



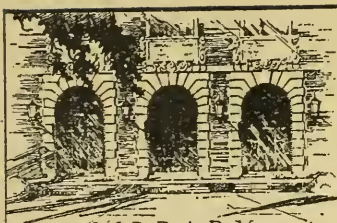
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THE
RETURN OF THE NATIVE

SECOND VOLUME

THE
RETURN OF THE NATIVE

BY

THOMAS HARDY

AUTHOR OF

'FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD' 'A PAIR OF BLUE EYES' ETC.

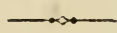
'To sorrow
I bade good morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind ;
But cheerly, cheerly,
She loves me dearly ;
She is so constant to me, and so kind.
I would deceive her,
And so leave her,
But ah ! she is so constant and so kind'

IN THREE VOLUMES — VOL. II.

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BOOK SECOND—*continued*

CHAPTER VI.

THE TWO STAND FACE TO FACE.

THE room had been arranged with a view to the dancing, the large oak table having been moved back till it stood as a breastwork to the fireplace. At each end, behind, and in the chimney-corner were grouped the guests, many of them being warm-faced and panting, among whom Eustacia cursorily recognised some well-to-do persons from beyond the heath. Thomasin, as she had expected, was not visible, and Eustacia recollected that a light had shone from an upper window when they were outside—the window, probably, of Thomasin's room. A nose, chin, hands, knees, and toes projected from the seat within the chimney-opening, which

members she found to unite in the person of Grandfer Cattle, Mrs. Yeobright's occasional assistant in the garden, and therefore one of the invited. The smoke went up from an Etna of turf in front of him, played round the notches of the chimney-crook, struck against the salt-box, and got lost among the fitches.

Another part of the room soon riveted her gaze. At the other side of the chimney stood the settle, which is the necessary supplement to a fire so open that nothing less than a strong breeze will carry up the smoke. It is, to the hearths of old-fashioned cavernous fireplaces, what the east belt of trees is to the exposed country estate, or the north wall to the garden. Outside the settle candles gutter, locks of hair wave, young women shiver, and old men sneeze. Inside is Paradise. Not a symptom of a draught disturbs the air; the sitters' backs are as warm as their faces, and songs and old tales are drawn from the occupants by the comfort-

able heat, like fruit from melon-plants in a frame.

It was, however, not with those who sat in the settle that Eustacia was concerned. A face showed itself with marked distinctness against the dark tanned wood of the upper part. The owner, who was leaning against the settle's outer end, was Clement Yeobright, or Clym, as he was called here; she knew it could be nobody else. The spectacle constituted an area of two feet in Rembrandt's intensest manner. A strange power in the lounge's appearance lay in the fact that, though his whole figure was visible, the observer's eye was only aware of his face.

To one of middle age the countenance was that of a young man, though a youth might hardly have seen any necessity for the term of immaturity. But it was really one of those faces which convey less the idea of so many years as its age than of so much experience as its store. The number of their years may have adequately summed

up Jared, Mahalaleel, and the rest of the antediluvians, but the age of a modern man is to be measured by the intensity of his history.

The face was well-shaped, even excellently. But the mind within was beginning to use it as a mere waste tablet whereon to trace its idiosyncrasies as they developed themselves. The beauty here visible would in no long time be ruthlessly overrun by its parasite, thought, which might just as well have fed upon a plainer exterior where there was nothing it could harm. Had Heaven preserved Yeobright from a wearing habit of meditation, people would have said 'A handsome man.' Had his brain unfolded under sharper contours they would have said 'A thoughtful man.' But an inner strenuousness was preying upon an outer symmetry, and they rated his look as singular.

Hence people who began by beholding him ended by perusing him. His countenance was overlaid with legible meanings.

Without being thought-worn he yet had certain marks derived from a perception of his surroundings, such as are not unfrequently found on men at the end of the four or five years of endeavour which follow the close of placid pupilage. He already showed that thought is a disease of flesh, and indirectly bore evidence that ideal physical beauty is incompatible with growth of fellow-feeling and a full sense of the coil of things. Mental luminousness must be fed with the oil of life, even though there is already a physical need for it; and the pitiful sight of two demands on one supply was just showing itself here.

When standing before certain men the philosopher regrets that thinkers are but perishable tissue, the artist that perishable tissue has to think. Thus to deplore, each from his point of view, the mutually destructive interdependence of spirit and flesh would have been instinctive with these in critically observing Yeobright.

As for his look, it was a natural cheerfulness striving against depression from without, and not quite succeeding. The look suggested isolation, but it revealed something more. As is usual with bright natures, the deity that lies ignominiously chained within an ephemeral human carcase shone out of him like a ray.

The effect upon Eustacia was palpable. The extraordinary pitch of excitement that she had reached beforehand would, indeed, have caused her to be influenced by the most commonplace man. She was troubled at Yeobright's presence.

The remainder of the play ended: the Saracen's head was cut off, and Saint George stood as victor. Nobody commented, any more than they would have commented on the fact of mushrooms coming in autumn or snowdrops in spring. They took the piece as phlegmatically as did the actors themselves. It was a phase of cheerfulness which was, as a matter of course, to be passed

through every Christmas ; and there was no more to be said.

They sang the plaintive chant which follows the play, during which all the dead men rise to their feet in a silent and awful manner, like the ghosts of Napoleon's soldiers in the Midnight Review. Afterwards the door opened, and Fairway appeared on the threshold, accompanied by Christian and another. They had been waiting outside for the conclusion of the play, as the players had waited for the conclusion of the dance.

'Come in, come in,' said Mrs. Yeobright ; and Clym went forward to welcome them. 'How is it you are so late? Grandfer Cattle has been here ever so long, and we thought you'd have come with him, as you live so near one another.'

'Well, I should have come earlier,' Mr. Fairway said, and paused to look along the beam of the ceiling for a nail to hang his hat on ; but, finding his accustomed one to be occupied by the mistletoe, and all the

nails in the walls to be burdened with bunches of holly, he at last relieved himself of the hat by ticklishly balancing it between the candle-box and the head of the clock-case. 'I should have come earlier, ma'am,' he resumed, with a more composed air, 'but I know what parties be, and how there's none too much room in folks' houses at such times, so I thought I wouldn't come till you'd got settled a bit.'

'And I thought so too, Mrs. Yeobright,' said Christian earnestly; 'but father there was so eager that he had no manners at all, and left home almost afore 'twas dark. I told him 'twas barely decent to come so oversoon; but words be wind.'

'Klk! I wasn't going to bide waiting about till half the game was over. I'm as light as a kite when anything's going on!' crowed Grandfer Cattle from the chimney-seat.

Fairway had meanwhile concluded a critical gaze at Yeobright. 'Now, you may

not believe it,' he said to the rest of the room, 'but I should never have knowed this gentleman if I had met him anywhere off his own heth : he's altered so much.'

'You too have altered, and for the better, I think, Timothy,' said Yeobright, surveying the firm figure of Fairway.

'Master Yeobright, look me over too. I have altered for the better, haven't I, hey?' said Grandfer Cante, rising and placing himself something above half an inch from Clym's eye, to induce the most searching criticism.

'To be sure we will,' said Fairway, taking the candle and moving it over the surface of the Grandfer's countenance, the subject of his scrutiny irradiating himself with light and pleasant smiles, and giving himself quick jerks of juvenility.

'You haven't changed much,' said Yeobright.

'If there's any difference, Grandfer is younger,' appended Fairway decisively.

‘And yet not my own doing, and I feel no pride in it,’ said the pleased ancient. ‘But I can’t be cured of my vagaries; them I plead guilty to. Yes, Master Cattle always was that, as we know. But I am nothing by the side of you, Mister Clym.’

‘Nor any o’ us,’ said Humphrey, in a low rich tone of admiration, not intended to reach anybody’s ears.

‘Really, there would have been nobody here who could have stood as decent second to him, or even third, if I hadn’t been a soldier in the Bang-up Locals (as we was called for our smartness),’ said Grandfer Cattle. ‘And even as ’tis we all look a little scammish beside him. But in the year four ’twas said there wasn’t a finer figure in the whole South Wessex than I, as I looked when dashing past the shop-winders with the rest of our company on the day we ran out o’ Budmouth because it was thoughted that Boney had landed round the point. There was I, straight as a young poplar,

wi' my firelock, and my bagnet, and my spatterdashes, and my stock sawing my jaws off, and my accoutrements sheening like the seven stars. Yes, neighbours, I was a pretty sight in my soldiering days. You ought to have seen me in four.'

' 'Tis his mother's side where Master Clym's figure comes from, bless ye,' said Timothy. 'I knowed her brothers well. Longer coffins were never made in the whole county of Wessex, and 'tis said that poor George's knees were crumpled up a little e'en as 'twas.'

' Coffins, where?' inquired Christian, drawing nearer. 'Have the ghost of one appeared to anybody, Master Fairway?'

' No, no. Don't let your mind so mislead your ears, Christian; and be a man,' said Timothy reproachfully.

' I will,' said Christian. 'But now I think o't, my shadow last night seemed just the shape of a coffin. What is it a sign of when your shade's like a coffin, neighbours?'

It can't be nothing to be afeard of, I suppose ?'

'Afeard, no!' said the Grandfer. 'Faith, I was never afeard of nothing except Boney, or I shouldn't ha' been the soldier I was. Yes, 'tis a thousand pities you didn't see me in four !'

By this time the mummers were preparing to leave ; but Mrs. Yeobright stopped them by asking them to sit down and have a little supper. To this invitation Father Christmas, in the name of them all, readily agreed.

Eustacia was happy in the opportunity of staying a little longer. The cold and frosty night without was doubly frigid to her. But the lingering was not without its difficulties. Mrs. Yeobright, for want of room in the larger apartment, placed a bench for the mummers immediately inside the pantry-door, which opened from the sitting-room. Here they seated themselves in a row, the door being left open : thus they were still virtually in the same apartment. Mrs. Yeo-

bright now murmured a few words to her son, who crossed the room to the pantry, striking his head against the mistletoe as he passed, and brought the mummers beef and bread, cake, pasty, mead, and elder-wine, the waiting being done by him and his mother, that the little maidservant might sit as guest. The mummers doffed their helmets, and began to eat and drink.

‘But you will surely have some?’ said Clym to the Turkish Knight, as he stood before that warrior tray in hand. She had refused, and still sat covered, only the sparkle of her eyes being visible between the ribbons which covered her face.

‘None, thank you,’ replied Eustacia.

‘He’s quite a youngster,’ said the Saracen apologetically, ‘and you must excuse him. He’s not one of the old set, but have jined us because t’other couldn’t come.’

‘But he will take something?’ persisted Yeobright. ‘Try a glass of mead or elder-wine.’

‘ Yes, you had better try that,’ said the Saracen. ‘ It will keep the cold out going home-along.’

Though Eustacia could not eat without uncovering her face she could drink easily enough beneath her disguise. The elder-wine was accordinly accepted, and the glass vanished inside the ribbons.

At moments during this performance Eustacia was half in doubt about the security of her position ; yet it had a fearful joy. A series of attentions paid to her, and yet not to her but to some imaginary person, by the first man she had ever been inclined to adore, complicated her emotions indescribably. She had loved him partly because he was exceptional in this scene, partly because she had from the first instinctively determined to love him, chiefly because she was in desperate need of loving somebody. Believing that she must love him in spite of herself, she had been influenced after the fashion of the second Lord Lyttleton and other persons, who have

dreamed that they were to die on a certain day, and by stress of a morbid imagination have actually brought about that event. Once let a maiden admit the possibility of her being stricken with love for some one at some hour and place, and the thing is as good as done.

Did anything at this moment suggest to Yeobright the sex of the creature whom that fantastic guise inclosed, how extended was her scope, both in feeling and in making others feel, and how far her compass transcended that of her companions in the band? When the disguised Queen of Love appeared before Æneas a preternatural perfume accompanied her presence and betrayed her quality. If such a mysterious emanation ever was projected by the emotions of an earthly woman upon their object, it must have signified Eustacia's presence to Yeobright now. He looked at her wistfully, then seemed to fall into a reverie, as if he were forgetting what he observed. The momentary situation

ended, he passed on, and Eustacia sipped her wine without knowing what she drank. The man for whom she had predetermined to nourish a passion went into the small room, and across it to the further extremity.

The mummers, as has been stated, were seated on a bench, one end of which extended into the small apartment, or pantry, for want of space in the outer room. Eustacia, partly from shyness, had chosen the innermost seat, which thus commanded a view of the interior of the pantry as well as the room containing the guests. When Clym passed down the pantry her eyes followed him in the gloom which prevailed there. At the remote end was a door which, just as he was about to open it for himself, was opened by somebody within; and light streamed forth.

The person was Thomasin, with a candle, looking anxious, pale, and interesting. Yeobright appeared glad to see her, and pressed her hand. 'That's right, Tamsie,' he said heartily, as though recalled to himself by the

sight of her: 'you have decided to come down. I am glad of it.'

'Hush—no, no,' she said quickly. 'I only came to speak to you.'

'But why not join us?'

'I cannot. At least I would rather not. I am not well enough, and we shall have plenty of time together now you are going to be home a good long holiday.'

'It isn't nearly so pleasant without you. Are you really ill?'

'Just a little, my old cousin—here,' she said, playfully sweeping her hand across her heart.

'Ah, mother should have asked somebody else to be present to-night, perhaps?'

'O no, indeed. I merely stepped down, Clym, to ask you——' Here he followed her through the doorway into the private room beyond, and, the door closing, Eustacia and the mummer who sat next to her, the only other witness of the performance, saw and heard no more.

The heat flew to Eustacia's head and cheeks. She instantly guessed that Clym, having been home only these two or three days, had not as yet been made acquainted with Thomasin's painful situation with regard to Wildeve; and seeing her living there just as she had been living before he left home, he naturally suspected nothing. Eustacia felt a wild jealousy of Thomasin on the instant. Though Thomasin might possibly have tender sentiments towards another man as yet, how long could they be expected to last when she was shut up here with this interesting and travelled cousin of hers? There was no knowing what affection might not soon break out between the two, so constantly in each other's society, and not a distracting object near. Clym's boyish love for her might have languished, but it might easily be revived again.

Eustacia was nettled by her own contrivances. What a sheer waste of herself to be dressed thus while another was shining to

advantage! Had she known the full effect of the encounter she would have moved heaven and earth to get here in a natural manner. The power of her face all lost, the charm of her motions all disguised, the fascinations of her coquetry denied existence, nothing but a voice left to her: she had a sense of the doom of Echo. 'Nobody here respects me,' she said. She had overlooked the fact that, in coming as a boy among other boys, she would be treated as a boy. The slight, though of her own causing, and self-explanatory, she was unable to dismiss as unwittingly shown, so sensitive had the situation made her.

Women have done much for themselves in histrionic dress. To look far below those who, like a certain fair personator of Polly Peachum early in the last century, and another of Lydia Languish early in this, have won not only love but ducal coronets into the bargain, whole shoals of them have reached to the initial satisfaction of getting

love almost whence they would. But the Turkish Knight was denied even the chance of achieving this by the fluttering ribbons which she dared not brush aside.

Yeobright returned to the room without his cousin. When within two or three feet of Eustacia he stopped, as if again arrested by a thought. He was gazing at her. She looked another way, disconcerted, and wondered how long this purgatory was to last. After lingering a few seconds he passed on again.

To court their own discomfiture by love is a common instinct with certain perfervid women, whose temerity in this respect resembles that of the daring aristocrats who, previous to the French Revolution, patronised and coquetted with the philosophy which afterwards proved their ruin. Conflicting sensations of love, fear, and shame reduced Eustacia to a state of the utmost uneasiness. To escape was her great and immediate desire. The other mummings appeared to be

in no hurry to leave ; and murmuring to the lad who sat next to her that she preferred waiting for them outside the house, she moved to the door as imperceptibly as possible, opened it, and slipped out.

The calm, lone scene reassured her. She went forward to the palings and leant over them, looking at the moon. She had stood thus but a little time when the door again opened. Expecting to see the remainder of the band, Eustacia turned ; but no—Clym Yeobright came out as softly as she had done, and closed the door behind him.

He advanced and stood beside her. ‘I have an odd opinion,’ he said, ‘and should like to ask you a question. Are you a woman—or am I wrong?’

‘I am a woman.’

His eyes lingered on her with great interest. ‘Do girls often play as mummers now? They never used to.’

‘They don’t now.’

‘Why did you?’

‘To get excitement and shake off depression,’ she said in low tones.

‘What depressed you?’

‘Life.’

‘That’s a cause of depression a good many have to put up with.’

‘Yes.’

A long silence. ‘And do you find excitement?’ asked Clym at last.

‘At this moment, perhaps.’

‘Then you are vexed at being discovered?’

‘Yes; though I thought I might be.’

‘I would gladly have asked you to our party had I known you wished to come. Have I ever been acquainted with you in my youth?’

‘Never.’

‘Won’t you come in again, and stay as long as you like?’

‘No. I wish not to be further recognised.’

‘Well, you are safe with me.’ After remaining in thought a minute he added

gently, 'I will not intrude upon you longer. It is a strange way of meeting, and I will not ask why I find a cultivated woman playing such a part as this.'

She did not volunteer the reason which he seemed to hope for, and he wished her good-night, going thence round to the back of the house, where he walked up and down by himself for some time before re-entering.

Eustacia, warmed with an inner fire, could not wait for her companions after this. She flung back the ribbons from her face, opened the gate, and at once struck into the heath. She did not hasten along. Her grandfather was in bed at this hour, for she so frequently walked upon the hills on moonlight nights that he took no notice of her comings and goings, and, enjoying himself in his own way, left her to do likewise. A more important subject than that of getting indoors now engrossed her. Yeobright, if he had the least curiosity, would infallibly discover her name. What then? She first felt a sort of exulta-

tion at the way in which the adventure had terminated, even though at moments between her exultations she was abashed and blushful. Then this consideration recurred to chill her : What was the use of her exploit ? She was at present a total stranger to the Yeobright family. The unreasonable nimbus of romance with which she had encircled that man might be her misery. How could she allow herself to become so infatuated with a stranger ? And to fill the cup of her sorrow there would be Thomasin, living day after day in inflammable proximity to him ; for she had just learnt that, contrary to her first belief, he was going to stay at home some considerable time.

She reached the wicket at Mistover Knap, but before opening it she turned and faced the heath once more. The form of Blackbarrow stood above the hills, and the moon stood above Blackbarrow. The air was charged with silence and frost. The scene reminded Eustacia of a circumstance

which till that moment she had totally forgotten. She had promised to meet Wildeve by the Barrow this very night at eight, to give a final answer to his pleading for an elopement.

She herself had fixed the evening and the hour. He had probably come to the spot, waited there in the cold, and been greatly disappointed.

‘Well, so much the better: it did not hurt him,’ she said serenely. Wildeve had at present the rayless outline of the sun through smoked glass, and she could say such things as that with the greatest facility.

She remained deeply pondering; and Thomasin’s winning manner towards her cousin arose again upon Eustacia’s mind.

‘O that she had been married to Damon before this!’ she said. ‘And she would if it hadn’t been for me! If I had only known—if I had only known!’

Eustacia once more lifted her deep stormy eyes to the moonlight, and, sighing that tragic

sigh of hers which was so much like a shudder, entered the shadow of the roof. She threw off her trappings in the outhouse, rolled them up, and went indoors to her chamber.

CHAPTER VII.

A COALITION BETWEEN BEAUTY AND ODDNESS.

THE old Captain's prevailing indifference to his granddaughter's movements left her free as a bird to follow her own courses ; but it so happened that he did take upon himself the next morning to ask her why she had walked out so late.

'Only in search of events, grandfather,' she said, looking out of the window with that drowsy latency of manner which discovered so much force behind it whenever the trigger was pressed.

'Search of events—one would think you were one of the bucks I knew at one-and-twenty.'

'It is so lonely here.'

'So much the better. If I were living in

a town my whole time would be taken up in looking after you. I fully expected you would have been home when I returned from the Woman.'

'I won't conceal what I did. I wanted an adventure, and I went with the mummers. I played the part of the Turkish Knight.'

'No, never? Ha, ha! Good gad! I didn't expect it of you, Eustacia.'

'It was my first performance, and it certainly will be my last. Now I have told you—and remember it is a secret.'

'Of course. But, Eustacia, you never did—ha! ha! Dammy, how 'twould have pleased me forty years ago! But remember, no more of that, my girl. You may walk on the heath night or day, as you choose, so that you don't bother me; but none of that again.'

'You need have no fear for me, grand-papa.'

Here the conversation ceased, Eustacia's moral training never exceeding in severity a

dialogue of this sort, which, if it ever became profitable to good works, would be a result not dear at the price. But her thoughts strayed far from her own personality after this ; and, full of a passionate and indescribable solicitude for one to whom she was not even a name, she went forth into the amplitude of tanned wild around her, restless as Ahasuerus the Jew. She was about half a mile from her residence when she beheld a sinister redness arising from a ravine a little way in advance—dull and lurid like a flame in sunlight. It was neither Moloch nor Mephistopheles, but Diggory Venn.

When the farmers who had wished to buy in a new stock of reddle during the last month had inquired where Venn was to be found people replied, 'On Egdon Heath.' Day after day the answer was the same. Now, since Egdon was populated with heathcroppers and furze-cutters rather than with sheep and shepherds, and the downs where most of the latter were to be found lay some to the

north, some to the west of Egdon, his reason for camping about there like Israel in Zin was not apparent. The position was central and occasionally desirable. But the sale of redden was not Diggory's primary object in remaining on the heath, particularly to so late a period of the year, when most travellers of his class had gone into winter quarters.

Eustacia looked at the lonely man. Wildeve had told her at their last meeting that Venn had been thrust forward by Mrs. Yeobright as one ready and anxious to take his place as Thomasin's betrothed. His figure was perfect, his face young and well outlined, his eye bright, his intelligence keen, and his position one which he could readily better if he chose. But in spite of possibilities it was not likely that Thomasin would accept this erratic young man while she had a cousin like Yeobright at her elbow, and Wildeve at the same time not absolutely indifferent. Eustacia was not long in guessing that poor Mrs. Yeobright, in her anxiety for

her niece's future, had mentioned this lover to stimulate the zeal of the other. Eustacia was on the side of the Yeobrights now, and entered into the spirit of the aunt's desire.

'Good morning, miss,' said the reddleman, taking off his cap of hareskin, and apparently bearing her no ill-will from recollection of their last meeting.

'Good morning, reddleman,' she said, hardly troubling to lift her heavily-shaded eyes to his. 'I did not know you were so near. Is your van here too?'

Venn moved his elbow towards a hollow in which a dense brake of purple-stemmed brambles had grown to such vast dimensions as almost to form a dell. Brambles, though churlish when handled, are kindly shelter in early winter, being the latest of the deciduous bushes to lose their leaves. The roof and chimney of Venn's caravan showed behind the tracery and tangles of the brake.

'You remain near this part?' she asked with more interest.

‘ Yes, I have business here.’

‘ Not altogether the selling of reddle ?’

‘ It has nothing to do with that.’

‘ It has to do with Miss Yeobright ?’

Her face seemed to ask for an armed peace, and he therefore said frankly, ‘ Yes, miss ; it is on account of her.’

‘ On account of your approaching marriage with her ?’

Venn flushed through his stain. ‘ Don’t make sport of me, Miss Vye,’ he said.

‘ It isn’t true ?’

‘ Certainly not.’

She was thus convinced that the reddleman was a mere *pis aller* in Mrs. Yeobright’s mind ; one, moreover, who had not even been informed of his promotion to that lowly standing. ‘ It was a mere notion of mine,’ she said quietly ; and was about to pass by without further speech, when, looking round to the right, she saw a painfully well-known figure serpentining upwards by one of the little paths which led to the top where she stood. Owing

to the necessary windings of his course, his back was at present towards them. She glanced quickly round; to escape that man there was only one way. Turning to Venn, she said, 'Would you allow me to rest a few minutes in your van? The banks are damp for sitting on.'

'Certainly, miss; I'll make a place for you.'

She followed him behind the dell of brambles to his wheeled dwelling, into which Venn mounted, placing the three-legged stool just within the door.

'That is the best I can do for you,' he said, stepping down and retiring to the path, where he resumed the smoking of his pipe as he walked up and down.

Eustacia bounded into the vehicle and sat on the stool, ensconced from view on the side towards the trackway. Soon she heard the brushing of other feet than the reddleman's, a not very friendly 'Good-day' uttered by two men in passing each other, and then

the dwindling of the footfall of one of them in a direction onwards. Eustacia stretched her neck forward till she caught a glimpse of a receding back and shoulders; and she felt a wretched twinge of misery, she knew not why. It was the sickening feeling which, if the changed heart has any generosity at all in its composition, accompanies the sudden sight of a once-loved one who is beloved no more.

When Eustacia descended to proceed on her way the reddleman came near. 'It was Mr. Wildeve who passed, miss,' he said slowly, and expressed by his face that he expected her to feel vexed at having been sitting unseen.

'Yes, I saw him coming up the hill,' replied Eustacia. 'Why should you tell me that?' It was a bold question, considering the reddleman's knowledge of her past love; but her undemonstrative manner had power to repress the opinions of those she deemed remote from her.

‘I am glad to hear that you can ask it,’ said the reddleman bluntly. ‘And, now I think of it, it agrees with what I saw last night.’

‘Ah—what was that?’ Eustacia wished to leave him, but wished to know.

‘Mr. Wildeve stayed at Blackbarrow a long time waiting for a lady who didn’t come.’

‘You waited too, it seems?’

‘Yes, I always do. I was glad to see him disappointed. He will be there again to-night.’

‘To be again disappointed. The truth is, reddleman, that that lady, so far from wishing to stand in the way of Thomasin’s marriage with Mr. Wildeve, would be very glad to promote it.’

Venn felt much astonishment at this avowal, though he did not show it clearly; that exhibition may greet remarks which are one remove from expectation, but it is usually withheld in complicated cases of two removes and upwards. ‘Indeed, miss,’ he replied.

‘How do you know that Mr. Wildeve will come to Blackbarrow again to-night?’ she asked.

‘I heard him say to himself that he would. He’s in a regular temper.’

