human concerns take precedence over divine; this world over the vague, mysterious possibilities of the next world.

Hardy reflects his negative view of Christianity not only in cynical treatments of hypocritical ministers, superstitious rustics, and insincere laity, but also in his use of old and decaying church structures. As a young man, Hardy received a considerable amount of professional training and actual work experience in architecture. His interest in the technicalities of building continued even after he devoted his full professional attention to writing, and he often displayed his knowledge of this practical art in his novels. In every novel, to some extent there is attention paid to various types of architecture, both secular and sacred. In
Desperate Remedies, A Pair of Blue Eyes, A Laodicean, and Jude the Obscure, several of the major characters are architects. By skillfully weaving architectural details into the narratives, Hardy transforms material which would probably otherwise be only incidental information into an integral part of his creative thought.

The important point for purposes of this study, however, is that Hardy often communicated through this medium his thesis that traditional Christianity, which at one time doubtless served a human need, is now sadly out of date and decadent. Hardy's belief that Christianity no longer provides a viable approach to the problems of existence finds convenient and effective illustration in the symbolism of decaying church structures. Hardy calls attention to the physical disintegration of church buildings in several of his novels. For example, in A Pair of Blue Eyes, he mentions the rotting floors of a number of churches in the area (p. 16). In The Mayor of Casterbridge, Hardy, in describing the village church makes a point of calling attention to "how completely the mortar from the joints of the stone-work had been nibbled out by time and weather, which had planted in the crevices thus made little tufts of stone-crop and grass almost as far up as the very battlements" (p. 39). In Desperate Remedies he offers an even broader description of the decay: "Everything in the place was the embodiment of decay: the fading red glare from the setting sun, which
came in at the west window, emphasizing the end of the day and all its cheerful doings, the mildewed walls, the uneven paving-stones, the wormy pews, the sense of recent occupation, and the dank air of death would have made grave a lighter mood" (p. 272). The decomposing church structure as a symbol of decaying Christian tradition, authority, and meaning is made even more vivid by Hardy's picturing the church at sunset, the suggestion that the end of the day in this community is also the end of an era for Christianity. Hardy seems to have possessed a certain fondness for describing the church edifice in the fading light of the western sunlight, for the village church in *Two on a Tower* attracts attention in the novel at that very hour. The disuse into which this former nucleus of the community has fallen provides the context for this presentation. Because of the population shift from rural countryside to urban centers precipitated by the Industrial Revolution, cottages that used to stand around the church vicinity have been torn down "leaving the old building to stand there alone, like a standard without an army" (p. 87). In *The Well-Beloved* old Hope Church lies in ruins, the victim of a landslide. Hardy slyly remarks on the strength of paganism in that particular part of the country and ventures that "Christianity had established itself precariously at best" (p. 19).

In the midst of crumbling church structures in the nineteenth century there developed a strong and important
architectural movement. As a matter of fashion, many com-
munities experienced a strong desire to improve the physical
appearance of their holy edifices. According to Brennecke,
A veritable architectural mania was sweeping
through the western counties of England.
Parsons, squires and bishops were regarding their
crumbling sanctuaries with dissatisfaction and
alarm. The old stone and wood was slowly suc-
cumbing to the gnawing tooth of Time. Towers
and floors were becoming shaky and unsafe, altar
screens were fading and wearing out, churchyard
monuments were tumbling over. All this dilapida-
tion was to be summarily "restored" . . . . A
furious restoration movement gripped everybody.
Unfortunately, a policy of thorough-going replace-
ment was generally adopted and followed, instead
of one of mere preservation of the remains of the
old art. Neo-Gothic being in vogue, the mutila-
tion of the ancient churches was terrific, brutal,
heartless.8
Perhaps because of his architectural concepts, Hardy
was vigorously opposed to this "abominable movement," as he
labeled it. Expert restoration would have been beautifully
acceptable, but what happened was less than aesthetically
desirable. The important point for present purposes, how-
ever, is that Hardy sees in the decay of medieval church
buildings, not some object for nostalgic regard but a symbol of the collapse of the Christian myth in modern times, the most important fall since the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden. The disaster was of such epic proportions that no amount of money and effort from all the queen's architects would be sufficient to reverse the effects.

