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Classes and Class Conflicts in Victorian England as Explored by Thomas Hardy

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The purpose of this research was to study in depth the relationships of individuals in the three social classes in England during the Victorian Age. Since original documents and research material were scarce I used two novels by Thomas Hardy to illustrate the conflicts between representatives of the social classes. In 1891 England was prosperous and many people believed there was no conflict between the classes. Thomas Hardy believed this was untrue and, by method of comparison, wrote Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure to prove his point. This thesis includes research on the two novels, Thomas Hardy's life, and last but not least is a study of the Age of Victoria.

CLASSES AND CLASS CONFLICTS IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND AS EXPLORED BY THOMAS HARDY

by

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I

History has many definitions. One very general and all inclusive definition is that history is the story of man as he interacts with other men and with his environment. One man's life is made up of hundreds of events large and small. Not every occurrence is worthy of note. What a man eats for dinner may not be as important as what he thought about a recent political election. When a man records the events in his life he selects which facts are worth remembering and discards the rest.

The same task of selectivity faces any historian when he attempts to tell the story of one nation, one people, one era. The historian must also make a choice and decide which events and facts are noteworthy and which can afford to be omitted. If the historian did not screen the material he works with, he would find his duties an impossibility.

In addition to selecting certain facts and data to be recorded, an historian is faced with the job of deciding which aspect of his subject matter will be concentrated upon. The story of a nation can be told from a member citizen's point of view, from a foreigner's point of view, from a contemporary news reporter's point of view, etc. In each instance the tale will be different. The story of a nation or a people can be told with emphasis on different aspects of society and culture. The artistic element of society may be dwelt upon, scientific discoveries may be concentrated upon, great men of the nation may be discussed, and so forth. Again, each telling will produce a different story. Similar historical data will reappear throughout each instance but essentially the histories will be unalike.

Because historians must make a choice and decide which nation they will write an history of, which people in the world are historically significant, which century or era in a nation or people's history is important, recorders of history must justify their choices. If a certain aspect of one nation's history is considered worthy of record, then there must be a reason. Many of these reasons will be personal because historians are like any other men. Inclinations towards the arts or sciences, military or technical influence their decisions just as they do non-historians.

As an historian, I have a particular interest in the history of Great Britain. In the history of the world she has been a leader and the bedrock of institutions of government and the arts and sciences which have continued in an unbroken tradition throughout the history of mankind. Although many periods of her history are interesting as well as significant, the nineteenth century in England's history--the era known as the Victorian Age--is to me the century which is the most fascinating. In this one period is a wealth of information full of historical meaning. Also the era is rich with literary and artistic contributions. If this were not enough, I see throughout the age many points where the historical and literary worlds interlock with each other. In dozens of instances, literary figures are prominent in the political sphere such as Benjamin Disraeli, an important politician who wrote Coningsby in 1844 and Sybil in 1845 (literary landmarks) in an effort to make the public aware of crucial social issues. Charles Dickens is perhaps the most outstanding example of another literary figure who combined politics with literature. Every novel he wrote stimulated the reading

public to take a harsh look at some suffering aspect of society.

Many reforms were passed during the Victorian period which corrected social injustices. However, a look at the authors who wrote in the latter portion of the century points out that not all social ills had been solved. After I read several novels by Thomas Hardy (1840-1928), I wondered why he was critical of a society that was supposed to have cured itself of major social inequalities. Also, I was curious about the fact that Hardy used a pre-industrial setting for his novels to illustrate the grievances he had against a society that was deep in the middle of the machine age. A closer look at Hardy's novels and of the historical events of the Victorian Age helped to make clear the fact that Thomas Hardy was, like Dickens and Disraeli before him, a social critic who used his novels to call the public's attention to a social injustice.

II

Great Britain during the Victorian Era had been going through a constant state of transition and flux. Old traditions and values which had held true for centuries were being undermined by new discoveries and beliefs. The very way in which people on the street interacted with each other changed. Old manners and customs were no longer held sacred and treated with awed respect. Even the Church of England, bulwark of the Empire was being criticized and re-examined. The social classes which had previously established themselves on the top of the societal pyramid were no longer isolated from contact with the lower and middle classes. In the days of "Merrie England" the very wealthy upper classes had little to do with the lower classes unless it was in a paternalistic way or if they had an employer-employee relationship. With England in a state of social confusion, all social classes were discovering that the old lines of social distinction were crumbling down about them. It was this entire system of social classes and class contact that Thomas Hardy found unacceptable in English society. He saw in the past and he saw in the present a pattern of social injustices committed because of the severe lines of distinction established between social classes. The same situation existed in pre-industrial England as did in industrial England only Hardy felt that his contemporary countrymen had forgotten that such social imbalances existed in modern society. He made his issues very clear to the reading public by placing his characters in an agricultural, pre-industrial setting, a time when such social cleavages and antagonisms between the classes were explicitly obvious. A question which remains to be answered is whether or not the reading public accepted Hardy as a social

critic and did anything about the clashes which existed between the social classes as a result of his novels' attack.

The last quarter of a century during the 1800's was extremely different from the first quarter. Until 1832 and the first great Reform Bill, England was in every sense of the word, "Merrie England." For hundreds of years England's economic and social foundation had been one of agriculture. Despite the advances made since the inception of the Industrial Revolution in 1760, many people still made their living from the land.

"Between the years 1802 and 1832 the existing system of British farming, by which land was owned by landlords, occupied by tenants, and cultivated by labourers, was practically universal."[1] This system of agricultural development was not unlike the farming practices of Elizabethan citizens of England. It had prevailed in England for centuries and had remained basically unchanged even though agriculture itself was gradually being industrialized.

During the Napoleonic Wars prices for agricultural products went up considerably due to the fact that demand increased during wartime. The increase in prices caused agricultural land to be considered a scarce and valuable commodity during the early years of the Victorian Age. As a result the Enclosure Movement gained great momentum.[2] In less than a

[1]H. D. Traill and J. S. Mann, Editors, Social England, Vol. VI (London, 1904), p. 102.

[2]The Enclosure Movement was an effort made to put as much arable land as possible into agricultural production.

century more than six million acres were enclosed in order to increase agricultural production.[3]

Landlords, tenants and labourers were all involved in the Enclosure Movement. Although at the turn of the nineteenth century some industrial advancements were being made in the field of agriculture, the opening of new lands to cultivation (brought about by the Enclosure Movement) meant that for every man who left the farm to work in the city there was a man needed to work newly opened farm land. Prior to this time much land which could have been put to agricultural use was left open in what was known as commons, or lands open to all. Once the Enclosure Movement began, open fields were turned into neat rectangular farms separated by hedges and wooden fences, fens or marshes were drained and much waste land was reclaimed. The high war-time agricultural prices from 1815 to 1832 saw many people firmly tied to the soil; England was still very much an agricultural nation.

Because agricultural prices were high due to a stimulated war-time and post-war economy, agricultural output was forced to increase in yield.[4] The enclosure of commons, fens and wasteland helped to ease the situation somewhat for more arable land meant more crops could be planted, therefore, more yield and profit for the people involved. "By 1845 the /enclosure/ movement was almost completed; about 4,000 acts had been passed, affecting

[3] R. J. Mitchell and M. D. R. Leys, A History of the English People (New York and London, 1950), p. 385.

[4] England could not import foreign wheat to feed her population and fulfill the demand because of the existing Corn Laws (high tariffs) which prevented foreign wheat from entering the country.

over 6,000,000 acres, or a fifth of the country. The area inclosed [sic] by agreement was apparently far larger, perhaps twice as great."[5] Since England was of small geographic proportions, only a limited percentage of land could be put into intensive agricultural use. This restriction forced agriculturists to look for technological improvements rather than to expect more land to be brought under tillage.[6]

G. D. H. Cole has written, "The period of the Napoleonic Wars is remarkable not so much for its great inventions [agricultural as well as industrial]... as for the momentum and speed of actual economic change."[7] Small farmers could not expect to sustain the impact of technology. They had neither the capital nor the manpower to invest in order to profit. "During the period 1790 - 1850 the small farmer disappeared, and the modern system of large-scale capitalistic farming developed."[8] It took large amounts of capital investment to support the technological advancements needed in the agricultural field. The old methods of farming used before the Enclosure Movement was filled with defects. For example, "Under the common husbandry no cultivator could adopt an improvement unless he could get all his neighbors to assent to it ... much time and labour was lost in taking men and horses from one to another of the scattered strips."[9]

[5]Herbert Heaton, Economic History of Europe (New York, 1948), p. 414.

[6]"By 1900 an open field or common pasture was a curiosity, the land had been divided into compact farms and fields, and the 2,000,000 acres of common or wasteland that remained were regarded as worthless..." ibid.

[7]G. D. H. Cole and Raymond Postgate, The British Common People (London, 1961), p. 118.

[8]Milton Briggs and Percy Jordan, Economic History of England, Part II (London, 1949), pp. 135-136.

[9]ibid., p. 133.

