

THOMAS HARDY

Wessex Tales



WESSEX TALES

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That Is to Say

The Three Strangers · A Tradition of Eighteen
Hundred and Four · The Melancholy Hussar ·
The Withered Arm · Fellow-townsmen ·
Interlopers at the Knap · The Distracted
Preacher

by

THOMAS HARDY

INTRODUCTION AND NOTES BY

F. B. Pinion

70059

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Notes and editorial matter
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Hardy's Major Works with year of book publication

- 1871 Desperate Remedies
- 1872 Under the Greenwood Tree
- 1873 A Pair of Blue Eyes
- 1874 Far from the Madding Crowd
- 1876 The Hand of Ethelberta
- 1878 The Return of the Native
- 1880 The Trumpet-Major
- 1881 A Laodicean
- 1882 Two on a Tower
- 1886 The Mayor of Casterbridge
- 1887 The Woodlanders
- 1888 Wessex Tales
- 1891 A Group of Noble Dames
- 1891 Tess of the d'Urbervilles
- 1894 Life's Little Ironies
- 1896 [1895] Jude the Obscure
- 1897 The Well-Beloved
- 1898 Wessex Poems
- 1902 Poems of the Past and the Present
- 1904 The Dynasts, pt 1
- 1906 The Dynasts, pt 2
- 1908 The Dynasts, pt 3
- 1909 Time's Laughingstocks
- 1913 A Changed Man and Other Tales
- 1914 Satires of Circumstance
- 1917 Moments of Vision
- 1922 Late Lyrics and Earlier
- 1923 The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall
- 1925 Human Shows
- 1928 Winter Words
- 1952 Our Exploits at West Poley

Glossary of Place-names

Locations of smaller places are given in mileage and direction with reference to well-known places.

ANGLEBURY. Wareham.

BUDMOUTH (REGIS). Weymouth.

CASTERBRIDGE. Dorchester.

CHALK-NEWTON. Maiden Newton, $7\frac{1}{2}$ NW Dorchester.

DAGGER'S GRAVE. Dagger's Gate, 1 NW Lulworth Cove.

EGDON (HEATH). Puddletown Heath and eastward, north of the Frome valley.

EVERSHEAD. Evershot, 6 WNW Cerne Abbas ('Abbot's-Cernel').

HOLMSTOKE. In the region of West Holme, Stokeford, and East Stoke, 2-4 W Wareham.

KING'S HINTOCK. Melbury Osmond, 7 NW Cerne Abbas ('Abbot's Cernel').

KINGSBERE. Bere Regis, 10 ENE Dorchester.

KNOLLSEA. Swanage.

LULWIND. Lulworth Cove.

NETHER-MOYNTON. Owermoigne, 6 SE Dorchester.

PORT-BREDY. Bridport.

RINGSWORTH. Ringstead Bay, $5\frac{1}{2}$ ENE Weymouth.

SHERTON (ABBAS). Sherborne.

SHOTTSFORD-FORUM. Blandford Forum.

STICKLEFORD. Tincleton, 5 E Dorchester.

Warm'ell Cross is the crossroads near Warmwell; here the road to Weymouth turns off from the Wareham-Dorchester road.

Glossary of Dialect Words

<i>a-scrum</i>	withered	<i>home-along</i>	going home
<i>athwart</i>	across	<i>innerds</i>	stomach
<i>barton</i>	farmyard	<i>jack-o'-lent</i>	numskull
<i>bleachy</i>	saltish	<i>laved</i>	baled, drew
<i>chimmer</i>	bedroom, chamber	<i>mid</i>	may
<i>climm</i>	climb	<i>'nation</i>	damnation
<i>clitch</i>	crook	<i>no'thern</i>	stupid
<i>coddle</i>	self-indulgent person	<i>out-step</i>	out of the way
<i>coomb</i>	small valley on the flank of a hill	<i>overlooked</i>	looked upon with an evil eye
<i>crope</i>	crept	<i>pink in</i>	draw in
<i>culpet</i>	culprit	<i>pinner</i>	pinafore
<i>cunning-man</i>	wizard, 'know- ing' man	<i>rathe</i>	soon, early
<i>dazed</i>	damned	<i>skimmer-cake</i>	cake baked on a metal skimming-ladle
<i>en</i>	him	<i>small</i>	light, weak (drink)
<i>ewe-leases</i>	downs or meadows for sheep	<i>strake</i>	section of an iron wheel-rim
<i>glum</i>	gloom	<i>stoor</i>	to-do, commotion
<i>hackle</i>	cone-shaped straw roof of a beehive	<i>tisty-tosty</i>	round, buxom
<i>hang-fair</i>	a hanging the public were allowed to watch	<i>tole</i>	draw, lure
<i>het</i>	hot	<i>vamp</i>	sole
		<i>yaller</i>	yellow
		<i>zeed</i>	saw
		<i>zull</i>	plough