Eustacia looked for a moment what she felt, and she murmured, lifting her deep dark eyes anxiously to his, ‘I wish I knew what to do. I don’t want to be uncivil to him; but I don’t wish to see him again; and I have some few little things to return to him.’

‘If you choose to send ’em by me, miss, and a note to tell him that you wish to say no more to him, I’ll take it for you quite privately. That would be the most straightforward way of letting him know your mind.’

‘Very well,’ said Eustacia. ‘Come towards my house, and I will bring it out to you.’

She went on, and as the path was an infinitely small parting in the shaggy locks of the heath the reddleman followed exactly

in her trail. She saw from a distance that the Captain was on the bank sweeping the horizon with his telescope ; and bidding Venn to wait where he stood, she entered the house alone.

In ten minutes she returned with a parcel and a note, and said, in placing them in his hand, 'Why are you so ready to take these for me ?'

'Can you ask that ?'

'I suppose you think to serve Thomasin in some way by it. Are you as anxious as ever to help on her marriage ?'

Venn was a little moved. 'I would sooner have married her myself,' he said in a low voice. 'But what I feel is that if she cannot be happy without him I will do my duty in helping her to get him, as a man ought.'

Eustacia looked curiously at the singular man who spoke thus. What a strange sort of love, to be entirely free from that quality of selfishness which is frequently the chief

constituent of the passion, and sometimes its only one! The reddleman's disinterestedness was so well deserving of respect that it overshoot respect by being barely comprehended; and she almost thought it absurd.

'Then we are both of one mind at last,' she said.

'Yes,' replied Venn gloomily. 'But if you would tell me, miss, why you take such an interest in her, I should be easier. It is so sudden and strange.'

Eustacia appeared at a loss. 'I cannot tell you that, reddleman,' she said coldly.

Venn said no more. He pocketed the letter, and, bowing to Eustacia, went away.

Blackbarrow had again become blended with night when Wildeve ascended the long acclivity at its base. On his reaching the top a shape grew up from the earth immediately behind him. It was that of Eustacia's emissary. He slapped Wildeve on the shoulder. The feverish young innkeeper

and ex-engineer started like Satan at the touch of Ithuriel's spear.

'The meeting is always at eight o'clock, at this place,' said Venn, 'and here we are—we three.'

'We three?' said Wildeve, looking quickly round.

'Yes; you, and I, and she. This is she.' He held up the letter and parcel.

Wildeve took them wonderingly. 'I don't quite see what this means,' he said. 'How do you come here? There must be some mistake.'

'It will be cleared from your mind when you have read the letter. Lanterns for one.' The reddleman struck a light, kindled an inch of tallow-candle which he had brought, and sheltered it with his cap.

'Who are you?' said Wildeve, discerning by the candlelight an obscure rubicundity of person in his companion. 'You are the reddleman I saw on the hill this morning—why, you are the man who——'

‘ Please read the letter.’

‘ If you had come from the other one I shouldn’t have been surprised,’ murmured Wildeve as he opened the letter and read. His face grew serious :—

TO MR. WILDEVE,—After some thought I have decided once and for all that we must hold no further communication. The more I consider the matter the more I am convinced that there must be an end to our acquaintance. Had you been uniformly faithful to me throughout these two years you might now have some ground for accusing me of heartlessness ; but if you calmly consider what I bore during the period of your desertion, and how I passively put up with your courtship of another without once interfering, you will, I think, own that I have a right to consult my own feelings when you come back to me again. That these are not what they were towards you may, perhaps, be a fault in me, but it is one which you can scarcely reproach me for when you remember how you left me for Thomasin.

The little articles you gave me in the early part of our friendship are returned by the bearer of this letter. They should rightly have been sent back when I first heard of your engagement to her.

EUSTACIA.

By the time that Wildeve reached her name the blankness with which he had read

the first half of the letter intensified to mortification. 'I am made a great fool of, one way and another,' he said pettishly. 'Do you know what is in this letter?'

The reddleman hummed a tune.

'Can't you answer me?' asked Wildeve warmly.

'Ru-um-tum-tum,' sang the reddleman.

Wildeve stood looking on the ground beside Venn's feet, till he allowed his eyes to travel upwards over Diggory's form, as illuminated by the candle, to his head and face. 'Ha-ha! Well, I suppose I deserve it, considering how I have played with them both,' he said at last, as much to himself as to Venn. 'But of all the odd things that ever I knew the oddest is that you should so run counter to your own interests as to bring this to me.'

'My interests?'

'Certainly. 'Twas your interest not to do anything which would send me courting Thomasin again, now she has accepted you—or something like it. Mrs. Yeobright says

you are likely to marry her. 'Tisn't true, then?'

'Good Lord! I heard of this before, but didn't believe it, When did she say so?'

Wildeve began humming as the reddleman had done.

'I don't believe it now,' cried Venn.

'Ru-um-tum-tum,' sang Wildeve.

'O Lord—how we can imitate!' said Venn contemptuously. 'Well, I'll have this out. I'll go straight to her.'

Diggory withdrew with an emphatic step, Wildeve's eye passing over his form in withering derision, as if he were no more than a heathcropper. When the reddleman's figure could no longer be seen Wildeve himself descended and plunged into the rayless hollow of the vale. Then he allowed his feelings vent.

'Humbled like this!' he said to himself. 'She has played that trick once too often. Between the two I am coming to the ground, am I? But we'll see. Little does she think

that I mean to take her at her word!’ He tore into fifty pieces the letter that he carried in his hand.

Wildevé was put upon his mettle by the situation. To lose the two women—he who had been the well-beloved of both—was too ironical an issue to be endured. He could only decently save himself by Thomasin ; and once he became her husband, Eustacia’s repentance, he thought, would set in for a long and bitter term. It was no wonder that Wildevé, ignorant of the new man at the back of the scene, should have supposed Eustacia to be playing a part. To believe that the letter was not the result of some momentary pique, to infer that she really gave him up to Thomasin, would have required previous knowledge of her transfiguration by that man’s influence. Who was to know that she had grown generous in the greediness of a new passion, that in coveting one cousin she was dealing liberally with another, that in her eagerness to appropriate she gave away ?

Full of this resolve to marry in haste, and wring the heart of the proud girl, Wildeve went his way.

Meanwhile Diggory Venn had returned to his van, where he stood looking thoughtfully into the stove. A new vista was opened up to him. But, however promising Mrs. Yeobright's views of him might be as a candidate for her niece's hand, one condition was indispensable to the favour of Thomasin herself, and that was a renunciation of his present wild mode of life. In this he saw little difficulty. He had already deposited a goodly sum of money in the nearest bank, and three months would suffice to start him in the channel from which he had been turned solely by the crushing of his hope as a lover. The vocation of a dairyman was what he had in his view; and thus established in the meadows beyond the heath, Venn thought that he could offer her a suitable home.

He could not afford to wait till the next

day before seeing Thomasin and detailing his plan. He speedily plunged himself into toilet operations, pulled a suit of cloth clothes from a box, and in about twenty minutes stood before the van-lantern as a reddleman in nothing but his face, the vermilion shades of which were not to be removed in a day. Closing the door and fastening it with a padlock, Venn set off towards Blooms-End.

He had reached the white palings and laid his hand upon the gate when the door of the house opened, and quickly closed again. A female form had glided in. At the same time a man, who had seemingly been standing with the woman in the porch, came forward from the house till he was face to face with Venn. It was Wildeve again.

‘Man alive, you’ve been quick at it,’ said Diggory sarcastically.

‘And you slow, as you will find,’ said Wildeve. ‘And,’ lowering his voice, ‘you may as well go back again now. I’ve claimed her, and got her. Ha-ha! Good night,

reddleman!' Thereupon Wildeve walked away.

Venn's heart sank within him, though it had not risen unduly high. He stood leaning over the palings in an indecisive mood for nearly a quarter of an hour. Then he went up the garden-path, knocked, and asked for Mrs. Yeobright.

Instead of requesting him to enter she came to the porch. There a discourse was carried on between them in low measured tones for the space of ten minutes or more. At the end of the time Mrs. Yeobright went in, and Venn sadly retraced his steps into the heath. When he had again regained his van he lit the lantern, and with an apathetic face at once began to pull off his best clothes, till in the course of a few minutes he reappeared as the confirmed and irretrievable reddleman that he had seemed before.

CHAPTER VIII.

FIRMNESS IS DISCOVERED IN A GENTLE HEART.

ON that evening the interior of Blooms-End, though cosy and comfortable, had been rather silent. Clym Yeobright was not at home. Since the Christmas party he had gone on a few days' visit to a friend about ten miles off.

The shadowy form seen by Venn to part from Wildeve in the porch, and quickly withdraw into the house, was Thomasin's. On entering she threw down a cloak which had been carelessly wrapped round her, and came forward to the light, where Mrs. Yeobright sat at her work-table, drawn up within the settle, so that part of it projected into the chimney-corner.

' I don't like your going out after dark

alone, Tasmin,' said her aunt quietly, without looking up from her work.

' I have only been just outside the door.'

' Well?' inquired Mrs. Yeobright, struck by a change in the tone of Thomasin's voice, and observing her. Thomasin's cheek was flushed to a pitch far beyond that which it had reached before her troubles, and her eyes glittered.

' It was *he* who knocked,' she said.

' I thought as much.'

' He wishes the marriage to be at once.'

' Indeed! What—is he anxious?' Mrs. Yeobright directed a searching look upon her niece. ' Why did not Mr. Wildeve come in?'

' He did not wish to. You are not friends with him, he says. He would like the wedding to be the day after to-morrow, quite privately; at the church of his parish—not at ours.'

' Oh! And what did you say?'

' I agreed to it,' Thomasin answered

firmly. 'I am a practical woman now. I don't believe in hearts at all. I would marry him under any circumstances since—since Clym's letter.'

A letter was lying on Mrs. Yeobright's work-basket, and at Thomasin's words her aunt re-opened it, and silently read for the tenth time that day:—

'What is the meaning of this silly story that people are circulating about Thomasin and Mr. Wildeve? I should call it humiliating if there was the least chance of its being true. How could such a gross falsehood have arisen? It is said that one should go abroad to hear news of home, and I appear to have done it. Of course I contradict the tale everywhere; but it is very vexing, and I wonder how it could have originated. It is too ridiculous that such a girl as Thomasin could so mortify us as to get jilted on the wedding-day. What has she done?'

'Yes,' Mrs. Yeobright said sadly, putting down the letter. 'If you think you can

marry him, do so. And since Mr. Wildeve wishes it to be unceremonious, let it be that too. I can do nothing. It is all in your own hands now. My power over your welfare came to an end when you left this house to go with him to Budmouth.' She continued, half in bitterness : ' I may almost ask, why do you consult me in the matter at all ? If you had gone and married him without saying a word to me I could hardly have been angry—simply because, poor girl, you cannot do a better thing.'

' Don't say that and dishearten me.'

' You are right : I will not.'

' I do not plead for him, aunt. Human nature is weak, and I am not a blind woman to insist that he is perfect. I did think so, but I don't now. But I know my course, and you know that I know it. I hope for the best.'

' And so do I, and we will both continue to,' said Mrs. Yeobright, rising and kissing her. ' Then the wedding, if it comes off, will

be on the morning of the very day that Clym comes home?’

‘Yes. I decided that it ought to be over before he came. After that you can look him in the face, and so can I. Our concealments will matter nothing.’

Mrs. Yeobright moved her head in thoughtful assent, and presently said, ‘Do you wish me to give you away? I am willing to undertake that, you know, if you wish, as I was last time. After once forbidding the banns, I think I can do no less.’

‘I don’t think I will ask you to come,’ said Thomasin reluctantly, but with decision. ‘It would be unpleasant, I am almost sure. Better let there be only strangers present, and none of my relations at all. I would rather have it so. I do not wish to do anything which may touch your credit, and I feel that I should be uncomfortable if you were there, after what has passed. I am only your niece, and there is no necessity why you should concern yourself more about me.’

‘ Well, he has beaten us,’ her aunt said. ‘ It really seems as if he had been playing with you in this way in revenge for my humbling him as I did by standing up against him at first.’

‘ Oh, no, aunt,’ murmured Thomasin.

They said no more on the subject then. Diggory Venn’s knock came soon after ; and Mrs. Yeobright, on returning from her interview with him in the porch, carelessly observed, ‘ Another lover has come to ask for you.’

‘ No?’

‘ Yes ; that young man Venn.’

‘ Asks to pay his addresses to me?’

‘ Yes ; and I told him he was too late.’

Thomasin looked silently into the candle-flame. ‘ Poor Diggory!’ she said, and then aroused herself to other things.

The next day was passed in mere mechanical deeds of preparation, both the women being anxious to immerse themselves in these to escape the emotional aspect of the

situation. Some wearing apparel and other articles were collected anew for Thomasin, and remarks on domestic details were frequently made, so as to obscure any inner misgivings about her future as Wildeve's wife.

The appointed morning came. The arrangement with Wildeve was that he should meet her at the church, to guard against any unpleasant curiosity which might have affected them had they been seen walking off together in the usual country way,

Aunt and niece stood together in the bedroom where the bride was dressing. The sun, where it could catch it, made a mirror of Thomasin's hair, which she always wore braided. It was braided according to a calendric system: the more important the day the more numerous the strands in the braid. On ordinary working-days she braided it in threes; on ordinary Sundays in fours; at May-polings, gipsyings, and the like she braided it in fives. Years ago she had said

that when she married she would braid it in sevens. It was braided in sevens to-day.

‘I have been thinking that I will wear my blue silk after all,’ she said. ‘It *is* my wedding-day, even though there may be something sad about the time. I mean,’ she added, anxious to correct any wrong impression, ‘not sad in itself, but in its having had great disappointment and trouble before it.’

Mrs. Yeobright breathed in a way which might have been called a sigh had she not resolutely determined that it should sound somewhat otherwise. ‘I almost wish Clyn had been at home,’ she said. ‘Of course you chose the time because of his absence.’

‘Partly. I have felt that I acted unfairly to him in not telling him all ; but, as it was done not to grieve him, I thought I would carry out the plan to its end, and tell the whole story when the sky was clear.’

‘You are a practical little woman,’ said Mrs. Yeobright smiling. ‘I wish you and he

—no, I don't wish anything. There, it is nine o'clock,' she interrupted, hearing a whizz and a dinging down stairs.

'I told Damon I would leave at nine,' said Thomasin, hastening out of the room.

Her aunt followed. When Thomasin was going down the little walk from the door to the wicket-gate Mrs. Yeobright looked reluctantly at her and said, 'It is a shame to let you go alone.'

'It is necessary,' said Thomasin.

'At any rate,' added her aunt, with forced cheerfulness, 'I shall call upon you this afternoon, and bring the cake with me. If Clym has returned by that time he will perhaps come too. I wish to show Mr. Wildeve that I bear him no ill-will. Let the past be forgotten. Well, God bless you! There, I don't believe in old superstitions, but I'll do it.' She threw a slipper at the retreating figure of the girl, who turned, smiled, and went on again.

A few steps further, and she looked back.

‘Did you call me, aunt?’ she tremulously inquired. ‘Good-bye!’

Moved by an uncontrollable feeling as she looked upon Mrs. Yeobright’s worn, wet face, she ran back, when her aunt came forward, and they met again. ‘O Tamsie,’ said the elder weeping, ‘I don’t like to let you go.’

‘I—I am——’ Thomasin began, giving way likewise. But, quelling her grief, she said ‘Good-bye!’ again and went on.

And then Mrs. Yeobright saw a little figure wending its way between the scratching furze-bushes, and diminishing far up the valley—a pale blue spot in a vast field of neutral brown, solitary and undefended except by the power of her own hope.

But the worst feature in the case was one which did not appear in the landscape: it was the man.

The hour chosen for the ceremony by Thomasin and Wildeve had been so timed as to enable her to escape the awkwardness

of meeting her cousin Clym, who was returning the same morning. To own to the partial truth of what he had heard in his absence would be distressing as long as the humiliating position resulting to herself and her aunt from the event was unimproved. It was only after a second and successful journey to the altar that she could lift up her head and prove the failure of the first attempt a pure accident.

She had not been gone from Blooms-End more than half-an-hour when Yeobright came up the road from the other direction and entered the house.

‘I had an early breakfast,’ he said to his mother after greeting her. ‘Now I could eat a little more.’

They sat down to the repeated meal, and he went on in a low, anxious voice, apparently imagining that Thomasin had not yet come down stairs :

‘What’s this I have heard about Thomasin and Mr. Wildeve?’

‘It is true in many points,’ said Mrs.

Yeobright quietly ; ‘ but it is all right now, I hope.’ She looked at the clock.

‘ True ?’

‘ Thomasin is gone to him to-day.’

Clym pushed away his breakfast. ‘ Then there is a scandal of some sort, and that’s what’s the matter with Thomasin. Was it this that made her ill ?’

‘ Yes. Not a scandal : a misfortune. I will tell you all about it, Clym. You must not be angry, but you must listen, and you’ll find that what we have done has been done for the best.’

She then told him the circumstances. All that he had known of the affair before he had returned from Paris was that there had existed an attachment between Thomasin and Wildeve, which his mother had at first discountenanced, but had since, owing to the arguments of Thomasin, looked upon in a little more favourable light. When she, therefore, proceeded to explain all he was greatly surprised and troubled.

‘And she determined that the wedding should be over before you came home,’ said Mrs. Yeobright, ‘that there might be no chance of her meeting you after you had heard the news, and so having a very painful time of it. That’s why she has gone to him; they have arranged to be married this morning.’

‘But I can’t understand it,’ said Yeobright, rising. ‘’Tis so unlike her. I can see why you did not write to me after that unfortunate return home. But why didn’t you let me know when the wedding was going to be—the first time?’

‘Well, I felt vexed with her just then. She seemed to me to be very obstinate; and when I found that you were nothing in her mind I vowed that she should be nothing in yours. I felt that she was only my niece after all; I told her she might marry, but that I should take no interest in it, and should not bother you about it either.’

‘It wouldn’t have been bothering me. Mother, you did wrong.’

‘I thought it might disturb you in your business, and that you might throw up your situation, or injure your prospects in some way because of it, so I said nothing. Of course, if they had married at that time in a proper manner, I should have told you at once.’

‘Tamsin actually being married while we are sitting here!’

‘Yes. Unless some accident happens again, as it did the first time. It may, considering he’s the same man.’

‘Yes, and I believe it will. Was it right to let her go? Suppose Wildeve is really a bad fellow?’

‘Then he won’t come, and she’ll come home again.’

‘You should have looked more into it.’

‘It is useless to say that,’ his mother answered, with an impatient look of sorrow. ‘You don’t know how bad it has been here

with us all these weeks, Clym. You don't know what a mortification anything of that sort is to a woman. You don't know the sleepless nights we've had in this house, and the almost bitter words that have passed between us since that fifth of November. I hope never to pass seven such weeks again. Tamsin has not gone outside the door, and I have been ashamed to look anybody in the face ; and now you blame me for letting her do the only thing that can be done to set that trouble straight.'

'No,' he said slowly. 'Upon the whole I don't blame you. But just consider how sudden it seems to me. Here was I, knowing nothing ; and then I am told all at once that Tamsie is gone to be married. Well, I suppose there was nothing better to do. Do you know, mother,' he continued after a moment or two, looking suddenly interested in his own past history, 'I once thought of Tamsin as a sweetheart? Yes, I did. How odd boys are! And when I came home and

saw her this time she seemed so much more affectionate than usual, that I was quite reminded of those days, particularly on the night of the party, when she was unwell. We had the party just the same—was not that rather cruel to her?’

‘It made no difference. I had arranged to give one, and it was not worth while to make more gloom than necessary. To begin by shutting ourselves up and telling you of Tamsin’s misfortunes, would have been a poor sort of welcome.’

Clym remained thinking. ‘I almost wish you had not had that party,’ he said; ‘and for other reasons. But I will tell you in a day or two. We must think of Tamsin now.’

They lapsed into silence. ‘I’ll tell you what,’ said Yeobright again, in a tone which showed some slumbering feeling still. ‘I don’t think it kind to Tamsin to let her be married like this, and neither of us there to keep up her spirits or care a bit about her.’

She hasn't disgraced herself, or done anything to deserve that. It is bad enough that the wedding should be so hurried and unceremonious, without our keeping away from it in addition. Upon my soul, 'tis almost a shame. I'll go.'

'It is over by this time,' said his mother, with a sigh; 'unless they were late, or he——'

'Then I shall be soon enough to see them come out. I don't quite like your keeping me in ignorance, mother, after all. Really, I half-hope he has failed to meet her?'

'And ruined her character?'

'Nonsense: that wouldn't ruin Thomasin.'

He took up his hat and hastily left the house. Mrs. Yeobright looked rather unhappy, and sat still, deep in thought. But she was not long left alone. A few minutes later Clym came back again, and in his company came Diggory Venn.

'I find there isn't time for me to get there,' said Clym.

‘Is she married?’ Mrs. Yeobright inquired, turning to the reddleman a face in which a strange strife of wishes, for and against, was apparent.

Venn bowed. ‘She is, ma’am.’

‘How strange it sounds!’ murmured Clym.

‘And he didn’t disappoint her this time,’ said Mrs. Yeobright.

‘He did not. And there is now no slight on her name. I was hastening ath’art to tell you at once, as I saw you were not there.’

‘How came you to be there? How did you know of it?’ she asked.

‘I have been in that neighbourhood for some time, and I saw them go in,’ said the reddleman. ‘Wildeve came up to the door, punctual as the clock. I didn’t expect it of him.’ He did not add, as he might have added, that how he came to be in that neighbourhood was not by accident; that, since Wildeve’s resumption of his right to Thomasin, Venn, with the thoroughness which was part of his character, had deter-

mined to see the end of the episode, and had accordingly kept strict watch upon his rival for that purpose.

‘Who was there?’ said Mrs. Yeobright.

‘Nobody hardly. I stood right out of the way, and she did not see me.’ The reddleman spoke huskily and looked into the garden.

‘Who gave her away?’

‘Miss Vye.’

‘How very remarkable! Miss Vye! It is to be considered an honour, I suppose.’

‘Who’s Miss Vye?’ said Clym.

‘Captain Drew’s granddaughter, of Mist-over Knap.’

‘A proud girl from Budmouth,’ said Mrs. Yeobright. ‘One not much to my liking. People say she’s a witch, but of course that’s absurd.’

The reddleman kept to himself his acquaintance with that fair personage, and also that Eustacia was there because he went to fetch her, in accordance with a promise he

had previously given as soon as he learnt that the marriage was to take place. He merely said, in continuation of the story :

‘I was sitting on the churchyard-wall when they came up, one from one way, the other from the other ; and Miss Vye was walking thereabouts, looking at the headstones. As soon as they had gone in I went to the door, feeling I should like to see it, as I knew her so well. I pulled off my boots because they were so noisy, and went up into the gallery. I saw then that the parson and clerk were already there.’

‘How came Miss Vye to have anything to do with it, if she was only on a walk that way?’

‘Because there was nobody else. She had gone into the church just before me, not into the gallery. The parson looked round before beginning, and as she was the only one near he beckoned to her, and she went up to the rails. After that, when it came to signing the book, she pushed up her veil and

signed; and Tamsin seemed to thank her for her kindness.' The reddleman told the tale thoughtfully, for there lingered upon his vision the changing colour of Wildeve, when Eustacia lifted the thick veil which had concealed her from recognition and looked calmly into his face. 'And then,' said Diggory sadly, 'I came away, for her history as Tamsin Yeobright was over.'

'I offered to go,' said Mrs. Yeobright regretfully. 'But she said it was not necessary.'

'Well, it is no matter,' said the reddleman. 'The thing is done at last as it was meant to be at first, and God send her happiness. Now I'll wish you good morning.'

He placed his cap on his head and went out.

From that instant of leaving Mrs. Yeobright's door the reddleman was seen no more in or about Egdon Heath for a space of many months. He vanished entirely. The nook among the brambles where his van had

been standing was as vacant as ever the next morning, and scarcely a sign remained to show that he had been there, excepting a few straws, and a little redness on the turf, which was washed away by the next storm of rain.

The report that Diggory had brought of the wedding, correct as far it went, was deficient in one significant particular, which had escaped him through his being at some distance back in the church. When Thomasin was tremblingly engaged in signing her name Wildeve had flung towards Eustacia a glance that said plainly, 'I have punished you now.' She had replied in a low tone—and he little thought how truly—'You mistake; it gives me sincerest pleasure to see her your wife to-day.'

BOOK THIRD
THE FASCINATION

CHAPTER I.

'MY MIND TO ME A KINGDOM IS.'

IN Clym Yeobright's face could be dimly seen the typical countenance of the future. Should there be a classic period to art hereafter, its Phidias may produce such faces. The view of life as a thing to be put up with, replacing that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilisations, must ultimately enter so thoroughly into the constitution of the advanced races that its facial expression will become accepted as a new artistic departure. People already feel that a man who lives without disturbing a curve of feature, or setting a mark of mental concern anywhere upon himself, is too far removed from modern perceptiveness to be a modern type. Physic-

ally beautiful men—the glory of the race when it was young—are almost an anachronism now ; and we may wonder whether, at some time or other, physically beautiful women may not be an anachronism likewise.

The truth seems to be that a long line of disillusionive centuries has permanently displaced the Hellenic idea of life, or whatever it may be called. What the Greeks only suspected we know well ; what their Æschylus imagined our nursery children feel. That old-fashioned revelling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quandary that man is in by their operation.

The lineaments which will get embodied in ideals based upon this new recognition will probably be akin to those of Yeobright. The observer's eye was arrested, not by his face as a picture, but by his face as a page ; not by what it was, but by what it recorded. His features were attractive in the light of symbols,

as sounds intrinsically common become attractive in language, and as shapes intrinsically simple become interesting in writing.

He had been a lad of whom something was expected. Beyond this all had been chaos. That he would be successful in an original way, or that he would go to the dogs in an original way, seemed equally probable. The only absolute certainty about him was that he would not stand still in the circumstances amid which he was born.