Also, common pasture land was usually over-stocked with cattle, and it was difficult to keep down diseases when all the sheep of the village were herded together in one flock. The Enclosure Movement served to bring together small sections of isolated farmland. As a result, the standards of farming in England were raised for, "Once land was enclosed the owner could take advantage of the new methods of farming, and put the land to the most economical use."[10]

The Agricultural Revolution in terms of technological advancements was a gradual and relatively slow process. Men such as Thomas Coke[11] and Robert Bakewell[12] gave the movement momentum. Coke was one of the first to advocate enclosing open lands and gathering together many small farms and making use of capital investment in the agricultural area. Bakewell developed new concepts in sheep rearing, which at this time was a very important factor of the British agricultural economy. Rapid improvements were made in the invention and perfection of tools and machines used in farming. Small and Rotherham improved the plough, James Meikle of Dunbar invented the threshing machine and the idea of a machine to spread hay to dry /horse tedder/ was developed at this time.[13] "Probably the most general advance was the substitution of iron tools for wood, and all iron ploughs and harrows /tools for leveling plowed ground/ came into use between 1830 and 1840."[14]

[10] ibid.

[11] (1752-1842)

[12] (1725-1795)

[13] Briggs and Jordan, op. cit., p. 145.

[14] ibid., p. 146.

In order to determine the effect agricultural changes had on the social classes in England during the early days of the Victorian Age, prices--particularly the price of wheat--should be considered. Fluctuation in the price of wheat would do much to determine how the British people were adjusting to agricultural developments. The reason wheat was used as a criterion for the standard of living is explained by G. D. H. Cole; "...wheat was the commodity on which the standard of living of the common people depended most of all."[15] Since wheat, or bread, was the basic staple of the majority of the people who lived in Britain during this time, the price of wheat was an indication of how well or how poorly the common man was living.

As mentioned earlier, during the Napoleonic War period there was a great expansion in the demand for wheat. Part of this demand was due to the fact that England's population was steadily increasing and part of the increase in demand was due to the war demand for food to feed not only British but Allied soldiers abroad. Wheat prices rose sharply. From 1786 to 1825 wheat prices increased from 46s. 3d. a quarter[16] to 57s. 3d. a quarter.[17] The high price of wheat kept the cost of living artificially high for the majority of the British people.[18] The cost of basic food commodities was ever increasing but most incomes did not increase at the same level and did not keep pace with the constantly climbing cost of wheat.

[15]Cole and Postgate, op. cit., p. 120.

[16]The term "quarter" refers to a standard form of measurement of wheat.

[17]Cole and Postgate, op. cit., p. 119.

[18]Ibid., p. 312.

Wartime economics did not entirely explain the persistent high prices in wheat and similar basic food stuffs. In 1815 England suffered an agricultural depression. The nation was plagued with bad weather and disease. Cattle were struck with rot, sheep were afflicted with scab, and crops such as corn were spoiled by disease. This state of affairs lasted until the forties. "The wheat prices from 1835 to the year of the famines /1839/ showed how the cost of living was artificially held up."[19]

The agricultural depression in England meant that wheat, which had been high in demand, was even harder to obtain on the market. The prices, therefore, continued to be high because disease had taken a large portion of the crops which ordinarily would have been sold to the public. The remainder of the wheat crops brought increasingly higher prices on the domestic market. The following is a summary in tabular form of the price of wheat from 1835 to 1851. These were the post-war years of high price and low quantity.[20]

Year	Price of Wheat per Quarter	
1835	39s.	4d.
1836	48s.	6d.
1837	55s.	10d.
1838	64s.	7d.
1839	70s.	8d.
1840	66s.	4d.
1841	64s.	4d.
1842	57s.	3d.
1843	50s.	1d.
1844	51s.	3d.
1845	50s.	10d.

(continued on p. 11)

[19]Briggs and Jordan, op. cit., p. 139 and Cole and Postgate, op. cit., p. 312.

[20]Prices are listed in shillings and pence.

Year	(continued)	Prices of Wheat per Quarter	
1846		54s.	8d.
1847		69s.	9d.
1848		50s.	6d.
1849		44s.	3d.
1850		40s.	3d.
1851		38s.	6d.

The above information represents the fluctuations in the price of wheat during the fifteen-year post-Napoleonic War period in British economic history.[21]

There is one other aspect to be considered in a study of Britain's post-war agricultural economic picture. Until 1849 there existed high tariff barriers against imported wheat. The Corn Laws or tariffs prevented imported wheat from coming into the country to ease the agricultural and economic crisis. Such laws only added to the hardships the British people were suffering due to the high prices of wheat.

British agriculturists recovered from the post-war depression and experienced a time of economic advance during the middle years of the nineteenth century. "Agricultural wages /another indication of living conditions/ had fallen substantially in the 'forties ... By 1860 the agricultural labourers were getting on the average rather over 20 per cent increases over the wages of 1850, and by 1870 nearly 30 per cent ... by 1875 average wages were about 55 per cent above the 1850 level."[22]

Agricultural conditions hit a severe slump after a peak of great prosperity in 1870. Bad harvests plagued the farmers and between 1874

[21] Cole and Postgate, op. cit., pp. 312-313.

[22] ibid., p. 352.

and 1882 there were only two good harvests. In addition, Reece's freezing operation was discovered in 1867 which, when later perfected, allowed foreign wheat to be preserved and transported to England with little danger of spoilage. "After 1875 the good times came to an end. The full force of free trade was felt and American wheat exports began to flood the English market. Grain also poured in from Canada, the Baltic, and South Russia."[23] Agricultural conditions were not unlike those days of the early part of the Victorian Age.

> The depression /1870's and after/ was due to low prices. It was, up to 1884, mainly the prices of corn and wool which were accountable. But there was a series of bad seasons in the 'seventies, the yield of wheat having been below the average in seven years out of ten. The acute stage was reached in 1879, known as the 'black year,' when the harvest was the worst of any in the second half of the century. Instead of advancing, prices fell, in consequence of heavy imports. America had a great crop, and shipped to England a much greater quantity of wheat than in any previous year. Again a disastrous attack of sheep-rot carried off large numbers of animals, while foot-and-mouth disease caused further losses. Thus all classes of agriculturists suffered. Thousands of farmers were nearly ruined.[24]

The changes which took place in the field of agriculture definitely had an acute effect on the farmers and agricultural labourers themselves but more important, fluctuations in agriculture affected each one of the social classes in England in some way or another. It is this impact on the classes which is significant.

[23] Briggs and Jordan, op. cit., p. 154.

[24] Traill, op. cit., p. 806.

The Enclosure Movement was considered an economic success. It was thought to be a major step forward in the field of agricultural development. Landlords or landowners gained because the enclosures of common land increased production and raised the standards of cultivation. Increased production meant greater yields and more profits for the landowners. The immediate effect was detrimental, however, to the tenants and farm labourers.

Enclosures had a negative effect on the general condition of the labouring population of England. Many individuals who had been earning a living off of common land were assigned too little land to maintain a small living, many failed to adhere to their legal rights when they didn't get as much as they should have[25] and others sold their allotments before or after awards were made.[26] "That land was enclosed with little respect for the rights of the weaker parties cannot be denied. In many cases, these private petitions were drawn up by the principal landowners[27] of a district meeting in secret, and the inhabitants knew little or nothing of the details until the Act was passed."[28] For many, primarily the landowners, the Enclosure Movement was extremely beneficial and much profit was gained. "But in the midst of this progress and growing prosperity the position of the agricultural labourer remained a gross and singular blot

[25]Legal procedures were too expensive for the common labourers.

[26]Traill, op. cit., p. 103.

[27]Refers to petitions to have land enclosed.

[28]Briggs and Jordan, op. cit., p. 131.

on the nation."[29]

Such a pattern of contrast between the landlords and labourers appeared again during the nineteenth century when the Corn Laws were still enforced. While the landowners gained the common people suffered because the price of wheat was kept artificially high. The Corn Laws brought profit for the wealthy and caused hardships for the poor. While Corn Laws were enforced landowners could ask a high price for the wheat they sold, knowing their product was domestically much in demand.[30] The labourers, individuals who lived at the subsistence level, had to buy wheat products /food staples/ no matter what the cost. When Corn Laws kept wheat prices high labourers went hungry. Thus a constant disparity existed between the rich and the poor classes.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, wealth divided individuals into social classes in England. Landowners were considered rich and therefore in an upper social category; farm labourers were almost always poor so they belonged in the lower class. Categorizing individuals in any society by means of income was not necessarily accurate but nevertheless it was the system most frequently used.

In 1815 Patrick Colquhoun published a population survey in which he listed British citizens according to class and income. Basing his estimates on a total population of fourteen million, Colquhoun broke down the classes in the following manner:

[29]R. J. Evans, The Victorian Age (London, 1950), p. 183-184.

[30]Corn Laws prevented foreign wheat from flooding domestic markets, a situation which would cause prices of wheat to fall.

> Roughly nine millions were assigned to the working classes, including paupers and vagrants, three millions to the freeholders and farmers, three-quarters of a million to the traders and employers, half a million to public employees and the professional class together, four hundred and thirty-seven thousand to the class of innkeepers and publicans, and four hundred and twenty-five thousand to the aristocracy.[31]

It must be kept in mind that Colquhoun's figures are over-weighted because he included domestic servants among dependents but his statistics are the best available from the period. His material illustrates that during the early years of the nineteenth century, the social structure was dominated by the aristocracy and landowners. The only other major portion of the population consists of the labouring class. These two large sectors of British society had little in common and contrasted greatly.