Particularly in **Jude the Obscure** Hardy uses as one of his most constant images that of the deterioration of the sanctuaries constructed during the glorious reign of medieval Christianity. Through the eyes of Jude Fawley, stone cutter and church restorer, the reader views the crumbling external ruins of the ancient faith. Reaching his beloved Christminster for the first time at night, Jude reverently wanders through the colleges, gazing in awe at the wondrous beauty. Everything seems perfect and ideal, just as he has dreamed all his life. The next morning, however, the daylight reveals the architectural defects, "the broken lines of the original idea" (p. 97) of this religious center of learning. Unfortunately for Jude, it was not until later that he learned of the existence of a similar and more significant discrepancy within the heart of Christminster. The decay of the physical features of this heart of Christianity was merely symptomatic of the weakness and evil within the system, the very point of Hardy's attack on the Christian tradition. Because of his lack of social position and financial standing, Jude was not to be admitted to these
spiritual halls of learning. This decision was impervious to Jude's ability, aspiration, and dedication, all of which had been clearly established by his painful years of independent study and preparation for the sole purpose of giving his life to the Church.

The woman in Jude's life is quick to point out to Jude the shortcomings of Christminster and the system: "You are one of the very men Christminster was intended for when the colleges were founded; a man with a passion for learning, but no money, or opportunities, or friends. But you were elbowed off the pavement by the millionaires' sons" (p. 179). Sue also recognizes Christminster for what it really was--"a nest of commonplace schoolmasters, whose characteristic is timid obsequiousness to tradition" (p. 382). But this devotion was a formally impersonal one--the true spirit had apparently decayed with the wasting stone and mortar. Amid the crumbling ruins of spiritual housing, Sue expressed the modern view in a conversation with Jude. Upon being asked if she would not like to rest in the cathedral, she replies that she would prefer to "sit in the railway station. . . . That's the centre of the town life now. The Cathedral has had its day. . . . [It] was a very good place four or five centuries ago; but it is played out now" (p. 159). There is no nostalgia in this observation--it is simply a matter-of-fact statement on the demise of Christianity.
This conviction of the obsoleteness of Christianity is even more forcefully presented in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. In reference to a Cistercian abbey which lay in ruins, Hardy grimly observes that, in sharp contrast, the monastery's grist mill remained very much in use. The reason for this particular state of affairs is painfully obvious, according to Hardy: "The mill still worked on, food being a perennial necessity; the abbey had perished, creeds being transient. One continually sees the ministration of the temporary outlasting the ministration of the eternal" (p. 299).

Perhaps Hardy's strongest assertion of the triumph of modern physical need and materialism over the spirit of medieval Christianity is found in a passage of *Far From the Madding Crowd*. Meditatively comparing the purposes which had prompted the construction of a church and a barn several centuries earlier, Hardy points out that in spite of the four hundred years which had passed, the function of only the barn remained unchanged:

The fact that four centuries had neither proved it to be founded on a mistake, inspired any hatred of its purpose, nor given rise to any reaction that had battered it down, invested this simple grey effort of old minds with a repose, if not a grandeur, which a too curious reflection was apt to disturb in its ecclesiastical . . . [counterpart]. For once mediaevalism and modernism had a
common standpoint. The lanceolate windows, the time-eaten archstone and chamfers, the orientation of the axis, the misty chestnut work of the rafters, referred to no exploded fortifying art or worn-out religious creed. The defence and salvation of the body by daily bread is still a study, a religion and a desire (pp. 164-65).

Hardy's cynical thrusts at traditional Christianity are evident in his concentration on the symbolic significance of church buildings crumbling in ruins in the nineteenth century. The effectiveness of the symbolism is increased when one realizes that rotting holy edifices are not merely part of Hardy's fictional creation, but that they are a fact of nineteenth-century life. If Hardy was willing to expose the hypocrisy of Christian ministers, satirize the religious attitudes and practices of the laity, and draw attention to the parallel between rotting church buildings and dying if not dead Christian theology, then it hardly seems likely that he would overlook the opportunity to treat the Deity himself with a generous measure of irreverence and irony. Indeed, he did not. A remark made by Hardy outside his fiction offers much insight into Hardy's view of traditional Christianity's concept of God. After living, observing, and thinking for half a century, Hardy remarked, "I have been looking for God 50 years, and I think that if he had existed I should have discovered him. As an external personality,
of course—the only true meaning of the word." The question of whether God really exists depends, at least in Hardy's judgment, on one's definition of "god." This point is clearly stated by Hardy in another one of his remarks:

Much confusion has arisen and much nonsense has been talked latterly in connection with the word "atheist." I have never understood how anybody can be one except in the sense of disbelieving in a tribal god, man-shaped, fiery-faced and tyrannous, who flies into a rage on the slightest provocation; . . . Fifty meanings attach to the word "God" nowadays, the only reasonable meaning being the Cause of Things, whatever that cause may be. Thus no modern thinker can be an atheist in the modern sense, while all modern thinkers are atheists in the ancient and exploded sense.  

