

“It is a difficult question, my friends, for any young man... whether to follow uncritically the track he finds himself in, without considering his aptness for it, or to consider what his aptness or bent may be, and reshape his course accordingly. I tried to do the latter, and I failed. But I don't admit that my failure proved my view to be a wrong one, or that my success would have made it a right one; though that's how we appraise such attempts nowadays—I mean, not by their essential soundness, but by their accidental outcomes... However, it was my poverty and not my will that consented to be beaten. It takes two or three generations to do what I tried to do in one; and my impulses—affections—vices perhaps they should be called—were too strong not to hamper a man without advantages, who should be as cold-blooded as a fish and as selfish as a pig to have a really good chance of being one of his country's worthies... I am in a chaos of principles—groping in the dark—acting by instinct and not after example. Eight or nine years ago, when I came here first, I had a neat stock of fixed opinions, but they dropped away one by one, and the further I get the less sure I am. I doubt if I have anything more for my present rule of life than following inclinations which do me and nobody else any harm, and actually give pleasure to those I love best.

There, gentlemen, since you wanted to know how I was getting on, I have told you. Much good may it do you! I cannot explain further here.”

Thomas Hardy