Wealth, Power and Resources of the British Empire[32]
published by Patrick Colquhoun in 1815

Class	Income
	£ (in pounds)
Aristocracy (Nobility, Gentry, Royalty and Upper Clergy, not including next group)	60,000,000
State Service and Pensions	8,000,000
Professions (rest of Clergy, Law, Medicine)	17,000,000
Agriculture (Landholders apart from aristocracy, including freeholders and farmers, but not including labourers)	74,000,000
Trade and Industry (excluding innkeepers and publicans, and also wage-earners)	37,000,000
Innkeepers and Publicans	9,000,000
Working Classes (artisans, labourers, miners, etc., including agricultural labourers)	82,000,000
Paupers, Vagrants and Criminals	10,000,000
Total Income	£297,000,000

[31] Cole and Postgate, op. cit., pp. 145-146.

[32] Source: Cole and Postgate, op. cit., pp. 144 and 145.

There was a social pyramid in England and within this formation the aristocracy rested at the top while the country people, the poor or common people, formed the foundation. Wealth or the lack of it divided the sectors in the social scale. The social framework was static and inflexible. The landowners made profits and did well; "the principal duty of the poor was to be content with their lot."[33] All the variations of social status between the rich and poor depended on gradations of income.

During the early days of the nineteenth century, industrialization was in the early stages of development. The "nouveaux riche", men who made their fortunes as merchants, factory owners and speculators, had not yet become a major portion of British society.[34] In 1832 when the Great Reform Bill was passed, the middle class did not even hold office. By mid-century and particularly from 1850 on, the history of England became the history of the middle class. They were to become a very important sector of the British social structure during the last years of the Victorian Era but they must be ruled out as an important element in the days of early nineteenth century, Romantic England.

Since there was a clear absence of middle class during the formative years of the Victorian Age, the differences between the upper classes and the lower classes became even more distinct and obvious.

Unless the social classes are defined any discussion about them

[33]Asa Briggs, The Making of Modern England (New York, 1959), p. 13.

[34]Later, when the members of the middle class began to accrue great masses of industrial wealth, there was a threat to the aristocracy for the division of classes was supposed to bebased on wealth. Often the industrialists had more actual income than long, established and titled aristocratic families.

becomes vague.[35] In the stratified Victorian social pattern, the term class meant "a category of persons who occupied a similar position on a hierarchical scale of certain characteristics such as wealth."[36] How much income or accumulated wealth a person or family had determined into what social category he would belong. Referring to Colquhoun's statistics /see table on page 15 this text/ , the upper classes would include the nobility, gentry, royalty and upper clergy. The lower classes included artisans, labourers, miners and agricultural labourers. Colquhoun's figures might be extended so that the category Agriculture (landowners apart from aristocracy) be included as upper class members and also some Professional men, especially the remainder of the clergy not included in the aristocracy. When such adjustments are made to Colquhoun's original computations, there is an even greater disparity between rich and poor, upper and lower class.

A revised table by adjusting Colquhoun's statistics would divide the upper and lower classes in the following manner:

Upper Class	Nobility, gentry, royalty, clergy, and landowners
Lower Class	Artisans, miners, and all labourers

Such a division would separate the two classes, upper and lower, into those who owned land and those who had no land at all.

[35]There is considerable undertainty about assigning any particular individual to a class or status group. At best the divisions can be made arbitrarily.

[36]Rolf Dahrendorf, Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society (Stanford, 1959), p. ix.

The upper class of Victorian England included the wealthy and those who may have been considered to be wealthy because of ownership of land, title, heritage or claim to royalty. England in 1832 resembled the cruder, pre-industrial, pre-democratic, unreformed England of the eighteenth century.[37] It was this, the ways of the eighteenth century, which lingered on at the top of British society well into the nineteenth century. Squire Westerns indulged themselves at will; the aristocracy or gentry remained unchanged since the days of Merrie England. "The poor had suffered by the war but at no period had the landed gentry been wealthier or happier, or more engrossed in the life of their pleasant country houses."[38] The rural landlord ruled supreme in the British countryside. The aristocracy at the top of the social scale was virtually divorced from the worries of the world. The very fact that the upper class had wealth allowed them the freedom to explore the pleasures of the leisure class. They had both the time and the money to hunt the fox, to drink fine wines and beers, to travel to the Continent on a Grand Tour, to spend money lavishly on themselves and their friends. The unfortunate aspect of the manner in which the upper class lived was that all too often their wealth and free time was had at the expense of the poor, labouring class at the bottom of the social scale.

Normally, the lower class came in contact with the aristocracy through the local gentry. "Presiding over life /in England/ was the country gentry."[39]

[37] G. Kitson-Clark, The Making of Victorian England (Cambridge, 1962), p. 206.

[38] Refers to the post-Napoleonic War period, approximately 1815 to 1839.

[39] Kitson-Clark, op. cit., p. 221.

"The conventional idea of an English squire of eighteenth and early nineteenth century seems to have a literary source: he was either idealized as a benevolent despot or regarded as a drunken sot."[40] Country house or mannor house life meant care-free, relaxed living for the country gentry. "Far more characteristic of the lesser squires, distributed over the countryside in snug estates was the real-life figure of a self-centered country gentleman with a dilettante interest in the arts, a shrewd interest in agriculture, and an enthusiasm for field sports."[41] The squire led a life not unlike that of a plantation owner in the South during the pre-Civil War days of early American history. "Although he travelled on the Continent and made expeditions to London from time to time, the squire's real interests were bound up with his neighborhood, his family, friends and dependents."[42]

The squire or gentry shared certain characteristics with other upper class individuals. According to Colquhoun, this would pertain to the nobility, royalty and clergy--all landowners. Their wealth was derived from the soil; they were often farmers themselves and they lived and worked among their people and were interested in sports rather than pressing social issues.[43] In actuality the gentry lived in a world divorced from the ways of the world. The gentle ways and courtly customs of the eighteenth century lingered on in the squirarchy at the top of British society.

[40]Mitchell and Leys, op. cit., p. 383.

[41]ibid.

[42]ibid.

[43]Esme Wingfield-Stratford, The Victorian Cycle (New York, 1935), pp. 9-20.

Gentlemen members of the upper class had so much wealth they were, as a result, left with a great deal of leisure time to spend on themselves. Most gentry were above all considered 'manly.' "The manly man was a hard fighter, a hard rider, a lard liver, a hard drinker, a hard swearer and a hard lover."[44] This was all the gentry had to do to amuse and entertain themselves; fight, ride, live, drink, swear and love lavishly. There were still a good number of gentlemen who could be described as Squire Westerns remaining in the countryside, left-overs from the days of the eighteenth century.

Upper class women often had nothing to do but to be approved by man and "to realize the type of female perfection which the breadwinner of the family expected to find in his wife and daughters."[45] While their husbands were off playing, hunting and enjoying themselves, the feminine sector of the country gentry were left helpless and with nothing to do. Young ladies were often taught by a private governess and whenever possible did as little domestic work as they could. These women were supposed to be acquiring the social manners and customs befitting their higher station in the social scale. Ladies of the gentry had little else to do but read poetry, repeat local gosspi and await gentlemanly attentions. Courting and social graces occupied much of their time. It was the hall-mark of a 'lady' to be idle.[46]

[44] Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., pp. 13-14.

[45] G. M. Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History, Vol. 4 (New York and London, 1949-1952), pp. 23-24.

[46] ibid., pp. 24-25.

"Upper class definitely meant gentleman or gentlewoman and something besides; and the prefix gentle had in most people's minds a definite relation to family antecedents as well as to occupation -- or to the absence of it."[47] At the very top of English society was a body of hereditarily titled individuals. There were very few of these people because their only claim to upper class status was a title. However, the titled aristocracy tended to marry into the social class immediately below them. Titled married new wealth in order to bolster the ranks. Many of these 'secondary' families were the lower ranks of the aristocracy -- the landed gentry just discussed.

The gentle class considered themselves the landed, privileged elite and had no doubts about the rightness of their claims to superiority. The life of the manor house, the only life they ever knew, could only have been theirs had they not title, land, money and the leisure time provided by their wealth. This attitude of superiority increased the already existing tensions which were evident between the upper class and the lower class. Especially in agricultural areas, the upper class and lower class came in constant contact with each other. The landless poor were made to feel even more downtrodden when they saw every day their masters sporting at the expense of their labourers who suffered. The rich could conceive of life in no other fashion. The only manners they knew were those of the wealthy and leisured class. Their days were full of hope and life moved on at a relaxed pace. The lower class never knew such an existence. They had suffered long enough; there had to be a change.

[47] G. D. H. Cole, Studies in Class Structure (London, 1955), p. 61.

What a contrast there was between the sumtuous manner of upper class life and the way the lower, poorer classes existed. The poor could afford little time to play for they worked from dawn till dusk. Women were far from idle; they worked right along with the men in the fields, dairies, grape arbors and pasturelands. There was no wealth and very little income among the poor workers. They owned no land and they worked and toiled on the land which belonged to others. Land was the basis of status and power in Victorian England. Land meant wealth. The rich had it and the poor had not. Between the two classes was a barrier of land. It was on this land, the agricultural fields, where the upper class and lower class came in contact and yet that very land kept them forever separated. Land was the battlefield between the classes.

