



Thomas Hardy's 'Poetical Matter' Notebook

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Thomas Hardy's 'Poetical Matter' notebook, the last to be published from among the small group of notebooks not destroyed by Hardy himself or by his executors, has now been meticulously edited with full scholarly annotation. Through its inclusion of so many notes copied by Hardy from old pocket-books subsequently destroyed, 'Poetical Matter' reaches back to all periods of his life, and is especially valuable from a biographical standpoint for its expansion and enhancement of knowledge of Hardy's final years and for its preservation of such intimate records as his richly revealing memories of the Bockhampton of his childhood and his sexually charged impressions of a woman glimpsed during a trip on a pleasure steamer in 1868. Its special distinctiveness nevertheless lies in its uniqueness as a late working notebook devoted specifically to verse. Florence Hardy, Hardy's widow, recalled his having experienced a great outburst of late creativity, feeling that he could go on writing almost indefinitely, and 'Poetical Matter' bears direct witness to his actively thinking about poetry and projecting and composing new poems until shortly before his death at the age of eighty-seven. As such, it contains an abundance of new ideas for poems and sequences of poems and demonstrates Hardy's characteristic creative progression, his working variously with initial ideas, with gathered notes, whether old or new, and with tentative prose formulations, verse fragments, metrical schemes, and rhyme patterns, towards the writing of the drafts from which, yet further worked and reworked, the completed poem would ultimately emerge.

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