

To H.H.O.C., K.P.A.D., A.R.L.M. and L.G.T.

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Good Little Thomas Hardy

C. H. Salter

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Good Little Thomas Hardy

Preface

Hardy is now widely read, in schools and universities and by the general public, and is seen on films and television. Apart from his merits, the reasons for this may be the brevity of his novels compared with other Victorians, his intelligibility without knowledge of the period, and our nostalgia. Signs and perhaps additional causes of this interest are the numerous editions of his works and of books about him, informative, critical, and hack. By informative I mean particularly the notes in the New Wessex edition of the novels, 1974–5; the collection of the prefaces and essays in a single volume of *Personal Writings*; the edition of the *Literary Notes I* and “1867 Notebook”; Professor Purdy’s *Bibliographical Study*; and Mr Pinion’s *Hardy Companion*. But these have been accompanied by excessive claims for Hardy as a Victorian man of ideas and social critic, and elaborate accounts of his art, some of which simply ignore his inferior work. In what follows I have tried to restore to the reader his freedom to respond to Hardy in what, to Hardy, can be the only right way – simply. This has resulted in a largely negative and destructive approach, even in my final, more positive, chapter: I hope I have shown my kindness for my subject *obiter*, and that some of my evidence may be useful to those reaching different conclusions. My title is, of course, taken from James’s letter to R. L. Stevenson (19 March 1892).

I would like to thank Irene Elsey for typing my illegible manuscript on top of all her other work.