Although Hardy the thinker did not believe in the Christian God as an "external personality," Hardy the artist demonstrates considerable interest in God as a hypothetical presence in poems and novels. He could conceive, for example, that this world had been overlooked by a pre-occupied but well-intentioned God, as in "God-Forgotten"; or he could pretend that the earth was a careless creation of which the Lord eventually repented, as in "By the Earth's Corpse." In other poems Hardy pictures God dying ("A Plaint to Man") or imagines him already dead ("God's Funeral").
Hardy's absolute rejection of traditional Christianity's insistence on the existence of a "good" God is at the heart of the ironic treatment of God found in the novels. Sometimes the references are rather indirect. For example, in The Well-Beloved, the protagonist, while standing on a cliff overlooking the sea, thinks of centuries of drownings and imagines all the souls encompassed in a single spirit, finding voice only in the howling of the wind. The one wish of the composite ghost is for a good God to appear and disunite all the captured souls. Needless to say, the ghost shrieked in vain (p. 19).

At other times, the references preclude any discussion of God by simply rejecting any possibility of supernatural existence. For example, a servant excuses his allusion to "Master God" with the explanation that he is telling another person's story. As for himself, the servant says, "[I'll] be dazed if I believe in such trumpery about folks in the sky" (Two on a Tower, p. 12). Another example is provided by a comment by Dairyman Crick, who takes exception to Tess's transcendental discourse by stating flatly that "[I] yet never had the least notion o' that till now, or feele my soul rise so much as an inch above my shirt-collar" (Tess of the D'Urbervilles, p. 155).

In other novels the disrespectful references to the Deity take the form of passing remarks on the narrative situation at the moment. For example, in Desperate Remedies, a
servant describes his mistress's abuse of her maids, a mistreatment so outrageous that seven maids have passed through the house in only the last year. The servant's evaluation of the problem as well as a hint of his theological attitudes is expressed in his statement: "The Lord must be a neglectful part at heart, or he'd never permit such overbearen goings on!" (p. 71). In Far From the Madding Crowd, just at the time that Boldwood is finally about to realize his desires for Bathsheba, Troy returns as if from the dead. In describing how Boldwood is thwarted again, Hardy remarks that for a time Boldwood did not even recognize this "impersonator of Heaven's persistent irony towards him" (p. 433). The idea that God takes some type of perverted pleasure in circumventing man's plans is shown in various novels. Another notable example occurs in The Mayor of Casterbridge when Elizabeth-Jane continues her plain and simple style of dress, even after coming into prosperity because, as she says, "It would be tempting Providence to hurl mother and me down, and afflict us again as He used to do" (p. 113).

The conclusion of a conversation between Manston and the postman in Desperate Remedies features a flippant attitude toward Christianity in general and God in particular. As the two trudge through the rain, they engage in a kind of theological discourse while maintaining their warmth and spirits with frequent pulls on the familiar flask:
"Besides," said Manston, "there's a way of liking a drop of liquor, and of being good—even religious—at the same time."

"Ay, for some thimble-and-button in-an-out fellers; but I could never get into the knack o' it; not I."

"Well, you needn't be troubled; it isn't necessary for the higher class of mind to be religious—they have so much common-sense that they can risk playing with fire."

"That hits me exactly."

"In fact, a man I know, who always had no other god but 'Me'; and devoutly loved his neighbor's wife, says now that believing is a mistake."

"Well, to be sure! However, believing in God is a mistake made by very few people, after all."

"A true remark."

"Not one Christian in our parish would walk half a mile in a rain like this to know whether the Scripture had concluded him under sin or grace."

"Nor in mine."