Hence, when his name was casually mentioned by neighbouring yeomen, the listener said, 'Ah, Clym Yeobright: what is he doing now?' When the instinctive question about a person is, What is he doing? it is felt that he will not be found to be, like most of us, doing nothing in particular. There is an indefinite sense that he must be invading some region of singularity, good or bad. The devout hope is that he is doing well. The secret faith is that he is making a mess of it. Half-a-dozen comfortable market-

men, who were habitual callers at the Quiet Woman as they passed by in their carts, were partial to the topic. In fact, though they were not Egdon men, they could hardly avoid it while they sucked their long clay tubes and regarded the heath through the window. Clym had been so inwoven with the heath in his boyhood that hardly anybody could look upon it without thinking of him. So the subject recurred: if he were making a fortune and a name, so much the better for him; if he were making a tragical figure in the world, so much the better for a narrative.

The fact was that Yeobright's fame had spread to an awkward extent before he left home. 'It is bad when your fame outruns your means,' said the Spanish Jesuit, Gracian. At the age of six he had asked a Scripture riddle: 'Who was the first man known to wear breeches?' and applause had resounded from the very verge of the heath. At seven he painted the Battle of Waterloo with tiger-lily pollen and black-currant juice, in the

absence of water-colours. By the time he reached twelve he had in this manner been heard of as artist and scholar for at least two miles round. An individual whose fame spreads three or four thousand yards in the time taken by the fame of others similarly situated to travel six or eight hundred must of necessity have something in him. Possibly Clym's fame, like Homer's, owed something to the accidents of his situation ; nevertheless famous he was.

He grew up and was helped out in life. That waggery of fate which started Clive as a writing clerk, Gay as a linendraper, Keats as a surgeon, and a thousand others in a thousand other odd ways, banished the wild and perceptive heath lad to be shopman to a jeweller.

The details of this choice of a business for him it is not necessary to give. At the death of his father a neighbouring gentleman had kindly undertaken to give the boy a start ; and this assumed the form of sending him to

the shop in Budmouth above-mentioned. Yeobright did not wish to go there, but it was the only feasible opening. Thence he went to London ; and thence, shortly after, to Paris, where he had remained till now.

Something being expected of him, he had not been at home many days before a great curiosity as to why he stayed on so long began to arise in the heath. The natural term of a holiday had passed, yet he still remained. On the Sunday morning following the week of Thomasin's marriage a discussion on this subject was in progress at a hair-cutting before Fairway's house. Here the local barbering was always done at this hour on this day ; to be followed by the great Sunday wash of the inhabitants at noon, which in its turn was followed by the great Sunday dressing an hour later. On Egdon Heath Sunday proper did not begin till dinner-time, and even then it was a somewhat battered specimen of the day.

These Sunday-morning hair-cuttings were performed by Fairway ; the victim sitting on a chopping-block in front of the house, without a coat, and the neighbours gossiping around, idly observing the locks of hair as they rose upon the wind after the snip, and flew away out of sight to the four quarters of the heavens. Summer and winter the scene was the same, unless the wind were more than usually blustering, when the stool was shifted a few feet round the corner. To complain of cold in sitting out of doors, hatless and coatless, while Fairway told true stories between the cuts of the scissors, would have been to pronounce yourself no man at once. To flinch, exclaim, or move a muscle of the face at the small stabs under the ear received from those instruments, or at scarifications of the neck by the comb, would have been thought a gross breach of good manners, considering that Fairway did it all for nothing. A bleeding about the poll on Sunday afternoons was amply accounted for by the

explanation, 'I have had my hair cut, you know.'

The conversation on Yeobright had been started by a distant view of the young man rambling leisurely across the heath before them.

'A man who is doing well elsewhere wouldn't bide here two or three weeks for nothing,' said Fairway. 'He's got some project in's head—depend upon that.'

'Well, 'a can't keep a shop here,' said Sam.

'I don't see why he should have had them two heavy boxes home if he had not been going to bide; and what there is for him to do here the Lord in heaven knows.'

Before many more surmises could be indulged in Yeobright had come near; and seeing the hair-cutting group he turned aside to join them. Marching up, and looking critically at their faces for a moment, he said, without introduction, 'Now, folks, let me guess what you have been talking about.'

‘Ay, sure, if you will,’ said Sam.

‘About me.’

‘Now, it is a thing I shouldn’t have dreamed of doing, otherwise,’ said Fairway, in a tone of integrity; ‘but since you have named it, Master Yeobright, I’ll own that we were talking about ’ee. We were wondering what could keep you home here mollyhorning about when you have made such a world-wide name for yourself in the nick-nack trade—now, that’s the truth o’t.’

‘I’ll tell you,’ said Yeobright, with unexpected earnestness. ‘I am not sorry to have the opportunity. I’ve come home because, all things considered, I can be a trifle less useless here than anywhere else. But I have only lately found this out. When I first got away from home I thought this place was not worth troubling about. I thought our life here was contemptible. To oil your boots instead of blacking them, to dust your coat with a switch instead of a

brush : was there ever anything more ridiculous ? I said.'

'So 'tis ; so 'tis !'

'No, no—you are wrong ; it isn't.'

'Beg your pardon, we thought that was your maning.'

'Well, this became very depressing as time went on. I found that I was trying to be like people who had hardly anything in common with myself. I was endeavouring to put off one sort of life for another sort of life which was not better than the life I had known before. It was simply different.'

'True ; a sight different,' said Fairway.

'Yes, Paris must be a taking place,' said Humphrey. 'Grand shop-winders, trumpets, and drums ; and here be we out of doors in all winds and weathers——'

'But you mistake me,' pleaded Clym. 'All this was very depressing. But not so depressing as something I next perceived—that my business was the silliest, flimsiest,

most effeminate business that ever a man could be put to. That decided me : I would give it up, and try to follow some rational occupation among the people I knew best, and to whom I could be of most use. I have come home ; and this is how I mean to carry out my plan. I shall keep a school as near to Egdon as possible, so as to be able to walk over here and have a night-school in my mother's house. But I must study a little at first, to get properly qualified. Now, neighbours, I must go.'

And Clym resumed his walk across the heath.

' He'll never carry it out in the world,' said Fairway. ' In a few weeks he'll learn to see things otherwise.'

' 'Tis good-hearted of the young man,' said another. ' But, for my part, I think he had better mind his business.'

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW COURSE CAUSES DISAPPOINTMENT.

YEOBRIGHT loved his kind. He had a conviction that the want of most men was knowledge of a sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence. He wished to raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class. What was more, he was ready at once to be the first unit sacrificed.

In passing from the bucolic to the intellectual life the intermediate stages are usually two at least, frequently many more ; and one of these stages is almost sure to be worldly advance. We can hardly imagine bucolic placidity quickening to intellectual aims without imagining social aims as the transitional

phase. Yeobright's local peculiarity was that in striving at high thinking he still cleaved to plain living—nay, wild and meagre living in many respects, and brotherliness with clowns.

He was a John the Baptist who took ennoblement rather than repentance for his text. Mentally he was in a provincial future, that is, he was in many points abreast with the central town thinkers of his date. Much of this development he may have owed to his studious life in Paris, where he had become acquainted with ethical systems popular at the time.

In consequence of this relatively advanced position Yeobright might have been called unfortunate. The rural world was not ripe for him. A man should be only partially before his time: to be completely to the vanward in aspirations is fatal to fame. Had Philip's warlike son been intellectually so far ahead as to have attempted civilisation without bloodshed, he would have been twice the

godlike hero that he seemed, but nobody would have heard of an Alexander.

In the interests of renown the forwardness should lie chiefly in the capacity to handle things. Successful propagandists have succeeded because the doctrine they bring into form is that which their listeners have for some time felt without being able to shape. A man who advocates æsthetic effort and deprecates social effort is only likely to be understood by a class to which social effort has become a stale matter. To argue upon the possibility of culture before luxury to the bucolic world may be to argue truly, but it is an attempt to disturb a sequence to which humanity has been long accustomed. Yeobright preaching to the Egdon eremites that they might rise to a serene comprehensiveness without going through the process of enriching themselves was not unlike arguing to ancient Chaldeans that in ascending from earth to the pure empyrean it was not neces-

sary to pass first into the intervening heaven of ether.

Was Yeobright's mind well-proportioned? No. A well-proportioned mind is one which shows no particular bias; one of which we may safely say that it will never cause its owner to be confined as a madman, tortured as a heretic, or crucified as a blasphemer. Also, on the other hand, that it will never cause him to be applauded as a prophet, revered as a priest, or exalted as a king. Its usual blessings are happiness and mediocrity. It produces the poetry of Rogers, the paintings of West, the statecraft of North, the spiritual guidance of Sumner; enabling its possessors to find their way to wealth, to wind up well, to step with dignity off the stage, to die comfortably in their beds, and to get the decent monument which, in many cases, they deserve. It never would have allowed Yeobright to do such a ridiculous thing as throw up his business to benefit his fellow-creatures.

He walked along towards home without attending to paths. If anyone knew the heath well it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product. His eyes had first opened thereon; with its appearance all the first images of his memory were mingled; his estimate of life had been coloured by it; his toys had been the flint knives and arrow-heads which he found there, wondering why stones should 'grow' to such odd shapes; his flowers the purple bells and yellow gorse; his animal kingdom the snakes and croppers; his society its human haunters. Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym. He gazed upon the wide prospect as he walked, and was glad.

To many persons this Egdon was a place which had slipped out of its century generations ago, to intrude as an uncouth object into this. It was an obsolete thing, and few

cared to study it. How could this be otherwise in the days of square fields, plashed hedges, and meadows watered on a plan so rectangular that on a fine day they look like silver gridirons? The farmer, in his ride, who could smile at artificial grasses, look with solicitude at the coming corn, and sigh with sadness at the fly-eaten turnips, bestowed upon the distant upland of heath nothing better than a frown. But as for Yeobright, when he looked from the heights on his way he could not help indulging in a barbarous satisfaction at observing that, in some of the attempts at reclamation from the waste, tillage, after holding on for a year or two, had receded again in despair, the ferns and furze-tufts stubbornly reasserting themselves.

He descended into the valley, and soon reached his home at Blooms-End. His mother was snipping dead leaves from the window-plants. She looked up at him as if she did not understand the meaning of his long stay with her; her face had worn that

look for several days. He could perceive that the curiosity which had been shown by the hair-cutting group amounted in his mother to concern. But she had asked no question with her lips, even when the arrival of his trunks suggested that he was not going to leave her soon. Her silence besought an explanation of him more loudly than words.

‘I am not going back to Paris again, mother,’ he said. ‘At least in my old capacity. I have given up the situation.’

Mrs. Yeobright turned in pained surprise. ‘I thought something was amiss, because of the boxes. I wonder you did not tell me sooner.’

‘I ought to have done it. But I have been in doubt whether you would be pleased with my plan. I was not quite clear on a few points myself. I am going to take an entirely new course.’

‘I am astonished, Clym. How can you want to do better than you’ve been doing?’

‘Very easily. But I shall not do better in

the way you mean ; I suppose it will be called doing worse. But I hate that business of mine, and I want to do some worthy thing before I die. As a schoolmaster I think to do it—a schoolmaster to the poor and ignorant, to teach them what nobody else will.'

'After all the trouble that has been taken to give you a start, and when there is nothing to do but to keep straight on, you say you will be a poor man's schoolmaster. Your fancies will be your ruin, Clym.'

Mrs. Yeobright spoke calmly, but the force of feeling behind the words was but too apparent to one who knew her as well as her son did. He did not answer. There was in his face that hopelessness of being understood which comes when the objector is constitutionally beyond the reach of a logic that, even under favouring conditions, is almost too coarse a vehicle for the subtlety of the argument.

No more was said on the subject till the end of dinner. His mother then began, as if

there had been no interval since the morning. 'It disturbs me, Clym, to find that you have come home with such thoughts as those. I hadn't the least idea that you meant to go backward in the world by your own free choice. Of course, I have always supposed you were going to push straight on, as other men do—all who deserve the name—when they have been put in a good way of doing well.'

'I cannot help it,' said Clym, in a troubled tone. 'Mother, I hate the flashy business. Talk about men who deserve the name, can any man deserving the name waste his time in that effeminate way, when he sees half the world going to ruin for want of somebody to buckle-to and teach 'em how to breast the misery they are born to? I get up every morning and see the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain, as St. Paul says, and yet there am I, selling trinkets to women and fops, and pandering to the meanest vanities—I, who have health and strength enough for

anything. I have been troubled in my mind about it all the year, and the end is that I cannot do it any more.'

'Why can't you do it as well as others?'

'I don't know, except that there are many things other people care for which I don't; and that's partly why I think I ought to do this. For one thing, my body does not require much of me. I cannot enjoy delicacies; good things are wasted upon me. Well, I ought to turn that defect to advantage, and by being able to do without what other people require I can spend what such things cost upon anybody else.'

Now, Yeobright, having inherited some of these very instincts from the woman before him, could not fail to awaken a reciprocity in her through her feelings, if not by arguments, disguise it as she might for his good. She spoke with less assurance. 'And yet you might have been a gentleman if you had only persevered. Manager to that large establishment—what better can a man wish for?'

What a post of trust and respect! I suppose you will be like your father; like him, you are getting weary of doing well.'

'No,' said her son; 'I am not weary of that, though I am weary of what you mean by it. Mother, what is doing well?'

Mrs. Yeobright was far too thoughtful a woman to be content with ready definitions, and, like the 'What is wisdom?' of Plato's Socrates, and the 'What is truth?' of Pontius Pilate, Yeobright's burning question received no answer.

The silence was broken by the clash of the garden gate, a tap at the door, and its opening. Christian Cantle appeared in the room in his Sunday clothes.

It was the custom on Egdon to begin the preface to a story before absolutely entering the house, so as to be well in for the body of the narrative by the time visitor and visited stood face to face. Christian had been saying to them while the door was leaving its latch, 'To think that I, who go from

home but once in a while, and hardly then, should have been there this morning !’

‘ ’Tis news you have brought us, then, Christian ?’ said Mrs. Yeobright.

‘ Ay, sure, about a witch, and ye must overlook my time o’ day ; for, says I, “ I must go and tell ’em, though they won’t have half-done dinner.” I assure ye it made me shake like a driven leaf, Do ye think any harm will come o’t ?’

‘ Well—what ?’

‘ This morning at church we was all standing up, and the passon said, “ Let us pray.” “ Well,” thinks I, “ one may as well kneel as stand ;” so down I went ; and, more than that, all the rest were as willing to oblige the man as I. We hadn’t been at it more than a minute when a most terrible screech sounded through church, as if somebody had just gied up their heart’s blood. All the folk jumped up, and then we found that Susan Nunsuch had pricked Miss Vye with a long stocking-needle, as she had

threatened to do as soon as ever she could get the young lady to church, where she don't come very often. She've waited for this chance for weeks, so as to draw her blood and put an end to the bewitching of Susan's children that has been carried on so long. Sue followed her into church, sat next to her, and as soon as she could find a chance in went the stocking-needle into my lady's arm.'

'Good heaven, how horrid!' said Mrs. Yeobright.

'Sue pricked her that deep that the maid fainted away; and as I was afeard there might be some tumult among us, I got behind the bass-viol and didn't see no more. But they carried her out into the air, 'tis said; but when they looked round for Sue she was gone. What a scream that girl gied, poor thing! There were the passon in his surplice holding up his hand and saying, "Sit down, my good people, sit down!" But the deuce a bit would they sit down. Oh! and what d'ye think I found out, Mrs. Yeobright?

The passon wears a suit of clothes under his surplice!—I could see his black sleeve when he held up his arm,'

'Tis a cruel thing,' said Yeobright.

'Yes,' said his mother.

'The nation ought to look into it,' said Christian. 'Here's Humphrey coming, I think.'

In came Humphrey. 'Well, have ye heard the news? But I see you have. 'Tis a very strange thing that whenever one of Egdon folk goes to church some rum job or other is sure to go on. The last time one of us was there was when neighbour Fairway went, in the Fall; and that was the day you forbad the banns, Mrs. Yeobright.'

'Has this cruelly-treated girl been able to walk home?' said Clym.

'They say she got better, and went home very well. And now I've told it I must be moving homeward myself.'

'And I,' said Humphrey. 'Truly now

we shall see if there's anything in what folks say about her.'

When they were gone into the heath again Yeobright said quietly to his mother, 'Do you think I have turned teacher too soon?'

'It is right that there should be school-masters, and missionaries, and all such men,' she replied. 'But it is right, too, that I should try to lift you out of this life into something higher, and that you should not come back again, and be as if I had not tried at all.'

Later in the day Sam, the turf-cutter, entered. 'I've come a-borrowing, Mrs. Yeobright. I suppose you have heard what's been happening to the beauty on the hill?'

'Yes, Sam: half-a-dozen have been telling us.'

'Beauty?' said Clym.

'Yes, tolerably well-favoured,' Sam re-

plied. 'Lord! all the country owns that 'tis one of the strangest things in the world that such a woman should have come to live up there.'

'Dark or fair?'

'Now, though I've seen her twenty times, that's a thing I cannot call to mind.'

'Darker than Tamsin,' murmured Mrs. Yeobright.

'A woman who seems to care for nothing at all, as you may say.'

'She is melancholy, then?' inquired Clym.

'She mopes about by herself, and don't mix in with the people.'

'Is she a young lady inclined for adventures?'

'Not to my knowledge.'

'Doesn't join in with the lads in their games, to get some sort of excitement in this lonely place?'

'No.'

'Mumming, for instance?'

‘No. Her notions be different. I should rather say her thoughts were far away from here, with lords and ladies she’ll never know, and mansions she’ll never see again.’

Observing that Clym appeared singularly interested, Mrs. Yeobright said rather uneasily to Sam, ‘You see more in her than most of us do. Miss Vye is to my mind too idle to be charming. I have never heard that she is of any use to herself or to other people. Good girls don’t get treated as witches even on Edgon.’

‘Nonsense—that proves nothing either way,’ said Yeobright.

‘Well, of course I don’t understand such niceties,’ said Sam, withdrawing from a possibly unpleasant argument; ‘and what she is we must wait for time to tell us. The business that I have really called about is this, to borrow the longest and strongest rope you have. The Captain’s bucket has dropped into the well, and they are in want of water; and as all the chaps are at home to-day we think we

can get it out for him. We have three cart-ropes already, but they won't reach to the bottom.'

Mrs. Yeobright told him that he might have whatever ropes he could find in the outhouse, and Sam went out to search. When he passed by the door Clym joined him, and accompanied him to the gate.

'Is this young witch-lady going to stay long at Mistover?' he asked.

'I should say so.'

'What a cruel shame to ill-use her! She must have suffered greatly—more in mind than in body.'

''Twas a graceless trick—such a handsome girl, too. You ought to see her, Mr. Yeobright, being a young man come from far, and with a little more to show for your years than most of us.'

'Do you think she would like to teach children?' said Clym.

Sam shook his head. 'Quite a different sort of body from that, I reckon.'

‘Oh, it was merely something which occurred to me. It would of course be necessary to see her and talk it over—not an easy thing by the way, for my family and hers are not very friendly.’

‘I’ll tell you how you might see her, Mr. Yeobright,’ said Sam. ‘We are going to grapple for the bucket at six o’clock to-night, and you could lend a hand. There’s five or six coming, but the well is deep, and another might be useful, if you don’t mind appearing in that shape. She’s sure to be walking round.’

‘I’ll think of it,’ said Yeobright ; and they parted.

He thought of it a good deal ; but nothing more was said about Eustacia inside the house at that time. Whether this romantic martyr to superstition and the melancholy mummer he had conversed with under the full moon were one and the same person remained as yet a problem.

CHAPTER III.

THE FIRST ACT IN A TIMEWORN DRAMA.

THE afternoon was fine, and Yeobright walked on the heath for an hour with his mother. When they reached the lofty ridge which divided the valley of Blooms-End from the valley of Shadwater they stood still and looked around. The Quiet Woman inn was visible on the low margin of the heath in one direction, and afar on the other hand rose Mistover Knap.

‘You mean to call on Thomasin?’ he inquired.

‘Yes. But you need not come this time,’ said his mother.

‘In that case I’ll branch off here, mother. I am going to Mistover.’

Mrs. Yeobright turned to him inquiringly.

‘I am going to help them get the bucket out of the Captain’s well,’ he continued. ‘As it is so very deep I may be useful. And I should like to see this Miss Vye—not so much for her good looks as for another reason.’

‘Must you go?’ his mother asked.

‘I thought to.’

And they parted. ‘There is no help for it,’ murmured Clym’s mother gloomily as he withdrew. ‘They are sure to see each other. I wish Sam would carry his news to other houses than mine.’

Clym’s retreating figure got smaller and smaller as it rose and fell over the hillocks on his way. ‘He is tender-hearted,’ said Mrs. Yeobright to herself while she watched him; ‘otherwise it would matter little. How he’s going on!’

He was, indeed, walking with a will over the furze, as straight as a line, as if his life

depended upon it. His mother drew a long breath, and turned to go back by the way she had come. The evening films began to make nebulous pictures of the valleys, but the high lands still were raked by the declining rays of the winter sun, which glanced on Clym as he walked forward, eyed by every rabbit and fieldfare around, a long shadow advancing in front of him.

On drawing near to the furze-covered bank and ditch which fortified the Captain's dwelling he could hear voices within, signifying that operations had been already begun. At the side-entrance gate he stopped and looked over.

Half a dozen able-bodied men were standing in a line from the well-mouth, holding a rope which passed over the well-roller into the depths below. Fairway, with a piece of smaller rope round his body, made fast to one of the standards, to guard against accidents, was leaning over the opening, his

right hand clasping the vertical rope that descended into the well.

‘Now, silence, folks,’ said Fairway.

The talking ceased, and Fairway gave a circular motion to the rope, as if he were stirring batter. At the end of a minute a dull splashing reverberated from the bottom of the well; the helical twist he had imparted to the rope had reached the grapnel below.

‘Haul!’ said Fairway; and the men who held the rope began to gather it over the wheel.

‘I think we’ve got sommat,’ said one of the haulers-in.

‘Then pull steady,’ said Fairway.

They gathered up more and more, till a regular dripping into the well could be heard below. It grew smarter with the increasing height of the bucket, and presently a hundred and fifty feet of rope had been pulled in.

Fairway then lit a lantern, tied it to another cord, and began lowering it into the

well beside the first. Clym came forward and looked down. Strange humid leaves, which knew nothing of the seasons of the year and quaint-natured moss were revealed on the well-side as the lantern descended; till its rays fell upon a confused mass of rope and bucket dangling in the dank, dark air.

‘We’ve only got en by the edge of the hoop—steady, for God’s sake!’ said Fairway.

They pulled with the greatest gentleness, till the wet bucket appeared about two yards below them, like a dead friend come to earth again. Three or four hands were stretched out, then jerk went the rope, whizz went the wheel, the two foremost haulers fell backward, the beating of a falling body was heard, receding down the sides of the well, and a thunderous uproar arose at the bottom. The bucket was gone again.

‘Damn the bucket!’ said Fairway.

‘Lower again,’ said Sam.

‘I’m as stiff as a ram’s horn stooping so

long,' said Fairway, standing up and stretching himself till his joints creaked.

'Rest a few minutes, Timothy,' said Yeobright. 'I'll take your place.'

The grapnel was again lowered. Its smart impact upon the distant water reached their ears like a kiss, whereupon Yeobright knelt down, and leaning over the well began dragging the grapnel round and round as Fairway had done.

'Tie a rope round him—it is dangerous,' cried a soft and anxious voice somewhere above them.

Everybody turned. The speaker was a woman, gazing down upon the group from an upper window, whose panes blazed in the ruddy glare from the west. Her lips were parted, and she appeared for the moment to forget where she was.

The rope was accordingly tied round his waist, and the work proceeded. At the next haul the weight was not heavy, and it was discovered that they had only secured a coil

of the rope detached from the bucket. The tangled mass was thrown into the background; Humphrey took Yeobright's place, and the grapnel was lowered again.

Yeobright retired to the heap of recovered rope in a meditative mood. Of the identity between the lady's voice and that of the melancholy mummer he had not a moment's doubt. 'How thoughtful of her!' he said to himself.

Eustacia, who had reddened when she perceived the effect of her exclamation upon the group below, was no longer to be seen at the window, though Yeobright scanned it wistfully. While he stood there the men at the well succeeded in getting up the bucket without a mishap. One of them then went to inquire for the Captain, to learn what orders he wished to give for mending the well-tackle. The Captain proved to be away from home; and Eustacia appeared at the door and came out. She had lapsed into an easy and dignified calm, far removed from

the intensity of life in her words of solicitude for Clym's safety.

'Will it be possible to draw water here to-night?' she inquired.

'No, miss; the bottom of the bucket is clean knocked out. And as we can do no more now we'll leave off, and come again to-morrow morning.'

'No water,' she murmured, turning away.

'I can send you up some from Blooms-End,' said Clym, coming forward and raising his hat as the men retired.

Yeobright and Eustacia looked at each other for one instant, as if each had in mind those few moments during which a certain moonlit scene was common to both. With the glance the calm fixity of her features sublimated itself to an expression of refinement and warmth: it was like garish noon rising to the dignity of sunset in a couple of seconds.

'Thank you; it will hardly be necessary,' she replied.

‘But if you have no water?’

‘Well, it is what I call no water,’ she said, blushing, and lifting her long-lashed eyelids as if to lift them were a work requiring consideration. ‘But my grandfather calls it water enough. This is what I mean.’

She moved away a few yards, and Clym followed. When she reached the corner of the enclosure, where the steps were formed for mounting the boundary bank, she sprang up with a lightness which seemed strange after her listless movement towards the well. It incidentally showed that her apparent languor did not arise from lack of force.

Clym ascended behind her, and noticed a circular burnt patch at the top of the bank. ‘Ashes?’ he said.

‘Yes,’ said Eustacia. ‘We had a little bonfire here last fifth of November, and those are the marks of it.’

On that spot had stood the fire she had kindled to attract Wildeve.

‘That’s the only kind of water we have,’ she continued, tossing a stone into the pool, which lay on the outside of the bank like the white of an eye without its pupil. The stone fell with a flounce, but no Wildeve appeared on the other side, as on a previous occasion there. ‘My grandfather says he lived for more than twenty years at sea on water twice as bad as that,’ she went on, ‘and considers it quite good enough for us here on an emergency.’