For the common labourer the whole period[48] was a time of depression and gloom. Often wages and income obtained from meager garden plots were so low that the poor were on the very edge of starvation, defenseless against illness or the slightest misfortune.[49] The breadwinner in a poor family during hard times had no alternative but to watch his family suffer. If there was a crop failure it meant unemployment which resulted in no income to pay for food for the hungry. The lower class was made more acutely aware of their plight when they compared the situation they found themselves faced with to the luxuries of their upper class landlords. It was bad enough that they should be living at the barest level of existence but it seemed worse when contrasted with the ways and manners of the rich.

[48] Refers to the early decades of the nineteenth century in England.

[49] Mitchell and Leys, op. cit., p. 387.

In the post-war years of prosperity for the upper class, the lower classes lived at the subsistence level or below. "In visiting the labouring families," wrote Rev. David Davies in The Case of Labourers in Husbandry, "I could not but observe their mean and distressed condition. I found them indifferently fed, badly clothed, some children without shoes and stockings, very few put to school...."[50]

Actually once the Napoleonic Wars were over the agricultural labourer was doing well, if real wages are considered and taking the average of the country as a whole.[51] "In some regions he was decidely better off. But his /agricultural labourer/ standard of life had declined in those parts of the rural South which lay farthest from the wage- competition of factories and mines, particularly where the poor-rates were being employed to keep wages down, and where the labourer depended on the landowner who employed him."[52]

There was a distinct difference between the conditions of the agricultural labourer during the eighteenth century and during the nineteenth century.

> The agricultural labourer during the early nineteenth century was often forced to take part of his wages in bad corn and worse beer. In earlier and simpler days the labourer had more often been lodged in the farm and ate at the board of the landowner. This had meant a closer and kinder personal contact and less segregation of classes.[53]

[50] J. F. C. Harrison, Ed., Society and Politics in England (New York, 1965), p. 35.

[51] Real Wages: The non-agricultural sector of the economy was in a depression so the labourer's income or dollar would buy more.

[52] Trevelyan, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

[53] ibid.

After the Napoleonic Wars there was a long period of hard times for the poor in England. Agricultural workers in particular suffered from the severe economic conditions. Industry no longer produced munitions so war-time industrial workers had no jobs; soldiers back from the war came home to find no work so the unemployed flooded the labour market. In addition, bad harvests meant starvation everywhere. The profits gained by the rich or upper class only accentuated the downtrodden lower class poor and their blighted condition.

The great majority of the lower classes was underfed, poorly housed, underpaid, had no particular powers or value to society, and was ignorant and illiterate.[54] "Between the years 1802 and 1832 the existing system of British farming, by which land was owned by landlords, occupied by tenants, and cultivated by labourers, became practically universal."[55] It was under such living conditions that the poor suffered and the rich thrived. Constantly in contact, the upper and lower classes conflicted over the every-day problems of existence.

The class system in Great Britain during the Victorian years was extremely structured and stratified. Not only was there a great disparity between rich and poor but there was very little opportunity for social mobility either up or down. This inflexibility further aggravated an already intolerable situation of social inequality in the eyes of the lower class. The prosperity of the upper class served to accentuate the

[54]Evans, op. cit., p. 187.

[55]Traill, op. cit., p. 102.

fact that the lower classes had nothing. In addition, the upper class often succeeded at the expense of the downtrodden poor.

II

Thomas Hardy, Victorian author, revolted against the class consciousness in British society. Because Hardy was originally from a very rural and remote part of England his most frequent contacts were primarily with lower class unskilled agricultural labourers. It was with these people that Hardy's sympathies rested.

Born in 1840, Thomas Hardy grew up in Wessex, an agricultural locale in the southwest corner of England. Hardy's birthplace was "a small cluster of tiny cottages, set off only by the inevitable tavern. It boasted neither church, school, nor post office. No main road ran through it. Dorchester itself, not yet tapped by railway lines, was self-contained enough but Upper Bockhampton was virgin, untouched by the steel of industrial culture, primitive, natural."[56]

Growing up in and around Dorchester put Hardy in contact with individuals whom he would never forget. His daily associations were with farmers' children, local shopkeepers, dairy maids, tavern keepers and the like. These individuals were rustic and unspoiled, untouched by the wheels of modern industry. In many ways they were fifty years behind times and yet this primitiveness is what endeared the people of the area to the heart of the author. There were certain qualities about

[56] Ernest Brennecke, Jr., The Life of Thomas Hardy (New York, 1925), p. 77.

the peasant folk which spoiled upon contact with the upper class.

The people of Wessex were slow-moving, clothed "in weather-worn garments whose cut, like the cut of their pro-nouns, had scarcely changed in generations..."[57] Such individuals were the dominating factors in Hardy's childhood. Identifying as he did with the downtrodden and poor, Hardy himself had feelings of class consciousness. As he grew into manhood he found himself caught in a dilemma: to which class did he truly belong.

Thomas Hardy came from a family with a mixed social background. His father was a common labourer and had made his living as a stone-mason. The family income was modest. On his father's side of the family then, the Hardys considered themselves part of the lower, working class. Hardy's mother, however, came from a long line of literary families; they had at one time had considerable wealth. In this respect, his family on his mother's side claimed to be upper class. However, "on both sides of his family the /social/ progression had been downward. From a position regarded by Victorian society as more worthy, that of landed proprietorship, the descent to the low thatched house on the edge of Egdon Heath was one that Hardy found hard to forget."[58]

In one respect Hardy grew up in an atmosphere of artificial and pretentious upper class values. At the same time he developed in a world peopled by genuine farm labourers tied to the earth by their work and their poverty. Caught in a pull between the two ends of the social scale, Thomas Hardy's feelings bent towards the rustic lower class.

[57] ibid.

[58] Carl J. Weber, Hardy of Wessex (Hamden, 1962), p. 7.

Caught in a class-conscious dilemma, Thomas Hardy lived in two worlds; his life was a double one. He lived both in the world of the wealthy and leisurely upper class and yet knew the realism of lower class life as well. "Hardy spoke with a Dorset accent, and he knew the rural dialect, but as a boy he was not permitted to speak it."[59] Although Hardy associated with the rural people of Dorchester, "his mother was too conscious of every mark of social inferiority to allow him to label himself by the rustic vocabulary."[60] When Hardy played with the youngsters in his area he acquired their habits, manners, language and rustic ways. His mother and father frowned on such customs and would not allow him to bring his lower class associates into their home. "Hardy soon learned that there was an invisible but distinct barrier between the life within his home and the life outside it."[61] This difference was the same as the barrier between the upper and lower classes. At the same time as he was growing into manhood Hardy learned another important lesson about English society. Not only was there a difference between life inside his home as compared to life outside the home but that very distinction made it clear to Hardy that there was a very clear barrier between the agricultural life of the lower class individuals whom he knew well and the landed gentry known to him as the upper class. From early childhood Thomas Hardy formed the ideas about classes and class consciousness which appeared in the novels he wrote as a mature man.

[59] ibid., pp. 19-20.

[60] ibid.

[61] Brennecke, Jr., op. cit., p. 80.

No exact date can be set for the first dawning of a sense of social distinction in Hardy's own mind, "but it was there before he had reached the age of ten; and, once planted in his mind, it never left him."[62] As Hardy grew into manhood the influence of his parents' social class consciousness became more pronounced and this in turn caused Hardy to become introspective and lonely. He knew not where to turn in his desire to identify with some facet of the social pattern. He criticized the society in which he lived; he expressed his criticism in his novels.

"Hardy's first novel, entitled The Poor Man and the Lady, emphasized throughout its actions the social disparity announced in the title."[63] In An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress and again in his later novels, the recognition of class disparity weighed more and more heavily upon him. The tales he wrote in the eighties and nineties reflected his early impressions of social discord.

"It is important to realize the early aspect of Hardy's life for it both determined and symbolized the ... sympathetic appreciation and pity /for the lower classes/ which was later on to characterize his whole artistic attitude."[64] The same theme of social conflict between the classes was evident in The Return of the Native written in 1878 and in his later novel The Mayor of Casterbridge, 1886.

[62] Weber, op. cit., p. 5.

[63] ibid.

[64] Brennecke, Jr., pp. cit., p. 81.

The period known as the "Hungry Forties" experienced by the agricultural workers and labourers greatly impressed author Thomas Hardy. Wessex was a locale which existed from day to day on agriculture and depended on food for the villages from agricultural production. The conditions of the Wessex region solidified in the mind of Thomas Hardy and impressed upon him the precarious existence of Wessex agricultural labourers of the lower class. When he was only ten Hardy knew a boy from his region who had starved to death during the famine years the agriculturists suffered.[65] Hardy's sympathy for the rustic heart grew over the years. In 1891 when many people in prosperous, industrial England believed class differences had been rectified, Thomas Hardy saw that one important aspect of British society remained unchanged. Class distinctions were as clear cut in 1890 as they were in 1815; only a slight transformation had taken place. Hardy saw that the former upper class, now in a high income bracket because they owned the factors of production, were the same type of individuals who had been the landed gentry fifty years previous. The lower class, instead of being agricultural labourers, were replaced by individuals who were just as distressed and in the same social category, the factory worker.[66] The situation of a wide gap between the upper and lower classes still existed but with the onset of the Industrial Revolution the characteristics of those two classes changed. There was still a stratified class system in England, and as a result there was still much conflict between the upper and lower classes.