"Ah, you may depend upon it they'll do away with Godamighty altogether before long, although we've had him over us so many years" (pp. 357-58).
While these disparaging remarks about God and Christianity have about them a kind of grim humor, in certain of the other novels, one may discover a blasphemous assault on God, or rather on the unthinking optimism of an easy faith which promised the existence of a beneficent Power. One of the best examples of this attitude is found in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, specifically in the scenes involving Tess's seduction and later on her execution. Unacquainted with the ways of evil men, the naive Tess is nevertheless able for a time to put up heroic resistance to Alec d'Urberville's crafty advances. But eventually, aided by her lack of sophistication and especially by her physical exhaustion, d'Urberville successfully though somewhat forcefully overcomes Tess. "But some may say," scoffs Hardy, "where was Tess's guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps like that other god of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke, he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awakened" (pp. 90-91).

After Tess returns home pregnant, she realizes that her simple mother had deliberately sent her out into the world so that she would be seduced and, hopefully, married. Since Tess refuses to marry a man whom she does not even like, much less love, all that Mrs. Durbeyfield can do is sigh and reply rather fatalistically, "Well, we must make the best of
it, I suppose. 'Tis nater, after all, and what do please God!' (p. 104).

Then at the dramatic closing of the novel there occurs the famous line for which Hardy was severely criticized. After the black flag rises, signifying Tess's execution, Hardy concludes, "'Justice' was done, and the President of the Immortals, in Aeschylean phrase, had ended his sport with Tess" (p. 508).

Although Hardy did not believe in the God of traditional Christianity, he makes use of that God in his fiction. Sometimes God is treated as indifferent to man; on occasion God seems vindictive. One can be certain of only one point: Hardy was convinced of the absurdity of traditional Christianity's insistence on the existence of a personal God, a dogma at the heart of Christian theology. For that reason Hardy in his fiction treats God with differing degrees of disrespect, ranging from grimly humorous thrusts to hardcore blasphemy.

Once again, a significant part of Hardy's negative religious attitude expressed in the form of superstitious rustics, insincere laity, crumbling Church buildings, and irreverent references to the Deity appears in some of the later novels, such as The Mayor of Casterbridge and Tess of the D'Urbervilles. It is, therefore, again tempting to argue that there exists in Hardy's novels a development or intensification in Hardy's anti-Christian position as it
finds expression in various Christian fixtures and personages. As attractive as this thesis is, it must be rejected. A significant part of Hardy's attention to anti-Christian expression, both in amount and degree, is to be found in early novels, such as *Desperate Remedies*, *The Return of the Native*, and especially *Far From the Madding Crowd*. The most important point, after all, is not whether Hardy's position takes a harder line as his career develops. For purposes of this study at least, the major consideration is the specific demonstration of evidence of Hardy's negative attitude toward Christianity as it is found in his novels.
FOOTNOTES

1 Webster, p. 26.


3 The Mayor of Casterbridge (New York: Modern Library, 1950), pp. 238-40. All future references to this source are from this edition and will be textually documented.

4 Brennecke, p. 56.

5 Far From the Madding Crowd (New York: Harper, 1902), p. 327. All future references to this source are from this edition and will be textually documented.

6 Under the Greenwood Tree (New York: Harper, 1896), pp. 48-49. All future references to this source are from this edition and will be textually documented.

7 The Trumpet-Major (New York: Harper, n.d.), p. 144. All future references to this source are from this edition and will be textually documented.

8 Brennecke, pp. 89-90.

9 Life, p. 224.

10 Ibid., p. 376.
CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to evaluate Hardy's cynical view of and attack on traditional Christianity by examining his treatment of its symbols and practitioners. It has been shown that the basis for Hardy's rejection of the Christian faith is his refusal to accept the "good" God theory, a concept insisted on and promised by Christianity for hundreds of years. This dissertation has argued that Hardy's disillusionment resulted not simply in the rejection of Christianity, not even in a nostalgic retrospective view of Christianity, but, rather, in an aggressively anti-Christian position clearly demonstrated in the novels by an attack on the components of Christianity. Hardy's consistent presentation in his fiction of ministers as either hypocritical or incompetent is certainly an indication of his bitterness toward the Church. Likewise, Hardy's scorn for traditional Christianity is also shown in his pictures of crumbling Church edifices, a symbol of the disintegration of the Christian myth in the nineteenth century. Moreover, Hardy extended his negative reaction to include not only a laity either insincere or inclined toward pagan superstition but also a God who ranges between absolute indifference and
sadistic hostility in his attitude toward and treatment of men.