‘Well, as a matter of fact there are no impurities in the water of these pools at this time of the year. It has only just rained into them.’

She shook her head. ‘I am managing to exist in a wilderness, but I cannot drink from a pond,’ she said.

Clym looked towards the well, which was now deserted, the men having gone home. ‘It is a long way to send for spring-water,’ he said, after a silence. ‘But since you don’t like this in the pond, I’ll try to get you some

myself.' He went back to the well. 'Yes, I think I could do it by tying on this pail.'

'But, since I would not trouble the men to get it, I cannot in conscience let you.'

'I don't mind the trouble at all.'

He made fast the pail to the long coil of rope, put it over the wheel, and allowed it to descend by letting the rope slip through his hands. Before it had gone far, however, he checked it.

'I must make fast the end first, or we may lose the whole,' he said to Eustacia, who had drawn near. 'Could you hold this a moment, while I do it—or shall I call your servant?'

'I can hold it,' said Eustacia; and he placed the rope in her hands, going then to search for the end.

'I suppose I may let it slip down?' she inquired.

'I would advise you not to let it go far,' said Clym. 'It will get much heavier, you will find.'

However, Eustacia had begun to pay out. While he was tying she cried, 'I cannot stop it!'

Clym ran to her side, and found he could only check the rope by twisting the loose part round the upright post, when it stopped with a jerk. 'Has it hurt you?' he said.

'Yes,' she replied.

'Very much?'

'No; I think not.' She opened her hands. One of them was bleeding; the rope had dragged off the skin. Eustacia wrapped it in her handkerchief.

'You should have let go,' said Yeobright. 'Why didn't you?'

'You said I was to hold on. . . . This is the second time I have been wounded to-day.'

'Ah, yes; I have heard of it. I blush for my native Egdon. Was it a serious injury you received in church, Miss Vye?'

There was such an abundance of sympathy in Clym's tone that Eustacia slowly

drew up her sleeve and disclosed her round white arm. A bright red spot appeared on its smooth surface, like a ruby on Parian marble.

‘There it is,’ she said, putting her finger against the spot.

‘It was dastardly of the woman,’ said Clym. ‘Will not Captain Drew get her punished?’

‘He is gone from home on that very business. I did not know that I had such a magic reputation.’

‘And you fainted?’ said Clym, looking at the scarlet little puncture as if he would like to kiss it and make it well.

‘Yes, it frightened me. I had not been to church for a long time. And now I shall not go again for ever so long—perhaps never. I cannot face their eyes after this. Don’t you think it dreadfully humiliating? I wished I was dead for hours after, but I don’t mind now.’

‘I have come to clean away these cob-

webs,' said Yeobright. 'Would you like to help me—by high class teaching? We might benefit them much.'

'I don't quite feel anxious to. I have not much love for my fellow-creatures. Sometimes I quite hate them.'

'Still I think that if you were to hear my scheme you might take an interest in it. There is no use in hating people—if you hate anything, you should hate what produced them.'

'Do you mean Nature? I hate her already. But I shall be glad to hear your scheme at any time.'

The situation had now worked itself out, and the next natural thing was for them to part. Clym knew this well enough, and Eustacia made a move of conclusion; yet he looked at her as if he had one word more to say. Perhaps if he had not lived in Paris it would never have been uttered.

'We have met before,' he said, regarding

her with rather more interest than was necessary.

‘I do not own it,’ said Eustacia, with a repressed, still look.

‘But I may think what I like.’

‘Yes.’

‘You are lonely here.’

‘I cannot endure the heath, except in its purple season. The heath is a cruel task-master to me.’

‘Can you say so?’ he asked. ‘To my mind it is most exhilarating; and strengthening, and soothing. I would rather live on these hills than anywhere else in the world.’

‘It is well enough for artists; but I never would learn to draw.’

‘And there is a very curious Druidical stone just out there.’ He threw a pebble in the direction signified. ‘Do you often go to see it?’

‘I was not even aware that there existed any such curious Druidical stone. I am aware that there is a parade at Budmouth.’

Yeobright looked thoughtfully on the ground. 'That means much,' he said.

'It does indeed,' said Eustacia.

'I remember when I had the same longing for town bustle. Five years of London or Paris would be a perfect cure for that.'

'Heaven send me such a cure! Now, Mr. Yeobright, I will go indoors and plaster my wounded hand.'

They separated, and Eustacia vanished in the increasing shade. She seemed full of many things. Her past was a blank, her life had begun. The effect upon Clym of this meeting he did not fully discover till some time after. During his walk home his most intelligible sensation was that his scheme had somehow become glorified. A beautiful woman had been intertwined with it.

On reaching the house he went up to the room which was to be made his study, and occupied himself during the evening in unpacking his books from the boxes and arranging them on shelves. From another

box he drew a lamp and a can of oil. He trimmed the lamp, arranged his table, and said, 'Now I am ready to begin.'

He rose early the next morning, read two hours before breakfast by the light of his lamp—read all the morning, all the afternoon. Just when the sun was going down his eyes felt weary, and he leant back in his chair.

His room overlooked the front of the premises and the valley of the heath beyond. The lowest beams of the winter sun threw the shadow of the house over the palings, across the grass margin of the heath, and far up the vale, where the chimney outlines and those of the surrounding tree-tops stretched forth in long dark prongs. Having been seated at work all day, he decided to take a turn upon the hills before it got dark ; and, going out forthwith, he struck across the heath towards Mistover.

It was an hour and a half later when he again appeared at the garden-gate. The shutters of the house were closed, and

Christian Cattle, who had been wheeling manure about the garden all day, had gone home. On entering he found that his mother, after waiting a long time for him, had finished her meal.

‘Where have you been, Clym?’ she immediately said. ‘Why didn’t you tell me that you were going away at this time?’

‘I have been on the heath.’

‘You’ll meet Eustacia Vye if you go up there.’

Clym paused a minute. ‘Yes, I met her this evening,’ he said, as though it were spoken under the sheer necessity of preserving honesty.

‘I wondered if you had.’

‘It was no appointment.’

‘No; such meetings never are.’

‘But you are not angry, mother?’

‘I can hardly say that I am not. Angry? No. But when I consider the usual nature of the drag which causes men of promise to disappoint the world I feel uneasy.’

‘You deserve credit for the feeling, mother. But I can assure you that you need not be disturbed by it on my account.’

‘When I think of you and your new crotchets,’ said Mrs. Yeobright, with some emphasis, ‘I naturally don’t feel so comfortable as I did a twelvemonth ago. It is incredible to me that a man accustomed to the attractive women of Paris and elsewhere should be so easily worked upon by a girl in a heath. You could just as well have walked another way.’

‘I had been studying all day.’

‘Well, yes.’ She added, more hopefully, ‘I have been thinking that you might get on as a schoolmaster, and rise that way, since you really are determined to hate the course you were pursuing.’

Yeobright was unwilling to disturb this idea, though his scheme was far enough removed from one wherein the education of youth should be made a mere channel of social ascent. He had no desires of that

sort. He had reached the stage in a young man's life when the grimness of the general human situation first becomes clear; and the realisation of this causes ambition to halt awhile. In France it is not uncustomary to commit suicide at this stage; in England we do much better, or much worse, as the case may be.

The love between the young man and his mother was strangely invisible now. Of love it may be said, the less earthly the less demonstrative. In its absolutely indestructible form it reaches a profundity in which all exhibition of itself is painful. It was so with these. Had conversations between them been overheard, people would have said, 'How cold they are to each other!'

His theory and his wishes about devoting his future to teaching had made an impression on Mrs. Yeobright. Indeed, how could it be otherwise when he was a part of her—when their discourses were as if carried on between the right and the left hands of the same

body? He had despaired of reaching her by argument; and it was almost as a discovery to him that he could reach her by a magnetism which was as superior to words as words are to yells.

Strangely enough he began to feel now that it would not be so hard to persuade her who was his best friend that comparative poverty was essentially the higher course for him, as to reconcile to his feelings the act of persuading her. From every provident point of view his mother was so undoubtedly right, that he was not without a sickness of heart in finding he could shake her.

She had a singular insight into life, considering that she had never mixed with it. There are instances of persons who, without clear ideas of the things they criticise, have yet had clear ideas of the relations of those things. Blacklock, a poet blind from his birth, could describe visual objects with accuracy; Professor Sanderson, who was also blind, gave excellent lectures on colour, and

taught others the theory of ideas which they had and he had not. In the social sphere these gifted ones are mostly women; they can watch a world which they never saw, and estimate forces of which they have only heard. We call it intuition.

What was the great world to Mrs. Yeobright? A multitude whose tendencies could be perceived, though not its essences. Communities were seen by her as from a distance; she saw them as we see the throngs which cover the canvases of Sallaert, Van Alsloot, and others of that school—vast masses of beings, jostling, zigzagging, and processioning in definite directions, but whose features are indistinguishable by the very comprehensiveness of the view.

One could see that, as far as it had gone, her life was very complete on its reflective side. The philosophy of her nature, and its limitation by circumstances, was almost written in her movements. They had a majestic foundation, though they were far from being

majestic ; and they had a groundwork of assurance, but they were not assured. As her once springy walk had become deadened by time, so had her natural pride of life been hindered in its blooming by her necessities.

The next slight touch in the shaping of Clym's destiny occurred a few days after. A barrow was opened on the heath, and Yeobright attended the operation, remaining away from his study during several hours. In the afternoon Christian returned from a journey in the same direction, and Mrs. Yeobright questioned him.

' They have dug a hole, and they have found things like flower-pots upside down, Mis'ess Yeobright ; and inside these be real charnel bones. They have carried 'em off to men's houses ; but I shouldn't like to sleep where they will bide. Dead folks have been known to come and claim their own. Mr. Yeobright had got one pot of the bones, and was going to bring 'em home—real skellington bones—but 'twas ordered otherwise. You'll

be relieved to hear that he gave away his, pot and all, on second thoughts; and a blessed thing for ye, Mis'ess Yeobright, considering the wind o' nights.'

'Gave it away?'

'Yes. To Miss Vye. She has a cannibal taste for such churchyard furniture seemingly.'

'Miss Vye was there too?'

'Ay, 'a b'lieve she was.'

When Clym came home, which was shortly after, his mother said, in a curious tone, 'The urn you had meant for me you gave away.'

Yeobright made no reply; the current of her feeling was too pronounced to admit it.

The early weeks of the year passed on. Yeobright certainly studied at home, but he also walked much abroad, and the direction of his walk was always towards some point of a line between Mistover and Blackbarrow.

The month of March arrived, and the heath showed its first faint signs of awakening

from winter trance. The awakening was almost feline in its stealthiness. The pool outside the bank by Eustacia's dwelling, which seemed as dead and desolate as ever to an observer who moved and made noises in his observation, would gradually disclose a state of great animation when silently watched awhile. A timid animal world had come to life for the season. Little tadpoles and efts began to bubble up through the water, and to race along beneath it; toads made noises like very young ducks, and advanced to the margin in twos and threes; overhead, bumble-bees flew hither and thither in the thickening light, their drone coming and going like the sound of a gong.

On an evening such as this Yeobright descended into the Blooms-End valley from beside that very pool, where he had been standing with another person quite silently and quite long enough to hear all this puny stir of resurrection in nature; yet he had not heard it. His walk was rapid as he came

down, and he went with a springy tread. Before entering upon his mother's premises he stopped and breathed. The light which shone forth on him from the window revealed that his face was flushed and his eye bright. What it did not show was something which lingered upon his lips like a seal set there. The abiding presence of this impress was so real that he hardly dared to enter the house, for it seemed as if his mother might say, 'What red spot is that glowing upon your mouth so vividly?'

But he entered soon after. The tea was ready, and he sat down opposite his mother. She did not speak many words; and as for him, something had been just done and some words had been just said on the hill which prevented him from beginning a desultory chat. His mother's taciturnity was not without ominousness, but he appeared not to care. He knew why she said so little, but he could not remove the cause of her bearing towards him. These half-silent sittings were

far from uncommon with them now. At last Yeobright made a beginning of what was intended to strike at the whole root of the matter.

‘ Five days have we sat like this at meals with scarcely a word. What’s the use of it, mother ? ’

‘ None,’ said she, in a heart-swollen tone. ‘ But there is only too good a reason.’

‘ Not when you know all. I have been wanting to speak about this, and I am glad the subject is begun. The reason, of course, is Eustacia Vye. Well, I confess I have seen her lately, and have seen her a good many times.’

‘ Yes, yes ; and I know what that amounts to. It troubles me, Clym. You are wasting your life here ; and it is solely on account of her. If it had not been for that woman you would never have entertained this teaching scheme at all.’

Clym looked hard at his mother. ‘ You know that is not it,’ he said.

‘Well, I know you had decided to attempt it before you saw her ; but that would have ended in intentions. It was very well to talk of, but ridiculous to put in practice. I fully expected that in the course of a month or two you would have seen the folly of such self-sacrifice, and would have been by this time back again to Paris in some business or other. I can understand objections to the jewellery trade—I really was convinced that it was inadequate to the life of a man like you. But, now I see how mistaken you are about this girl, I doubt if you could be correct about other things.’

‘How am I mistaken in her?’

‘She is lazy and dissatisfied. But that is not all of it. Supposing her to be as good a woman as any you can find, which she certainly is not, why do you wish to connect yourself with anybody at present?’

‘Well, there are practical reasons,’ Clym began, and then almost broke off under an overpowering sense of the weight of

argument which could be brought against his statement. 'If I take a school an educated woman would be invaluable as a help to me.'

'What! you really mean to marry her?'

'It would be premature to state that plainly. But consider what obvious advantages there would be in doing it. She——'

'Don't suppose she has any money. She hasn't a farthing.'

'She is excellently educated, and would make a good matron in a boarding school. I candidly own that I have modified my views a little, in deference to you; and it should satisfy you. I no longer adhere to my intention of giving with my own mouth rudimentary education to the lowest class. I can do better. I can establish a good private school for farmers' sons, and without stopping the school I can manage to pass examinations. Then I can take orders. By this means, and by the assistance of a wife like her——'

‘ Oh, Clym !’

‘ I shall ultimately, I hope, be at the head of one of the best schools in the county.’

Yeobright had enunciated the word ‘ her’ with a fervour which, in conversation with a mother, was absurdly indiscreet. Hardly a maternal heart within the four seas could, in such circumstances, have helped being irritated at that ill-timed betrayal of feeling.

‘ You are blinded, Clym,’ she said warmly. ‘ It was a bad day for you when you first set eyes on her. And your scheme is merely a castle in the air built on purpose to justify this folly which has seized you, and to salve your conscience on the irrational situation you are in.’

‘ Mother, that’s not true,’ he firmly answered.

‘ Can you maintain that I sit and tell untruths, when all I wish to do is to save you from sorrow ? For shame, Clym ! But it is all through that woman—a hussy !’

Clym reddened like fire and rose. He

placed his hand upon his mother's shoulder and said, in a tone which hung strangely between entreaty and command, 'I won't hear it. I may be led to answer you in a way which we shall both regret.'

His mother parted her lips to begin some other vehement truth, but on looking at him she saw that in his face which led her to leave the words unsaid. Yeobright walked once or twice across the room, and then suddenly went out of the house. It was eleven o'clock when he came in, though he had not been further than the precincts of the garden. His mother was gone to bed. A light was left burning on the table, and supper was spread. Without partaking of any food he secured the doors and went upstairs.

CHAPTER IV.

AN HOUR OF BLISS AND MANY HOURS OF
SADNESS.

THE next day was gloomy enough at Blooms-End. Yeobright remained in his study, sitting over the open books; but the work of those hours was miserably scant. Determined that there should be nothing in his conduct towards his mother resembling sullenness, he had occasionally spoken to her on passing matters, and would take no notice of the brevity of her replies. With the same resolve to keep up a show of conversation he said, about seven o'clock in the evening, 'There's an eclipse of the moon to-night. I am going out to see it.' And, putting on his overcoat, he left her.

The low moon was not as yet visible from the front of the house, and Yeobright climbed out of the valley until he stood in the full flood of her light. But even now he walked on, and his steps were in the direction of Blackbarrow.

In half an hour he stood at the top. The sky was clear from verge to verge, and the moon flung her rays over the whole heath, but without sensibly lighting it, except where paths and water-courses had laid bare the white flints and glistening quartz sand, which made streaks upon the general shade. After standing awhile he stooped and felt the heather. It was dry, and he flung himself down upon the Barrow, his face towards the moon, which depicted a small image of herself in each of his eyes.

He had often come up here without stating his purpose to his mother; but this was the first time that he had been ostensibly frank as to his purpose while really concealing it. It was a moral situation which, three months

earlier, he could hardly have credited of himself. In returning to labour in this sequestered spot he had anticipated an escape from the clafing of social necessities ; yet behold they were here also. More than ever he longed to be in some world where personal ambition was not the only recognised form of progress—such, perhaps, as might have been the case at some time or other in the silvery globe then shining upon him. His eye travelled over the length and breadth of that distant country—over the Bay of Rainbows, the sombre Sea of Crises, the Ocean of Storms, the Lake of Dreams, the vast Walled Plains, and the wondrous Ring Mountains—till he almost felt himself to be voyaging bodily through its wild scenes, standing on its hollow hills, traversing its deserts, descending its vales and old sea bottoms, or mounting to the edges of its craters.

While he watched the far-removed landscape a tawny stain grew into being on the lower verge : the eclipse had begun. This

marked a preconcerted moment ; for the remote celestial phenomenon had been pressed into sublunary service as a lover's signal. Yeo-bright's mind flew back to earth at the sight ; he arose, shook himself, and listened. Minute after minute passed by, perhaps ten minutes passed, and the shadow on the moon perceptibly widened. He heard a rustling on his left hand, a cloaked figure with an upturned face appeared at the base of the Barrow, and Clym descended. In a moment the figure was in his arms, and his lips upon hers.

‘ My Eustacia ! ’

‘ Clym, dearest ! ’

Such a situation had less than three months brought forth.

They remained long without a single utterance, for no language could reach the level of their condition : words were as the rusty implements of a bygone barbarous epoch, and only to be occasionally tolerated.

‘ I began to wonder why you did not come, ’

said Yeobright, when she had withdrawn a little from his embrace.

‘You said ten minutes after the first mark of shade on the edge of the moon; and that’s what it is now.’

‘Well, let us only think that here we are.’

Then, holding each other’s hand, they were again silent, and the shadow on the moon’s disc grew a little larger.

‘Has it seemed long since you last saw me?’ she asked.

‘It has seemed sad.’

‘And not long? That’s because you occupy yourself, and so blind yourself to my absence. To me, who can do nothing, it has been like living under stagnant water.’

‘I would rather bear tediousness, dear, than have time made short by the means that mine has been shortened,’

‘In what way is that? You have been thinking you wished you did not love me.’

‘How can a man wish that, and yet love on? No, Eustacia.’

‘Men can, women cannot.’

‘Well, whatever I may have thought, one thing is certain—I do love you—past all compass and description. I love you to oppressiveness—I, who have never before felt more than a pleasant passing fancy for any woman I have ever seen. Let me look right into your moonlit face, and dwell on every line and curve in it! Only a few hair-breadths make the difference between this face and faces I have seen many times before I knew you; yet what a difference—the difference between everything and nothing at all. One touch on that mouth again! there, and there, and there. Your eyes seem heavy, Eustacia.’

‘No, it is my general way of looking. I think it arises from my feeling sometimes an agonising pity for myself that I ever was born.’

‘You don’t feel it now?’

‘No. Yet I know that we shall not love like this always. Nothing can insure

the continuance of love. It will evaporate like a spirit, and so I feel full of fears.'

'You need not.'

'Ah, you don't know. You have seen more than I, and have been into cities and among people that I have only heard of, and have lived more years than I; but yet I am older at this than you. I loved another man once, and now I love you.'

'In God's mercy don't talk so, Eustacia.'

'But I do not think I shall be the one who wearies first. It will, I fear, end in this way: your mother will find out that you meet me, and she will influence you against me?'

'That can never be. She knows of these meetings already.'

'And she speaks against me?'

'I will not say.'

'There, go away. Obey her. I shall ruin you. It is foolish of you to meet me like this. Kiss me, and go away for ever. For ever—do you hear?—for ever.'

‘Not I.’

‘It is your only chance. Many a man’s love has been a curse to him.’

‘You are desperate, full of fancies, and wilful; and you misunderstand. I have an additional reason for seeing you to-night besides love of you. For though, unlike you, I feel our affection may be eternal, I feel with you in this, that our present mode of existence cannot last.’

‘Oh! ’tis your mother. Yes, that’s it. I knew it.’

‘Never mind what it is. Believe this, I cannot let myself lose you. I must have you always with me. This very evening I do not like to let you go. There is only one cure for this anxiety, dearest—you must be my wife.’

She started; then endeavoured to say calmly, ‘Cynics say that cures the anxiety by curing the love.’

‘But you must answer me. Shall I claim you some day—I don’t mean at once?’

‘I must think,’ Eustacia murmured. ‘At

present speak of Paris to me. Is there any place like it on the earth?’

‘It is very beautiful. But you will be mine?’

‘I will be nobody else’s in the world—does that satisfy you?’

‘Yes, for the present.’

‘Now tell me of the Louvre,’ she continued evasively.

‘I hate talking of Paris! Well, I remember one sunny room in the Louvre which would make a fitting place for you to live in—the Galerie d’Apollon. Its windows are mainly east; and in the early morning, when the sun is bright, the whole apartment is in a perfect blaze of splendour. The rays bristle and dart from the encrustations of gilding to the magnificent inlaid coffers, from the coffers to the gold and silver plate, from the plate to the jewels and precious stones, from these to the enamels, till there is a perfect network of light which quite dazzles the eye. But now, about our marriage——’

‘And Versailles—the King’s Gallery is some such gorgeous room, is it not?’

‘Yes. But what’s the use of talking of gorgeous rooms? By the way, the Little Trianon would suit us beautifully to live in, and you might walk in the gardens in the moonlight and think you were in some English shrubbery; it is laid out in English fashion.’

‘I should hate to think that.’

‘Then you could keep to the lawn in front of the Grand Palace. All about there you would doubtless feel in a world of historical romance.’

He went on, since it was all new to her, and described Fontainebleau, St. Cloud, the Bois, and many other familiar haunts of the Parisians; till she said:

‘When used you go to these places?’

‘On Sundays.’

‘Ah, yes. I dislike English Sundays. How I should chime in with their manners over there! Dear Clym, you’ll go back again?’

Clym shook his head, and looked at the eclipse.

‘If you’ll go back again I’ll—be something,’ she said tenderly, putting her head near his breast. ‘If you’ll agree I’ll give my promise, without making you wait a minute longer.’

‘How extraordinary that you and my mother should be of one mind about this!’ said Yeobright. ‘I have vowed not to go back, Eustacia. It is not the place I dislike; it is the occupation.’

‘But you can go in some other capacity.’

‘No. Besides, it would interfere with my scheme. Don’t press that, Eustacia. Will you marry me?’

‘I cannot tell.’

‘Now—never mind Paris; it is no better than other spots. Promise, sweet.’

‘You will never adhere to your education plan, I am quite sure; and then it will be all right for me; and so I promise to be yours for ever and ever.’

Clym brought her face towards his by a gentle pressure of the hand, and kissed her.

‘Ah! but you don’t know what you have got in me,’ she said. ‘Sometimes I think there is not that in Eustacia Vye which will make a good homespun wife. Well, let it go—see how our time is slipping, slipping, slipping.’ She pointed towards the hour-glass, which stood on a stone between their feet and the moon, the upper half showing itself to be two-thirds empty.

‘You are too mournful.’

‘No. Only I dread to think of anything beyond the present. What is, we know. We are together now, and it is unknown how long we shall be so: the unknown always fills my mind with terrible possibilities, even when I may reasonably expect it to be cheerful. . . . Clym, the eclipsed moonlight shines upon your face with a strange foreign colour, and shows its shape as if it were cut out in gold. That means that you should be doing better things than this.’

‘You are ambitious, Eustacia—no, not exactly ambitious, luxurious. I ought to be of the same vein, to make you happy, I suppose. And yet, far from that, I could live and die in a hermitage here, with proper work to do.’

There was that in his tone which implied distrust of his position as a solicitous lover, a doubt if he were acting fairly towards one whose tastes touched his own only at rare and infrequent points. She saw his meaning, and whispered, in a low, full accent of eager assurance, ‘Don’t mistake me, Clym: though I should like Paris, I love you for yourself alone. To be your wife and live in Paris would be heaven to me; but I would rather live with you in a hermitage here than not be yours at all. It is gain to me either way, and very great gain. There’s my too candid confession.’

‘Spoken like a woman. And now I must soon leave you. I’ll walk with you towards your house.’

‘ But must you go home yet ? ’ she asked.
‘ Yes, the sand has nearly slipped away, I see, and the eclipse is creeping on more and more. Don’t go yet. Stop till the hour has run itself out ; then I will not press you any more. You will go home and sleep well ; I keep sighing in my sleep. Do you ever dream of me ? ’

‘ I cannot recollect a clear dream of you. ’

‘ I see your face in every scene of my dreams, and hear your voice in every sound. I wish I did not. It is too much what I feel. They say such love never lasts. But it must ! And yet once, I remember, I saw an officer of the Hussars ride down the street at Budmouth, and though he was a total stranger and never spoke to me, I loved him till I thought I should really die of love—but I didn’t die, and at last I left off caring for him. How terrible it would be if a time should come when I could not love you, my Clym ! ’

‘ Please don’t say such reckless things. When we see such a time at hand we will

say, "I have outlived my end and purpose," and die. There, the hour has expired: now let us walk on.'

Hand-in-hand they went along the path towards Mistover. When they were near the house he said, 'It is too late for me to see your grandfather to-night. Do you think he will object to it?'

'I will speak to him. I am so accustomed to be my own mistress that it did not occur to me that we should have to ask him.'

Then they lingeringly separated, and Clym descended towards Blooms-End.