[65]Weber, op. cit., p. 14.

[66]England at this time was primarily an urban nation (1890's).

"Hardy dramatized the evil of class feeling--how 'honest human affection will become shamefaced and mean under the frost of class-division and social prejudices'--in nearly all of his stories and novels."[67] In each novel, despite the major theme of morality, Thomas Hardy stressed the continuous existence of classes and the destruction such stratification caused to human beings. When the classes were pitted against each other, constantly in conflict, it was the lower class that suffered the most. Hardy strongly felt that the upper classes had a detrimental affect upon the lower class rustics. When they came in contact it seemed that it was the lower classes who suffered at the expense of the upper class.

The two novels in which Thomas Hardy most strongly voiced his opinions about class and class consciousness in Victorian society and the injustices such distinctions brought about were Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure. The poor, Hardy believed, were coarse but had the virtues of fidelity, simplicity, endurance, and tolerance. They were simple but pure. However, "this rural simplicity was threatened by aristocratic complexity."[68] The simple rustics became tainted and lost their virtue when they came in touch with the complex life of the upper class. The poor were corrupted when the two classes, upper and lower, conflicted. In Tess and in Jude are numerous examples of the upper and lower classes which Hardy felt so intensely about. He wove stories about the day to day lives of the common as well as the upper class people of Wessex, discussed examples of when and under what conditions the two

[67] Albert J. Guerard, Thomas Hardy (Cambridge, 1949), p. 24.

[68] ibid., p. 20.

classes came into contact with each other, and why they clashed. Both novels, Tess of the d'Urbervilles written in 1891 and Jude the Obscure in 1896, were set in the agricultural atmosphere which Hardy knew well. It was his technique to criticize the current social pattern by writing novels which were stories about the people who lived in the days of very early Victorian England. This was his advantage as an author, however, because Hardy wrote best about the people and the area with which he was most familiar. He truly entered the hearts, minds, and feelings of the Wessex population. His portrayals of such people and their problems, in turn made it possible for Hardy to enter into the feelings of his contemporaries. Tess and Jude were criticisms of a society of the past but the two novels also deal with the contemporary world and problems of Hardy's mature years.[69]

The scene of Hardy's novels is established in an agricultural setting in or near his home area of Dorchester in Wessex. Within this setting Tess was written; Hardy had two reasons in mind. First, he wanted to arouse sympathy for a virtuous girl who had a tragic life because she had been unjustly seduced by a member of the upper class. Secondly, Hardy hoped to make clear the unfair treatment the lower classes suffered on the account of the upper classes. It was in a rural setting that Hardy could best describe the contacts which Tess had both with the simple,[70] rustic ways of life but also with the superficial manners of the upper

[69] David Cecil, Hardy the Novelist (London, 1960), p. 18.

[70] This also gave Hardy an opportunity to say something about the deplorable situation of British agriculture in the nineteenth century.

class which Hardy so strongly resented. He not only sympathized with the downtrodden but stated that when the lower classes came into contact with the upper classes, the poor were sure to suffer because of the association. Tess' life had been destroyed as a result of her contact with the upper class roue, Alec d'Urberville. "The beautiful innocent maiden, Tess /representative of the lower class/ was betrayed by a wicked seducer /refers to Alec of the upper class/ and ended her life on the gallows tree."[71]

There are numerous examples in Tess which confirm Hardy's philosophy about the social classes in Victorian England. "A few very real problems recur in most of the /Hardy/ novels and provide a formal subject matter; the contrast between rural simplicity and aristocratic complexity and corruption, the pathos of regional and class deracination, and the destructive effect of class feeling."[72] Tess herself represents the simple rustic Hardy so much admires and individuals like Alec are upper class personalities with whom the lower class come into contact. The classes represented in the two Hardy novels, Tess of the d'Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure, in the author's mind stood for very specific elements in British society.

The upper class in Hardy's novels referred particularly to the remnants of a once-wealthy and titled family. The 'smaller gentry' still were considered landowners and had all the accouterments of the aristocratic

[71] Cecil, op. cit., p. 32.

[72] Guerard, op. cit., p. 19.

gentry but they still represented, in comparison to lower class workers, the upper stratum of British society. Class status was a relative topic and even though the gentry were, in Victorian society, on the way down the social ladder, in the eyes of the lower class the gentry were considered to be the upper class. The gentry or upper class income came from ownership of land. Even though they were not extremely wealthy, in fact, they sometimes were relatively poor themselves, they were nevertheless wealthier than the working class poor.

The entire setting of Tess of the d'Urbervilles was an agricultural one. Shaston and the village of Marlott plus the adjoining region of Blackmoor made up the locale in which the episode took place. Hardy described his native Wessex when he wrote:

> The village of Marlott lay amid the northeastern undulations of the beautiful Vale of Blakemoor, or Blackmoor, aforesaid, an engirdled and secluded region, for the most part untrodden as yet by tourist or landscape painter, though within a four-hours journey from London.[73]

It was in an area quite similar to the territory in which Hardy had grown up, that the representatives of both the upper and lower class lived, struggled, and died. In Tess of the d'Urbervilles the upper class gentry and lower class labourers of the farms were in frequent contact with each other due to the fact that they both lived in a rural, agricultural region.

Thomas Hardy manipulated the setting of the novel, Tess, in

[73] Thomas Hardy, Tess of the d'Urbervilles (New York, 1964), p. 22.

order to argue his ideas about the stratified system of class distinction which he saw not only in the England of the past but in the latter part of the nineteenth century as well. In a rural area both upper and lower class individuals were dependent upon the land in some manner for their very existence (upper and lower classes). Although the labourers no longer lived and ate on the premises of the landed gentry as they once had done during the days of the eighteenth century, the poor and the wealthy did come in contact with each other. Upper class individuals held positions of local importance and often had some sort of supervisory powers over the poor. In the case with Tess herself, her family of farm labourers obtained word that they had a legal claim to a titled family--the family and name of d'Urberville. As a result, Tess is actually sent to seek out an upper class relation so that she might 'claim kin.' This was a rare instance of upper and lower classes relating to each other, but there were many other examples in the every-day pattern of life in rustic Wessex and the nearby regions. Quite often when the lower classes were in want due to a famine or crop failure, they went to the landowners to express and, hopefully, to fulfill their needs. The gentry were paternal overseers of the labouring lower class.

In Tess of the d'Urbervilles Hardy assigned two characters to the landed upper class gentry: Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare.[74] The author's attack on the upper class originated with a description of the titled d'Urbervilles. Instead of being legitimate claimants to aristocracy,

[74] It seems ironic that both characters are men and lead to the destruction and eventual downfall of a female member of the lower class.

the family's source was from a merchant who had adopted an important sounding name so that it would appear that his family was aristocratic. In other words, they were impersonators.

> The d'Urbervilles--or Stoke-d'Urbervilles, as they at first called themselves--were a somewhat unusual family. When old Mr. Simon Stoke had made his fortune as an honest merchant in the North, he decided to settle as a county man in the South of England; in doing this he felt the necessity of recommencing with a name that would not too readily identify him with the smart tradesman of the past and that would be less commonplace than the original bald, stark words. He considered that d'Urberville looked and sounded as well as any and d'Urberville accordingly was annexed to his own name for himself and his heirs eternally.[75]

It was into such a pseudo-aristocratic family of d'Urberville that a son, Alec, was born. In his description of Alec and his subsequent behavior, Thomas Hardy very vividly portrays his feelings and sentiments about the upper class. Hardy reinforces these denunciations when he discussed Alec d'Urberville's contacts with not only Tess but the entire village of the rusties of Marlott.

Alec d'Urberville was typical of the upper class gentry because he had title (even though adopted), family heritage, money and leisure. He was reckless, hard-living, a cad and a playboy. He could best be described in one word--roue. Alec was a cigar-smoking, rich young vulgarian who lived only for his own animal pleasure.[76]

[75]Hardy, Tess, pp. 50-51.

[76]Cecil, op. cit., p. 115.

> He had an almost swarthy complexion, with full lips, badly moulded, though red and smooth, above which was a well-groomed black moustache with curled points, though his age could not be more than three- or four-and-twenty. Despite the touches of barbarism in his countours, there was a singular force in the gentleman's face and in his bold rolling eye.[77]

There seems to be no doubt that Hardy considered Alec as the villain in his novel, Tess of the d'Urbervilles. He let Alec d'Urberville represent all that was corrupt and evil in the upper classes. It was the character Alec who seduced Tess, a lower class farm girl whom Hardy called 'a pure woman.' Not only did Alec take advantage of an innocent rustic but in addition he showed little concern for the consequences of his actions. Hardy, in the character of Alec, very clearly points out that he felt the upper classes were often irresponsible and were unconcerned for the fate of the lower classes. When the upper and lower classes did come into contact with each other, and as a result conflicted as did Alec and Tess, it was the upper class individual who survived and the lower class person who was made to suffer because of the relationship. Irresponsibility and a lack of concern for the outcome of their actions, especially when those actions had to do with the lower classes, were sins of the upper class which Hardy could not forgive. Therefore, he wrote about them and exposed them to the reading world.