Numerous examples of Hardy's negative attitude toward traditional Christianity have been selected, presented, and discussed as representative of the frequent references in his novels. As it has been shown, some of them are grimly humorous; many are mildly satirical; and still others are bitterly sarcastic. No attempt has been made to force a scheme of systematic progression in the development of Hardy's reaction, for, interestingly enough, the novels fail to exhibit any type of consistent development in anti-Christian attitude. In fact, an examination of Hardy's negative references to and treatments of traditional Christianity reveals that some of the early novels, such as *A Pair of Blue Eyes* and *Far From the Madding Crowd*, frown more on the Established Church, its beliefs, practitioners, and artifacts, than do some of the later novels, such as *The Mayor of Casterbridge* and *The Well-Beloved*. It is interesting to note, however, that Hardy's last novel, *Jude the Obscure* (1895), features his most thorough and violent assault on conventional beliefs, an assertion which can be at least partially substantiated by the angry cry of protest which arose from the Victorian public against this severe treatment of Christianity.¹

It is in its all-pervasiveness that *Jude the Obscure* seems to contain the essence of and to represent a type of
climax in Hardy's attack in his fiction on orthodox Christianity. In the preface, Hardy states his purpose as being to present a "tragedy of unfulfilled aims." That goal he certainly reaches, for the entire novel is an ironic treatment of Jude Fawley's failure to accomplish his life-long and lofty desires for a Christminster education and church career. Jude's history is that of a man who valiantly struggles to reach fine ideals but strives in vain because the current of life is too much for his temporal strength to overcome. Hardy is particularly interested in emphasizing the point that however admirable Jude's ambitions are, Jude does not receive any kind of divine support in his efforts. Hardy seems to be asking the same cynical question regarding Jude's situation that he posed in reference to Tess's seduction in an earlier novel: Where is the guardian angel? Where is the Providence insisted on by traditional Christianity? Is He so concerned with his own pursuits that no time or attention remains for man? To be sure, even the most sympathetic reader must admit that in the course of the narrative Tess is a fornicator, an adultress, and a murderess, and is finally hanged for her crime; however, even the most hard-hearted judge must allow that Tess's entire situation derived from circumstances over which she had little if any control. Hardy's point is that only token assistance from the warm, personal hand of the God preached by traditional Christianity and subscribed to by Tess would have been sufficient for her to lead a happy and productive life. Jude
Fawley's situation of divine neglect seems even more unforgivable than does Tess's, for Jude devoted most of his life to efforts designed to demonstrate his desire and ability to contribute to the Christian cause. Hardy's thesis, once more, is that traditional Christianity's belief in a "good" God is untenable. By extension, if God would not assist Jude, a poor but intelligent and worthy young man who aspired to become a Christian clergyman, why should He be concerned about the problems and perils of ordinary people?

Even Hardy's presentation of Jude's background reveals circumstances wholly unsympathetic to the youth's admirable goals. The aunt with whom Jude lived would have preferred him dead, as were his mother and father. The farmer for whom he once worked gave him a sound thrashing when he showed pity on the birds he was supposed to have been frightening out of the fields. Hardy cannot resist making the ironic observation that the sounds of the whipping echoed from "the brand new church tower just behind the mist, towards the building of which structure had largely subscribed to testify his love for God and man" (pp. 12-13). Incidentally, this new church building had just replaced the original one, which had been torn down, cracked up, and utilized as road-metal and pig-sty walls (p. 7).

Even so, inspired by the departure for Christminster of Mr. Phillotson, the village schoolmaster, young Jude
determined to follow the same course. For the next several years Jude worked, first as a delivery boy for his aunt's bakery, then as an apprentice stone cutter. But during these years he exerted an heroic effort to conquer his environment by faithfully studying Greek and Latin in preparation for his admission to Christminster. One would have difficulty in imagining a greater demonstration of serious intent in clerical aspiration than years of isolated, independent study of Greek and Latin grammar. It does not, therefore, seem unreasonable to expect at least some small demonstration of interest in the form of assistance from the warm, personal God whose Christian service Jude wished to enter. But this concern was never to come.