And as he walked further and further from the charmed atmosphere of his Olympian girl his face grew sad with a new sort of sadness. A perception of the dilemma in which his love had placed him came back in full force. In spite of Eustacia's apparent willingness to wait through the period of an unpromising engagement, till he should be established in his new pursuit, he could not but perceive at moments that she loved him rather

as a visitant from a gay world to which she rightly belonged than as a man with a purpose opposed to that recent past of his which so interested her. Often at their meetings a word or a sigh would escape her. It meant that, though she made no conditions as to his return to the French capital, this was what she secretly longed for in the event of marriage; and it robbed him of many an otherwise pleasant hour. Along with that came the widening breach between himself and his mother. Whenever any little occurrence had brought into more prominence than usual the disappointment that he was causing her it had sent him on lone and moody walks; or he was kept awake a great part of the night by the turmoil of spirit which such a recognition created. If Mrs. Yeobright could only have been led to see what a sound and worthy purpose this purpose of his was, and how little it was being affected by his devotion to Eustacia, how differently would she regard him!

Thus as his sight grew accustomed to the first blinding halo kindled about him by love and beauty Yeobright began to perceive what a strait he was in. Sometimes he wished that he had never known Eustacia, immediately to retract the wish as brutal. Three antagonistic growths had to be kept alive : his mother's trust in him, his plan for becoming a teacher, and Eustacia's happiness. His fervid nature could not afford to relinquish one of these, though two of the three were as many as he could hope to preserve. Though his love was as chaste as that of Petrarch for his Laura, it had made fetters of what previously was only a difficulty. A position which was not too simple when he stood whole-hearted had become indescribably complicated by the addition of Eustacia. Just when his mother was beginning to tolerate one scheme he had introduced another still bitterer than the first, and the combination was more than she could bear.

CHAPTER V.

SHARP WORDS ARE SPOKEN, AND A CRISIS
ENSUES.

WHEN Yeobright was not with Eustacia he was sitting slavishly over his books : when he was not reading he was meeting her. These meetings were carried on with the greatest secrecy.

One afternoon his mother came home from a morning visit to Thomasin. He could see from a disturbance in the lines of her face that something had happened.

‘I have been told an incomprehensible thing,’ she said mournfully. ‘Captain Drew has let out at the Woman that you and Eustacia Vye are engaged to be married.’

‘We are,’ said Yeobright. ‘But it may not be yet for a very long time.’

‘ I should hardly think it would be yet for a very long time. You will take her to Paris, I suppose ? ’ She spoke with weary hopelessness.

‘ I am not going back to Paris. ’

‘ What will you do with a wife, then ? ’

‘ Keep a school in Budmouth, as I have told you. ’

‘ That’s incredible. The place is overrun with schoolmasters. You have no special qualifications. What possible chance is there for such as you ? ’

‘ There is no chance of getting rich. But with my system of education, which is as new as it is true, I shall do a great deal of good to my fellow-creatures. ’

‘ Dreams, dreams ! If there had been any other system left to be invented they would have found it out at the Universities long before this time. ’

‘ Never, mother. They cannot find it out, because their teachers don’t come in contact with the class which demands such a system

—that is, those who have had no preliminary training. My plan is one for instilling high knowledge into empty minds without first cramming them with what has to be uncrammed again before true study begins.’

‘I might have believed you if you had kept yourself free from entanglements; but this woman—if she had been a good girl it would have been bad enough; but being——’

‘She is a good girl.’

‘So you think. A band-master’s daughter. What has her life been?’

‘She is Captain Drew’s granddaughter. And she is a lady by instinct.’

‘They call him Captain, but anybody is captain. No doubt he has been to sea in some tub or other. Why doesn’t he look after her? No lady would rove about the heath at all hours of the day and night, as she does. But that’s not all of it. There was something between her and Thomasin’s husband at one time—I am as sure of it as that I stand here.’

‘Eustacia has told me. He did pay her a little attention a year ago; but there’s no harm in that. I like her all the better.’

‘Clym,’ said his mother with firmness, ‘I have no proofs against her, unfortunately. But if she makes you a good wife, there has never been a bad one.’

‘Believe me, you are almost exasperating,’ said Yeobright vehemently. ‘And this very day I had intended to arrange a meeting between you and her. But you give me no peace; you try to thwart my wishes in everything.’

‘I hate the thought of any son of mine marrying badly. Yet that is what you seem determined to do. I wish I had never lived to see this; it is too much for me—it is more than I thought!’ She turned to the window. Her breath was coming quickly, and her lips were pale, parted, and trembling.

‘Mother,’ said Clym, ‘whatever you do, you will always be dear to me—that you know. But one thing I have a right to say,

which is, that at my age I am old enough to know what is best for me.'

Mrs. Yeobright remained for some time silent and shaken, as if she could say no more. Then she replied, 'Best? Is it best for you to injure your prospects for such a voluptuous, idle woman as that? Don't you see that by the very fact of your choosing her you prove that you do not know what is best for you? You give up your whole thought—you set your whole soul—to please a woman.'

'I do. And that woman is you.'

'How can you treat me so flippantly!' said his mother, turning again to him with a tearful look. 'You are unnatural, Clym, and I did not expect it.'

'Very likely,' said he cheerlessly. 'You did not know the measure you were going to mete me, and therefore did not know the measure that would be returned to you again.'

'You answer me; you think only of her. You stick to her in all things.'

‘That proves her to be worthy. I have never yet supported what is bad. And I do not care only for her. I care for you, and for myself, and for anything that is good. When a woman once dislikes another she is merciless!’

‘O Clym! please don’t go setting down as my fault what is your obstinate wrong-headedness. If you wished to connect yourself with an unworthy person why did you come home here to do it? Why didn’t you do it in Paris?—it is more the fashion there. You have come only to distress me, a lonely woman, and shorten my days! I wish that you would bestow your presence only where you bestow your love.’

Clym said huskily, ‘You are my mother. I will say no more—beyond this, that I beg your pardon for having thought this my home. I will no longer inflict myself upon you; I’ll go.’ And he went out with tears in his eyes.

It was a sunny afternoon at the beginning

of summer, and the moist hollows of the heath had passed from their brown to their green stage. Yeobright walked to the edge of the basin which extended down from Mist-over and Blackbarrow. By this time he was calm, and he looked over the landscape. In the minor valleys, between the hillocks which diversified the contour of the vale, the fresh young ferns were luxuriantly growing up, ultimately to reach a height of five or six feet. He descended a little way, flung himself down in a spot where a path emerged from one of the small hollows, and waited. Hither it was that he had promised Eustacia to bring his mother this afternoon, that they might meet and be friends. His attempt had utterly failed.

He was in a nest of vivid green. The ferny vegetation round him, though so abundant, was quite uniform; it was a grove of machine-made foliage, a world of green triangles with saw-edges, and not a single flower. The air was warm with a

vaporous warmth, and the stillness was unbroken. Lizards, grasshoppers, and ants were the only living things to be beheld. The scene seemed to belong to the ancient world of the carboniferous period, when the forms of plants were few, and of the fern kind; when there was neither bud nor blossom, nothing but a monotonous extent of leafage, amid which no bird sang.

When he had reclined for some considerable time, gloomily pondering, he discerned above the ferns a drawn-bonnet of white silk approaching from the left, and Yeobright knew directly that it covered the head of her he loved. His heart awoke from its apathy to a warm excitement, and, jumping to his feet, he said aloud, ' I knew she was sure to come.'

She vanished in a hollow for a few moments, and then her whole form unfolded itself from the brake.

' Only you here?' she exclaimed, with a disappointed air, whose hollowness was

proved by her rising redness and her half-guilty low laugh. 'Where is Mrs. Yeobright?'

'She has not come,' he replied in a subdued tone.

'I wish I had known that you would be here alone,' she said seriously, 'and that we were going to have such an idle, pleasant time as this. Pleasure not known beforehand is half-wasted; to anticipate it is to double it. I have not thought once to-day of having you all to myself this afternoon, and the actual moment of a thing is so soon gone.'

'It is indeed.'

'Poor Clym!' she continued, looking tenderly into his face. 'You are sad. Something has happened at your home. Never mind what is—let us only look at what seems.'

'But, darling, what shall we do?' said he.

'Still go on as we do now—just live on from meeting to meeting, never minding about another day. You, I know, are always

thinking of that—I can see you are. But you must not—will you, dear, dear Clym?’

‘You are just like all women. They are ever content to build their lives on any incidental position that offers itself; whilst men would fain make a globe to suit them. Listen to this, Eustacia. There is a subject I have determined to put off no longer. Your sentiment on the wisdom of *Carpe diem* does not impress me to-day. Our present mode of life must shortly be brought to an end.’

‘It is your mother.’

‘It is. I love you none the less in telling you; it is only right you should know.’

‘I have feared my bliss,’ she said, with the merest motion of her lips. ‘It has been too intense and consuming.’

‘There is hope yet. There are forty years of work in me yet, and why should you despair? I am only at an awkward turning. I wish people wouldn’t be so ready to think that there is no progress without uniformity.’

‘ Ah—your mind runs off to the philosophical side of it. Well, these sad and hopeless obstacles are welcome in one sense, for they enable us to look with indifference upon the cruel satires that Fate loves to indulge in. I have heard of people, who, upon coming suddenly into happiness, have died from anxiety lest they should not live to enjoy it. I felt myself in that whimsical state of uneasiness lately ; but I shall be spared it now. Let us walk on.’

Clym took the hand which was already bared for him—it was a favourite way with them to walk bare hand in bare hand—and led her through the ferns. They formed a very comely picture of love at full flush, as they walked along the valley that late afternoon, the sun sloping down on their right, and throwing their thin spectral shadows, tall as poplar trees, far out across the furze and fern. Eustacia went with her head thrown back fancifully, a certain glad and voluptuous air of triumph pervading her eyes at having won

by her own unaided self a man who was her perfect complement in attainments, appearance, and age. On the young man's part, the paleness of face which he had brought with him from Paris, and the incipient marks of time and thought, were less perceptible than when he returned, the healthful and energetic sturdiness which was his by nature having partially recovered its original proportions. They wandered onward till they reached the nether margin of the heath, where it became marshy, and merged in moorland.

'I must part from you here, Clym,' said Eustacia.

They stood still and prepared to bid each other farewell. Everything before them was on a perfect level. The sun, resting on the horizon line, streamed across the ground from between copper-coloured and lilac clouds, stretched out in flats beneath a sky of pale soft green. All dark objects on the earth that lay towards the sun were over-

spread by a purple haze, against which groups of wailing gnats shone out, rising upwards and dancing about like sparks of fire.

‘Oh! this leaving you is too hard to bear!’ exclaimed Eustacia in a sudden whisper of anguish. ‘Your mother will influence you too much; I shall not be judged fairly; it will get afloat that I am not a good girl, and the witch story will be added to make me blacker.’

‘They cannot. Nobody dares to speak disrespectfully of you or of me.’

‘O how I wish I was sure of never losing you—that you could not be able to desert me anyhow!’

Clym stood silent a moment. His feelings were high, the moment was passionate, and he cut the knot.

‘You shall be sure of me, darling,’ he said, folding her in his arms. ‘We will be married at once.’

‘Oh, Clym!’

‘Do you agree to it?’

‘If—if we can.’

‘We certainly can, both being of full age. And I have not followed my occupation all these seven years without having accumulated money; and if you will agree to live in a tiny cottage somewhere on the heath, until I take a house in Budmouth for the school, we can do it at a very little expense.’

‘How long shall we have to live in the tiny cottage, Clym?’

‘About six months. At the end of that time I shall have finished my reading—yes, we will do it, and this heart-aching will be over. We shall, of course, live in absolute seclusion, and our married life will only begin to outward view when we take the house in Budmouth, where I have already addressed a letter on the matter. Would your grandfather allow you?’

‘I think he would—on the understanding that it should not last longer than six months.’

‘I will guarantee that, if no misfortune happens.’

‘If no misfortune happens,’ she repeated slowly.

‘Which is not likely. Dearest, fix the exact day.’

And then they consulted on the question, and the day was chosen. It was to be a fortnight from that time.

This was the end of their talk, and Eustacia left him. Clym watched her as she retired towards the sun. The luminous rays wrapped her up with her increasing distance, and the rustle of her dress over the sprouting sedge and grass died away. As he watched the dead flat of the scenery overpowered him, though he was fully alive to the beauty of that untarnished early summer green which was worn for the nonce by the poorest blade. There was something in its oppressive horizontality which too much reminded him of the arena of life; it gave him a sense of bare equality

with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun.

Eustacia was now no longer the goddess but the woman to him, a being to fight for, support, help, be maligned for. Now that he had reached a cooler moment he would have preferred a less hasty marriage; but the card was laid, and he determined to abide by the game. Whether Eustacia was to add one other to the list of those who love too hotly to love long and well, the forthcoming event was certainly a ready way of proving.

CHAPTER VI.

YEOBRIGHT GOES, AND THE BREACH IS
COMPLETE.

ALL that evening smart sounds denoting an active packing up came from Yeobright's room to the ears of his mother down stairs.

Next morning he departed from the house and again proceeded across the heath. A long day's march was before him, his object being to secure a dwelling to which he might take Eustacia when she became his wife. Such a house, small, secluded, and with its windows boarded up, he had casually observed a month earlier, near a village about five miles off; and thither he directed his steps to-day.

The weather was far different from that of the evening before. The yellow and vapoury sunset which had wrapped up Eustacia from his parting gaze had presaged change. It was one of those not infrequent days of an English June which are as wet and boisterous as November. The cold clouds hastened on in a body, as if painted on a moving slide. Vapours from other continents arrived upon the wind, which curled and panted round him as he walked on.

At length Clym reached the margin of a fir and beech plantation that had been enclosed from heath-land in the year of his birth. Here the trees, laden heavily with their new and humid leaves, were now suffering more damage than during the highest winds of winter, when the boughs are specially disencumbered to do battle with the storm. The wet young beeches were undergoing amputations, bruises, crippings, and harsh lacerations, from which the wasting sap would bleed for many a day to come, and which

would leave scars visible till the day of their burning. Each stem was wrenched at the root, where it moved like a bone in its socket, and at every onset of the gale convulsive sounds came from the branches, as if pain were felt. In a neighbouring brake a finch was trying to sing ; but the wind blew under his feathers till they stood on end, twisted round his little tail, and made him give up his song.

Yet a few yards to Yeobright's left, on the open heath, how ineffectively gnashed the storm ! Those gusts which tore the trees merely waved the furze and heather in a light caress. Egdon was made for such times as these.

Yeobright reached the empty house about mid-day. It was almost as lonely as that of Eustacia's grandfather, but the fact that it stood near a heath was disguised by a belt of firs which almost enclosed the premises. He journeyed on about a mile farther to the village in which the owner lived, and, return-

ing with him to the house, arrangements were completed, and the man undertook that one room at least should be ready for occupation the next day. Clym's intention was to live there alone until Eustacia should join him on their wedding-day.

Then he turned to pursue his way homeward through the drizzle that had so greatly transformed the scene. The ferns, among which he had lain in comfort yesterday, were dripping moisture from every frond, wetting his legs through as he brushed past; and the fur of the rabbits leaping around him was clotted into dank locks by the same watery leafage.

He reached home damp and weary enough after his ten-mile walk. It had hardly been a propitious beginning, but he had chosen his course, and would show no swerving. The evening and the following morning were spent in concluding arrangements for his departure. To stay at home a minute longer than necessary after having

once come to his determination would be, he felt, only to give new pain to his mother by some word, look, or deed.

He had hired a conveyance and sent off his goods by two o'clock that day. The next step was to get some furniture, which, after serving for temporary use in the cottage, would be available for the house at Budmouth when increased by goods of a better description. A mart extensive enough for the purpose existed some miles beyond the spot chosen for his residence, and there he resolved to pass the coming night.

It now only remained to wish his mother good-bye. She was sitting by the window as usual when he came downstairs.

'Mother, I am going to leave you,' he said, holding out his hand.

'I thought you were by your packing,' replied Mrs. Yeobright in a voice from which every particle of emotion was painfully excluded.

'And you will part friends with me?'

‘Certainly, Clym.’

‘I am going to be married on the twenty-fifth.’

‘I thought you were going to be married.’

‘And then—and then you must come and see us. You will understand me better after that, and our situation will not be so wretched as it is now.’

‘I do not think it likely I shall come to see you.’

‘Then it will not be by my fault or Eustacia’s, mother. Good-bye.’

He kissed her cheek, and departed in great misery, which was several hours in lessening itself to a controllable level. The position had been such that nothing more could be said without, in the first place, breaking down a barrier; and that was not to be done.

No sooner had Yeobright gone from his mother’s house than her face changed its rigid aspect for one of blank despair. After a while she wept, and her tears brought some

relief. During the rest of the day she did nothing but walk up and down the garden-path in a state bordering on stupefaction. Night came, and with it but little rest. The next day, with an instinct to do something which should reduce prostration to mournfulness, she went to her son's room, and with her own hands arranged it in order, for an imaginary time when he should return again. She gave some attention to her flowers, but it was perfunctorily bestowed, for they no longer charmed her.

It was a great relief when, early in the afternoon, Thomasin paid her an unexpected visit. This was not the first meeting between the relatives since Thomasin's marriage; and past blunders having been in a rough way rectified, they could always greet each other with pleasure and ease.

The oblique band of sunlight which followed her through the door became the young wife well. It illuminated her as her presence illuminated the heath. In her

movements, in her gaze, she reminded the beholder of the feathered creatures who lived around her home. All similes and allegories concerning her began and ended with birds. There was as much variety in her motions as in their flight. When she was musing she was a kestrel, which hangs in the air by an invisible motion of its wings. When she was in a high wind her light body was blown against trees and banks like a heron's. When she was frightened she darted noiselessly like a kingfisher. When she was serene she skimmed like a swallow, and that is how she was moving now.

‘You are looking very blithe, upon my word, Tamsie,’ said Mrs. Yeobright, with a sad smile. ‘How is Damon?’

‘He is very well.’

‘Is he kind to you, Thomasin?’ And Mrs. Yeobright observed her narrowly.

‘Pretty fairly.’

‘Is that honestly said?’

‘Yes, aunt. I would tell you if he were

unkind.' She added, blushing, and with hesitation : ' He—I don't know if I ought to complain to you about this, but I am not quite sure what to do. I want some money, you know, aunt—some to buy little things for myself—and he doesn't give me any. I don't like to ask him ; and yet, perhaps, he doesn't give it me because he doesn't know. Ought I to mention it to him, aunt ?'

' Of course you ought. Have you never said a word on the matter ?'

' You see, I had some of my own,' said Thomasin evasively ; ' and I have not wanted any of his until lately. I did just say something about it last week ; but he seems—not to remember.'

' He must be made to remember. You are aware that I have a little box full of spade-guineas, which your uncle put into my hands to divide between yourself and Clym whenever I chose. Perhaps the time has come when it should be done. They can be turned into sovereigns at any moment.'

‘ I think I should like to have my share—that is, if you don’t mind.’

‘ You shall, if necessary. But it is only proper that you should first tell your husband distinctly that you are without any, and see what he will do.’

‘ Very well, I will. . . . Aunt, I have heard about Clym. I know you are in trouble about him, and that’s why I have come.’

Mrs. Yeobright turned away, and her features worked in her attempt to conceal her feelings. Then she ceased to make any attempt, and said, weeping, ‘ Oh, Thomasin, do you think he hates me? How can he bear to grieve me so, when I have lived only for him through all these years?’

‘ Hate you—no,’ said Thomasin soothingly. ‘ It is only that he loves her too well. Look at it quietly—do. It is not so very bad of him. Do you know, I thought it not the worst match he could have made. With the exception of her father, Miss Vye’s family is a good one; and he was clever.’

‘ It is no use, Thomasin ; it is no use. Your intention is good ; but I will not trouble you to argue. I have gone through the whole that can be said on either side times, and many times. Clym and I have not parted in anger ; we have parted in a worse way. It is not a passionate quarrel that would have broken my heart ; it is the steady opposition and persistence in going wrong that he has shown. Oh, Thomasin, he was so good when he was a little boy—so tender and kind !’

‘ He was, I know.’

‘ I did not think one whom I called mine would grow up to treat me like this. He spoke to me as if I opposed him to injure him. As though I could wish him ill !’

‘ There are worse women in the world than Eustacia Vye.’

‘ There are too many better ; that’s the agony of it. It was she, Thomasin, and she only, who led your husband to act as he did : I would swear it.’

‘No,’ said Thomasin eagerly. ‘It was before he knew me that he thought of her, and it was nothing but a mere flirtation.’

‘Very well; we will let it be so. There is little use in unravelling that now. Sons must be blind if they will. Why is it that a woman can see from a distance what a man cannot see close? Clym must do as he will—he is nothing more to me. And this is maternity—to give one’s best years and best love to ensure the fate of being despised!’

‘You are too unyielding. Think how many mothers there are whose sons have brought them to public shame by real crimes before you feel so deeply a case like this.’

‘Thomasin, don’t lecture me—I can’t have it. It is the excess above what we expect that makes the force of the blow, and that may not be greater in their case than in mine: they may have foreseen the worst. . . . I am wrongly made, Thomasin,’ she added, with a mournful smile. ‘Some widows can guard against the wounds their

children give them by turning their hearts to another husband and beginning life again. But I always was a poor, weak, one-idea'd creature—I had not the compass of heart nor the enterprise for that. Just as forlorn and stupefied as I was when my husband's spirit flew away I have sat ever since—never attempting to mend matters at all. I was comparatively a young woman then, and I might have had another family by this time, and have been comforted by them for the failure of this one son.'

'It was more noble in you that you did not.'

'The more noble, the less wise.'

'Forget it, and be soothed, dear aunt. And I shall not leave you alone for long. I shall come and see you every day.'

And for one week Thomasin literally fulfilled her word. She endeavoured to make light of the wedding; and brought news of the preparations, and that she was invited to be present. The next week she was rather

unwell, and did not appear. Nothing had as yet been done about the guineas, for Thomasin feared to address her husband again on the subject, and Mrs. Yeobright had insisted upon this.

One day just before this time, Wildeve was standing at the door of the Quiet Woman. In addition to the upward path through the heath to Blackbarrow and Mistover, there was a road which branched from the highway a short distance below the inn, and ascended to Mistover by a circuitous and easy incline. This was the only route for vehicles to the Captain's retreat. A light cart from the nearest town descended the road, and the lad who was driving pulled up in front of the inn for something to drink.

'You come from Mistover?' said Wildeve.

'Yes. They are taking in good things up there. Going to be a wedding.' And the driver buried his face in his mug.

Wildeve had not received an inkling of the fact before, and a sudden expression of pain overspread his face. He turned for a moment into the passage to hide it. Then he came back again.

‘Do you mean Miss Vye?’ he said. ‘How is it—that she can be married so soon?’

‘By the will of God and a ready young man, I suppose.’

‘You don’t mean, Mr. Yeobright?’

‘Yes. He has been creeping about with her all the spring.’

‘I suppose—she is immensely taken with him?’

‘She is crazy about him, so their general servant of all work tells me. And that lad Charley that looks after the horse is all in a daze about it. The stun-poll has got fond-like of her.’

‘Is she lively—is she glad? Going to be married so soon—well.’

‘It isn’t so very soon.’

‘No; not so very soon.’

Wildeve went indoors to the empty room, a curious heartache within him. He rested his elbow upon the mantelpiece and his face upon his hand. When Thomasin entered the room he did not tell her of what he had heard. The old longing for Eustacia had reappeared in his soul; and it was mainly because he had discovered that it was another man’s intention to possess her.

To be yearning for the difficult, to be weary of what offered; to care for the remote, to dislike the near: it was Wildeve’s nature always. This is the true mark of the man of sentiment. Though Wildeve’s fevered feeling had not been elaborated to real poetical compass, it was of the standard sort. He might have been called the Rousseau of Egdon.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MORNING AND THE EVENING OF AN
EVENTFUL DAY.

THE wedding morning came. Nobody would have imagined from appearances that Blooms-End had any interest in Mistover that day. A solemn stillness prevailed around the house of Clym's mother, and there was no more animation indoors. Mrs. Yeobright, who had declined to attend the ceremony, sat by the breakfast-table in the old room which communicated immediately with the porch, her eyes listlessly directed towards the open door. It was the room in which, six months earlier, the merry Christmas party had met, to which Eustacia came secretly and as a stranger. The only living thing that entered now was a sparrow; and seeing no move-

ments to cause alarm, he hopped boldly round the room, endeavoured to go out by the window, and fluttered among the pot-flowers. This roused the lonely sitter, who got up, released the bird, and went to the door. She was expecting Thomasin, who had written the night before to state that the time had come when she would wish to have the money, and that she would if possible call this day.

Yet Thomasin occupied Mrs. Yeobright's thoughts but slightly as she looked up the valley of the heath, alive with butterflies, and with grasshoppers whose husky noises on every side formed a whispered chorus. A domestic drama, for which the preparations were now being made about two miles off, was but little less vividly present to her eyes than if enacted before her. She tried to dismiss the vision, and walked about the garden-plot; but her eyes ever and anon sought out the direction of the parish-church to which Mistover belonged, and her excited

fancy clove the hills which divided the building from her eyes. The morning wore away. Eleven o'clock struck: could it be that the wedding was then in progress? It must be so. She went on imagining the scene at that church to which he had by this time taken his bride. She pictured the little group of children by the gate as the pony-carriage drove up in which, as Thomasin had learnt, they were going to perform the short journey. Then she saw them enter and proceed to the chancel and kneel; and the service seemed to go on.

She covered her face with her hands. 'O it is a mistake!' she groaned. 'And he will rue it some day, and think of me!'

While she remained thus, overcome by her forebodings, the old clock indoors whizzed forth twelve strokes. Soon after, faint sounds floated to her ear from afar over the hills. The breeze came from that quarter, and it had brought with it the notes of distant bells, gaily starting off in a peal:

one, two, three, four, five. The ringers at East Egdon were announcing the nuptials of Eustacia and her son.

‘Then it is over,’ she murmured. ‘Well, well! and life too will be over soon. And why should I go on scalding my face like this? Cry about one thing in life, cry about all; one thread runs through the whole piece. And yet we say, “a time to laugh!”’

Towards evening Wildeve came. Since Thomasin’s marriage Mrs. Yeobright had shown towards him that grim friendliness which at last arises in all such cases of undesired affinity. The vision of what ought to have been is thrown aside in sheer weariness, and brow-beaten human endeavour listlessly makes the best of the fact that is. Wildeve, to do him justice, had behaved very courteously to his wife’s aunt; and it was with no surprise that she saw him enter now.

