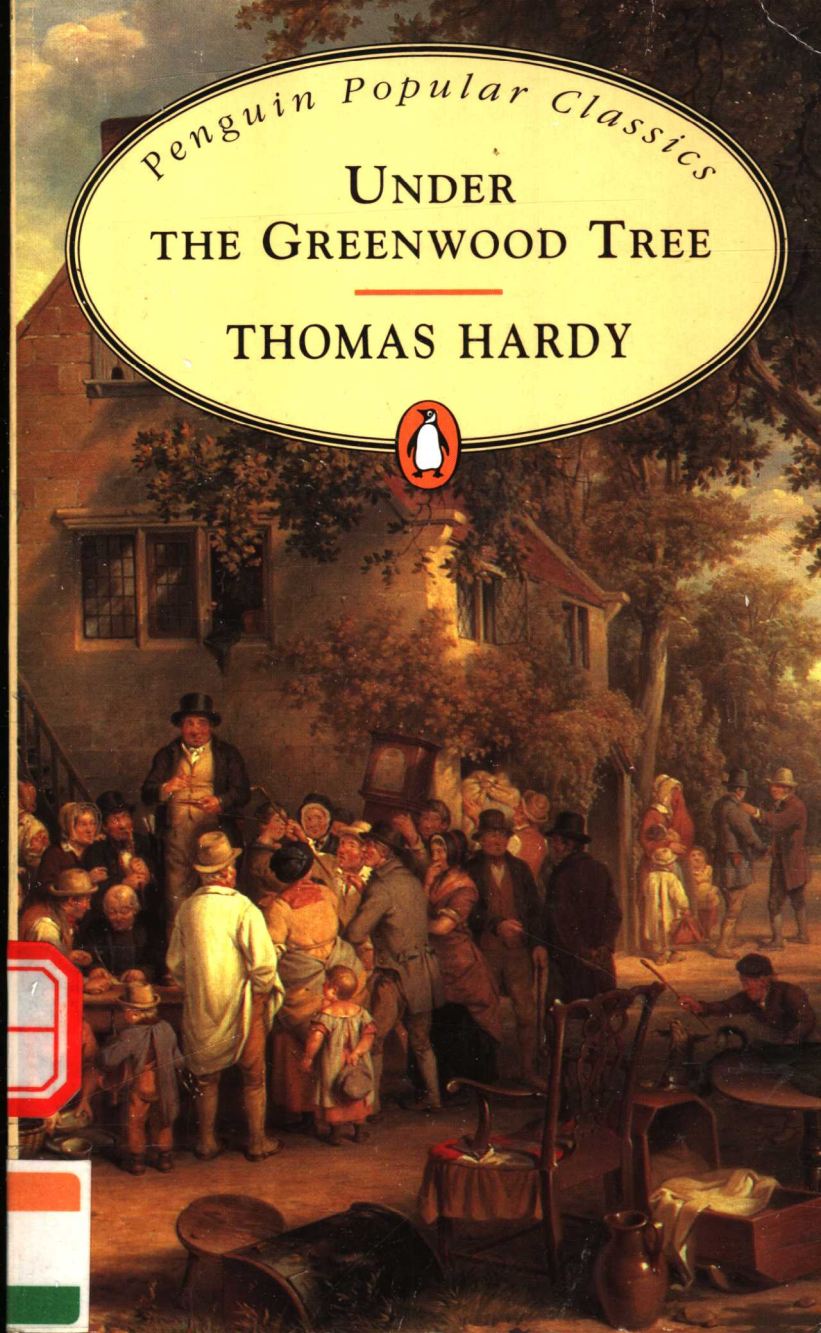


Penguin Popular Classics

UNDER
THE GREENWOOD TREE

THOMAS HARDY



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PENGUIN BOOKS

A PENGUIN/GODFREY CAVE EDITION

UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE

BY THOMAS HARDY

THOMAS HARDY (1840–1928). One of the few writers to succeed as both major novelist and poet, Hardy is best known for his beautiful but often harsh portrayal of rural England set in and around his beloved Wessex.

The son of a master stonemason, Thomas Hardy was born in Higher Bockhampton, Dorset, in June 1840. He was educated first at the village school and then in Dorchester. His mother harboured intellectual ambitions for him and encouraged him to read widely; at the age of sixteen, however, he was apprenticed to John Hicks, a local architect, where he was trained in the architecture of Gothic revival, an interest that stayed with Hardy for the rest of his life. In 1862 Hardy moved to London to follow his profession, working for the architect Arthur Blomfield. It was during his busy years in London that Hardy started to write, greatly encouraged by his close friend Horace Moule.