In Tess of the d'Urbervilles Hardy's sympathies were with the common agricultural labourers and their families. Before Tess came in contact with Alec, her family name had been 'Durbeyfield' and considered

[77] Hardy, Tess, p. 51.

themselves to be no higher in the social scale and no higher in social importance than the lowest member of the societal ladder. Hardy wrote Tess from the common man's point of view and wrote criticizing the values of the upper classes. He considered the aristocracy hypocritical and artificial compared to the genuine wholesomeness of the lower class working people.

A sense of injustice against the pure simple rustics is portrayed in descriptions of Tess, her family, and the villagers of Marlott.

> Why it was that upon this beautiful feminine tissue, [Tess] ... there should have been traced such a coarse pattern as it was doomed to receive; ... many thousand years of analytical philosophy have failed to explain ...[78]

Hardy believed the agricultural labourers, the poor lower class, were taken advantage of by the upper classes. The coarse pattern traced upon Tess was the imprint of Alec d'Urberville's rash actions. Hardy was disturbed by the fact that Alec never had to pay for his crimes but Tess, who was unaware of the trouble she had gotten into, suffered the remainder of her life. This was the injustice in the social system as Hardy saw it.

Tess and her lower class relatives came in contact with one other example of the upper class which served to solidify Hardy's ideas about the gap between the classes in the minds of the reading public. Angel Clare was not quite the demon that Hardy described in the characterization of Alec d'Urberville but there are similarities in the family backgrounds

[78] Hardy, Tess, p. 89.

from which both young men originated.

> Old Mr. Clare was a clergyman of a type which, within the last twenty years, has well nigh dropped out of contemporary life. 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, he had in his raw youth made up his mind once and for all on the deeper questions of existence and admitted no further reasoning on them thenceforward. He was regarded even by those of his own date and school of thinking as extreme; while, on the other hand, those totally opposed to him were unwillingly won to admiration for his thoroughness and for the remarkable power he showed in dismissing all question as to principles in his energy for apply them ... One thing he certainly was--sincere.[79]

Alec d'Urberville came from a family of landed gentry, a family that had earned its money in the market but acquired its title by hoax. Angel Clare's family represented the original aristocracy; one facet of the upper class was the clergy and Angel Clare's family had a long tradition of clerics in their heritage.

Although Angel Clare showed signs of wishing to abandon the upper class background from which he came, he had not lost contact with his family, especially his two brothers, pillars of the church and members of the landed gentry. Thomas Hardy expressed his opinion of the Established Church and its clergy in the characters of Angel Clare's two brothers. Angel himself is also part of this aspect of society but he is a vague figure because he threatens to drop the ways of the upper class. His two brothers, however, are perfect examples of aristocrats.

[79] Hardy, Tess, pp. 173-174.

> After breakfast he /Angel Clare/ walked with his two brothers, non-evangelical, well-educated, hall-marked young men, correct to their remotest fibre; such unimpeachable models as are turned out yearly by the lathe of a systematic tuition.[80]

Hardy continues the description of Angel's two brothers by explaining their clerical background.

> If these two noticed Angel's growing social ineptness, he noticed their growing mental limitations. Felix seemed to him all Church, Cuthbert all College. His Diocesan Synod and Visitations were the mainsprings of the world to the one; Cambridge to the other. Each brother candidly recognized that there were a few unimportant scores of millions of outsiders in civilized society, persons who were neither university men nor churchmen; but they were to be tolerated rather than reckoned with and respected.[81]

In one brief paragraph Thomas Hardy cut through the social stratification of Victorian England and attacked both the church and education as well as the class system with a double-edged sword. Angel Clare's family represented to Hardy everything he objected to in the upper class factor of British Victorian society. This very attitude of superiority kept the upper and lower classes separate and was responsible for the paternal attitude of the rich towards the poor.

Thomas Hardy developed these strong feelings against both the church and British education in the last novel he ever wrote, Jude the Obscure. There were small indications, as previously mentioned, which

[80] ibid., pp. 175-176.

[81] ibid.

were evident of such emotions about these institutions long before Jude the Obscure was written. In Tess of the d'Urbervilles there are several passages which give an indication that Hardy was aware of class distinctions in the areas of education and the church. The discussion between Angel Clare and his brothers is one of them.

Actually Hardy was sympathetic towards Clare primarily because Angel Clare tried to close the gap which existed between the classes. He showed signs of leaving his upper class ties and joining the lower ranks. This was perhaps most clearly evident when Angel married Tess. Angel Clare was an exception; he was an example of an upper class individual who profited by his contact with the lower classes. In Victorian society it was possible for an upper class individual to move down the social scale and in this particular case, Hardy pointed out that such a move was a beneficial one. However, it was not possible for the lower classes to be brought up into the world of the upper aristocracy, the rich and titled. When Angel Clare wanted to marry Tess Durbeyfield, the maid of a dairy, it was necessary for him to give up his family ties and go into the ranks of the lower class himself. He could not incorporate Tess into the upper class establishment of his family. She clearly did not belong to the world of the parson and the scholar.

Hardy described Angel Clare as a mixture of upper class habits and lower class emotions. He was the youngest in his aristocratic, clerical family and his ties to the upper class, landed gentry were very loose ones. He, somewhat like Hardy, was a combination of both classes. His family claimed to be aristocratic and yet Clare's contacts were with

agricultural rustics. Angel Clare was caught in the middle, in between social classes.

> ... something nebulous, preoccupied, vague, in his bearing and regard, marked him as one who probably had no very definite aim or concern about his material future. Yet as a lad people had said of him that he was one who might do anything if he tried ... He was the youngest son of his father, a poor parson at the other end of the country, and had arrived at Talbothays Dairy as a six months' pupil after going the round of some other farms, his object being to acquire a practical skill in the various processes of farming, with a view either to the Colonies or the tenure of a home-farm as circumstances might decide.[82]

Angel Clare was caught, not unlike Hardy himself, in a dilemma pulled between two separate and distinct social classes. His parents wanted him to follow their expectations in the upper class tradition and he refused, hence they viewed him as flirting with a future in the ranks of the lower class. Despite his sympathies, Angel Clare was still viewed by the rustics as their superior; he was forever upper class.

> Mr. Angel Clare--he that is learning milking and that plays the harp--never says much to us. /These are the comments of one of the dairymaids./ He is a pa'son's son, and is too much taken up wi' his own thoughts to notice girls. He is the dairyman's pupil--learning farming in all its branches. He has learnt sheep-farming at another place, and he's now mastering dairy-work ... Yes, he is quite the gentleman-born. His father is the Reverent Mr. Clare at Emminster -- a good many miles from here.[83]

Even though Angel Clare rejected the values of the upper class and learned the ways of the working class, he was never really accepted as

[82] Hardy, Tess, p. 130.

[83] ibid., p. 129.

one of them. The common people with whom he associated consistently thought of him as different, as upper class, as the son of a parson. Throughout Tess of the d'Urbervilles Angel Clare made attempts to break away from his upper class heritage and tried to join the lower class. "The material distinctions of rank and wealth he increasingly despised. Even the 'good old family' ... had no aroma for him ..."[84]

It is difficult to assign Clare to a social slot and define him as an upper class individual who came into contact and conflict with the lower class. He did come in contact with the poor but he abandoned his upper class family to do so. Despite all his good efforts, however, it seems clear that Hardy, in the long run, considered Angel Clare to be a representative of the upper class who meets and corrupts the lower class peasant. Even though he was an ambivalent character caught in a vise between upper and lower classes, Clare followed the same pattern as did Alec d'Urberville. When his associations with Tess proved a disappointment to him[85] he left her and shunned responsibility for his actions just as Alec did. In Hardy's mind, this fact alone puts both men into the same category.

Actually any discussion about Angel Clare turns into a series of conflicting statements because he is part of both of the worlds Hardy was familiar with. Perhaps the best summary is the one Hardy wrote himself about Clare: "Despite his heterodoxy, faults, and weaknesses, Clare was a man with a conscience."[86]

[84]Hardy, Tess, pp. 132-133.

[85]Clare left Tess when he found out she was not a virgin when they were married.

[86]Hardy, Tess, p. 170.

In comparison to the lower class, as represented by Tess, her family and the village peasants of Marlott, both Alec d'Urberville and Angel Clare are clearly upper class representatives, the case of Clare being a borderline exception. Recalling the fact that the upper class had considerable income and the lower class had none, both Alec and Angel had access to family wealth. In this respect there was a very sharp distinction between the characters Hardy defined as upper class and the rustic poor.

Mrs. Durbeyfield, Tess' mother, was an example of the wife of a typical agricultural labourer squeezing out an existence in a rural and struggling community. Tess, although a lower class individual herself, had hopes of something better; she saw her mother as hopelessly caught in the web of despair brought on by too much work and too little food.

> There stood her mother amid the group of children, as Tess had left her, hanging over the Monday washing-tub, which had now, as always, lingered on to the end of the week ... As usual, Mrs. Durbeyfield was balanced in the aforesaid business of rocking her youngest child. The cradle-rockers had done hard duty for so many years, under the weight of so many children ...[87]

The same type of fruitless life faced practically every individual in Wessex who had to labour on the land in order to survive. If any misfortune occurred, the whole village's existence was threatened. There seemed to be no question in Hardy's mind that the poor should be assigned to the lower social class category. Theirs was a life of continuous gloom and hard times.