‘Thomasin has not been able to come,

as she promised to do,' he replied to her inquiry, which had been anxious, for she knew that her niece was badly in want of money. 'The Captain came down last night and personally pressed her to join them to-day. So, not to be unpleasant, she determined to go. They fetched her in the pony-chaise, and are going to bring her back.'

'Then it is done,' said Mrs. Yeobright. 'Have they gone to their new home?'

'I don't know. I have had no news from Mistover since Thomasin left to go.'

'You did not go with her?' said she, as if there might be good reasons why.

'I could not,' said Wildeve, reddening slightly. 'We could not both leave the house; it was rather a busy morning, on account of Southerton Great Market. I believe you have something to give to Thomasin? If you like, I will take it.'

Mrs. Yeobright hesitated, and wondered if Wildeve knew what the something was. 'Did she tell you of this?' she inquired.

‘Not particularly. She casually dropped a remark about having arranged to fetch some article or other.’

‘It is hardly necessary to send it. She can have it whenever she chooses to come.’

‘That won’t be yet. In the present state of her health she must not go on walking so much as she has done.’ He added, with a faint twang of sarcasm: ‘What wonderful thing is it that I cannot be trusted to take?’

‘Nothing worth troubling you with.’

‘One would think you doubted my honesty,’ he said, with a laugh, though his colour rose in a quick resentfulness frequent with him.

‘You need think no such thing,’ said she drily. ‘It is simply that I, in common with the rest of the world, feel that there are certain things which had better be done by certain people than by others.’

‘As you like, as you like,’ said Wildeve laconically. ‘It is not worth arguing about. Well, I think I must turn homeward again,

as the inn must not be left long in charge of the lad and the maid only.'

He went his way, his farewell being scarcely so courteous as his greeting. But Mrs. Yeobright knew him thoroughly by this time, and took little notice of his manner, good or bad.

When Wildeve was gone Mrs. Yeobright stood and considered what would be the best course to adopt with regard to the guineas, which she had not liked to entrust to Wildeve. It was hardly credible that Thomasin had told him to ask for them, when the necessity for them had arisen from the difficulty of obtaining money at his hands. At the same time Thomasin really wanted them, and might be unable to come to Blooms-End for another week at least. To take or send the money to her at the inn would be impolitic, since Wildeve would pretty surely be present, or would discover the transaction; and if, as her aunt suspected, he treated her less kindly than she deserved to be treated,

he might then get the whole sum out of her gentle hands. But on this particular evening Thomasin was at Mistover, and anything might be conveyed to her there without the knowledge of her husband. Upon the whole the opportunity was worth taking advantage of.

Her son, too, was there, and was now married. There could be no more proper moment to render him his share of the money than the present. And the chance that would be afforded her, by sending him this gift, of showing how far she was from bearing him ill-will, cheered the sad mother's heart.

She went upstairs and took from a locked drawer a little box, out of which she poured a hoard of broad unworn guineas that had lain there many a year. There were a hundred in all, and she divided them into two heaps, fifty in each. Tying up these in small canvas bags, she went down to the garden and called to Christian Cattle, who

was loitering about in hope of a supper which was not really owed him. Mrs. Yeobright gave him the money-bags, charged him to go to Mistover, and on no account to deliver them into anyone's hands save her son's and Thomasin's. On further thought she deemed it advisable to tell Christian precisely what the two bags contained, that he might be fully impressed with their importance. Christian pocketed the money-bags, promised the greatest carefulness, and set out on his way.

'You need not hurry,' said Mrs. Yeobright. 'It will be better not to get there till after dusk, and then nobody will notice you. Come back here to supper, if it is not too late.'

It was nearly nine o'clock when he began to ascend the vale towards Mistover; but the long days of summer being at their climax, the first obscurity of evening had only just begun to tan the landscape. At this point of his journey Christian heard voices,

and found that they proceeded from a company of men and women who were traversing a hollow ahead of him, the tops only of their heads being visible.

He paused and thought of the money he carried. It was almost too early even for Christian to seriously fear robbery; nevertheless he took a precaution which ever since his boyhood he had adopted whenever he carried more than two or three shillings upon his person—a precaution somewhat like that of the owner of the Pitt or Regency Diamond when filled with similar misgivings. He took off his boots, untied the guineas, and emptied the contents of one little bag into the right boot, and of the other into the left, spreading them as flatly as possible over the bottom of each, which was really a spacious coffer by no means limited to the size of the foot. Pulling them on again and lacing them to the very top, he proceeded on his way, more easy in his head than under the soles of his feet.

His path converged towards that of the noisy company, and on coming nearer he found to his relief that they were several Egdon people whom he knew very well, while with them walked Fairway, of Blooms-End.

‘What! Christian going too?’ said Fairway as soon as he recognised the newcomer. ‘You’ve got no young woman nor wife to your name to gie a gown-piece to, I’m sure.’

‘What d’ye mean?’ said Christian.

‘Why, the raffle. The one we go to every year. Going to the raffle as well as ourselves?’

‘Never knew a word o’t. Is it like cudgel-playing or other smallest forms of bloodshed? I don’t want to go, thank you, Mister Fairway, and no offence.’

‘Christian don’t know the fun o’t, and ’twould be a fine sight for him,’ said a buxom woman. ‘There’s no danger at all, Christian. Every man put’s in a shilling a-piece, and

one wins a gown-piece for his wife or sweetheart if he's got one.'

'Well, as that's not my fortune there's no meaning in it to me. But I should like to see the fine spectacle, if there's nothing of the black art in it, and if a man may look on without cost or getting into any dangerous tumult?'

'There will be no uproar at all,' said Timothy. 'Sure, Christian, if you'd like to come we'll see there's no harm done.'

'And no unseemly gaieties, I suppose? You see, neighbours, if so, it would be setting father a bad example, as he is so outwardly given. But a gown-piece for a shilling, and no black art—'tis worth looking in to see, and it wouldn't hinder me half-an-hour. Yes, I'll come, if you'll step a little way towards Mistover with me afterwards, supposing night should have closed in, and nobody else is going that way.'

One or two promised; and Christian, diverging from his direct path, turned round

to the right with his companions towards the Quiet Woman.

When they entered the large common room of the inn they found assembled there about ten men from among the neighbouring population, and the group was increased by the new contingent to double that number. Most of them were sitting round the room in seats divided by wooden elbows like those of cathedral stalls, which were carved with the initials of many an illustrious drunkard of former times who had passed his days and his nights between them, and now lay as an alcoholic cinder in the nearest churchyard. Among the cups on the long table before the sitters lay an open parcel of light drapery—the gown-piece, as it was called—which was to be raffled for. Wildeve was standing with his back to the fireplace, smoking a cigar; and the promoter of the raffle, a packman from a distant town, was expatiating upon the value of the fabric as material for a summer dress.

‘Now, gentlemen,’ he continued, as the new-comers drew up to the table, ‘there’s five have entered, and we want four more to make up the number. I think, by the faces of those gentlemen who have just come in, that they are shrewd enough to take advantage of this rare opportunity of beautifying their ladies at a very trifling expense.’

Fairway, Sam, and another placed their shillings on the table, and the man turned to Christian.

‘No, sir,’ said Christian, drawing back, with a quick gaze of misgiving. ‘I am only a poor chap come to look on, an it please ye, sir. I don’t so much as know how you do it. If so be I was sure of getting it I would put down the shilling; but I couldn’t otherwise.’

‘I think you might almost be sure,’ said the pedlar. ‘In fact, now I look into your face, even if I can’t say you are sure to win, I can say that I never saw anything look more like winning in my life.’

‘You’ll anyhow have the same chance as the rest of us,’ said Sam.

‘And the extra luck of being the last comer,’ said another.

‘And I was born wi’ a caul, and perhaps can be no more ruined than drowned,’ Christian added, beginning to give way.

Ultimately Christian laid down his shilling, the raffle began, and the dice went round. When it came to Christian’s turn he took the box with a trembling hand, shook it fearfully, and threw a pair-royal. Three of the others had thrown common low pairs, and all the rest mere points.

‘The gentleman looked like winning, as I said,’ observed the chapman, blandly. ‘Take it, sir; the article is yours.’

‘Haw-haw-haw!’ said Fairway. ‘I’m damned if this isn’t the quarest start that ever I knowed!’

‘Mine?’ asked Christian, with a vacant stare from his target eyes. ‘I—I haven’t got neither maid, wife, nor widder belonging

to me at all, and I'm afeard it will make me laughed at to hae it, Master Traveller. What with being curious to join in I never thought of that. What shall I do wi' a woman's clothes, and not lose my decency !'

'Keep it, to be sure,' said Fairway, 'if it is only for luck. Perhaps 'twill tempt some woman that thy poor carcase had no power over when standing empty-handed.'

'Keep it, certainly,' said Wildeve, who had idly watched the scene from a distance.

The table was then cleared of the articles, and the men began to drink.

'Well, to be sure !' said Christian half to himself. 'To think I should have been born so lucky as this, and not have found it out until now ! What curious creatures these dice be—powerful rulers of us all, and yet at my command. I am sure I never need be afeard of anything after this.' He handled the dice fondly one by one. 'Why, sir,' he said, in a confidential whisper to Wildeve, who was near his left hand, 'if I could only

use this power that's in me of multiplying money I might do some good to a near relation of yours, seeing what I've got about me of hers—eh?' He tapped one of his money-laden boots upon the floor.

'What do you mean?' said Wildeve.

'That's a secret. Well, I must be going now.' He looked anxiously towards Fairway.

'Where are you going?' Wildeve asked.

'To Mistover Knap. I have to see Mrs. Thomasin there—that's all.'

'I am going there too, to fetch Mrs. Wildeve. We can walk together.'

Wildeve became lost in thought, and a look of inward illumination came into his eyes. It was money for his wife that Mrs. Yeobright could not trust him with. 'Yet she could trust this fellow,' he said to himself. 'Why, doesn't that which belongs to the wife belong to the husband too?'

He called to the pot-boy to bring him his hat, and said, 'Now, Christian, I am ready.'

‘Mr. Wildeve,’ said Christian timidly, as he turned to leave the room, ‘would you mind lending me them wonderful little things that carry my luck inside ’em, that I might practise a bit by myself, you know?’ He looked wistfully at the dice and box lying on the mantelpiece.

‘Certainly,’ said Wildeve, carelessly. ‘They were only cut out by some lad with his knife, and are worth nothing.’ And Christian went back and privately pocketed them.

Wildeve opened the door and looked out. ‘The night was warm and cloudy. ‘By Gad! ’tis dark,’ he continued. ‘But I suppose we shall find our way.’

‘If we should lose the path it might be awkward,’ said Christian. ‘A lantern is the only shield that will make it safe for us.’

‘Let’s have a lantern by all means.’ The stable-lantern was fetched and lighted. Christian took up his gown-piece, and the two set out to ascend the hill.

Within the room the men fell into chat till their attention was for a moment drawn to the chimney-corner. This was large, and, in addition to its proper recess, contained within its jambs, like many on Egdon, a receding seat, so that a person might sit there absolutely unobserved, provided there was no fire to light him up, as was the case now and throughout the summer. From the niche a single object protruded into the light from the candles on the table. It was a clay pipe, and its colour was crimson red. The men had been attracted to this object by a voice behind the pipe asking for a light.

‘Upon my life, it fairly startled me when the man spoke!’ said Fairway, handing a candle. ‘Oh—’tis the reddleman. You’ve kept a quiet tongue, young man.’

‘Yes, I had nothing to say,’ observed Venn. In a few minutes he arose and wished the company good-night.

Meanwhile Wildeve and Christian had plunged into the heath.

It was a stagnant, warm, and misty night, full of all the heavy perfumes of new vegetation not yet dried by hot sun, and among these particularly the scent of the fern. The lantern, dangling from Christian's hand, brushed the feathery fronds in passing by, disturbing moths and other winged insects, which flew out and alighted upon its horny panes.

'So you have money to carry to Mrs. Wildeve?' said Christian's companion, after a silence. 'Don't you think it very odd that it shouldn't be given to me?'

'As man and wife be one flesh, 'twould have been all the same, I should think,' said Christian. 'But my strict documents was, to give the money into Mrs. Wildeve's hand; and 'tis well to do things right.'

'No doubt,' said Wildeve. Any person who had known the circumstances might have perceived that Wildeve was mortified by the discovery that the matter in transit was money, and not, as he had supposed,

when at Blooms-End, some fancy nicknack which only interested the two women themselves. Mrs. Yeobright's refusal implied that his honour was not considered to be of sufficiently good quality to make him a safe bearer of his wife's property.

‘How very warm it is to-night, Christian,’ he said, panting, when they were nearly under Blackbarrow. ‘Let us sit down for a few minutes, for heaven's sake.’

Wildeve flung himself down on the soft ferns; and Christian, placing the lantern and parcel on the ground, perched himself in a cramped position hard by, his knees almost touching his chin. He presently thrust one hand into his coat-pocket and began shaking it about.

‘What are you rattling in there?’ said Wildeve.

‘Only the dice, sir,’ said Christian, quickly withdrawing his hand. ‘What magical machines these little things be, Mr. Wildeve! ’Tis a game I should never get tired of. Would

you mind my taking 'em out and looking at 'em for a minute, to see how they are made? I didn't like to look close before the other men, for fear they should think it bad manners in me.' Christian took them out and examined them in the hollow of his hand by the lantern light. 'That these little things should carry such luck, and such charm, and such a spell, and such power in 'em, passes all I ever heard or seed,' he went on, with a fascinated gaze at the dice, which, as is frequently the case in country places, were made of wood, the points being burnt upon each face with the end of a wire.

'They are a great deal in a small compass, you think?'

'Yes. Do ye suppose they really be the devil's playthings, Mr. Wildeve? If so, 'tis no good sign that I be such a lucky man.'

'You ought to win some money, now that you've got them. Any woman would marry you then. Now is your time, Christian, and I would recommend you not to let it slip.

Some men are born to luck, some are not. I belong to the latter class.'

'Did you ever know anybody who was born to it besides myself?'

'O yes. I once heard of an Italian, who sat down at a gaming-table, with only a louis (that's a foreign sovereign) in his pocket. He played on for twenty-four hours, and won ten thousand pounds, stripping the bank he had played against. Then there was another man who had lost a thousand pounds, and went to the broker's next day to sell stock, that he might pay the debt. The man to whom he owed the money went with him in a hackney-coach; and to pass the time they tossed who should pay the fare. The ruined man won, and the other was tempted to continue the game, and they played all the way. When the coachman stopped he was told to drive home again: the whole thousand pounds had been won back by the man who was going to sell.'

'Ha—ha—splendid!' exclaimed Christian. 'Go on—go on!'

‘ Then there was a man named Rumbold, who was only a waiter at a club-house. He began playing first half-crown stakes, and then higher and higher, till he became very rich, got an appointment in India, and rose to be Governor of Madras. His daughter married a member of parliament, and the Bishop of Carlisle stood godfather to one of the children.’

‘ Wonderful ! wonderful !’

‘ And once there was a young man in America who gambled till he had lost his last dollar. He went out, sold his watch and chain ; came in, and lost them : went out and sold his umbrella ; lost again : sold his hat ; lost again : sold his coat and came in in his shirt-sleeves ; lost again. Began taking off his breeches, and then a looker-on gave him a trifle for his pluck. With this he won. Won back his coat, won back his hat, won back his umbrella, his watch, his money, and went out of the door a rich man.’

‘ O ’tis too good—it takes away my

breath! Mr. Wildeve, I think I will try another shilling with you, as I am one of that sort; no danger can come o't, and you can afford to lose.'

'Very well,' said Wildeve, rising. Searching about with the lantern, he found a large flat stone, which he placed between himself and Christian, and sat down again. The lantern was opened to give more light, and its rays directed upon the stone. Christian put down a shilling, Wildeve another, and each threw. Christian won. They played for two. Christian won again.

'Let us try four,' said Wildeve. They played for four. This time the stakes were won by Wildeve.

'Ah, those little accidents will, of course, sometimes happen to the luckiest man,' he observed.

'And now I have no more money!' exclaimed Christian excitedly. 'And yet, if I could go on, I should get it back again, and more. I wish this was mine.' He struck

his boot upon the ground, so that the guineas chinked within.

‘What! you have not put Mrs. Wildeve’s money there?’

‘Yes. ’Tis for safety. Is it any harm to raffle with a married lady’s money when, if I win, I shall only keep my winnings, and give her her own all the same; and if t’other man wins, her money will go to the lawful owner?’

‘None at all.’

Wildeve had been brooding ever since they started on the mean estimation in which he was held by his wife’s friends; and it cut his heart severely. As the minutes had passed, he had gradually drifted into a revengeful intention without knowing the precise moment of forming it. This was to teach Mrs. Yeobright a lesson, as he considered it to be; in other words, to show her, if he could, that her niece’s husband was the proper guardian of her niece’s money.

‘Well, here goes!’ said Christian, begin-

ning to unlace one boot. 'I shall dream of it nights and nights, I suppose; but I shall always swear my flesh don't crawl when I think o't.'

He thrust his hand into the boot and withdrew one of poor Thomasin's precious guineas, piping hot. Wildeve had already placed a sovereign on the stone. The game was then resumed. Wildeve won first, and Christian ventured another, winning himself this time. The game fluctuated, but the average was in Wildeve's favour. Both men became so absorbed in the game that they took no heed of anything but the pigmy objects immediately beneath their eyes: the flat stone, the open lantern, the dice, and the few illuminated fern-leaves which lay under the light, were the whole world to them.

At length Christian lost rapidly; and presently, to his horror, the whole fifty guineas belonging to Thomasin had been handed over to his adversary.

'I don't care—I don't care!' he moaned,

and desperately set about untying his left boot to get at the other fifty. 'The devil will toss me into the flames on his three-pronged fork for this night's work, I know. But perhaps I shall win yet, and then I'll get a wife to sit up with me o' nights, and I won't be afeard, I won't! Here's another for'ee, my man.' He slapped another guinea down upon the stone, and the dice-box was rattled again.

Time passed on. Wildeve began to be as excited as Christian himself. When commencing the game his intention had been nothing further than a bitter practical joke on Mrs. Yeobright. To win the money, fairly or otherwise, and to hand it contemptuously to Thomasin in her aunt's presence, had been the dim outline of his purpose. But men are drawn from their intentions, even in the course of carrying them out, and it was extremely doubtful, by the time the twentieth guinea had been reached, whether Wildeve was conscious of

any other intention than that of winning for his own personal benefit. Moreover, he was now no longer gambling for his wife's money, but for Yeobright's ; though of this fact Christian, in his apprehensiveness, did not inform him till afterwards.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, when, with almost a shriek, Christian placed Yeobright's last bright guinea upon the stone. In forty seconds it had gone the way of its companions.

Christian turned and flung himself on the ferns in an agony of remorse. ' Oh, what shall I do with my wretched self ! ' he groaned. ' What shall I do ! Will any good Heaven have mercy upon my wicked soul ! '

' Do ? Live on just the same.'

' I won't live on just the same. I'll die. I say you are a—a——'

' A man sharper than my neighbour.'

' Yes, a man sharper than my neighbour ; a regular sharper.'

' Poor chips-in-porridge, you are very unmannerly.'

‘I don’t know about that. And I say you are unmannerly. You’ve got money that isn’t your own. Half the guineas are poor Mr. Clym’s,’

‘How’s that?’

‘Because I had to gie fifty of ’em to him—Mrs. Yeobright said so.’

‘Oh Well, ’twould have been more graceful of her to have given them to his wife Eustacia. But they are in my hands now.’

Christian pulled on his boots, and with heavy breathings, which could be heard to some distance, dragged his limbs together, arose, and tottered away out of sight. Wildeve set about shutting the lantern to return to the house, for he deemed it too late to go to Mistover to meet his wife, who was to be driven home in the Captain’s four-wheel. While he was closing the little horn door a figure slowly rose from behind a neighbouring bush and came forward into the lantern light. It was the tall crimson form of the reddleman.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NEW FORCE DISTURBS THE CURRENT.

WILDEVE stared. Venn looked coolly towards Wildeve, and, without a word being spoken, he deliberately sat himself down where Christian had been seated, thrust his hand into his pocket, drew out a sovereign, and laid it on the stone.

‘You have been watching us from behind that bush?’ said Wildeve.

The reddleman nodded. ‘Down with your stake,’ he said. ‘Or haven’t you pluck enough to go on?’

Now, gambling is a species of amusement which is much more easily begun with full pockets than left off with the

same; and though Wildeve in a cooler temper might have prudently declined this invitation, the excitement of his recent success carried him completely away. He placed one of the guineas on the slab beside the reddleman's sovereign, 'Mine is a guinea,' he said.

'A guinea that's not your own,' said Venn sarcastically.

'It is my own,' answered Wildeve haughtily. 'It is my wife's, and what is hers is mine.'

'Very well; let's make a beginning.' He shook the box, and threw eight, ten, and nine; the three casts amounting to twenty-seven.

This encouraged Wildeve. He took the box; and his three casts amounted to forty-five.

Down went another of the reddleman's sovereigns against his first one which Wildeve laid. This time Wildeve threw fifty-one points, but no pair. The reddle-

man looked grim, threw a raffle of aces, and pocketed the stakes.

‘Here you are again,’ said Wildeve contemptuously. ‘Double the stakes.’ He laid two of Thomasin’s guineas, and the reddleman his two pounds. Venn won again. New stakes were laid on the stone, and the gamblers proceeded as before.

Wildeve was a nervous and excitable man; and the game was beginning to tell upon his temper. He writhed, fumed, shifted his seat; and the beating of his heart was almost audible. Venn sat with lips impassively closed and eyes reduced to a pair of unimportant twinkles; he scarcely appeared to breathe. He might have been an Arab, an automaton; he would have been like a red-sandstone statue but for the motion of his arm with the dice-box.

The game fluctuated, now in favour of one, now in favour of the other, without any great advantage on the side of either. Nearly twenty minutes were passed thus. The light of the candle had by this time attracted

heath-flies, moths, and other winged creatures of night, which floated round the lantern, flew into the flame, or beat about the faces of the two players.

But neither of the men paid much attention to these things, their eyes being concentrated upon the little flat stone, which to them was an arena vast and important as a battle-field. By this time a change had come over the game: the reddleman won continually. At length sixty guineas—Thomasin's fifty, and ten of Clym's—had passed into his hands. Wildeve was reckless, frantic, exasperated.

“Won back his coat,” said Venn silyly.

Another throw, and the money went the same way.

“Won back his hat,” continued Venn.

‘Oh, oh!’ said Wildeve.

“Won back his watch, won back his money, and went out of the door a rich man,” added Venn sentence by sentence as stake after stake passed over to him.

‘Five more!’ shouted Wildeve, dashing down the money. ‘And three casts be hanged—one shall decide.’

The red automaton opposite lapsed into silence, nodded, and followed his example. Wildeve rattled the box, and threw a pair of sixes and five points. He clapped his hands: ‘I have done it this time—hurrah!’

‘There are two playing, and only one has thrown,’ said the reddleman, quietly bringing down the box. The eyes of each were then so intently converged upon the stone that one could fancy their beams were visible, like rays in a fog.

Venn lifted the box, and behold a triplet of sixes was disclosed.

Wildeve was full of fury. While the reddleman was grasping the stakes Wildeve seized the dice and hurled them, box and all, into the darkness, uttering a fearful imprecation. Then he arose and began stamping up and down like a madman.

‘Is it all over, then?’ said Venn.

‘No, no!’ cried Wildeve. ‘I mean to have another chance yet. I must!’

‘But, my good man, what have you done with the dice?’

‘I threw them away—it was a momentary irritation. What a fool I am! Here—come and help me to look for them—we must find them again.’

Wildeve snatched up the lantern and began anxiously prowling among the furze and fern.

‘You are not likely to find them there,’ said Venn, following. ‘What did you do such a crazy thing as that for? Here’s the box. The dice can’t be far off.’

Wildeve turned the light eagerly upon the spot where Venn had found the box, and mauled the herbage right and left. In the course of a few minutes one of the dice was found. They searched on for some time, but no other was to be seen.

‘Never mind,’ said Wildeve; ‘let’s play with one.’

‘Agreed,’ said Venn.

Down they sat again, and recommenced with single guinea stakes; and the play went on smartly. But Fortune had unmistakably fallen in love with the reddleman to-night. He won steadily, till he was the owner of fourteen more of the gold pieces. Seventy-nine of the hundred guineas were his, Wildeve possessing only twenty-one. The aspect of the two opponents was now singular. Apart from motions, a complete diorama of the fluctuations of the game went on in their eyes. A diminutive candle-flame was mirrored in each pupil, and it would have been possible to distinguish therein between the moods of hope and the moods of abandonment, even as regards the reddleman, though his facial muscles betrayed nothing at all. Wildeve played on with the recklessness of despair.

‘What’s that?’ he suddenly exclaimed, hearing a rustle; and they both looked up.

They were surrounded by dusky forms

about four feet high, standing a few paces beyond the rays of the lantern. A moment's inspection revealed that the encircling figures were heathcroppers, their heads being all towards the players, at whom they gazed intently.

‘Hoosh!’ said Wildeve; and the whole forty or fifty animals at once turned and galloped away. Play was again resumed.

Ten minutes passed away. Then a large death's-head moth advanced from the obscure outer air, wheeled twice round the lantern, flew straight at the candle, and extinguished it by the force of the blow. Wildeve had just thrown, but had not lifted the box to see what he had cast; and now it was impossible.

‘What the infernal!’—he shrieked. ‘Now, now what shall we do? Perhaps I have thrown six—have you any matches?’

‘None,’ said Venn.

‘Christian had some—I wonder where he is? Christian!’

But there was no reply to Wildeve's shout, save a mournful whining from the herons which were nesting lower down the vale. Both men looked blankly round without rising. As their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness they perceived faint greenish points of light among the grass and fern. These lights dotted the hillside like stars of a low magnitude.

‘Ah—glowworms,’ said Wildeve. ‘Wait a minute. We can continue the game.’