One of the first occasions when Jude needed heavenly assistance occurred one Saturday afternoon when on his twentieth birthday Jude was returning home from his work. While walking along, Jude talks to himself, reviewing orally his progress in the classics and his great plans for entering Christminster and eventually rising to a high position in the Church. As he dreamily strolls along, engrossed in his sublime thought and lofty soliloquy, all of a sudden, a "soft cold substance" strikes him sharply on the ear. One glance at the object reveals to him that it is the "characteristic part of a barrow-pig." Another look shows that he is not as alone as he thought—he sees three young women kneeling beside a stream washing pigs' chitterlings.
Moreover, he almost immediately is able to determine which one threw this "indecent thing." Jude's problem is that he is completely naive in social situations, especially those involving the opposite sex. This inexperience is immediately perceived by Arabella Donn, the beautiful female animal that had thrown the gristle missile. The upshot of this symbolic encounter is that Arabella soon has Jude asking to see her the next afternoon. In his excitement Jude forgets that for years he has passed his Sundays religiously studying in preparation for his admission to Christminster. If Providence exists and is an active agent in men's lives, as Christianity insists, then Jude was certainly failed in his time of need. Hardy's point, of course, is that the question is not whether Jude deserved divine aid, but whether such assistance is even possible. Only if one accepts the "good" God theory can he discuss the possibility of God's concern and the appropriateness of the demonstration of this divine interest. And Hardy did not.

At the risk of laboring the obvious, it might be mentioned that any summary of Jude's introduction to Arabella is highly unsatisfactory. Hardy's beautifully ironic handling of the episode is superb. It is difficult to imagine a more appropriate method of accentuating the vivid contrast of the beauty of Jude's lofty aspirations and the ugliness of the physical circumstances of life than that of having a pizzle smack him in the ear as he dreams of
spiritual success. Indeed, one can hardly overlook the phallic significance of the mundane intrusion of the flesh into Jude's holy realm. Nature, as it were, unsympathetically breaks up Jude's intellectual and spiritual preoccupation in favor of procreation of the race. Nature thwarts his religious aspirations by asserting the dominance of the body over the spirit, and, by logical extension, of sex over religion.

Thus, Hardy is once more advancing his conviction that no beneficent Providence rules the universe. Jude, with all his fine sensibilities and high hopes does not receive the sympathy and succor that might reasonably be expected from a "good" God. God's apparent lack of interest in Jude's spiritual success seems to result in scorn for Jude's exalted emotions and lofty ambitions. Jude is left to remain the helpless object of a base physical force which drags his spirit down to the grossness of a carnal relationship. The sordidness of the pig farm where Jude is craftily seduced by the scheming Arabella continues this symbol of the purely animal lust that ironically shackles Jude's great religious expectations. It is important to recognize that Hardy's unfavorable and unsympathetic treatment of the sexual encounter between Jude and Arabella is not simply the reflection of Victorian sexual mores and taboos. Indeed, Hardy is often sympathetic almost to the point of approval in his presentation of illicit affairs. The central consideration
in this situation is not to register approval or disapproval of the fornication but to establish the contrast between Jude's spiritual aspirations and his animal lust.

The relationship between Jude and Arabella develops into an affair which continues for two months. Then, just as Jude's intellect begins to regain control of his emotions, Arabella strategically misleads him into believing that they must marry in order to save her from disgrace (p. 64). Honorable young man that he is, Jude marries her, in spite of the fact that the commitment practically ruins his life's spiritual ambition. Fortunately—or unfortunately, depending upon one's point of view—Jude and Arabella soon quarrel and separate, Arabella going to Australia with her family and Jude making his way to Christminster with renewed hopes for some divine miracle to gain his admission to the university.

Although Jude does move his residence to Christminster, he does not move any closer to acceptance by the University. When questioned by a countryman about his progress in the "City of Light," a place described by this simple villager with amazingly clear vision as "auld crumbling buildings, half-church, half-almshouse, and not much going on at that," Jude replies that it is "a unique centre of thought and religion—the intellectual and spiritual granary of this country" (p. 133). Thus, while Jude manages for some time to preserve his illusions, he is still thwarted in his
educational objective. And he continues to work as a stone cutter by day and to study long hours on the classics by night. No "good" God ever responds to his needs.

Finally Jude hits on the scheme of appealing to the benevolence of some of the university officials for their advice and, hopefully, personal interest and assistance. Five letters gain him a single belated, brief response: One T. Tetuphenay recommends that the ten years of private study notwithstanding, Jude remain "in his own sphere" and stick to his own simple life as a working-man (p. 139). As sensible as this admonition is, it is also understandably a crushing blow to Jude's morale. But, if God himself does not choose to help, why should Jude expect assistance from mere professors of Christian theology?