Returning to Dorset in 1867 Hardy began his first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, but it was rejected for publication. While living in Dorset, Hardy became very attached to his cousin Tryphena Sparks; their relationship and hers with Horace Moule has been the subject of much speculation ever since. It was on an architectural mission to St Juliot in Cornwall in 1868 that Hardy met Emma Gifford, whom he was later to marry. Although their marriage was often strained, it was Emma who encouraged Hardy to renounce architecture in favour of writing full-time. Hardy wrote eleven novels between his first success with *Far from the Madding Crowd* in 1874 and the publication of *Jude the Obscure* in 1896. Among his most well-known novels are *The Return of the Native* (1878), *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891). Increasingly harsh attacks by critics on his 'pessimism' and 'immorality' in the later novels led Hardy to abandon the novel form for ever. For the remainder of his life he devoted himself to poetry, publishing his first collection of verse, *Wessex Poems*, in 1898.

Emma died in 1912, which affected Hardy greatly, leading to some of his most deeply felt poems. Marrying his secretary and close companion Florence Dugdale in 1914, Hardy remained for most of his time at his house in Dorchester. An intensely private person he set about writing his autobiography during the last years of his life, to prevent others from prying after his death. Published posthumously in 1928, it was passed off as the work of Florence Dugdale, as Hardy had intended it should be. Thomas Hardy is buried in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey.

Under the Greenwood Tree is the first of Hardy's novels to be set in Wessex and marked a turning-point in his career. Its publication in 1872 attracted the attention of the editor of the *Cornhill* magazine, which in turn meant that Hardy was never forced to publish anonymously again.

Readers may also find the following books of interest: John Bayley, *An Essay on Hardy* (1978); Simon Gatrell, *Hardy the Creator* (1988); Robert Gittings, *Young Thomas Hardy* (1975) and *The Older Hardy* (1978); J. Goode, *Hardy: The Offensive Truth* (1988); Patricia Ingham, *A Feminist Reading of Hardy* (1989); and Michael Millage (ed.), *The Life and Works of Thomas Hardy* (1985) and *Thomas Hardy: A Biography* (1982).

PREFATORY NOTE

Under the Greenwood Tree was first brought out in the summer of 1872 in two volumes. The name of the story was originally intended to be, more appropriately, *The Mellstock Quire*, and this has been appended as a sub-title since the early editions, it having been thought inadvisable to displace for it the title by which the book first became known.

In re-reading the narrative after a long interval there occurs the inevitable reflection that the realities out of which it was spun were material for another kind of study of this little group of church-musicians than is found in the chapters here penned so lightly, even so farcically and flippantly at times. But circumstances would have rendered any aim at a deeper, more essential, more transcendent handling inadvisable at the date of writing; and the exhibition of the Mellstock Quire in the following pages must remain the only extant one, except for the few glimpses of that long perished band which have given in verse elsewhere.

T. H.

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UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE OR THE MELLSTOCK QUIRE

PART I—WINTER

CHAPTER I

MELLSTOCK-LANE

To dwellers in a wood almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature. At the passing of the breeze the fir-trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself; the ash hisses amid its quiverings; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall. And winter, which modifies the note of such trees as shed their leaves, does not destroy its individuality.

On a cold and starry Christmas-eve within living memory a man was passing up a lane towards Mellstock Cross in the darkness of a plantation that whispered thus distinctively to his intelligence. All the evidences of his nature were those afforded by the spirit of his footsteps, which succeeded each other

Under the Greenwood Tree

lightly and quickly, and by the liveliness of his voice as he sang in a rural cadence:

“ With the rose and the lily
And the daffodowndilly,
The lads and the lasses a-sheep-shearing go.”

The lonely lane he was following connected one of the hamlets of Mellstock parish with Upper Mellstock and Lewgate, and to his eyes, casually glancing upward, the silver and black-stemmed birches with their characteristic tufts, the pale grey boughs of beech, the dark-creviced elm, all appeared now as black and flat outlines upon the sky, wherein the white stars twinkled so vehemently that their flickering seemed like the flapping of wings. Within the woody pass, at a level anything lower than the horizon, all was dark as the grave. The copse-wood forming the sides of the bower interlaced its branches so densely, even at this season of the year, that the draught from the north-east flew along the channel with scarcely an interruption from lateral breezes.

After passing the plantation and reaching Mellstock Cross the white surface of the lane revealed itself between the dark hedgerows like a ribbon jagged at the edges; the irregularity being caused by temporary accumulations of leaves extending from the ditch on either side.