Ven sat still, and his companion went hither and thither till he had gathered thirteen glowworms—as many as he could find in a space of four or five minutes—upon a dockleaf which he pulled for the purpose. The reddleman vented a low humorous laugh when he saw his adversary return with these. ‘Determined to go on, then?’ he said drily.

‘I always am in such cases,’ said Wildeve angrily. And shaking the glowworms from the leaf, he ranged them with a

trembling hand in a circle on the stone, leaving a space in the middle for the descent of the dice-box, over which the thirteen tiny lamps threw a pale phosphorescent shine. The game was again renewed. It happened to be that season of the year at which glow-worms put forth their greatest brilliancy, and the light they yielded was more than ample for the purpose, since it is possible on such nights to read the handwriting of a letter by the light of two or three.

The incongruity between the men's deeds and their environment was striking. The soft juicy vegetation of the hollow in which they sat, gently rustling in the warm air, the uninhabited solitude, the chink of guineas, the rattle of the dice, the exclamations of the players, combined to form such a bizarre exhibition of circumstances as had never before met on those hills since they first arose out of the deep.

Wildeva had lifted the box as soon as the lights were obtained, and the solitary die

proclaimed that the game was still against him.

‘I won’t play any more : you’ve been tampering with the dice,’ he shouted.

‘How—when they were your own?’ said the reddleman.

‘We’ll change the game : the lowest point shall win the stake—it may cut off my ill luck. Do you refuse?’

‘No—go on,’ said Venn.

‘Oh! there they are again—damn them!’ cried Wildeve, looking up. The heathcroppers had returned noiselessly, and were looking on with erect heads just as before, their timid eyes fixed upon the scene, as if they were wondering what mankind and candle-light could have to do in these haunts at this untoward hour.

‘What a plague those creatures are—staring so!’ he said, and flung a stone, which scattered them; when the game was continued as before.

Wildeve had now ten guineas left; and

each laid five. Wildeve threw three points, Venn two; and raked in the coins. The other seized the die, and clenched his teeth upon it in sheer rage, as if he would bite it in pieces. 'Never give in—here are my last five!' he cried, throwing them down. Hang the glowworms—they are going out. Why don't you burn, you little fools? Stir them up with a thorn.'

He probed the glowworms with a bit of stick, and rolled them over, till the bright side of their tails was upwards.

'There's light enough. Throw on,' said Venn.

Wildeve brought down the box within the shining circle and looked eagerly. He had thrown ace. 'Well done!—I said it would turn, and it has turned.' Venn said nothing; but his hand shook slightly.

He threw ace also.

'Oh!' said Wildeve. 'Curse me!'

The die smacked the stone a second time. It was ace again. Venn looked

gloomy, threw : the die was seen to be lying in two pieces, the cleft sides uppermost.

‘I’ve thrown nothing at all,’ he said.

‘Serves me right—I split the die with my teeth. Here—take your money. Blank is less than one.’

‘I don’t wish it.’

‘Take it, I say—you’ve won it!’ And Wildeve threw the stakes against the reddleman’s chest. Venn gathered them up, arose, and withdrew from the hollow, Wildeve sitting stupefied.

When he had come to himself he also arose, and, with the extinguished lantern in his hand, went towards the high road. On reaching it he stood still. The silence of night pervaded the whole heath except in one direction; and that was towards Mist-over. There he could hear the noise of light wheels, and presently saw two carriage-lamps descending the hill. Wildeve screened himself under a bush, and waited.

The vehicle came on and passed before

him. It was a hired carriage, and behind the coachman were two persons whom he knew well. There sat Eustacia and Yeobright, the arm of the latter being round her waist. They turned the sharp corner by Shadwater Weir towards the temporary home which Clym had hired and furnished, about three miles to the eastward.

Wildevve forgot the loss of the money at the sight of his lost love, whose preciousness in his eyes was increasing in geometrical progression with each new incident that reminded him of their hopeless division. Brimming with the subtilised misery that he was capable of feeling, he followed the opposite way towards the inn.

About the same moment that Wildevve stepped into the highway Venn also had reached it at a point a hundred yards farther on ; and he, hearing the same wheels, likewise waited till the carriage should come up. When he saw who sat therein he seemed to be disappointed. Reflecting a minute or two, during

which interval the carriage rolled on, he crossed the road, and took a short cut through the furze and heath to a point where the turnpike-road bent round in ascending a hill. He was now again in front of the carriage, which presently came up at a walking pace. Venn stepped forward and showed himself.

Eustacia started when the lamp shone upon him, and Clym's arm was involuntarily withdrawn from her waist. He said, 'What, Diggory? You are having a lonely walk.'

'Yes—I beg your pardon for stopping you,' said Venn. 'But I am waiting about for Mrs. Wildeve: I have something to give her from Mrs. Yeobright. Can you tell me if she's gone home from the party yet?'

'No. But she will be leaving soon. You may possibly meet her at the corner.'

Venn made a farewell obeisance, and walked back to his former position, where the bye-road from Mistover joined the highway. Here he remained fixed for nearly half an hour; and then another pair of lights

came down the hill. It was the old-fashioned wheeled nondescript belonging to the Captain, and Thomasin sat in it alone, driven by Charley.

The reddleman came up as they slowly turned the corner. 'I beg pardon for stopping you, Mrs. Wildeve,' he said. 'But I have something to give you privately from Mrs. Yeobright.' He handed a small parcel; it consisted of the hundred guineas he had just won, roughly twisted up in a piece of paper.

Thomasin recovered from her surprise, and took the packet. 'That's all, ma'am—I wish you good night,' he said, and vanished from her view.

Thus Venn, in his anxiety to rectify matters, had placed in Thomasin's hands not only the fifty guineas which rightly belonged to her, but also the fifty intended for her cousin Clym. His mistake had been based upon Wildeve's words at the opening of the game, when he indignantly denied that the first guinea was not his own. It had not

been heard by the reddleman that at halfway through the performance Thomasin's money was exhausted, the continuation being with that of another person; and it was an error which afterwards helped to cause more misfortune than treble the loss in money value could have done.

The night was now somewhat advanced; and Venn plunged deeper into the heath, till he came to a ravine where his van was standing—a spot not more than two hundred yards from the site of the gambling bout. He entered this movable home of his, lit his lantern, and, before closing his door for the night, stood reflecting on the circumstances of the preceding hours. While he stood the dawn grew visible in the north-east quarter of the heavens, which, the clouds having cleared off, was bright with a soft sheen at this midsummer time, though it was only between one and two o'clock. Venn, thoroughly weary, then shut his door, and flung himself down to sleep.

BOOK FOURTH

THE CLOSED DOOR

CHAPTER I.

THE RENCONTRE BY THE POOL.

THE July sun shone over Egdon and fired its crimson heather to scarlet. It was the one season of the year, and the one weather of the season, in which the heath was gorgeous. This flowering period represented the second or noontide division in the cycle of those superficial changes which alone were possible here; it followed the green or young-fern period, representing the morn, and preceded the brown period, when the heath-bells and ferns would wear the russet tinges of evening; to be in turn displaced by the dark hue of the winter period, representing night.

Clym and Eustacia, in their little house at

Alderworth, were living on with a monotony which was delightful to them. The heath and changes of weather were quite blotted out from their eyes for the present. They were enclosed in a sort of luminous mist, which hid from them surroundings of any inharmonious colour, and gave to all things the character of light. When it rained they were charmed, because they could remain indoors together all day with such a show of reason ; when it was fine they were charmed, because they could sit together on the hills. They were like those double stars which revolve round and round each other, and from a distance appear to be one. The absolute solitude in which they lived intensified their reciprocal thoughts ; yet some might have said that it had the disadvantage of consuming their mutual affections at a fearfully prodigal rate. Yeobright did not fear for his own part ; but recollection of Eustacia's old speech about the evanescence of love, now apparently forgotten by her, some-

times caused him to ask himself a question ; and he recoiled at the thought that the quality of finiteness was not foreign to Eden.

When three or four weeks had been passed thus Yeobright resumed his reading in earnest. To make up for lost time he studied indefatigably, for he wished to enter his new profession with the least possible delay.

Now, Eustacia's dream had always been that, once married to Clym, she would have the power of inducing him to return to Paris. He had carefully withheld all promise to do so ; but would he be proof against her coaxing and argument ? She had calculated to such a degree on the probability of success that she had represented Paris, and not Budmouth, to her grandfather as in all likelihood their future home. Her hopes were bound up in this dream. In the quiet days since their marriage, when Yeobright had been poring over her lips, her eyes, and the lines of her face, she had mused and mused on

the subject, even while in the act of returning his gaze ; and now the sight of the books, indicating a future which was antagonistic to her dream, struck her with a positively painful jar. She was hoping for the time when, as the mistress of some pretty establishment, however small, in Paris, she would be passing her days on the skirts at least of the gay world, and catching stray wafts from those town pleasures she was so well fitted to enjoy. Yet Yeobright was as firm in the contrary intention as if the tendency of marriage were rather to develop the fantasies of young philanthropy than to sweep them away.

Her anxiety reached a high pitch ; but there was something in Clym's undeviating manner which made her hesitate before sounding him on the subject. At this point in their experience, however, an incident helped her. It occurred one evening about six weeks after their union, and arose entirely out of the unconscious misapplication by

Venn of the fifty guineas intended for Yeobright.

A day or two after the receipt of the money Thomasin had sent a note to her aunt to thank her. She had been surprised at the comparative largeness of the amount; but as no sum had ever been mentioned she set that down to her late uncle's generosity. She had been strictly charged by her aunt to say nothing to her husband of this gift; and Wildeve, as was natural enough, had not brought himself to mention to his wife a single particular of the midnight scene in the heath. Christian's terror, in like manner, had tied his tongue on the share he took in that proceeding; and hoping that by some means or other the money had gone to its proper destination, he simply asserted as much, without giving details.

Therefore, when a week or two had passed away, Mrs. Yeobright began to wonder why she never heard from her son of the receipt of the present; and to add gloom to

her perplexity came the possibility that resentment might be the cause of his silence. She could hardly believe as much, but why did he not write? She questioned Christian, and the confusion in his answers would at once have led her to believe that something was wrong, had not one-half of his story been corroborated by Thomasin's note.

Mrs. Yeobright was in this state of uncertainty when she was informed one morning that her son's wife was visiting her grandfather at Mistover. She determined to walk up the hill, see Eustacia, and ascertain from her daughter-in-law's lips whether the family guineas, which were to Mrs. Yeobright what family jewels are to wealthier dowagers, had miscarried or not.

When Christian learnt where she was going his concern reached its height. At the moment of her departure he could prevaricate no longer, and, confessing to the gambling, told her the truth as far as he knew it—that the guineas had been won by Wildeve.

‘What, is he going to keep them?’ Mrs. Yeobright cried.

‘I hope and trust not!’ moaned Christian. ‘He’s a good man, and perhaps will do good things. He said you ought to have gied Mr. Clym’s share to Eustacia, and that’s perhaps what he’ll do himself.’

To Mrs. Yeobright, as soon as she could calmly reflect, there was much likelihood in this, for she could hardly believe that Wildeve would really appropriate money belonging to her son. The intermediate course of giving it to Eustacia was the sort of thing to please Wildeve’s fancy. But it filled the mother with anger none the less. That Wildeve should have got command of the guineas after all, and should rearrange the disposal of them, placing Clym’s share in Clym’s wife’s hands, because she had been his own sweetheart, and might be still, was as irritating a pain as any that Mrs. Yeobright had ever borne.

She instantly dismissed the wretched

Christian from her employ for his conduct in the affair ; but, feeling quite helpless and unable to do without him, told him afterwards that he might stay a little longer if he chose. Then she hastened off to Eustacia, moved by a much less promising emotion towards her daughter-in-law than she had felt half an hour earlier, when planning her journey. At that time it was to inquire in a friendly spirit if there had been any accidental loss ; now it was to ask plainly if Wildeve had privately given her money which had been intended as a sacred gift to Clym.

She started at two o'clock, and her meeting with Eustacia was hastened by the appearance of the young lady beside the pool and bank which bordered her grandfather's premises, where she stood surveying the scene, and perhaps thinking of the romantic enactments it had witnessed in past days. When Mrs. Yeobright approached, Eustacia surveyed her with the calm stare of a stranger.

The mother-in-law was the first to speak. 'I was coming to see you,' she said.

'Indeed!' said Eustacia with surprise, for Mrs. Yeobright, much to the girl's mortification, had refused to be present at the wedding. 'I did not at all expect you.'

'I was coming on business only,' said the visitor more coldly than at first. 'Will you excuse my asking this—Have you received a gift from Thomasin's husband?'

'A gift?'

'I mean money!'

'What—I myself?'

'Well, I meant yourself, privately—though I was not going to put it in that way.'

'Money from Mr. Wildeve? No—never! Madam, what do you mean by that?' Eustacia fired up all too quickly, for her own consciousness of the old attachment between herself and Wildeve led her to jump to the conclusion that Mrs. Yeobright also knew of it, and might have come

to accuse her of receiving dishonourable presents from him now.

‘ I simply ask the question,’ said Mrs. Yeobright. ‘ I have been——’

‘ You ought to have better opinions of me—I fear you were against me from the first!’ exclaimed Eustacia.

‘ No. I was simply for Clym,’ replied Mrs. Yeobright, with too much emphasis in her earnestness. ‘ It is the instinct of everyone to look after their own.’

‘ How can you imply that he required guarding against me?’ cried Eustacia, passionate tears in her eyes. ‘ I have not injured him by marrying him. What sin have I done that you should think so ill of me? You had no right to speak against me to him when I have never wronged you.’

‘ I only did what was fair under the circumstances,’ said Mrs. Yeobright more softly. ‘ I would rather not have gone into this question at present, but you compel me. I am not ashamed to tell you the honest truth.’

I was firmly convinced that he ought not to marry you—therefore I tried to dissuade him by all the means in my power. But it is done now, and I have no idea of complaining any more. I am ready to welcome you.'

'Ah, yes, it is very well to see things in that business point of view,' murmured Eustacia, a smothered fire of feeling being suggested by her bearing. 'But why should you think there is anything between me and Mr. Wildeve? I have a spirit as well as you. I am indignant; and so would any woman be. It was a condescension in me to be Clym's wife, and not a manoeuvre, let me remind you; and therefore I will not be treated as a schemer whom it becomes necessary to bear with because she has crept into the family.'

'Oh!' said Mrs. Yeobright, vainly endeavouring to control her anger. 'I have never heard anything to show that my son's lineage is not as good as the Vyes'—perhaps

better. It is amusing to hear you talk of condescension.'

'It was condescension, nevertheless,' said Eustacia vehemently. 'And if I had known then what I know now, that I should be living in this wild heath a month after my marriage, I—I should have thought twice before agreeing.'

'It would be better not to say that; it might not sound truthful. I am not aware that any deception was used on his part—I know there was not—whatever might have been the case on the other side.'

'This is too exasperating,' answered the younger woman huskily, her face crimsoning, and her eyes darting light. 'How can you dare to speak to me like that? I insist upon repeating to you that had I known that my life would from my marriage up to this time have been as it is, I should have said *No*. I don't complain. I have never uttered a sound of such a thing to him; but it is true. I hope therefore that in the future you will

be silent on my eagerness. If you injure me now you injure yourself.'

'Injure you? Do you think I am an evil-disposed person?'

'You injured me before my marriage, and you have now suspected me of secretly favouring another man for money!'

'I could not help what I thought. But I have never spoken of you outside my house.'

'You spoke of me within it, to Clym, and you could not do worse.'

'I did my duty.'

'And I'll do mine.'

'A part of which will possibly be to set him against his mother because she has made an inquiry. It is always so. But why should I not bear it as others have borne it before me?'

'I understand you,' said Eustacia, breathless with emotion. 'You think me capable of every bad thing. Who can be worse than a wife who encourages a lover, and

poisons her husband's mind against his relative? Yet that is now the character given to me. Will you not come and drag him out of my hands?'

Mrs. Yeobright gave back heat for heat.

'Don't rage at me, madam! It ill becomes your beauty, and I am not worth the injury you may do it on my account, I assure you. I am only a poor old woman who has lost a son.'

'If you had treated me honourably you would have had him still,' Eustacia said, while scalding tears trickled from her eyes. 'You have brought yourself to folly; you have caused a division which can never be healed!'

'I have done nothing. This audacity from a young woman is more than I can bear.'

'It was asked for—you have suspected me, and you have made me speak of my husband in a way I would not have done. You will let him know that I have spoken thus,

and it will cause misery between us. Will you go away from me? You are no friend!

‘I will go when I have spoken a word. If anyone says I have come here to question you without good grounds for it, that person speaks untruly. If anyone says that I attempted to stop your marriage by any but honest means, that person, too, does not speak the truth. I have fallen on an evil time; God has been unjust to me in letting you insult me. Probably my son’s happiness does not lie on this side of the grave, for he is a foolish man who neglects the advice of his parent. You, Eustacia, stand on the edge of a precipice without knowing it. Only show my son one-half the temper you have shown me to-day—and you may before long—and you will find that though he is as gentle as a child with you now, he can be as hard as steel!’

The excited mother then withdrew, and Eustacia, panting, stood looking into the pool.

CHAPTER II.

HE IS SET UPON BY ADVERSITIES; BUT HE
SINGS A SONG.

THE result of that unpropitious interview was that Eustacia, instead of passing the afternoon with her grandfather, hastily returned home to Clym, where she arrived three hours earlier than she had been expected.

She came indoors with her face flushed, and her eyes still showing traces of her recent excitement. Yeobright looked up astonished; he had never seen her in any way approaching to that state before. She passed him by, and would have gone upstairs unnoticed, but Clym was so concerned that he immediately followed her.

‘What is the matter, Eustacia?’ he said. She was standing on the hearthrug in the bedroom, looking upon the floor, her hands clasped in front of her, her bonnet yet unremoved. For a moment she did not answer; and then she replied, in a low voice, ‘I have seen your mother; and I will never see her again.’

A weight fell like a stone upon Clym. That same morning, when Eustacia had arranged to go and see her grandfather, Clym had expressed a wish that she would drive down to Blooms-End and inquire for her mother-in-law, or adopt any other means she might think fit to bring about a reconciliation. She had set out gaily; and he had hoped for much.

‘Why is this?’ he asked.

‘I cannot tell—I cannot remember. I met your mother. And I will never meet her again.’

‘Why?’

‘What do I know about Mr. Wildeve?’

I won't have wicked opinions passed on me by anybody. Oh! it was too humiliating to be asked if I had received any money from him, or encouraged him, or something of the sort—I don't exactly know what!'

'How could she have asked you that?'

'She did.'

'Then there must have been some meaning in it. What did my mother say besides?'

'I don't know what she said, except in so far as this, that we both said words which can never be forgiven.'

'Oh, there must be some misapprehension. Whose fault was it that her meaning was not made clear?'

'I would rather not say. It may have been the fault of the circumstances, which were awkward at the very least. O Clym—I cannot help expressing it—this is an unpleasant position that you have placed me in. But you must improve it—yes, say you will—for I hate it all now. Yes, take me to Paris, and go on with your old occupation,

Clym! I don't mind how humbly we live there at first, if it can only be Paris, and not Egdon Heath.'

'But I have quite given up that idea,' said Yeobright, with surprise. 'Surely I never led you to expect such a thing?'

'I own it. Yet there are thoughts which cannot be kept out of mind, and that one was mine. Must I not have a voice in the matter, now I am your wife and the sharer of your doom?'

'Well, there are things which are placed beyond the pale of discussion; and I thought this was specially so, and by mutual agreement.'

'Clym, I am unhappy at what I hear,' she said in a low voice; and her eyes drooped, and she turned away.

This indication of an unexpected mine of hope in Eustacia's bosom disconcerted her husband. It was the first time that he had confronted the fact of the indirectness of a woman's movement towards her desire.

But his intention was unshaken, though he loved Eustacia well. All the effect that her remark had upon him was a resolve to chain himself more closely than ever to his books, so as to be the sooner enabled to appeal to substantial results from another course in arguing against her whim.

Next day the mystery of the guineas was explained. Thomasin paid them a hurried visit, and Clym's share was delivered up to him by her own hands. Eustacia was not present at the time.

'Then this is what my mother meant,' exclaimed Clym. 'Thomasin, do you know that they have had a bitter quarrel?'

There was little more reticence now than formerly in Thomasin's manner towards her cousin. It is the effect of marriage to engender in several directions some of the reserve it annihilates in one. 'Your mother told me,' she said quietly. 'She came back to my house.'

'The worst thing I dreaded has come to

pass. Was mother much disturbed when she came to you, Thomasin ?'

'Yes.'

'Very much indeed ?'

'Yes.'

Clym leant his elbow upon the post of the garden-gate, and covered his eyes with his hand.

'Don't trouble about it, Clym. They may get to be friends.'

He shook his head. 'Not two people with inflammable natures like theirs. Well, what must be will be.'

'One thing is cheerful in it—the guineas are not lost.'

'I would rather have lost them twice over than have had this happen.'

Amid these jarring events Yeobright felt one thing to be indispensable—that he should speedily make some show of progress in his scholastic plans. With this view he read far into the small hours during many nights.

One morning, after a severer strain than usual, he awoke with a strange sensation in his eyes. The sun was shining directly upon the window-blind, and at his first glance thitherward a sharp pain obliged him to quickly close his eyelids. At every new attempt to look about him the same morbid sensibility to light was manifested, and excoriating tears ran down his cheeks. He was obliged to tie a bandage over his brow while dressing ; and during the day it could not be abandoned. Eustacia was thoroughly alarmed. On finding that the case was no better the next morning they decided to send to Southerton for a surgeon.

Towards evening he arrived, and pronounced the disease to be acute inflammation induced by Clym's night studies, continued in spite of a cold previously caught, which had weakened his eyes for the time.

Fretting with impatience at this interruption to a task he was so anxious to hasten, Clym was transformed into an invalid. He

was shut up in a room from which all light was excluded, and his condition would have been one of absolute misery had not Eustacia read to him by the glimmer of a shaded lamp. He hoped that the worst would soon be over; but at the surgeon's third visit he learnt to his dismay that although he might venture out of doors with shaded eyes in the course of a month, all thought of pursuing his work, or of reading print of any description, would have to be given up for a long time to come.

One week and another week wore on, and nothing seemed to lighten the gloom of the young couple. Dreadful imaginings occurred to Eustacia, but she carefully refrained from uttering them to her husband. Suppose he should become blind, or, at all events, never recover sufficient strength of sight to engage in an occupation which would be congenial to her feelings, and conduce to her removal from this lonely dwelling among the hills? That dream of beautiful Paris

was not likely to cohere into substance in the presence of this misfortune. As day after day passed by, and he got no better, her mind ran more and more in this mournful groove, and she would go away from him into the garden and weep despairing tears.

Yeobright thought he would send for his mother ; and then he thought he would not. Knowledge of his state could only make her the more unhappy ; and the seclusion of their life was such that she would hardly be likely to learn the news except through a special messenger. Endeavouring to take the trouble as philosophically as possible, he waited on till the third week had arrived, when he went into the open air for the first time since the attack. The surgeon visited him again at this stage, and Clym urged him to express a distinct opinion. The young man learnt with added surprise that the date at which he might expect to resume his labours was as uncertain as ever, his eyes being in that peculiar state which, though affording

him sight enough for walking about, would not admit of their being strained upon any definite object without incurring the risk of reproducing ophthalmia in its acute form.

Clym was very grave at the intelligence, but not despairing. A quiet firmness, and even cheerfulness, took possession of him. He was not to be blind; that was enough. To be doomed to behold the world through smoked glass for an indefinite period was bad enough, and fatal to any kind of advance; but Yeobright was an absolute stoic in the face of mishaps which only affected his social standing; and, apart from Eustacia, the humblest walk of life would satisfy him if it could be made to work in with some form of his culture scheme. To keep a cottage night-school was one such form; and his affliction did not master his spirit as it might otherwise have done.

He walked through the warm sun westward into those tracts of Egdon with which he was best acquainted, being those lying

nearer to his old home. He saw before him in one of the valleys the gleaming of whetted iron, and advancing, dimly perceived that the shine came from the tool of a man who was cutting furze. The worker recognised Clym, and Yeobright learnt from the voice that the speaker was Humphrey.

Humphrey expressed his sorrow at Clym's condition ; and added, ' Now, if yours was low-class work like mine, you could go on with it just the same.'

' Yes ; I could,' said Yeobright, musingly. ' How much do you get for cutting these faggots ?'

' Half-a-crown a hundred, and in these long days I can live very well on the wages.'

During the whole of Yeobright's walk home to Alderworth he was lost in reflections which were not of an unpleasant kind. On his coming up to the house Eustacia spoke to him from the open window, and he went across to her.

' Darling,' he said, ' I am much happier.

And if my mother were reconciled to me and to you I should, I think, be happy quite.'

'I fear that will never be,' she said, looking afar with her beautiful stormy eyes. 'How *can* you say "I am happier," and nothing changed?'

'It arises from my having at last discovered something I can do, and get a living at, in this time of misfortune.'

'Yes?'

'I am going to be a furze-cutter.'

'No, Clym!' she said, the slight hopefulness previously apparent in her face going off again, and leaving her worse than before.

'Surely I shall. Is it not very unwise in us to go on spending the little money we've got when I can keep down expenditure by an honest occupation? The outdoor exercise will do me good, and who knows but that in a few months I shall be able to go on with my reading again?'

'But my grandfather offers to assist us, if we require assistance.'

‘We don’t require it. If I go furze-cutting we shall be fairly well off.’

‘In comparison with slaves, and the Israelites in Egypt, and such people!’ A bitter tear rolled down Eustacia’s face, which he did not see. There had been *nonchalance* in his tone, showing her that he felt no absolute grief at a consummation which to her was a positive horror.

The very next day Yeobright went to Humphrey’s cottage, and borrowed of him leggings, gloves, a whetstone, and a hook, to use till he should be able to purchase some for himself. Then he sallied forth with his new fellow-labourer and old acquaintance, and selecting a spot where the furze grew thickest he struck the first blow in his adopted calling. His sight, like the wings in ‘Rasselas,’ though useless to him for his grand purpose, sufficed for this strait, and he found that when a little practice should have hardened his palms against blistering he would be able to work with ease.