[87]Hardy, Tess, pp. 30-31.

> The staple conversation of the farms ... was on the uselessness of saving money; and smock-frocked arithmeticians, leaning on their ploughs or hoes, would enter into calculations of great nicety to prove that parish relief was a fuller provision for a man in his old age than any which could result from savings out of their wages during a whole lifetime.[88]

There was a sharp contrast between characters such as Alec and Angel Clare and the village people of Marlott. They found their lives intermingled and yet they were as distinct from each other as black is from white.

Perhaps the most tragic example in the struggle and conflict between the classes in Tess of the d'Urbervilles is Tess herself.

> She was a fine and handsome girl--not handsomer than some others, possibly--but her mobile peony mouth and large innocent eyes added eloquence to colour and shape. She wore a red ribbon in her hair and was the only one of the white company who could boast of such a pronounced adornment.[89]

The entire novel of Tess of the d'Urbervilles revolved around the story of an innocent rustic daughter of a lower class agricultural labourer who, despite her naivete, was seduced and consequently destroyed by her contact with a young and sporting member of the upper class landed gentry. This was a very abrupt way of confronting his readers with an example of a serious social disease--class divisions. The theme of Tess was controversial; it was "the story of a seduced girl making a futile

[88]Hardy, Tess, p. 75.

[89]ibid., p. 25.

but heroic effort to help her worthless family in a blighted world, where families go down, down, down."[90] Thomas Hardy used the technique to jar Victorians out of their complacency and self-satisfaction with life as it was.

The agricultural sector of British economy had reached the peak of prosperity around 1870 and many felt all social ills related to agriculture and the lower classes of society had disappeared.[91]

III

Thomas Hardy wrote another novel in 1896, Jude the Obscure, hoping to prove to the satisfied individuals in British society that they were closing their eyes to social problems which still existed. Although still very closely tied to agriculture, Hardy used the clergy and the field of education as additional voices for his criticisms against class distinction in British society. The clergy at this time was simply another aspect of the landowning aristocracy.

The Church (Church of England) and education were very tightly knit together. Much of what Hardy knew about both was the result of personal experience. "As a boy Hardy had been a regular attendant at the services in Stinsford Church. Entering the Church would have involved him in the pursuit of a university education -- a vague and distant goal for a boy in a home where there had been no previous experience with Oxford or Cambridge."[92]

[90]Weber, op. cit., p. 119.

[91]Another reason for the complacency of the Victorian people was the series of laws which were passed between 1815 and 1870 rectifying social ills.

[92]Weber, op. cit., p. 19.

There are strong parallels between Thomas Hardy and Jude Fawley in Jude the Obscure. Hardy clearly tells much about his own life and his personal experiences with class distinction and divisions as he related the tale of a young man set on going to a university. Hardy was aware of gross injustices in the Church and in the clergy who were responsible for administering public education in England. "He /Hardy/ thought," therefore, "of telling the story of a young man who could not go to Oxford, who after heroic struggles and ultimate failure committed suicide."[93]

Jude represents Hardy's feelings about the upper class clergy and their monopoly on education in England. Also, Jude is a portrayal of a lower class boy who was faced with living in parts of two worlds, his own lower class world and an upper class existence at Oxford or Cambridge. There are many aspects of Jude Fawley that remind the reader of Hardy's own background and would explain his prejudices and thoughts about the social classes.

Thomas Hardy was born two miles from Stinsford (Mellstock) and Jude Fawley came from Mellstock in South Wessex. Hardy was born a bookworm and in Jude the boy was crazy about books. When Hardy was a young boy a local youngster driving a baker's cart had stopped him and wanted to borrow Hardy's Latin grammar. In the novel Jude Fawley asked for some grammars and also drove a baker's cart for his great-aunt. When Hardy was older he taught himself Homer just as did Jude. These and many other instances point out the similarities between Jude Fawley and

[93] ibid., p. 141.

Thomas Hardy's own life.[94]

Jude himself had come from a lower class background but was confronted with representatives of the upper class in the form of clergymen. Most of the clergy were a form of local gentry and were frequently landowners. They came in contact with the lower class peasants in the process of their religious duties but also because they played the role of the squirarchy towards the labouring class. The Anglican parsons were considered members of the local gentry. "He /the parson/ enjoyed a comfortable and leisured gentility, second only to that of the squire in the parish."[95]

Although the clergy, according to Colquhoun's table, were part of the upper class, they were divided within the social category. "The Bishops, the Cathedral clergy and wealthier parish priests were part of the 'enjoying'class;"[96] the remainder were lesser gentry. The upper class clergy Hardy was familiar with constituted both the local gentry and a few representatives of the higher clergy, if the term may be used. Thomas Hardy criticized the clergy for the injustices committed against the lower classes. The offenses were primarily in the field of education; Hardy felt that only the privileged were able to acquire a good education when the clerics were in charge of the whole educational system.

> The development of public education was difficult to achieve. Long before the 1840's, Whitbread in 1806, Brougham in 1820, and Roebuck in 1833 had brought forward bills for creating a rate-aided system of

[94]Weber, op. cit., p. 201.

[95]Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., p. 193.

[96]Trevelyan, op. cit., p. 45.

> education. The march of intellect, they believed, needed a nationaly enforced discipline, and the State would have to supplement the work of the two main voluntary educational societies--the British and Foreign School Society (founded in 1807) which included both Churchmen and Nonconformists, and the National Society (founded in 1811) which was exclusively Church of England.[97]

Efforts to establish a national system of education were thwarted due to the religious zeal of the sponsors of the voluntary societies. There was a clash between Anglican demands for complete control and Nonconformist emphasis on religious liberty.

Thomas Hardy's concern about education in England fits in quite closely with his concern about the rigid class system in British society. He felt that restricting education to the 'chosen' was but another form of class division and stratification with exclusion of the lower classes. The novel Jude the Obscure was the instrument Hardy used to express his feelings against the Church and its control over the British educational system.

During the eighteenth century the primary education of the poor had been left to the zeal of voluntary workers, prompted by religious, charitable, and other motives. A large proportion of the population was entirely without the means of education and this area was not considered a duty of the state. What education was available came through religious channels. There was much disagreement between the Established Church and various Dissenter groups for neither accepted the manner in which

97 Asa Briggs, op. cit., p. 336.

their children were receiving religious-educational instruction.

Around the turn of the century the British government recognized the need to take some investigative steps in order to rectify the situation.

> In 1816 Brougham's Commission sat to inquire into the state of the education of the lower orders in London, but the evidence taken concerned chiefly the abuse of charitable endowments. In 1818 its inquiry was made to extend to the whole country, and it continued to sit for many years. There were shown to be 19,326 infant and day schools of all kinds, attended by 605,704 pupils of all classes; whereas it was estimated that the number of children requiring elementary teaching was over two millions. To remedy the defective supply Brougham brought forward a Bill in 1820, in which he proposed a local rate, placing local control in the hands of the magistrates ... The Bill was rejected.[98]

Since no solution could be found to the question of education and the state, the clergy continued to administer the schools of the nation. The Forster Education Act was not passed until 1870 and it was not a complete solution for it did not deal directly with the injustices of education at the university level. As late as 1870 Thomas Hardy still saw signs of inequalities in the social system in the field of education. It was for this reason that he penned Jude the Obscure. The novel was his last attempt to awaken the reading public and force them to become aware of the fact that classes did still exist and that those classes were essentially no different than the separate upper and lower classes he had known as a boy in Wessex.

Conditions at Oxford and Cambridge were so strict and uncompromising

[98]Traill, op. cit., p. 831.

that it was virtually impossible for anyone other than the wealthy aristocrats and their sons to go there. Ability in any other than the upper class was ignored.

> At the beginning of the nineteenth century the excellence of a student's merits were tested at Cambridge only in one way, by the Mathematical Tripos ... At Oxford there had been no examination for degrees until the beginning of the century, when classical and mathematical honours lists began. Until 1850 no other radical change was effected at either university.[99]

Throughout the nineteenth century the number of persons admitted to the universities was extremely small. Cambridge had reluctantly admitted additional students but the increase was not proportionate to the growth of the population in England at this time. Jude the Obscure opened up the socio-economic problems of British education in the nineteenth century. Jude Fawley made an attempt to breach the gap which existed between his lower class agricultural background and the upper class world of the academy. Hardy illustrated the class conflicts in Jude through Jude himself, his farm wife Arabella, and Mr. Phillotson. In Jude the Obscure it is somewhat difficult to assign any major character to the upper class because there is no specific individual who exactly fits the role. The most likely character would be Mr. Phillotson, who, at the beginning of the novel left the agricultural community and went to the city in search of a university degree. Mr. Phillotson's intention was to solidify his identification with the clerical

[99] ibid., p. 846.

upper class, those individuals who controlled the world of the academics.

There are contacts and resulting conflicts between both the lower and upper classes. The primary struggle in the novel exists between Jude and the upper class in the academic world. Since the clergy and the scholars of Oxford and Cambridge were often one and the same, Jude was in a clash with both the Church and the whole field of education.