The song (many times interrupted by flitting thoughts which took place of several bars, and resumed at a point it would have reached had its continuity been unbroken) now received a more palpable check, in the shape of “Ho-i-i-i-i!” from the crossing lane to Lower Mellstock, on the right of the singer who had just emerged from the trees.

“Ho-i-i-i-i!” he answered, stopping and looking

Mellstock-Lane

round, though with no idea of seeing anything more than imagination pictured.

"Is that thee, young Dick Dewy?" came from the darkness.

"Ay, sure, Michael Mail."

"Then why not stop for fellow-craters—going to thy own father's house too, as we be, and knowen us so well?"

Dick Dewy faced about and continued his tune in an under-whistle, implying that the business of his mouth could not be checked at a moment's notice by the placid emotion of friendship.

Having come more into the open he could now be seen rising against the sky, his profile appearing on the light background like the portrait of a gentleman in black cardboard. It assumed the form of a low-crowned hat, an ordinary-shaped nose, an ordinary chin, an ordinary neck, and ordinary shoulders. What he consisted of further down was invisible from lack of sky low enough to picture him on.

Shuffling, halting, irregular footsteps of various kinds were now heard coming up the hill, and presently there emerged from the shade severally five men of different ages and gaits, all of them working villagers of the parish of Mellstock. They, too, had lost their rotundity with the daylight, and advanced against the sky in flat outlines, which suggested some processional design on Greek or Etruscan pottery. They represented the chief portion of Mellstock parish choir.

The first was a bowed and bent man, who carried a fiddle under his arm, and walked as if engaged in studying some subject connected with the surface of the road. He was Michael Mail, the man who had hallooed to Dick.

Under the Greenwood Tree

The next was Mr. Robert Penny, boot- and shoe-maker; a little man who, though rather round-shouldered, walked as if that fact had not come to his own knowledge, moving on with his back very hollow and his face fixed on the north-east quarter of the heavens before him, so that his lower waistcoat-buttons came first, and then the remainder of his figure. His features were invisible; yet when he occasionally looked round, two faint moons of light gleamed for an instant from the precincts of his eyes, denoting that he wore spectacles of a circular form.

The third was Elias Spinks, who walked perpendicularly and dramatically. The fourth outline was Joseph Bowman's, who had now no distinctive appearance beyond that of a human being. Finally came a weak lath-like form, trotting and stumbling along with one shoulder forward and his head inclined to the left, his arms dangling nervelessly in the wind as if they were empty sleeves. This was Thomas Leaf.

"Where be the boys?" said Dick to this somewhat indifferently-matched assembly.

The eldest of the group, Michael Mail, cleared his throat from a great depth.

"We told them to keep back at home for a time, thinken they wouldn't be wanted yet awhile; and we could choose the tuens, and so on."

"Father and grandfather William have expected ye a little sooner. I have just been for a run round by Ewelease Stile and Hollow Hill to warm my feet."

"To be sure father did! To be sure 'a did expect us—to taste the little barrel beyond compare that he's going to tap."

"'Od rabbit it all! Never heard a word of it!" said Mr. Penny, gleams of delight appearing upon his

Mellstock-Lane

spectacle-glasses, Dick meanwhile singing parenthetically—

“The lads and the lasses a-sheep-shearing go.”

“Neighbours, there’s time enough to drink a sight of drink now afore bedtime?” said Mail.

“True, true—time enough to get as drunk as lords!” replied Bowman cheerfully.

This opinion being taken as convincing they all advanced between the varying hedges and the trees dotting them here and there, kicking their toes occasionally among the crumpled leaves. Soon appeared glimmering indications of the few cottages forming the small hamlet of Upper Mellstock for which they were bound, whilst the faint sound of church-bells ringing a Christmas peal could be heard floating over upon the breeze from the direction of Longpuddle and Weatherbury parishes on the other side of the hills. A little wicket admitted them to the garden, and they proceeded up the path to Dick’s house.

CHAPTER II

THE TRANTER'S

It was a long low cottage with a hipped roof of thatch, having dormer windows breaking up into the eaves, a chimney standing in the middle of the ridge and another at each end. The window-shutters were not yet closed, and the fire- and candle-light within radiated forth upon the thick bushes of box and laurestinus growing in clumps outside, and upon the bare boughs of several codlin-trees hanging about in various distorted shapes, the result of early training as espaliers combined with careless climbing into their boughs in later years. The walls of the dwelling were for the most part covered with creepers, though these were rather beaten back from the doorway—a feature which was worn and scratched by much passing in and out, giving it by day the appearance of an old keyhole. Light streamed through the cracks and joints of outbuildings a little way from the cottage, a sight which nourished a fancy that the purpose of the erection must be rather to veil bright attractions than to shelter unsightly necessities. The noise of a beetle and wedges and the splintering of wood was periodically heard from this direction; and at some little distance further a steady regular munching and the occasional scurr of a rope betokened a stable, and horses feeding within it.

