

INTRODUCTION

By way of defining the scope and nature of this dissertation, it should be said that it attempts no comprehensive study in any particular form of Thomas Hardy's writings - his fiction, short story, poetry or poetic drama, but concentrates on the author's view of the world and life expressed in them. The object is to prove that Hardy's own term "evolutionary meliorism" sums up his view more appropriately than the term "pessimism" used by the critics and reviewers.

Hardy rejected Christian theology with its stress on the benevolent nature of the Creator and hope of deliverance from misery, as part of the divine plan, with the coming of the kingdom of God. His view of life as evil is partly due to his rejection of the theological idea of Christianity, but chiefly due to his concept of the blind Immanent Will controlling the world. Hardy's Immanent will is much similar to Schopenhauer's Will to live and Nietzsche's Will to power. Metaphysically, it is the First Cause, or the irrational element of the world ground, which made the blunder of starting the creative process, giving rise to the miseries of existence. Practically, it is the desire to live, or to live more fully, present in every form of life, expressing itself as passion, desire, ambition, rivalry and combat, and producing suffering and destruction. As sexual desire it procreates life, and as social strife and war it produces new social order,

institution and dynasty, destroying the old ones. The blindness of the Will is the unpurposiveness of this continual process of creation and destruction. This view of Will made pessimism unavoidable to Hardy, and he was a pessimist. But the critics so concentrate on Hardy's pessimism that his success in overcoming the pessimistic mood and becoming a meliorist goes unnoticed. Pessimism is nearer than optimism to meliorism, and Hardy turned a meliorist by adapting his idea of the Will to the evolutionary idea of the metaphysicians like Schelling and Hartmann.

Metaphysically, the evolution of the First Cause is the dawning of consciousness on the Unconscious or the World ground, by which the initial error of creating life and life's misery is remedied. Practically, it is the spread of reason or promotion of consciousness in the world of beings, hastening its realization about the deceptive and destructive nature of passion and desire and helping it conquer the Will to live by developing the wish not to live.

The melioristic implication of Hardy's evolutionary idea is that, with the gradual spread of reason, the tendency to work by instinct will decrease, and strife and rivalry, plight and pain, will diminish, till the whole of the world comes to be ruled by reason and all passion and pursuit cease to exist. But passion and pursuit being the essence of life, what remains when they disappear? Nothing.

This is Hardy's view of the end of the evolutionary process. For him, meliorism means the lessening of misery during the process and the coming of peace and rest with the extinction of life at the end. Hardy's meliorism promises no fulfilment, no joy and no happiness, but only peace. In respect of the ultimate attainment, Hardy's view partly resembles Buddhist nirvāna and differs widely from the christian view of the coming of eternal joy and happiness in the kingdom of God.

Hardy's view clearly shows his rejection of Christian theology, but to call his views un-Christian on that ground is to miss his never-failing faith in what he understood to be the essence of Christianity — Christ's teaching about the essential goodness of man and its value in bringing about amelioration of the world and its deliverance from misery. Hardy thought of amelioration in his own way and relied on the power of reason in effecting deliverance, but he never failed to stress that goodness of human soul is indispensable for urging individuals to work for the spread of reason. Reason and love — the intellectual and the moral and emotional capacity of man, must work together in order to effect deliverance. Reason alone, without love is impotent. Hardy may not have been a christian in his belief, but he was a true Christian in his faith in Christ's teaching about human potentiality.

The dissertation concludes with an estimate of Hardy's evolutionary meliorism. Hardy's idea is unique in character and positive in ideal. It is thoroughly consistent and logical. Above all, it is essentially modern in its rejection of everything supernatural and occult and in its stress on human potentiality.

CONTENTS

	Pages
Chapter I	
Christian Message and Hardys' responses	
Chapter II	
Hardy's outlook and its Causes	
Chapter III	
Immanent will in Hardy	
Chapter IV	
Hardy's idea of Evolution	
Chapter V	
Evolutionary Process in Hardy's Works	
Chapter VI	
Melioristic Implication of Hardy's Evolutionary Ideas	
Chapter VII	
An Estimate of Hardy's Evolutionary Meliorism	