During his early days in Christminster Jude sought out his beautiful cousin, Sue Bridehead, whom he had never met. Almost immediately, he is sexually attracted to her, but this time he recognizes the imminent danger that pursuing a relationship with any woman would be to his ambitions for a church career. Besides, technically he is still married to Arabella. Although he becomes convinced that he should pray against his fleshly weakness, Jude excuses himself with the rationalization that his interest in Sue is strictly a Platonic one. In his heart, however, he knows that his intentions are anything but intellectual. Nevertheless, Jude's passions triumph. He does not even resort to prayer, in
spite of his conviction that as a future spiritual leader he should pray for divine strength in this time of need (p. 115). It might be argued, of course, that since the hand of Providence had not yet been in evidence in Jude's life, there was little reason to think that it might suddenly appear.

Jude and Sue meet frequently, but he is unable to declare his love for her, especially after she learns of Arabella. In fact, almost as a direct result of Jude's initial secrecy about Arabella, Sue marries Mr. Phillotson, Jude's old school master, to whom Jude had recommended Sue as a teacher-pupil. Although Jude is certain that Sue loves him and has married Phillotson only to spite him about his dishonesty regarding Arabella, he knows that he should depart forever from her life. "Those earnest men he read of . . . would have shunned such encounters if they doubted their own strength. But he could not. He might fast and pray during the whole interval, but the human was more powerful in him than the divine" (pp. 249-50). In spite of Jude's personal exertions in the form of fasting and praying during this critical time, there was, as usual, no assistance from a benevolent Spirit.

Circumstances, moreover, such as their aunt's death continue to bring the apparently inseparable pair together. Jude begins to realize that he will never be able to serve as a spiritual exponent of orthodox dogma:
It has been his standing desire to become a prophet, however humble, to his struggling fellow-creatures, without any thought of personal gain. Yet with a wife living away from him . . . and himself in love erratically . . . he had sunk to be barely respectable according to regulation views.

It was not for him to consider further; he had only to confront the obvious, which was that he had made himself quite an imposter as a law-abiding religious teacher (pp. 262-63).

That very same evening Jude burns all the theological and ethical works which he had dearly purchased and reverently studied for half his life. His break is now complete. "In his passion for Sue he could now stand as an ordinary sinner, and not as a whitened sepulchre" (p. 264). No longer is the Church meaningful to him. Any happiness and fulfillment he might gain from existence must occur in this life, not in the next. In spite of his genuine desire to be a Christian leader, Jude has been defeated by an indifferent society, and by extension, an apparently unconcerned deity. The goodness of God has not intervened.

As Jude suspected, Sue does not love Phillotson. Unable to endure his embraces, indeed, so physically repulsed by the middle-aged schoolmaster that she leaps from a second-story window to escape him, Sue leaves Phillotson, who
generously gives her a divorce so that she can be free to go to Jude. The remainder of the narrative is one of gradual degradation and increasing discouragement. Sue is a strange woman who, though she really loves Jude, prefers not to be his mistress. Upon learning that Arabella has returned from Australia, however, Sue fears that she may lose Jude if she continues to reject his passion. Jude divorces Arabella so that he and Sue can marry, but because of their first unhappy experiences in the bonds of "legal" matrimony, they refuse to re-enter this objectionable civil contract. Even after Arabella's son, Father Time, comes to live with them, Jude and Sue are unable to marry. Naturally they have to suffer the penalty of social ostracism from the "respectable" folk and are driven to a miserable itinerant life.