The choir stamped severally on the door-stone to

The Tranter's

shake from their boots any fragment of earth or leaf adhering thereto, then entered the house and looked around to survey the condition of things. Through the open doorway of a small inner room on the right hand, of a character between pantry and cellar, was Dick Dewy's father Reuben, by vocation a "tranter," or irregular carrier. He was a stout florid man about forty years of age, who surveyed people up and down when first making their acquaintance, and generally smiled at the horizon or other distant object during conversations with friends, walking about with a steady sway, and turning out his toes very considerably. Being now occupied in bending over a hog's-head that stood in the pantry ready horsed for the process of broaching, he did not take the trouble to turn or raise his eyes at the entry of his visitors, well knowing by their footsteps that they were the expected old comrades.

The main room, on the left, was decked with bunches of holly and other evergreens, and from the middle of the beam bisecting the ceiling hung the mistletoe, of a size out of all proportion to the room, and extending so low that it became necessary for a full-grown person to walk round it in passing, or run the risk of entangling his hair. This apartment contained Mrs. Dewy the tranter's wife, and the four remaining children, Susan, Jim, Bessy, and Charley, graduating uniformly though at wide stages from the age of sixteen to that of four years—the eldest of the series being separated from Dick the firstborn by a nearly equal interval.

Some circumstance had apparently caused much grief to Charley just previous to the entry of the choir, and he had absently taken down a small looking-glass, holding it before his face to learn how

Under the Greenwood Tree

the human countenance appeared when engaged in crying, which survey led him to pause at the various points in each wail that were more than ordinarily striking, for a thorough appreciation of the general effect. Bessy was leaning against a chair, and glancing under the plaits about the waist of the plaid frock she wore, to notice the original unfaded pattern of the material as there preserved, her face bearing an expression of regret that the brightness had passed away from the visible portions. Mrs. Dewy sat in a brown settle by the side of the glowing wood fire—so glowing that with a heedful compression of the lips she would now and then rise and put her hand upon the hams and flitches of bacon lining the chimney, to reassure herself that they were not being broiled instead of smoked—a misfortune that had been known to happen now and then at Christmas-time.

“Hullo, my sonnies, here you be, then!” said Reuben Dewy at length, standing up and blowing forth a vehement gust of breath. “How the blood do puff up in anybody’s head, to be sure, a-stooping like that! I was just going out to gate to hark for ye.” He then carefully began to wind a strip of brown paper round a brass tap he held in his hand. “This in the cask here is a drop o’ the right sort” (tapping the cask); “’tis a real drop o’ cordial from the best pickled apples—Sansoms, Stubbards, Five-corners, and such-like—you d’mind the sort, Michael?” (Michael nodded.) “And there’s a sprinkling of they that grow down by the orchard-rails—streaked ones—rail apples we d’call ’em, as ’tis by the rails they grow, and not knowing the right name. The water-cider from ’em is as good as most people’s best cider is.”

The Tranter's

"Ay, and of the same make too," said Bowman. "'It rained when we wrung it out and the water got into it,' folk will say. But 'tis on'y an excuse. Watered cider is too common among us."

"Yes, yes; too common it is!" said Spinks with an inward sigh, whilst his eyes seemed to be looking at the case in an abstract form rather than at the scene before him. "Such poor liquor do make a man's throat feel very melancholy—and is a disgrace to the name of stimmilent."

"Come in, come in, and draw up to the fire; never mind your shoes," said Mrs. Dewy, seeing that all except Dick had paused to wipe them upon the doormat. "I am glad that you've stepped up-along at last; and, Susan, you run down to Grammer Kaytes's and see if you can borrow some larger candles than these fourteens. Tommy Leaf, don't ye be afeard! Come and sit here in the settle."

This was addressed to the young man before mentioned, consisting chiefly of a human skeleton and a smock-frock, who was very awkward in his movements, apparently on account of having grown so very fast that before he had had time to get used to his height he was higher.

"Hee—he—ay!" replied Leaf, letting his mouth continue to smile for some time after his mind had done smiling, so that his teeth remained in view as the most conspicuous members of his body.

"Here, Mr. Penny," resumed Mrs. Dewy, "you sit in this chair. And how's your daughter, Mrs. Brownjohn?"

"Well, I suppose I must say pretty fair." He adjusted his spectacles a quarter of an inch to the right. "But she'll be worse before she's better, 'a b'lieve."