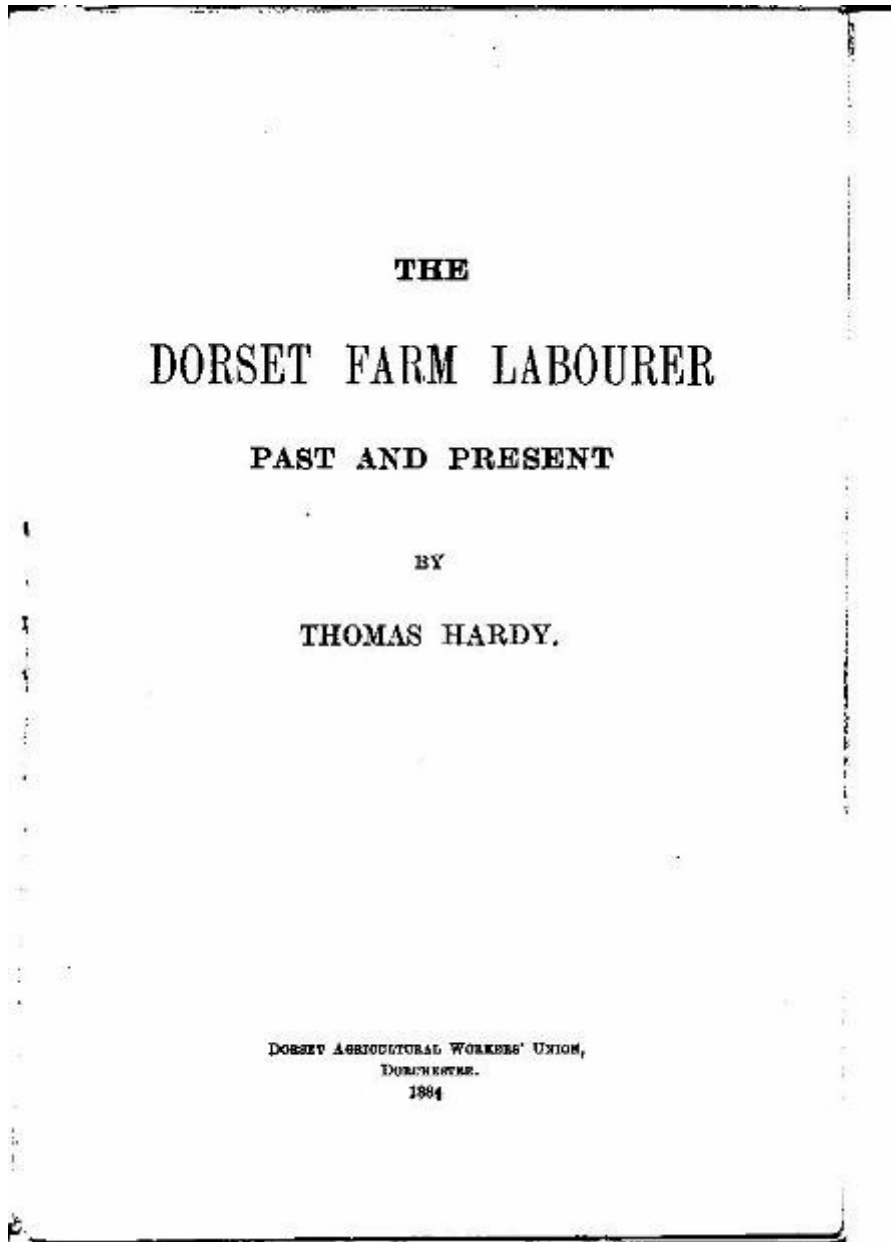


**THE RAREST HARDY? A REASSESSMENT OF 'THE DORSET
FARM LABOURER PAST AND PRESENT'**

by HUMPHREY M. PAIN



Facsimile Title Page

Thomas Hardy's essay 'The Dorsetshire Labourer', published under his name as a magazine article in 1883, was reprinted with a slightly altered title and other minor

variations in a pamphlet dated 1884. This too named Hardy as the author, but bore no printer's colophon and named as publisher the Dorset Agricultural Workers' Union, of which nothing is known.

R.L. Purdy, in his exemplary *Thomas Hardy, A Bibliographical Study* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1954), cast doubt on the pamphlet's authenticity as regards date and imprint, but as far as is known no serious research has been done in the intervening half-century to confirm or deny his suspicions.

This paper reviews the evidence surrounding the pamphlet, and concludes that the case for its genuineness and date is almost irresistibly strong, but that the attribution to the Dorset Agricultural Workers' Union is with a high degree of likelihood a deliberate deception.

In 1883, at the suggestion of the publisher Charles J. Longman, Hardy wrote an essay of approximately 7,500 words entitled 'The Dorsetshire Labourer', which was published in *Longman's Magazine* in July of that year.¹

It can now be seen as a more important article than it appeared at the time both in terms of Hardy's development as a writer and because it is a rare foray by him into social – nearly political – debate, something that he avoided for most of his life.

Coming immediately after the relative failure of *A Laodicean* (1881) and *Two On a Tower* (1882), and immediately before the far greater achievement of *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886) and *The Woodlanders* (1887), 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' may be seen as a turning-point at which Hardy abandoned his attempts to depict upper-class life and had gained sufficient confidence to return to the Wessex scenes and Wessex folk that he knew.

At the age of 43 he had travelled far enough from the soil not to fear being himself seen as 'Hodge' – the derogatory Victorian term for a yokel that sets the theme of his essay. He was able now to look kindly and even proudly upon his

background and to write about it with gathering power. 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' in many ways marks the beginning of Hardy's greatness.

Composition and Publication

The authenticity of 'The Dorsetshire Labourer' is beyond question. The manuscript, on 31 quarto pages in Hardy's familiar hand, and signed by him at the end, is in the Dorset County Museum in Dorchester, where it is available for study.

The manuscript is marked up for the typesetters, who were evidently expected to set three pages or so per shift, and is clearly the basis for the magazine publication, whose printing, by Spottiswoode and Co. of London, is almost immaculate, only a single apparent error having escaped the proof-reader.ⁱⁱ

Hardy said in later life that the article had never been reprinted. A letter to his friend Sydney Cockerell of 5 October 1911ⁱⁱⁱ confirms this; and certainly it was never collected during his lifetime, although it appeared in 1925 in the United States in an unauthorised compilation of his shorter writings edited by the American writer and critic Ernest Brennecke Jr.^{iv} in defiance of Hardy's copyright and wishes. Certain quirks of punctuation show that Brennecke copied exactly the *Longman's Magazine* publication, even to the UK spelling of words like 'colour' – and indeed 'labourer' – so it is of no bibliographical importance.

After its New York publication, Hardy wrote that he would never permit Brennecke's book to appear in England, but that he had discussed a compilation of minor works to be published by Macmillan as part of a uniform edition.

In a letter to the collector Carroll A. Wilson dated 4 October 1931 (Collection, Colby College, Maine), Purdy wrote of having visited Hardy's widow Florence Emily at Max Gate: 'She has the ms [of The Dorsetshire Labourer] and had thought of having it privately printed – TH was glad it had escaped the Brennecke [sic] book and had suggested this.' As we know, the essay certainly had not escaped the Brennecke book, and even if neither Hardy nor Florence Emily had noticed the fact, it is curious

that Purdy, with his encyclopaedic knowledge of Hardy publications, should recount Mrs Hardy's statement without challenging it.

Mrs Hardy never did have the essay printed, but in 1931, three years after Hardy's death, Charles Howes, a bookseller in St Leonard's, Sussex, offered for sale three copies of what appeared to be the first separate publication of the essay, in the form of an unbound pamphlet of 21 printed pages retitled 'The Dorset Farm Labourer Past And Present'. The pamphlet had clearly been typeset from the *Longman's Magazine* essay, but it contained numerous printer's errors and a few minor changes to remove it from a magazine context. The pamphlet is poorly printed on cheap, unwatermarked paper and has no printer's or publisher's name other than 'Dorset Agricultural Workers' Union, Dorchester, 1884' on the title page.

Mrs Lilian Swindall, archivist of the Hardy collection in the Dorset County Museum, says researchers have sought in vain for such a Union, and in her view it never existed. The Dorset County Archives, the National Farmers' Union, the British Library and other sources are all silent on the subject, confirming Mrs Swindall's belief, which the present writer shares.

A fourth copy of the pamphlet was sold by George Sexton, a Brighton bookseller, in 1937, and a fifth, again by Howes, in 1939. Finally, in 1955, a sixth copy appeared, stamped 'rough proof' and containing a plethora of printer's errors, only some of them picked up by the proof-reader and corrected in the subsequent copies. It was sold by Colin Richardson, a London bookseller, who had obtained it from Howes.^v This copy was purchased for £25 (then \$100) by Purdy, who offered it to the prominent American Hardy collector Frederick B. Adams Jr.^{vi}, but whether or not Adams bought it, it eventually made its way to Yale, where it is now in the Beinecke collection. (Note that in 1955, £25 was good money for a minor Hardy work. Multiplying by 10 or even 20 times gives some idea: £250 - £500 at today's prices is worth having but clearly not life-changing. The point of this comparison will be evident later.)

The above dates and facts are trebly significant in that none of the copies appeared until after Hardy's death; that Sexton and Richardson were friends of Howes, who was thus the known source of five of them; and that no further copies have appeared since Howes retired from the book trade in 1959. This must raise suspicions about the pamphlet as a whole and Howes's role in particular. To the bibliographical mind, recollections of the T.J. Wise – H. Buxton Forman forgeries begin to surface.

For those not familiar with their extraordinary story, Buxton Forman (1842-1917) and Wise (1859-1937) were prominent bibliographers and bibliophiles who between around 1870 and 1900 collaborated in producing more than 100 forgeries of nineteenth-century pamphlets, mainly concentrating on English poets. Some were fabricated reprints of existing works, while others were offered as hitherto unknown printings preceding the genuine first edition. They were exposed in 1934 in a book by John Carter and Graham Pollard, who concealed their sensational revelations behind the cautious title *An Enquiry into the Nature of Certain XIXth Century Pamphlets* (Constable, London, 1934).^{vii} Buxton Forman was already dead, and in view of Wise's reputation the exposure was at first treated with scepticism if not downright incredulity, but the facts are now beyond doubt and are taken as demonstrating that nobody, however apparently blameless, is beyond suspicion in such a case.

Although the dates fit, we may fortunately dismiss any association between the Hardy pamphlet and Forman and Wise. The late John Carter was clearly referring to them when he assured Purdy that the British Library copy bore 'no resemblance to the forgeries with which he was familiar'. More recently, Mr John Collins, co-author of the 1983 reassessment of the Wise-Buxton Forman forgeries, reiterated Carter's view to the present writer. The reasons for their confidence will be dealt with later in this paper.

This does not eliminate the possibility that 'The Dorset Farm Labourer Past and Present' (hereafter referred to as TDFL) is a forgery by another hand, and the

question of where Howes found five of the existing six copies is central to the present enquiry. First let us examine the material at hand.

ⁱ *Longman's Magazine*, London, vol.II, July 1883, pp.252-69.

ⁱⁱ *Longman's Magazine* (p.264 line 24) and TDFL (p.15 line17) read 'country' where the ms has 'county'. In the context, this appears to be a typesetter's error.

ⁱⁱⁱ R.L. Purdy and M. Millgate (eds.) *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, vol. IV (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p.178.

^{iv} Ernest Brennecke Jr., *Life and Art by Thomas Hardy* (Greenberg, New York, 1925), pp.20-47.

^v Letter from Purdy to Adams, 31 July 1955. Author's collection.

^{vi} *Ibid.*

^{vii} Nicolas Barker and John Collins, revised second edition of the above, with an epilogue, (Scolar Press, London, 1983). See also the same authors' *Sequel To an Enquiry* (Scolar Press, London, 1983).