Day after day he rose with the sun, buckled on his leggings, and went off to the rendezvous with Humphrey. His custom was to work from four o'clock in the morning till noon; then, when the heat of the day was at its highest, to go home and sleep for an hour or two; afterwards coming out again and working till dusk at nine.

This man from Paris was now so disguised by his leather accoutrements, and by the goggles he was obliged to wear over his eyes, that his closest friend might have passed by without recognising him. He was a brown spot in the midst of an expanse of olive-green gorse, and nothing more. Though frequently depressed in spirit when not actually at work, owing to thoughts of Eustacia's position and his mother's estrangement, when in the full swing of labour he was cheerfully disposed and calm.

His daily life was of a curious microscopic sort, his whole world being limited to a circuit of a few feet from his person. His

familiars were creeping and winged things, and they seemed to enroll him in their band. Bees hummed around his ears with an intimate air, and tugged at the heath and furze-flowers at his side in such numbers as to weigh them down to the sod. The strange amber-coloured butterflies which Egdon produced, and which were never seen elsewhere, quivered in the breath of his lips, alighted upon his bowed back, and sported with the glittering point of his hook as he flourished it up and down. Tribes of emerald-green grasshoppers leaped over his feet, falling awkwardly on their backs, heads, or hips, like unskilful acrobats, as chance might rule ; or engaged themselves in noisy flirtations under the fern-fronds with silent ones of homely hue. Huge flies, ignorant of ladders and wire-netting, and quite in a savage state, buzzed about him without knowing that he was a man. In and out of the fern-brakes snakes glided in their most brilliant blue and yellow guise, it being the

season immediately following the shedding of their old skins, when their colours are brightest. Litters of young rabbits came out from their forms to sun themselves upon hillocks, the hot beams blazing through the delicate tissue of each thin-fleshed ear, and firing it to a blood-red transparency in which the veins could be seen.

The monotony of his occupation soothed him, and was in itself a pleasure. A forced limitation of effort offered a justification of homely courses to an unambitious man, whose conscience would hardly have allowed him to remain in such obscurity while his powers were unimpeded. Hence Yeobright sometimes sang to himself, and when obliged to accompany Humphrey in search of brambles for faggot-bonds he would amuse himself with sketches of Parisian life and character, and so wile away the time.

On one of these warm afternoons Eustacia walked out alone in the direction of Yeobright's place of work. He was busily

chopping away at the furze, a long row of faggots which stretched downward from his position representing the labour of the day. He did not observe her approach, and she stood close to him, and heard his under-current of song. It shocked her. To see him there, a poor afflicted man, earning money by the sweat of his brow, had at first moved her to tears ; but to hear him sing and not at all rebel against an occupation which, however satisfactory to himself, was degrading to her, as an educated lady-wife, wounded her through. Unconscious of her presence, he still went on singing :—

‘ Le point du jour
 A nos bosquets rend toute leur parure ;
 Flore est plus belle à son retour ;
 L’oiseau reprend doux chant d’amour :
 Tout célèbre dans la nature
 Le point du jour.

‘ Le point du jour
 Cause parfois, cause douleur extrême,
 Que l’espace des nuits est court
 Pour le berger brûlant d’amour,
 Forcé de quitter ce qu’il aime
 Au point du jour.’

It was bitterly plain to Eustacia that he did not care much about social failure; and the proud fair woman bowed her head and wept in sick despair at thought of the blasting effect upon her own life of that mood and condition in him. Then she came forward.

‘I would starve rather than do it,’ she exclaimed vehemently. ‘And you can sing! I will go and live with my grandfather again.’

‘Eustacia! I did not see you, though I noticed something moving,’ he said gently. He came forward, pulled off his huge leather glove, and took her hand. ‘Why do you speak in such a strange way? It is only a little song which struck my fancy when I was in Paris, and now just applies to my life with you. Has your love for me all died, then, because my appearance is no longer that of a fine gentleman?’

‘Dearest, you must not question me unpleasantly, or it may make me not love you.’

‘Do you believe it possible that I would run the risk of doing that?’

‘Well, you follow out your own ideas, and won’t give in to mine when I wish you to leave off this shameful labour. Is there anything you dislike in me that you act so contrarily to my wishes? I am your wife, and why will you not listen? Yes, I am your wife indeed.’

‘I know what that tone means.’

‘What tone?’

‘The tone in which you said, “Your wife indeed.” It meant, “Your wife, worse luck.”’

‘It is hard in you to probe me with that remark. A woman may have reason, though she is not without heart, and if I felt “worse luck,” it was no ignoble feeling—it was only too natural. There, you see that at any rate I do not attempt untruths. Do you remember how, before we were married, I warned you that I had not good wifely qualities?’

‘You mock me to say that now. On that point at least the only noble course would be to hold your tongue, for you are still queen of me, Eustacia, though I may no longer be king of you.’

‘You are my husband. Does not that content you?’

‘Not unless you are my wife without regret.’

‘I cannot answer you. I remember saying that I should be a serious matter on your hands.’

‘Yes, I saw that.’

‘Then you were too quick to see! No true lover would have seen any such thing; you are too severe upon me, Clym—I don’t like your speaking so at all.’

‘Well, I married you in spite of it, and don’t regret doing so. How cold you seem this afternoon! and yet I used to think there never was a warmer heart than yours.’

‘Yes, I fear we are cooling—I see it as well as you,’ she sighed mournfully. ‘And

how madly we loved two months ago! You were never tired of contemplating me, nor I of contemplating you. Who could have thought then that by this time my eyes would not seem so very bright to yours, nor your lips so very sweet to mine? Two months—is it possible? Yes, 'tis too true.'

'You sigh, dear, as if you were sorry for it; and that's a hopeful sign.'

'No. I don't sigh for that. There are other things for me to sigh for, or any other woman in my place.'

'That your chances in life are ruined, by marrying in haste an unfortunate man?'

'Why will you force me, Clym, to say bitter things? I deserve pity as much as you. As much?—I think I deserve more. For you can sing. It would be a strange hour which should catch me singing under such a cloud as this! Believe me, sweet, I could weep to a degree that would astonish and confound such an elastic mind as yours. Even had you felt careless about your own

affliction, you might have refrained from singing out of sheer pity for mine. God! if I were a man in such a position I would curse rather than sing.'

Yeobright placed his hand upon her arm. 'Now, don't you suppose, my inexperienced girl, that I cannot rebel, in high Promethean fashion, against the gods and fate as well as you. I have felt more steam and smoke of that sort than you have ever heard of. But the more I see of life the more do I perceive that there is nothing particularly great in its greatest walks, and therefore nothing particularly small in mine of furze-cutting. If I feel that the greatest blessings vouchsafed to us are not very valuable, how can I feel it to be any great hardship when they are taken away? So I sing to pass the time. Have you indeed lost all tenderness for me, that you begrudge me a few cheerful moments?'

'I have still some tenderness left for you.'

‘Your words have no longer their old flavour. And so love dies with good fortune!’

‘I cannot listen to this, Clym—it will end bitterly,’ she said in a broken voice. ‘I will go home.’

CHAPTER III.

SHE GOES OUT TO BATTLE AGAINST
DEPRESSION.

A FEW days later, before the month of August had expired, Eustacia and Yeobright sat together at their early dinner.

Eustacia's manner had become of late almost apathetic. There was a forlorn look about her beautiful eyes which, whether she deserved it or not, would have excited pity in the breast of anyone who had known her during the full flush of her love for Clym. The feelings of husband and wife varied, in some measure, inversely with their positions. Clym, the afflicted man, was cheerful; and he even tried to comfort her, who had never felt a moment of physical suffering in her whole life.

‘Come, brighten up, dearest; we shall be all right again. Some day perhaps I shall see as well as ever. And I solemnly promise that I’ll leave off cutting furze as soon as I have the power to do anything better. You cannot seriously wish me to stay idling at home all day?’

‘But it is so dreadful—a furze-cutter! and you a man who have lived about the world, and speak French, and know the classics, and who are fit for what is so much better than this.’

‘I suppose when you first saw me and heard about me I was wrapped in a sort of golden halo to your eyes—a man who knew glorious things, and had mixed in brilliant scenes—in short, an adorable, delightful, distracting hero?’

‘Yes,’ she said, sobbing.

‘And now I am a poor fellow in brown leather.’

‘Don’t taunt me. But enough of this. I will not be depressed any more. I am

going from home this afternoon, unless you greatly object. There is to be a village picnic—a gipsying, they call it—at East Egdon, and I shall go.'

'To dance?'

'Why not? You can sing.'

'Well, well, as you will. Must I come to fetch you?'

'If you return soon enough from your work. But do not inconvenience yourself about it. I know the way home, and the heath has no terror for me.'

'And can you cling to gaiety so eagerly as to walk all the way to a village festival in search of it?'

'Now, you don't like my going alone! Clym, you are not jealous?'

'No. But I would come with you if it could give you any pleasure; though, as things stand, perhaps you have too much of me already. Still, I somehow wish that you did not want to go. Yes, perhaps I am jealous; and who could be jealous with more

reason than I, a half-blind man, over such a woman as you ?’

‘Don’t think like it. Let me go, and don’t take all my spirits away.’

‘I would rather lose all my own, my sweet wife. Go and do whatever you like. Who can forbid your indulgence in any whim? You have all my heart yet, I believe; and because you bear with me, who am in truth a drag upon you, I owe you thanks. Yes, go alone and shine. As for me, I will stick to my doom. At that kind of meeting people would shun me. My hook and gloves are like the St. Lazarus rattle of the leper, warning the world to get out of the way of a sight that would sadden them.’ He kissed her, put on his leggings, and went out.

When he was gone she rested her head upon her hands and said to herself, ‘Two wasted lives—his, and mine. And I am come to this! Will it drive me out of my mind?’

She cast about for any possible course which offered the least improvement on the existing state of things, and could find none. She imagined how all those Budmouth ones who should learn what had become of her would say, 'Look at the girl for whom nobody was good enough!' To Eustacia the situation seemed such a mockery of her hopes that death appeared the only door of relief if the satire of heaven should go much further.

Suddenly she aroused herself and exclaimed, 'But I'll shake it off. Yes, I *will* shake it off! No one shall know my suffering. I'll be bitterly merry, and ironically gay, and I'll laugh in derision! And I'll begin by going to this dance on the green.'

She ascended to her bedroom and dressed herself with scrupulous care. To an on-looker her beauty would have made her feelings almost seem reasonable. The gloomy corner into which accident as much as indiscretion had brought this woman might

have led even a moderate partisan to feel that she had cogent reasons for asking the Supreme Power by what right a being of such exquisite finish had been placed in circumstances calculated to make of her charms a curse rather than a blessing.

It was five in the afternoon when she came out from the house ready for her walk. There was material enough in the picture for twenty new conquests. The rebellious sadness that was rather too apparent when she sat indoors without a bonnet was cloaked and softened by her outdoor attire, which always had a sort of nebulosity about it, devoid of harsh edges anywhere; so that her face looked from its environment as from a cloud, with no noticeable lines of demarcation between flesh and clothes. The heat of the day had scarcely declined as yet, and she went along the sunny hills at a leisurely pace, there being ample time for her idle expedition. Tall ferns buried her in their leafage whenever her path lay through them,

which now formed miniature forests, though not one stem of them would remain to bud the next year.

The site chosen for the village festivity was one of the lawn-like oases which were occasionally, yet not often, met with on the plateaus of the heath district. The brakes of furze and fern terminated abruptly round the margin, and the grass was unbroken. A green cattle-track skirted the spot, without, however, emerging from the screen of fern, and this path Eustacia followed, in order to reconnoitre the group before joining it. The lusty notes of the East Egdon band had directed her unerringly, and she now beheld the musicians themselves, sitting in a blue wagon with red wheels, scrubbed as bright as new, and arched with sticks, to which boughs and flowers were tied. In front of this was the grand central dance of fifteen or twenty couples, flanked by minor dances of inferior individuals whose gyrations were not always in strict keeping with the tune.

The young men wore blue and white rosettes, and with a flush on their faces footed it to the girls, who, with the excitement and the exercise, blushed deeper than the pink of their numerous ribbons. Fair ones with long curls, fair ones with short curls, fair ones with love-locks, fair ones with braids, flew round and round; and a beholder might well have wondered how such a prepossessing set of young women, of like size, age, and disposition, could have been collected together where there were only one or two villages to choose from. In the background was one happy man dancing by himself, with closed eyes, totally oblivious of all the rest. A fire was burning under a pollard thorn a few paces off, over which three kettles hung in a row. Hard by was a table where elderly dames prepared tea, but Eustacia looked among them in vain for the cattle-dealer's wife who had suggested that she should come, and had promised to obtain a courteous welcome for her.

This unexpected absence of the only local resident whom Eustacia knew considerably damaged her scheme for an afternoon of reckless gaiety. Joining in became a matter of difficulty, notwithstanding that, were she to advance, cheerful females would come forward with cups of tea and make much of her as a stranger of superior grace and knowledge to themselves. Having watched the company through the figures of two dances, she decided to walk a little further, to a cottage where she might get some refreshment, and then return homeward in the shady time of evening.

This she did; and by the time that she retraced her steps towards the scene of the picnic, which it was necessary to repass on her way to Alderworth, the sun was going down. The air was now so still that she could hear the band immediately she had set out again, and it seemed to be playing with more spirit, if that were possible, than when she had come away. On reaching the

hill the sun had quite disappeared; but this made little difference either to Eustacia or to the revellers, for a round yellow moon was rising behind her, though its rays had not yet outmastered those from the west. The dance was going on just the same, but strangers had arrived and formed a ring around the figure, so that Eustacia could stand among these without a chance of being recognised.

A whole village-full of emotion, scattered abroad all the year long, met here in a focus for an hour. The forty hearts of those waving couples were beating as they had not done since, twelve months before, they had come together in similar jollity. For the time Paganism was revived in their hearts, the pride of life was all in all, and they adored none other than themselves.

How many of those impassioned but temporary embraces were destined to become perpetuated was possibly the wonder of some of those who indulged in them, as

well as of Eustacia who looked on. She began to envy those pirouetters, to hunger for the hope and happiness which the fascination of the dance seemed to engender within them. Desperately fond of dancing herself, one of Eustacia's expectations of Paris had been the opportunity it might afford her of indulging in this favourite pastime. Unhappily, that expectation was now extinct within her for ever.

Whilst she abstractedly watched them spinning and fluctuating in the increasing moonlight she suddenly heard her name whispered by a voice over her shoulder. Turning in surprise, she beheld at her elbow one whose presence instantly caused her to flush to the temples.

It was Wildeve. Till this moment he had not met her eye since the morning of his marriage, when she had been loitering in the church, and had startled him by lifting her veil and coming forward to sign the register as witness. Yet why the sight of him

should have instigated that sudden rush of blood she could not tell.

Before she could speak he whispered, 'Do you like dancing as much as ever?'

'I think I do,' she replied in a low voice.

'Will you dance with me?'

'It would be a great change for me; but will it not seem strange?'

'What strangeness can there be in relations dancing together?'

'Ah—yes, relations. Perhaps none.'

'Still, if you don't like to be seen, pull down your veil; though there is not much risk of being known by this light. Lots of strangers are here.'

She did as he suggested; and the act was a tacit acknowledgment that she accepted his offer.

Wildeve gave her his arm and took her down on the outside of the ring to the bottom of the dance, which they entered. In two minutes more they were involved in the figure and began working their way upwards

to the top. Till they had advanced half-way thither Eustacia wished more than once that she had not yielded to his request; from the middle to the top she felt that, since she had come out to seek pleasure, she was only doing a natural thing to obtain it. Fairly launched into the ceaseless glides and whirls which their new position as top couple opened up to them, Eustacia's pulses began to move too quickly for longer rumination of any kind.

Through the length of five-and-twenty couples they threaded their giddy way, and a new vitality entered her form. The pale ray of evening lent a fascination to the experience. There is a certain degree and tone of light which tends to disturb the equilibrium of the senses, and to promote dangerously the tenderer moods; added to movement, it drives the emotions to rankness, the reason becoming sleepy and unperceiving in inverse proportion; and this light fell now upon these two from the disc of the moon.

All the dancing girls felt the symptoms, but Eustacia most of all. The grass under their feet became trodden away, and the hard, beaten surface of the sod, when viewed aslant towards the moonlight, shone like a polished table. The air became quite still; the flag above the wagon which held the musicians clung to the pole, and the players appeared only in outline against the sky; except when the circular mouths of the trombone, ophicleide, and French horn gleamed out like huge eyes from the shade of their figures. The pretty dresses of the maids lost their subtler day colours and showed more or less of a misty white. Eustacia floated round and round on Wildeve's arm, her face rapt and statuesque; her soul had passed away from and forgotten her features, which were left empty and quiescent, as they always are when feeling goes beyond their register.

How near she was to Wildeve! it was terrible to think of. She could feel his

breathing, and he, of course, could feel hers. How badly she had treated him! yet, here they were treading one measure. The enchantment of the dance surprised her. A clear line of difference divided like a tangible fence her experience within this maze of motion from her experience without it. Her beginning to dance had been like a change of atmosphere; outside, she had been steeped in arctic frigidity by comparison with the tropical sensations here. She had entered the dance from the troubled hours of her late life as one might enter a brilliant chamber after a night walk in a wood. Wildeve by himself would have been merely an agitation; Wildeve added to the dance, and the moonlight and the secrecy, began to be a delight. Whether his personality supplied the greater part of this sweetly compounded feeling, or whether the dance and the scene weighed the more therein, was a nice point upon which Eustacia herself was entirely in a cloud.

People began to say, 'Who are they?' but no invidious inquiries were made. Had Eustacia mingled with the other girls in their ordinary daily walks the case would have been different: here she was not inconvenienced by excessive inspection, for all were wrought to their brightest grace by the occasion. Like the planet Mercury surrounded by the lustre of sunset, her permanent brilliancy passed without much notice in the temporary glory of the situation.

As for Wildeve, his feelings are easy to guess. Obstacles were a ripening sun to his love, and he was at this moment in a delirium of exquisite misery. To clasp as his for five minutes what was another man's through all the rest of the year was a kind of thing he of all men could appreciate. He had long since begun to sigh again for Eustacia; indeed, it may be asserted that signing the marriage register with Thomasin was the natural signal to his heart to return to its first quarters, and that the extra complication of Eustacia's

marriage was the one addition required to make that return compulsory.

Thus, for different reasons, what was to the rest an exhilarating movement was to these two a riding upon the whirlwind. The dance had come like an irresistible attack upon whatever sense of social order there was in their minds, to drive them back into old paths which were now no longer regular. Through three dances in succession they spun their way; and then, fatigued with the incessant motion, Eustacia turned to quit the circle in which she had already remained too long. Wildeve led her to a grassy mound a few yards distant, where she sat down, her partner standing beside her. From the time that he addressed her at the beginning of the dance till now they had not exchanged a word.

‘The dance and the walking have tired you?’ he said tenderly.

‘No; not greatly.’

‘It is strange that we should have met

here of all places, after missing each other so long.'

'We have missed because we tried to miss, I suppose.'

'Yes. But you began that proceeding—by breaking a promise.'

'It is scarcely worth while to talk of that now. We have formed other ties since then—you no less than I.'

'I am sorry to hear that your husband is ill.'

'He is not ill—only incapacitated.'

'Yes: that is what I mean. I sincerely sympathise with you in your trouble. Fate has treated you cruelly.'

She was silent awhile. 'Have you heard that he has chosen to work as a furze-cutter?' she said in a low, mournful voice.

'It has been mentioned to me,' answered Wildeve hesitatingly. 'But I hardly believed it.'

'It is true. What do you think of me as a furze-cutter's wife?'

‘ I think the same as ever of you, Eustacia. Nothing of that sort can degrade you: you ennoble the occupation of your husband.’

‘ I wish I could feel it.’

‘ Is there any chance of Mr. Yeobright getting better?’

‘ He thinks so. I doubt it.’

‘ I was quite surprised to hear that he had taken a cottage. I thought, in common with other people, that he would have taken you off to a home in Paris immediately after you had married him. “ What a gay, bright future she has before her!” I thought. He will, I suppose, return there with you, if his sight gets strong again?’

Observing that she did not reply, he regarded her more closely. She was almost weeping. Images of a future never to be enjoyed, the revived sense of her bitter disappointment, the picture of the neighbours’ suspended ridicule which was raised by Wildeve’s words, had been too much for proud Eustacia’s equanimity.

Wildeve could hardly control his own too forward feelings when he saw her silent perturbation. But he affected not to notice this, and she soon recovered her calmness.

‘ You did not intend to walk home by yourself ? ’ he asked.

‘ O yes, ’ said Eustacia. ‘ What could hurt me on this heath, who have nothing ? ’

‘ The first half of my way home is the same as yours. I shall be glad to keep you company as far as Throope Corner. ’ Seeing that Eustacia sat on in hesitation, he added, ‘ Perhaps you think it unwise to be seen in the same road with me after the events of last summer ? ’

‘ Indeed I think no such thing, ’ she said haughtily. ‘ I shall accept whose company I choose, for all that may be said by the miserable inhabitants of Egdon. ’

‘ Then let us walk on—if you are ready. Our nearest way is towards that holly-bush with the dark shadow that you see down there. ’

Eustacia arose, and walked beside him in the direction signified, brushing her way over the damping heath and fern, and followed by the strains of the merry-makers, who still kept up the dance. The moon had now waxed bright and silvery, but the swarthy heath was proof against such illumination, and there was to be observed the striking scene of a dark, rayless tract of country, under an atmosphere charged from its zenith to its extremities with whitest light. To an eye above them their two faces would have appeared amid the expanse like two pearls on a table of ebony.

On this account the irregularities of the path were not visible, and Wildeve occasionally stumbled; whilst Eustacia found it necessary to perform some graceful feats of balancing whenever a small tuft of heather or root of furze protruded itself through the grass of the narrow track and entangled her feet. At these junctures in her progress a hand was invariably stretched forward to

steady her, holding her firmly until smooth ground was again reached, when the hand was again withdrawn to a respectful distance.

They performed the journey for the most part in silence, and drew near to Throope Corner, a few hundred yards from which a short path branched away to Eustacia's house. By degrees they discerned coming towards them a pair of human figures, apparently of the male sex.

When they came a little nearer Eustacia broke the silence by saying, 'One of those men is my husband. He promised to come to meet me.'

'And the other is my greatest enemy,' said Wildeve.

'It looks like Diggory Venn.'

'That is the man.'

'It is an awkward meeting,' said she; 'but such is my fortune. He knows too much about me, unless he could know more, and so prove to himself that what he now

knows counts for nothing. Well, let it be : you must deliver me up to them.'

'You will think twice before you direct me to do that. Here is a man who has not forgotten an item in our meetings at Blackbarrow : he is in company with your husband. Which of them, seeing us together here, will believe that our meeting and dancing at the gipsy-party was by chance ?'

'Very well,' she whispered gloomily. 'Leave me before they come up.'

Wildeve bade her an earnest farewell, and plunged across the fern and furze, Eustacia slowly walking on. In two or three minutes she met her husband and his companion.

'My journey ends here for to-night, reddleman,' said Yeobright as soon as he perceived her. 'I turn back with this lady. Good-night.'

'Good-night, Mr. Yeobright,' said Venn. 'I hope to see you better soon.'

The moonlight shone directly upon Venn's

face as he spoke, and revealed all its lines to Eustacia. He was looking suspiciously at her. That Venn's keen eye had discerned what Yeobright's feeble vision had not—a man in the act of withdrawing from Eustacia's side—was within the limits of the probable.

Had Eustacia been able to follow the reddleman she would soon have found striking confirmation of her thought. No sooner had Clym given her his arm and led her off the scene than the reddleman turned back from the beaten track towards East Egdon, whither he had been strolling merely to accompany Clym in his walk, Diggory's van being again in the neighbourhood. Stretching out his long legs, he crossed the pathless portion of the heath somewhat in the direction which Wildeve had taken. Only a man accustomed to nocturnal rambles could at this hour have descended those shaggy slopes with Venn's velocity without falling headlong into a pit, or snapping off his leg by jamming his foot into some rabbit-burrow. But Venn

went on without much inconvenience to himself, and the course of his scamper was towards the Quiet Woman Inn. This place he reached in about half an hour, and he was well aware that no person who had been near Throope Corner when he started could have got down here before him.

The lonely inn was not yet closed, though scarcely an individual was there, the business done being chiefly with travellers who passed the inn on long journeys, and these had now gone on their way. Venn went to the public room, called for a mug of ale, and inquired of the maid in an indifferent tone if Mr. Wildeve was at home.

Thomasin sat in an inner room and heard Venn's voice. When customers were present she seldom showed herself, owing to her inherent dislike for the business; but perceiving that no one else was there to-night, she came out.

'He is not at home yet, Diggory,' she said pleasantly. 'But I expected him

sooner. He has been to East Egdon to buy a horse.'

'Did he wear a white hat?'

'Yes.'

'Then I saw him at Throope Corner, leading one home,' said Venn drily. 'A beauty, with a white face and a mane as black as night. He will soon be here, no doubt.' Rising and looking for a moment at the pure, sweet face of Thomasin, over which a shadow of sadness had passed since the time when he had last seen her, he ventured to add, 'Mr. Wildeve seems to be often away at this time.'

'O yes,' cried Thomasin in what was intended to be a tone of gaiety. 'Husbands will play the truant, you know. I wish you could tell me of some secret plan that would help me to keep him home at my will in the evenings.'

'I will consider if I know of one,' replied Venn in that same light tone which meant no lightness. And then he bowed in a manner of his own invention and moved to

go. Thomasin offered him her hand; and without a sigh, though with food for many, the reddleman went out.

When Wildeve returned, a quarter of an hour later, Thomasin said simply, and in the abashed manner usual with her now, 'Where is the horse, Damon?'

'Oh, I have not bought it after all. The man asks too much.'

'But somebody saw you at Throope Corner leading it home—a beauty, with a white face and a mane as black as night.'

'Ah!' said Wildeve, fixing his eyes upon her; 'who told you that?'

'Venn the reddleman.'

The expression of Wildeve's face became curiously condensed. 'That is a mistake—it must have been some one else,' he said slowly and testily, for he perceived that Venn's grim counter-moves had begun again.

END OF VOL. II.

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