Jude Fawley originated from a remote, rural corner of England. His guardian was an old bakerwoman. He was something of an orphan in the world since Hardy describes his parents as both dead. Jude's great-aunt described him thus:

> He came from Mellstock, down in South Wessex ... where his father was living, and was took wi' the shakings for death, and died in two days ... It would ha' been a blessing if Goddy-mighty had took thee too, wi' thy mother and father, poor useless boy.[100]

Throughout the novel Jude's lower class background and rustic heritage prevented him from ever breaking down the walls which divided the classes. After a disastrous contact with the upper class at Christminster /Hardy's name for an institution similar to Oxford or Cambridge/, Hardy described Jude as:

> ... oddly swathed, pale as a monumental figure in alabaster, and much stared at by other passengers. ... On his face showed the determined purpose that alone sustained him, but to which his weakness afforded a sorry foundation.[101]

Not unlike Tess, Jude had lost everything once he came in contact with

[100] Hardy, Jude the Obscure (New York, 1961), p. 17.

[101] ibid., p. 382.

members of the upper class. As late as 1896 when Jude was written and published, Hardy still felt that any contact between the classes would result in the downfall of the simple labourers. In the case of Jude, this proved to be true.

Jude had been warned by his fellow villagers not to attempt to enter the world of the upper class but he was intent on doing so regardless. His great-aunt said about Christminster, "It is a place much too good for you ever to have much to do with ..."[102] She continued by remarking, "We've never had anything to do with folk in Christminster, nor folk in Christminster with us."[103] Such comments reflect the conception which common people held about a location reserved for the upper class. Unaware of the fate which awaited him there, Jude continued to think of Christminster as "the heavenly Jerusalem."[104]

Hardy stressed over and over again in Jude the Obscure that the town of Christminster was reserved for the upper class. When Jude Fawley asked a neighbor man about the place, the man forwarned him:

> Ah, young man, you'd have to get your head screwed on t'other way before you could read what they read there. 'Tis all learning there--nothing but learning, except religion. And that's learning, too, for I never could understand it. Yes, 'tis a serious-minded place.[105]

Hardy very clearly expressed his own feelings through the lips of a

[102] ibid., p. 22.

[103] ibid.,

[104] ibid., p. 24.

[105] Hardy, Jude, p. 28.

local villager. Class discrimination was a very obvious part of the world of education which was reserved for the upper class. There was no place in the upper class world for a lower class labourer who aspired to more. Jude himself realized that he was reaching for the impossible but he tried to break down the barrier between the classes anyway. The result was his own downfall. Hardy again demonstrated that when the lower class rustics come in contact with the upper class aristocrats, the lower classes will be made to suffer as a result of the relationship. Once Jude had experienced personal catastrophe due to his failure to obtain the goal he set for himself, he despairs and ultimately brings about his own destruction. He pessimistically thinks to himself:

> They seem laughing at me! The phantoms all about here, in the college archways, and windows. They used to look friendly in the old days, particularly Addison, and Gibbon, and Johnson, and Dr. Browne, and Bishop Ken ------.[106]

A second and perhaps clearer example of the lower class rustic in Jude the Obscure appeared in the character of Arabella.

> She was a fine dark-eyed girl, not exactly handsome, but capable of passing as such at a little distance, despite some coarseness of skin and fibre. She had a round and prominent bosom, full lips, perfect teeth, and the rich complexion of a Cochin hen's egg. She was a complete and substantial animal ... [107]

Her father was a farmer and a local pig-breeder. Arabella herself worked

[106] Ibid., p. 387.

[107] Hardy, Jude, p. 43.

to help her parents in their business by cleaning the innards of pigs. Most of her friends and associates originated from the same background as did she. The young woman with whom she worked shared local gosspi and took part in the same daily activities as Arabella. Hardy portrays her as a typical, rather crude, daughter of the agricultural world of Wessex. When she and Jude married, she kept him at the same social level as herself. She squelched Jude's aspirations and maintained their level of living as it had always been -- that of the common labourer or farmer.

The only figure in Jude the Obscure who clearly resembled the upper class was Mr. Phillotson.[108] He was a local schoolmaster who left Mellstock to seek a career in Christminster. Jude followed in his footsteps.

Phillotson, like Angel Clare, was in Hardy's mind an ambivalent character. He was caught at the crossroads of the two classes, upper and lower. He knew the value that a university degree would have for him if he was to be successful. A degree was required if he was to be a member of the upper class. "It is the necessary hallmark of a man who wants to do anything ..." he told Jude.[109] His dream was to be a man of the university, a university graduate and then be ordained. Unfortunately, Phillotson did not succeed in achieving his goal. When Jude came to Christminster he sought out Mr. Phillotson, expecting to find him in a position of high importance. He was informed, however, that Phillotson was a village schoolmaster and no more. "Then he couldn't do it!" Jude remarked.

[108] Jude also came in contact with the deans of the university but only by mail. They represented the elite of the upper class but his relationship to them was distant.

[109] Hardy, Jude, p. 14.

In Jude the Obscure Phillotson could be said to have been a symbol or a figure who stood for all that was of the upper class in university life. In actuality there was no specific individual in the novel with whom Jude came in contact who truly represented the clerical facet of the upper class. No one specific individual came in contact with Jude to illustrate the conflict which existed between his goal to enter the upper class university life and the aristocratic world of Christminster. Phillotson is the closest example in the entire novel for he left the agricultural community and at least made an attempt to stay in and around the academic life.

One might say in Jude that the concept of class stratification and class conflicts brought about by such stratification was not clearly explained in the novel, specifically because there was no one individual character to represent the upper class. Despite the fact that Phillotson failed to reach his goal and therefore was perhaps forever just as much a member of the lower class as was Jude himself, one of the major themes of Jude was one of class pitted against class. Instead of arguing his point of view using specific characters to represent the upper and lower class, Hardy drew a vivid picture of the life of the lower class labourers and wrote the entire novel as a story of the upper class in contrast to the common man. It was a picture of one man, Jude, against the whole world, so to speak. Hardy's Jude explained how the aspirations of a labouring youth could never be fulfilled as long as there was a barrier between the social classes. Jude stood for all young people[110] in England who were being denied progression in the world due

[110] ibid., p. 103.

to the unfair pressures put upon them by the upper class. The upper class was actually preventing progress in modern England. This, thought Hardy, was a serious defect in the social structure of his native land.

> Only a wall divided him /Jude/ from those ... men who had nothing to do from morning till night but to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest. Only a wall--but what a wall ! [111]

The wall was built of prejudice and class hatred. The wall in Jude was a symbol of the barrier which stood between the upper and lower classes.

It seemed unusual to many of Hardy's readers that he should attempt to be a contemporary social critic because his stories were, as they perceived them, fifty years behind times. Hardy used a pre-industrial setting for Tess and Jude to illustrate the grievances he had against a society that was deep in the middle of the machine age. However, it is important to note that the same situation existed in pre-industrial England as in modern industrial British society. Hardy felt that his contemporaries had forgotten that social imbalances still existed. He made his issues very clear to the reading public by placing his characters in an agricultural, pre-industrialized environment where social disparities were more clearly exposed to the naked eye.

A second aspect of Hardy's social criticism pertained to economic conditions in England. Not only did Hardy write in a manner which compared an earlier agricultural age with a later industrialized period of time, but he actually foresaw dangers threatening British agricultural life once again. When he was thirty-five, Thomas Hardy saw all

[111] ibid., p. 88.

about him the signs of another agricultural depression. With that depression he feared would come the same social and economic disease he had experienced in his youth in Wessex. Agricultural workers would face years of famine; the upper class landowners would again profit. He foresaw the pitting of class against class when the common man would once again be made to suffer at the hands of the upper class.

Thomas Hardy saw a social malady in the present and future of England and tried to make his reading public aware of the danger. His public rejected him. He was able to approach the commonest aspects of life in such a manner as to lay bare its real significance in a general scheme of things, and to present an apparently trivial situation in such a way as to make it the vehicle for the communication of an ultimate truth.[112]

To many, however, the truth was difficult to accept so it was rejected and discarded. The new upper class -- the wealthy industrial middle class-- refused to look at the world about them in realistic terms and as a result closed their eyes and deafened their ears to social critics. Excuses were made and Tess and Jude were objected to on moral grounds. The middle class was offended. Upon the publication of Tess, the public could talk of nothing else but the ethical and moral sympathy Hardy gave to an unwed mother. The public did not see that her story was a plea for simple charity and at the same time was a bitter attack against Victorian social hypocrisy. Jude was likewise attacked by the public because Hardy cried out for a realistic approach to the

[112]Ernest Brennecke, Thomas Hardy's Universe (New York, 1966), p. 13.

problem of divorce. The moral values of the Victorians had been attacked and their pride offended; the public looked no further into Hardy's novels to see the deeper meaning. His issues about class division and conflict were ignored, overshadowed by Victorian hypocrisy.

If it is true that an age is reflected in its literature, then Tess and Jude were truly representative of the Victorian age. Historians of the present and of the future can look back and see not only that Thomas Hardy was a social critic who made clear the class consciousness in British society but also that his Victorian contemporaries were hypocrites who heard him not. Hardy never wrote another novel.

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