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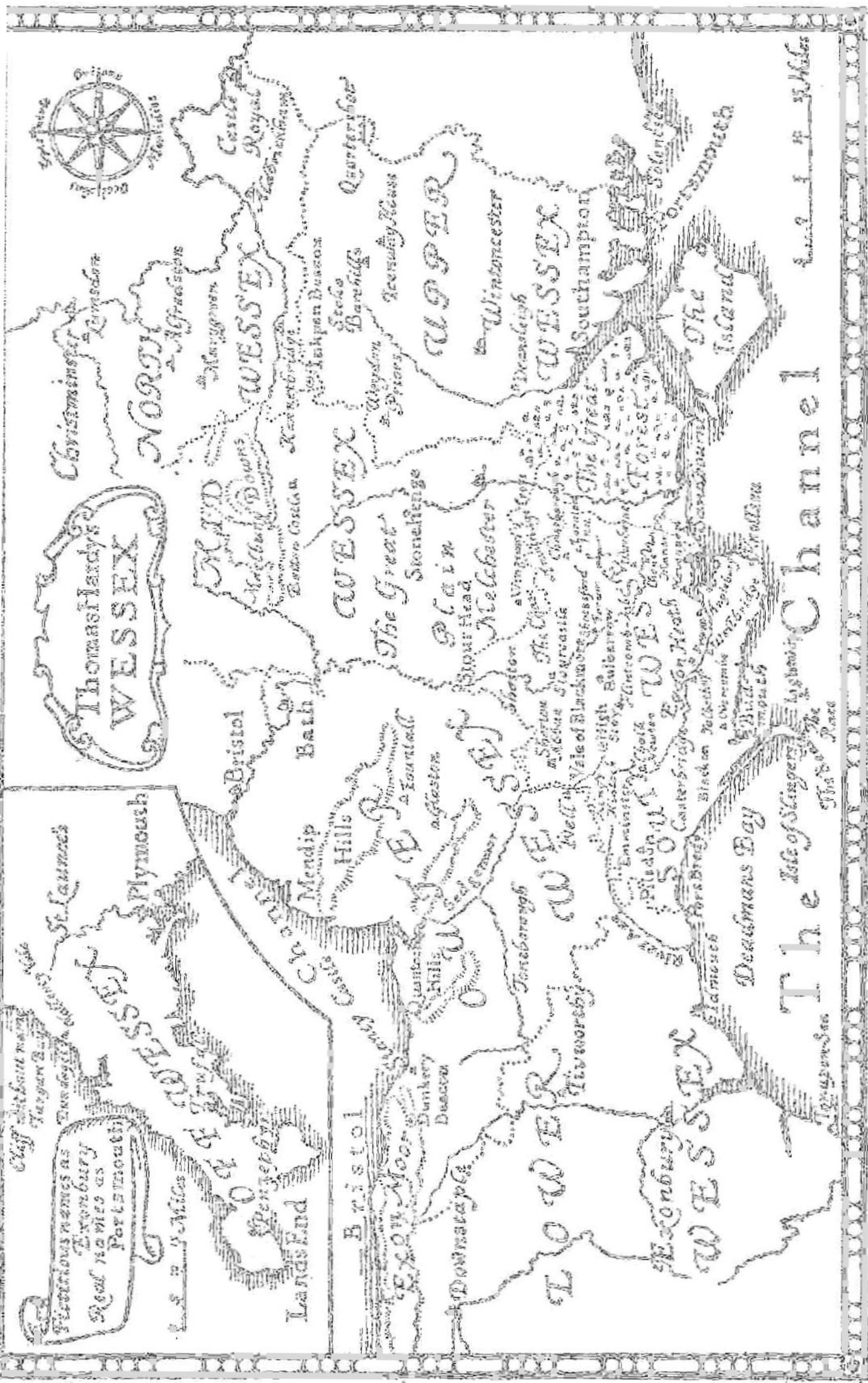
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Introduction

AS A short-story writer, Hardy undoubtedly reaches a higher stature than any English novelist who preceded him. Like Scott, he believes in telling stories of uncommon events: 'We tale-tellers are all Ancient Mariners, and none of us is warranted in stopping Wedding Guests (in other words, the hurrying public) unless he has something more unusual to relate than the ordinary experience of every average man or woman,' he wrote in 1893. Yet, though an imaginative rather than a realistic writer, he rarely (and never completely) flits into a world of fantasy; his stories are rooted in Wessex. They derive as much from local history, traditions, folklore and newspapers as from invention. Truth can be stranger than fiction, and some of the most graphic (and harrowing) details are based on recollections Hardy heard from his parents in his youth.

Since 1895, when he virtually abandoned the writing of prose fiction, many authors have achieved greater sophistication and technical expertise in the short story than Hardy ever aspired to. Yet his virtues as a writer are more enduring. High literary excellence, Longinus wrote, 'is the echo of a great mind'. With Hardy we often feel we are sharing the thoughts, feelings and vision of a great mind, whether we agree with his philosophical presuppositions or not. He has the creative gift which makes characters and visible scenes live as imaginative realities; he evades sentimentality by combining compassion with critical detachment; he is a master of suspense, the unexpected, and irony of situation; and his range extends from the deeply tragic to the highly humorous and diverting. If he is not one of the greatest short-story tellers, his short stories reflect a great writer in many moods.

Satisfying the requirements of magazine editors led to occasional compromises, as Hardy exemplifies at the end of 'The Distracted Preacher'. The short stories vary in length from such a novelette to the very brief, and some of his best are to be found in each of these categories. There is an art in concealing art of which Hardy is master more often than is generally suspected. It is doubtful whether some of his tales, especially the less 'literary', could be told with more life and economy, and a greater air of verisimilitude. Oral methods of narration sometimes contribute effectively towards the latter end, as in 'A Tradition of Eighteen Hundred and Four'; occasionally this fictional device is little more than a parenthetical convention.

Although *Wessex Tales* was the first collection of Hardy's short stories to be published, it contains no suggestion of immaturity. Six of his novels, including *Far from the Madding Crowd* and *The Return of the Native*, had been published before the earliest of its inclusions was written, and the last of them (chronologically) belong to the period of *The Woodlanders* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The seven stories vary widely not only in length but in character, ranging from the humorous to the tragical, and from the romantic to the more realistic, one being a miniature novel rather than a long short story. Hardy's preface illustrates the reality behind some of their more extraordinary features, and there can be little doubt that Wessex history and tradition add to the fascination of this popular volume.

F. B. PINION