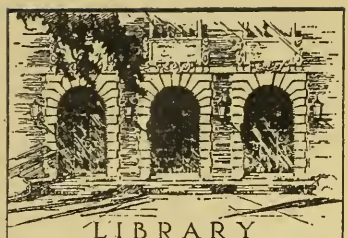

EX
LIBRIS
ARTHUR M.
BROWN



UNDER

THE GREENWOOD TREE.

UNDER THE

GREENWOOD TREE

A

Rural Painting of the Dutch School.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'DESPERATE REMEDIES.'

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18 CATHERINE ST. STRAND.
1872.

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SONS, PRINTERS, PANCRAS ROAD, N.W.

CONTENTS OF VOLUME I.

Part I. Winter.

Part II. Spring.

PART I.

WINTER.

CHAPTER I.

MELLSTOCK-LANE.

To dwellers in a wood, almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature. At the passing of the breeze, the fir-trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself; the ash hisses amid its quiverings; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall. And winter, which modifies the note of such trees as shed their leaves, does not destroy its individuality.

On a cold and starry Christmas-eve less than a generation ago, a man was passing along a lane in the darkness of a plantation

that whispered thus distinctively to his intelligence. All the evidences of his nature were those afforded by the spirit of his footsteps, which succeeded each other lightly and quickly, and by the liveliness of his voice as he sang in a rural cadence:

'With the rose and the lily
And the daffodowndilly,
The lads and the lasses a-sheep-shearing go.'

The lonely lane he was following connected the hamlets of Mellstock and Lewgate, and to his eyes, casually glancing upward, the silver and black-stemmed birches with their characteristic tufts, the pale gray boughs of oak, the dark-creviced elm, all appeared now as black and flat outlines upon the sky, wherein the white stars twinkled so vehemently that their flickering seemed like the flapping of wings. Within the woody pass, at a level anything lower than the horizon, all was dark as the grave.

The copsewood forming the sides of the bower interlaced its branches so densely, even at this season of the year, that the draught from the north-east flew along the channel with scarcely an interruption from lateral breezes.

At the termination of the wood, the white surface of the lane revealed itself between the dark hedgerows, like a ribbon jagged at the edges; the irregularity being caused by temporary accumulations of leaves extending from the ditch on either side.

The song (many times interrupted by flitting thoughts which took the place of several bars, and resumed at a point it would have reached had its continuity been unbroken) now received a more palpable check, in the shape of 'Ho-i-i-i-i-i!' from the dark part of the lane in the rear of the singer, who had just emerged from the trees.

'Ho-i-i-i-i-i!' he answered with uncon-

cern, stopping and looking round, though with no idea of seeing anything more than imagination pictured.

'Is that thee, young Dick Dewy ?' came from the darkness.

'Ay, sure, