Chapter-9

A Thin Trickle of Laughter

While studying the elements of mirth and laughter in Hardy’s fiction, it may be noted that these are not consistently present in all his works. Some of Hardy’s earlier novels like Desperate Remedies, The Hand of Ethelberta, A Laodicean and Two on a Tower lack the boisterous plebeian mirth though laughter is not altogether absent in them. Again, in Hardy’s ‘last’ novels like Tess of the D’Urbervilles and Jude the Obscure collective joviality seems to take a backseat. The Well-Beloved which is the ‘self-questioning of a disturbed artist probing his own art’\(^1\), lacks the elements of laughter altogether, perhaps, because laughter is the prerogative of the marginal people. It is interesting to probe whether in his ‘last’ novels he was sliding down the ‘Darkling Plain’; however, a thin trickle of laughter continues to flow and resurface along.

As mentioned in earlier chapters, for the reasons lamented by Hardy himself in his seminal essay ‘The Dorsetshire Labourers’, elements of collective mirth gradually disappeared from the Wessex life itself. That may explain the fading of the element from his last novels. But at the same time it is true that no chronological order or pattern can be traced in Hardy’s fiction regarding the tide and ebb of this laughter.
I have restricted in one chapter the discussion of the novels in which there is a thin trickle of laughter. For convenience of investigation these novels have been probed under two sub-headings — ‘The Early Phase’ and ‘The Later Phase’.

**The Early Phase**

Hardy’s endeavour at novel writing started from the late summer of 1867 at higher Bockhampton. The fiction, titled *The Poor Man and the Lady* and originally subtitled ‘A Story with no Plot, Containing some original verses’, appears to be a ‘revolutionary satire’ (Duffin 1) inspired by ‘a passion for reforming the world’ (THD 216) and on the advice of George Meredith, the author did not publish it though it was finished and revised within June 1868. John Morley, Macmillan’s reader, liked ‘the opening pictures of the Christmas Eve in the tranter’s house’ (THD 216). The manuscript of the novel was eventually destroyed though the Christmas scenes were used and improved in *Under the Greenwood Tree*.

While advising not to publish *The Poor Man and the Lady*, Meredith counseled Hardy to write a novel with a more complicated plot. The result was the mystery-thriller *Desperate Remedies* (1871) influenced by the style of Wilkie Collins and Miss Braddon, the book which, according to Duffin, “if sent to a publisher to-day, would be marked by the reader as a likely
crime Club 'Book of the month'” (1). The Spectator sternly denounced the novel and ‘Hardy was too upset to notice the incidental praise of the comic rustics’ (Turner 21) [emphasis added]. Pinion observes that in this novel ‘Hardy’s rustic humour is already to the fore’ (THD 76).

Elements of collective enjoyment are presented by the author in Desperate Remedies. In Chapter 8, while gossiping with Mr Springrove and some peasants about Miss Aldclyffe’s affair with the steward Mr Manston, the parish clerk Richard Crickett delivers a short and entertaining speech on matrimony. During the conversation Mr Springrove asks him how he can become the husband of a lady who is an ‘entertainen woman’, of whom Crickett is the third husband.

‘Clerk Crickett, I fancy you know everything about everybody,’ said Gad.

‘Well so’s,’ said the clerk modestly. ‘I do know a little. It comes to me.’

‘And I know where from’.

‘Ah’.

‘That wife o’ thine. She’s an entertainen woman, not to speak disrespectful.’
‘She is: and a winner one. Look at the husbands she’ve had—
God bless her!’

‘I wonder you could stand third in that list, Clerk Crickett,’ said Mr Springrove. (DR 103)

Crickett admits that it has been a matter of surprise to him as well. Then he delivers his short speech on conjugal life:

“Well, ’t has been a power o’ marvel to myself oftentimes. Yes, matrimony do begin wi’ “Dearly beloved”, and ends wi’ “Amazement”, as the prayer book says. But what could I do, neighbour Springrove? ’Twas ordained to be. Well do I call to mind what your poor lady said to me when I had just married. “Ah, Mr Crickett,” says she, “your wife will soon settle you as she did her other two: here’s a glass o’ rum, for I shan’t see your poor face this time next year.” I swallered the rum, called again next year, and said, “Mrs Springrove, you gave me a glass o’ rum last year because I was going to die — here I be alive still, you see.” “Well thought of, clerk! Here’s two glasses for you now, then,” says she. “Thank you, mem,” I said, and swallowed the rum. Well, dang my old sides, next year I thought I’d call again and get three. And call I did. But she wouldn’t give me a
drop o' the commonest. "No, clerk," says she, "you are too tough for a woman's pity."... Ah, poor soul, 'twas true enough! Here be I, that was expected to die, alive and hard as a nail, you see, and there's she moulderen in her grave.' (DR 103-104)

When Gad Weedy wants to console by saying that it was Crickett's wife's fate not to have an alive husband for long, the parish clerk philosophically observes,

'Fate? Bless thy simplicity, so 'twas her fate; but she struggled to have one, and would, and did. Fate's nothing beside a woman's schemen!' (DR 104)

Such a comment in the fiction of an author, who is often categorized as a fatalist, is significant. Besides, there are the carnivalesque features of profaning the sacrosanct 'prayer-book', trivializing the social institution of wedding, indulging in profuse drinking and laughing at death.

The conclusion of the novel, titled 'Sequel', the Midsummer Night of 1867, fifteen months after Miss Aldclyffe's demise, depicts six Carriford parish ringers including Crickett and a stranger gathered to enjoy the occasion. Christina Hole informs,

Midsummer Day (June 24th) is the feast of the Nativity of St John the Baptist, that great saint who was the herald of Our
Lord, and whose festival, unlike those of other saints, commemorates his birth rather than his death and entry into Paradise. It falls only three days after the Summer Solstice, the day on which the sun reaches its highest glory, and thereafter begins to decline, and in the liturgical calendar, it is equated with it. Anciently, it was a fire-festival of great importance when, through countless centuries, the sun was ritually strengthened by bonfires burning everywhere on Mid-summer Eve, by torchlight processions through the streets, by flaming tar-barrels, and in some districts, by wheels bound with straw and tow, set alight, and rolled down steep hillsides into the valley below. (138)

However, here the ringers do not indulge in Midsummer Fire but they ring the church bells by pulling and catching ‘frantically at the dancing bell-ropes, the locks of their hair waving in the breeze created by their quick motions…. Their ever changing shadows mingle on the wall in an endless variety of kaleidoscopic forms…’ (DR 325) The triple-bob-major (a particular kind of bell-ringing)\(^2\) continues for forty minutes. The stranger, to whom it has been a novel experience, admits that he has enjoyed it a lot. They celebrate the occasion with consumption of liquor.
‘I enjoyed it much,’ said the man modestly.

‘What we should ha’ done without you words can’t tell. The man that belongs by rights to that there bell is ill o’ two gallons of old cider’.

And now so’s,’ remarked the fifth ringer, as pertaining to the last allusion, we’ll finish this drop o’ cider and metheglin, and every man home-along straight as a line.’

‘With all my heart,’ Clerk Crickett replied. ‘And the Lord send if I ha’n’t done my duty by Master Teddy Springrove – that I have so.’

‘And the rest of us,’ they said, as the cup was handed round.

(DR 326)

Their collective merriment, ringing the bell ‘frantically’ and simultaneous consumption of liquor remind the reader of the frenzy of the carnival crowd during Saturnalia. Figures of the central stage, like Miss Aldclyffe, may suffer and die, but the commoners go on.

During their conversation Crickett tells the entertaining story how he got a ‘half-sovereign’ from Parson Raunham. His comment on the Church in the conclusion of the tale reveals the uncrowning feature which is a major quality of carnival merriment.
Ah, well I do bear in mind what I said to Pa’son Raunham about thy mother’s family o’ seven, the very first week of his coming here, when I was just in my prime. “And how many daughters has that poor Weedy got, clerk?” he says. “Six, sir,” says I, “and every one of ’em has got a brother!” “Poor woman,” says he, “a dozen children! — give her this half-sovereign from me, clerk.” ’A laughed a good five minutes afterwards, when he found out my merry nater — ’a did. But there, ’tis over wi’ me now. Enteren the Church is the ruin of a man’s wit, for wit’s nothing without a faint shadow o’ sin.’ (DR 326)

Not only the religious authority is ridiculed, but the parson’s intelligence is also questioned, thus exposing the commoners’ attitude towards the church.

To read The Hand of Ethelberta (1876) immediately after Far from the Madding Crowd (1874) is to feel ‘the surroundings irritating and the story nauseatingly dull’ though the story is not ‘really uninteresting’ (Duffin 15). After suspending writing for ‘domestic reasons’ including the search for a permanent home and his spoiled relationship with Emma for serial writing under constant pressure (Turner 50), he wrote the novel which has mainly
urban setting as its background. The comic rustic characters are entirely absent here, and the novel loses by the absence.

A Laodicean (1881) which, as confessed by Hardy himself, contained 'more facts of his own life than anything he had ever written' and the 'finest hour' of his relationship with Emma (Turner 73), also includes a few merry situations and features of the carnivalesque.

In the fourth chapter when Somerset asks the landlord if there are many Baptists in the neighbourhood, the latter replies that there are so many; far more than the average in country parishes:

'Even here, in my house, now,' he added, 'when folks get a drop of drink into 'em, and their feelings rise to a zong, some man will strike up a hymn by preference. But I find no fault with that; for though 'tis hardly human nature to be so calculating in yer cups, a feller may as well sing to gain something as sing to waste.' (L. 65)

The apparently naïve comment exposes the rustics' attitude towards the church and religion particularly when we consider the following confession:

' [...] I was a Methodist once – ay, for a length of time. 'Twas owing to my taking a house next door to a chapel; so that what with hearing the organ bizz like a bee through the wall, and
what with finding it saved umbrellas on wet Zundays, I went
over to that faith for two years – though I believe I dropped
money by it – I wouldn’t be the man to say so if I hadn’t.
Howsomever, when I moved into this house I turned back again
to my old religion. Faith, I don’t zee much difference: be you
one, or be you t’other you’ve got to get your living.’ (L 65)

This matter-of-fact disposition carries the suggestion of the ‘de-crowning’ of
the Church.

The fifteenth chapter opens with vivid arrangement of the garden-
party at the Stancy Castle, the residence of Paula Power, as ‘her days of
infestivity were plainly ended, and her days of gladness were to begin’ (L
132). Mrs Goodman (her aunt and companion) assists Paula in receiving the
guests. The musicians ‘fill the air with their strains from the embowered
enclosure of a drooping ash’ (L 132); the ladies move about in spectacular
garments — ‘here being coloured dresses with white devices, there white
dresses with coloured devices, and younder transparent dresses with no
device at all.’ (L 132).

When it is dusk, the guests queue up to the dining-hall. A tent has been
erected for dancing.
It was now brilliantly lighted up, and the musicians, who during daylight had been invisible behind the ash-tree, were ensconced at one end with their harps and violins. It reminded him [Somerset] that there was to be dancing. The tent had in the meantime half filled with a new set of young people who had come expressly for the pastime. Behind the girls gathered numbers of newly arrived young men with low shoulders and diminutive moustaches, who were evidently prepared for once to sacrifice themselves as partners. (L 135)

As the first set of dance begins, the old and middle-aged persons congregate to witness the gyrations of their sons and daughters. When another dance or two are in progress, Somerset, being thrilled by the sight, feels the urge to dance with Paula. After much pursuance Paula agrees to dance with him. The musicians are excited at the proceedings:

It seemed as if those musicians had thrown a double sweetness into their notes on seeing the mistress of the castle in the dance, [...]. (L 136)

Somerset admits that it is the sweetest moment of his life. Though his dance with Paula is over and they retire to the back tent, there is no sign of cessation so far as the dancing of young ones are concerned. Paula remarks,
‘I think they begin to feel the heat,’ (L 137). Even streaming down of rain cannot restrain them from dancing.

‘How happy they are!’ said Paula. ‘They don’t even know that it is raining. I am so glad that my aunt had the tent lined; otherwise such a downpour would have gone clean through it.’

The thunder-storm showed no symptoms of abatement, and the music and dancing went on more merrily than ever. (L 138)

Though the garden party is arranged by an aristocrat, the jovial participation of the commoners and their uninhibited convivial attitude resemble the festive abundance of the carnival. Whenever situations permit, the so-called ‘pessimistic’ author never refrains from indulging in festive revelry.

In Chapter 7 of ‘Book the Second’, during a conversation between Dare and Captain de Stancy, the former offers the latter liquor which is termed by Dare as “the blushful Hippocrene”. He also reminds de Stancy that the poet describes it as

‘Tasting of Flora and the country green;

Dance, and Provençal song and sun-burnt mirth.’

These famous lines from Keats’s ‘Ode to a Nightingale’ perfectly evoke the carnival atmosphere.
In Chapter 6 of ‘Book the Third’ there is a vivid delineation of a Hunt Ball performed at the town-hall of Toneborough. When Somerset enters there,

The doors were opened for him, and entering the vestibule lined with flags, flowers, evergreens, and escutcheons, he stood looking into the furnace of gaiety beyond. (L 225)

For two to three hours the young people danced frantically seeming ‘not to know that they were mortal’ (L 225). The room vibrates ‘like a heart’ and ‘the pulse was regulated by the trembling strings of the most popular quadrille band in Wessex’ (L 225). The detail description of the heterogeneous gathering is significant.

The room was crowded — too crowded. Every variety of fair one, beauties primary, secondary, and tertiary, appeared among the personages composing the throng. There were suns and moons; also pale planets of little account. Broadly speaking, these daughters of the county fell into two classes: one the pink-faced unsophisticated girls from neighbouring rectories and small country-houses, who knew not town except for an occasional fortnight, and who spent their time from Easter to Lammas Day much as they spent it during the remaining nine
months of the year: the other class were the children of the wealthy landowners who migrated each season to the townhouse; (L 225-226)

The collective nature of the dance party and its spontaneity give it a carnivalesque quality. Though the congregation comprises of youths from different strata of the society, the festive nature of the occasion reminds us of the Saturnalian exuberance. Besides, like carnival, the barrier between the haves and the have-nots dissolves here.

The fourth chapter of ‘Book the Sixth’ opens up in the Lord-Quantock-Arms Inn at Markton on a windy November afternoon. A number of farmers and some other professional men of the town gather there as the ‘rural landlord’ (L 397) of the inn arranges a feast for the workpeople. His ‘usual position was for the moment reversed’ (L 397). He orders,

‘[...] Here maid! — what with the wind, and standing about, my blood’s as low as water — bring us a thimbleful of that that isn’t gin and not far from it.’ (L 398)

The commoners gossip about Paula’s prospect of becoming Mrs Somerset. Havil informs them that the couple has already married abroad when they had been on a foreign tour. After a while the newly wedded couple arrives
outside the inn. The landlord declares ‘all’s well that ends well [...]’ (L 399). The crowd gathers outside.

Raising a hurrah, the group would not leave till Somerset had showed himself at the bay-window above; and then declined to go away till Paula also had appeared, when, remarking that her husband seemed a quite young man enough, and would make a very good country member when their present one misbehaved himself, the assemblage good-humouredly disappeared. (L 400)

Their appreciative gesture brings out their fellow-feeling for the neighbours, their inherent generosity and their quality of appreciating anything positive.

In Two on a Tower (1882), laughter is primarily provided by the ‘cheerful and well-known’ (TT 17) rustic characters like Sammy Blare, Nat Chapman, Hezekiah Biles and Haymoss Fry whom we first meet in the Second Chapter at Swithin St Cleeve’s apartment when they assemble there to practice church-music as the members of the choir. However, there is scarcely any elaborate description of their collective enjoyment. Only in Chapter XXIV there is a touch of merriment prior to the confirmation at the Welland Church and the following grand luncheon in honour of the Bishop Helmsdale at Welland House. The mid-May morning is delineated nicely by the author. After portraying the outworks of the Welland gardens comprising
of the lilac, the laburnum, and the guilder-rose, the larkspur, the peony;

Hardy describes:

The animate things that moved amid this scene of colour were plodding bees, gadding butterflies, and numerous sauntering young feminine candidates for the impending confirmation, who, having gaily bedecked themselves for the ceremony, were enjoying their own appearance by walking about in twos and threes till it was time to start. (TT 174)

Swithin St Cleeve, who comes to the Welland church to attend the confirmation, is vexed not to see his beloved (and secretly married wife) Viviette. But as he approaches the church porch, he discovers

From the north side of the nave smiled a host of girls, gaily uniform in dress, age, and a temporary repression of their natural tendency to 'skip like a hare over the meshes of good counsel.' Their white muslin dresses, their round white caps, from beneath whose borders hair-knots and curls of various shades of brown escaped upon their low shoulders, as if against their will, lighted up the dark pews and grey stone-work to an unwonted warmth and life. (TT 175)
Ultimately the luncheon takes place where the Bishop is fascinated by Viviette ‘to an unprecedented degree’ (TT 179). The lively movement of the young girls and their colourful garments add to the vivacity of the occasion. The intensity of the festive atmosphere is accentuated by their youthful presence.

**The Second Phase**

This portion includes the exploration of Hardy’s last three novels for the elements of laughter in them. In *Tess* and *Jude* such elements are present to a certain extent though rather subdued. *The Well-Beloved* has scarcely any scope of incorporating simple unrestrained mirth of the proletariats as this novel focuses exclusively on an artist wrestling with his mode eventually disillusionment with the created artifact which ultimately leads him to resign.

*Tess of the d’Urbervilles* (1891) which appeals to the widest range of readers and which is significantly ranked as ‘one of the greatest novels in all world literature’ by the Bishop of Salisbury at the Hardy Society Conference church service in 1990 (Gibson 117), depicts the ‘children of the open air’ (T 84) and contains elements of rural joviality. While commenting on the opening chapter, Duffin observes,
The method of presenting the necessary facts about the D’Urberville descent, the *racy humour* of the dialogue, the picture of John Durbeyfield: all are beyond praise. (49)

J. C. Brown identifies that Hardy recognizes drinking as one of the few pleasures enjoyed by the rustics. The novelist explains Joan Durbeyfield’s search of her husband thus:

This going to hunt up her shiftless husband at the inn was one of Mrs Durbeyfield’s still extant enjoyments [...] shutting her eyes to his defects of character, and regarding him only in his ideal presentation as lover. (TD 44)

Mr Durbeyfield is sometimes found with his wife Joan in a Bacchic mood in the public-house and the drinking continues up to late hours.

The second chapter portrays Marlott, Tess’s native place, in the lap of the vale of Blackmoor, and a group of girls including Tess join in the May-day dancing in accordance with the ancient custom. Though their jig is disturbed by ‘the richly comical passing of John Durbeyfield, singing, drunk, in the carriage he has hired to transport his new splendours’ (Duffin 49), the girls ‘were all cheerful, and many of them merry’ (TD 35).

The banded ones were all dressed in white gowns — a gay survival from Old Style days, when cheerfulness and May-time
were synonymous — days before the habit of taking long views had reduced emotions to a monotonous average. Their first exhibition of themselves was in a processional march of two and two round the parish. Ideal and real clashed slightly as the sun lit up their figures against the green hedges and creeper-laced house-fronts; for though the whole troop wore white garments, no two whites were alike among them. (TD 34)

The pulse of merry England reverberates in their dance, reminiscent of the Saturnalian gaiety. The unrestrained movement of the girls and ladies draws the attraction of the male inhabitants of the village.

[...] the club having entered the allotted space, dancing began. As there were no men in the company the girls danced at first with each other, but when the hour for the close of labour drew on, the masculine inhabitants of the village, together with other idlers and pedestrians, gathered round the spot, and appeared inclined to negotiate for a partner. (TD 36)

Angel Clare is among the onlookers, and sees for the first time Tess who 'remained with her comrades till dusk, and participated with a certain zest in the dancing'. (TD 39)
In Chapter 10 of ‘Phase the First’ titled ‘The Maiden’ the pleasures of the Trantridge inhabitants who ‘drank hard’ are delineated. The people of the farms around often talk about the futility of saving money and their chief pleasure is to go on every Saturday night to Chaseborough, a dilapidated market-town two or three miles away, and consume liquor sold to them as beer by the inn-keepers there. The result is obvious. They sleep the entire morning every Sunday instead of attending the church service. For a considerable time Tess restrains herself from this ‘weekly pilgrimages’ (TD 88). But being pressed by the matrons almost of her age, at length she consents to go.

Her first experience of the journey afforded her more enjoyment than she had expected, the hilariousness of the others being quite contagious after her monotonous attention to the poultry-farm all the week. She went again and again. (TD 88)

After a month or two on a Saturday in September a fair and a market day coincide and the people of Trantridge ‘sought double delights at the inns on that account’ (TD 88). Tess, due to some engagement in the poultry-farm, starts late and she is informed that her companions have gone to a private
"POPULAR FONDNESS FOR QUAIN'T OLD CUSTOMS": 
GREENAWAY-STYLE TREATMENT OF JACK I' THE GREEN

The First of May

CHIMNEY Sweeps' Day, Blackbird is gay,
Here he is singing, you see, in the "May."
He has feathers as black as a chimney sweep's coat,
So on Chimney Sweeps' Day he must pipe a glad note.

JACK IN THE GREEN

Jack-in-the-Green from door to door
Capers along with his followers four.
As May Day mummers are seldom seen,
Let us all give a copper to Jack-in-the-Green.

"POPULAR FONDNESS FOR QUAIN'T OLD CUSTOMS":
KATE GREENAWAY-STYLE TREATMENT OF JACK I' THE GREEN.

little jig at a hay-trusser's house. Approaching the house she hears the fiddled notes of a reel in progress but there is no sound of dancing.

When she came close and looked in she beheld indistinct forms racing up and down to the figure of the dance, the silence of their footfalls arising from their being overshoe in 'scroff'—that is to say, the powdery residuum from the storage of peat and other products, the stirring of which by their turbulent feet created the nebulosity that involved the scene. [...] They coughed as they danced, and laughed as they coughed. (TD 89)

Frenzied dancing continues and Trantridge 'metamorphosed itself thus madly' (TD 90). The fascination of the commoners for boozing and dancing is vividly presented here and this resembles the proceeding of the carnival merriment of ancient and medieval Europe. When the boozing is over 'Then these children of the open air, whom even excess of alcohol could scarce injure permanently, betook themselves to the field-path; [...] and the spirit of the scene, and of the moonlight, and of Nature, seemed harmoniously to mingle with the spirit of wine. (TD 96) The fact that collective rejoicing had not vanished even under the constant assault of rapid industrialization, that the instinct of mirth still existed in the late nineteenth century England, is once again exemplified here.
In *Jude the Obscure* (1895) where the male protagonist is ‘closer to being Hardy’s surrogate than any other male figure in the novels’ (Bloom 12) and which is generally considered to be grimly tragic, also contains elements of unrestrained carnivalesque, though, of course, in a much subdued degree. And though the traces of merriment are not altogether absent in this ‘autobiographical’ novel ‘The novel’s tragic effect was darkened, not lightened, by laughter’ (Turner 150).

In Chapter VI, ‘At Christminster’ Jude, while strolling in the street, enters a public hall, where a concert is in progress. The hall is full of shop youths, girls, soldiers, apprentices, even boys of eleven and ‘light women of the more respectable and amateur class’ (*JO* 105).

He had tapped the real Christminster life. A band was playing, and the crowd walked about and jostled each other, and every now and then a man got upon a platform and sang a comic song. (*JO* 105)

Some frivolous girls make advances desiring to get a little fun but Jude abstains from flirting or drinking perhaps due to the spell of Sue (who is not present there) hovering round him. The occasion brings out the exuberant town-life and exemplifies that though some of Hardy’s protagonists may
restrain themselves from rejoicing, the commoners, despite everyday work-load, display their capacity to indulge in uncontrolled merriment.

In the opening chapter of the section ‘At Shaston’ the author gives a hilarious description of ancient Shaston.

It was a place where the churchyard lay nearer heaven than the church steeple, where beer was more plentiful than water, and where there were more wanton women than honest wives and maids. It is also said that after the middle ages the inhabitants were too poor to pay their priests, and hence were compelled to pull down their churches, and refrain altogether from the public worship of God; a necessity which they bemoaned over their cups in the settles of their inns on Sunday afternoons. In those days the Shastonians were apparently not without a sense of humour. (JO 184)

Such a ‘de-throning’ of the church and appreciation of drinks by the Shastonians hark back to the Bacchanalian spirit of the ancient Europe. More significantly, Hardy’s highlighting this side of Shaston life exemplifies that as a close observer of society, he is not blind to its comic aspects even when handling a tragic plot.
In Chapter V of the section titled ‘At Aldbrickham and Elsewhere’ the author portrays the ‘Great Wessex Agricultural Show’ (JO 267) at Stoke-Barehills. The fair is arranged for a week every year. A green field of a square half mile is covered with rows of large tents, huts, booths, pavilions, arcades and porticoes. People come from the town en masse and enter the exhibition ground. There are, on the one hand, the Art Department, the horticulture tent etc.; on the other, there is refreshment bar as well. Sue, who has come along with Jude and Father Time, dressed in her new summer cloth, ‘flexible and light as a bird [...] went along as if she hardly touched ground’ (JO 269), is delighted to meet Anny, her childhood friend, there. ‘Anny burst out in hearty laughter at the mere fact of the chance encounter’ (JO 270). Anny’s disposition represents the crowd’s merry mood in general though persons like Arabella exploit the gathering for some cruder purposes. Sue and her family attend the pavilion of flowers —

[…] Sue’s usually pale cheeks reflecting the pink of the tinted roses at which she gazed; for the gay sights, the air, the music, and the excitement of a day’s outing with Jude, had quickened her blood and made her eyes sparkle with vivacity. (JO 273)

while Arabella loitering in search of her spouse ‘found him seated on a stool by the bar, talking to one of the gaily dressed maids who had served
him with spirits' (JO 272). Such heterogeneous sources of entertainment are the characteristics of the agricultural fair. However, public delight in any fair meant for common people retains at least some heritage of the carnival spirit.

Chapter VII of the same section depicts the spring fair at Kennetbridge. The author observes that though this trade gathering has been much reduced from its original size, ‘the long straight street of the borough presented a lively scene about midday’ (JO 286) on a Saturday evening in May. The reduction of the size of the fair and that of mirth are due to the annual migration of the rustic labourers to the industrial towns. In ‘The Dorsetshire Labourers’, Hardy comments,

> It is the common remark of villagers above the labouring class, who know the latter well as personal acquaintances, that “there are no nice homely workfolk now as there used to be.” There may be, and is, some exaggeration in this, but it is only natural that, now different districts of them are shaken together once a year, and redistributed, like a shuffled pack of cards, they have ceased to be so local in feeling or manner as formerly, and have entered on the condition of inter-social citizens, “whose city stretches the whole county over”. (Orel 181)
In Chapter VII of the final section titled ‘At Christminster Again’ we find Arabella arranging a ‘convivial gathering’ (JO 351) to boost Jude up and to help him recover from his physical (and perhaps mental) agony. When Jude is asked to suggest any guest of his own choice other than those mentioned by Arabella and her father Mr Donn, he, in a ‘saturnine humour of perfect recklessness’ adds to the list the names of Uncle Joe, Stagg and ‘others whom he remembered as having been frequenters of the well-known tavern during his bout therein years before’ (JO 351). Tinker Taylor, one of Donn’s neighbours, who was not invited, comes to the butcher’s shop at late hours for trotters. He finds none there but was promised to get his requirements the next morning. Being inquisitive, he glances into the back parlour and ‘saw the guests sitting round, card-playing, and drinking, and otherwise enjoying themselves at Donn’s expense’ (JO 351). Taylor returns to his home and when he comes to Donn’s shop next morning, still finding nobody there taps at the door of the sitting room. And he is utterly taken aback to discover that

Hosts and guests were sitting card-playing, smoking and talking, precisely as he had left them eleven hours earlier; [...] though it had been broad daylight for two hours out of doors. (JO 352)
Taylor can hardly rely on his eyes and it seems to him that suddenly he is flung back again into the last night.

Though this party is arranged by Arabella mainly to announce her remarriage with Jude; the plebeians' jest for any festive occasion and that too continuing up to almost any length of time testifies to the continuity of the festive tradition even in the industrializing nineteenth century England. This occasion once again proves that unlike the protagonists people in the lower stratum of the society aspire less and so suffer less. With their down-to-earth expectations they remain satisfied with whatever meagre sources of enjoyment they get. And they can lengthen the hours of revelry to relish those occasional chances of happiness in their toilsome existence.

The last chapter of the novel strikes an excellent dialogic of the protagonists' pathetic mental and physical agony indoor and the festive exuberance in the open air outside. This dialogic is most poignantly manifest in the words of Jude lying in his death-bed and listening to the noise of the festive crowd outside:

‘There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor.... The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master. [...]’ (JO 374)
Of course, this significant utterance may imply the plight of human beings caged in the earthly existence and frequently oppressed by their creator who is mentioned as the ‘master’ here. But the Saturnalian implication of unrestrained merry-making may also be considered in another light. The hurrahs of the people outdoor after each utterance of the protagonist make the dichotomy of death and life, pathos and festivity, all the more prominent. The dilemma of Arabella in this context is significant:

‘I should not mind having a spin there with a fellow’s arm round my waist,’ she said to one of the men. ‘But Lord, I must be getting home again — there’s a lot to do. No dancing for me!’ (JO 375).

However, for the common people the festival is the time of rejoicing. Those who come up from the villages go on ‘picnicking on the grass’ (JO 372). Several Dons and their wives, the undergraduates with their jolly female companions join the fest. The people enjoy horse-play, more vigorously the boat-racing and ‘The fun on the water reached the acme of excitement’ (JO 377). Meanwhile Jude passes away — ‘The bumping of near thirty years had ceased’ (JO 376). The dialogic reaches the pinnacle at this juncture ascertaining once again that though the protagonists may suffer and cease to exist, there is no cessation of merriment for the world outside.
NOTES


2. F.B. Pinion in A Thomas Hardy dictionary informs, ‘Such a peal would require eight bells, Hardy’s bell-ringing here (DR. Sequel) is based on what he knew of the six-bell peal at Fordington.