Meanwhile Arabella has lost another husband. In her grief as a widow she joined an evangelical church to gain comfort, and, "as 'twas righter than gin," (p. 383) she became quite fanatical in her religious beliefs. Upon seeing Jude again, however, she decides that in spite of the consolations of religion, she prefers the comforts of Jude's body. Flinging the tracts away which she had intended to give to sinners, she refuses to pray against her lust and says, "Feelings are feelings! I won't be a creeping hypocrite any longer" (p. 386). One wonders at this point whether even the hand of Providence can save Jude from Arabella.
Now with three children Jude decides to visit Christminster again. Arriving in a rain storm, the family experiences considerable difficulty in finding lodging. To complicate matters even further, Sue is expecting another child. When Father Time learns of this new trouble, he precociously makes the bizarre suggestion that if all the children were dead, then Jude and Sue would be free from most of their problems. Taking matters into his own hands, he hangs his step-brothers and then himself. This shocking event causes Sue to abort and leads her to believe that heaven is afflicting her and Jude for their sins. In a bitterly ironic passage in which Hardy demonstrates the indifference of God and the universe, as the grief-stricken pair wait for the coroner, they must listen to the organist practicing in the College chapel. The selection being played is the anthem from the Seventy-third Psalm, "Truly God is loving unto Israel" (p. 413). One would have difficulty imagining a more inappropriate hymn. The incongruity exhibited in this tragic scene is but one more example of Hardy's attack on traditional Christianity's concept of a "good" God.

In her despair Sue becomes repentant and returns to the High Church sentiments of her youth. She even forces herself to leave Jude and morbidly to return to Phillotson as his dutiful wife. Also filled with despair and weakened by illness, Jude once again falls easy prey to Arabella, who
this time gets Jude drunk and marries him. It does not matter, however, for with the departure of Sue, Jude loses his desire to live and rapidly weakens with a lung infection. While the vulgar Arabella is out looking for male companionship during a University holiday, Jude is lying on his death bed, and even as Jude dies, Arabella is being embraced by a man in the street.

That is the end of Jude, a man who sincerely desired and valiantly attempted to devote his life's energies to the services of the Church. In spite of his efforts to overcome his environment and the socio-economic restrictions of a professedly Christian society, Jude receives assistance neither from the Church nor, even more important, from Christianity's "good" God. As Hardy emphasizes, no sympathetic assistance from an understanding God of goodness and concern came to strengthen Jude in his attempt to overcome his difficulties, both internal and external. And life overcame Jude. Because of constant thwarting of praise-worthy ambitions and because of ubiquitous and inexplicable pain and cruelty in the world, Hardy could not and would not accept traditional Christianity's comforting belief in a benevolent Power of the universe.

To the end of his life Hardy maintained his intellectual rejection of Christianity's "good" God theory. On his last day he requested the reading of a famous passage from literature--not several comforting verses which promise
eternal life after death, for Hardy was convinced that death concludes man's drama of pain and frustration. Rather, he asked that his wife read to him the fifty-eighth quatrain of the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*:

Oh, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
And who with Eden didst devise the Snake;
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is Blackened, Man's Forgiveness give--and take!^{3}

It is difficult to imagine a more appropriate conclusion of Hardy's life than his requesting the reading of this blasphemous quatrain. This final repudiation of Christianity's "good" God is clear evidence of Hardy's aggressively negative attitude toward Christianity. Hardy's action on his death bed takes on added significance when one considers that Hardy was not content to spend his productive years lashing out at Christianity, but even at the end of his life insisted on viciously attacking the Christian God one final time.

Although the mainstream of Hardy criticism has contended that while Hardy did indeed experience a serious disillusionment with Christianity, he was inclined to look back on his childhood faith with nostalgia. Or if this view sometimes seems harsh, it is only temporarily ambivalent. This dissertation has argued that Hardy's attitude toward Christianity as revealed in his novels is not only not ambiguous, but, as a matter of fact, is specifically anti-Christian, often to the point of vehemence; that his
treatment of various components of Christianity in his novels is aggressively anti-Christian; and that the feeling is so pronounced and the evidence so consistently and abundantly found that the novels may be read as anti-Christian propagandistic tracts.
FOOTNOTES

1Albert J. Guerard, *Thomas Hardy: The Novels and the Stories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1949), p. 17, describes this reaction as the "fury of outraged optimism" at Hardy's daring to question the "integrity of God in his heaven." The intensity of the negative reaction is illustrated by an Anglican bishop's supposedly having burned a copy of *Jude* in a public bonfire (Brennecke, p. 162); moreover, it is generally thought that Hardy turned back to writing poetry, his first love, because of this hostile reception (Brennecke, p. 190). Probably the gradually increasing uneasiness of the orthodox about Hardy's philosophical assumptions and religious views did contribute to his shift in genres. However, Hardy's secure financial position by this time made the decision not only feasible but also imminent, regardless of the public reception of the novels.


LIST OF WORKS CONSULTED

I. Primary Sources

A. Works by Thomas Hardy


B. Other Primary Works


II. Secondary Sources


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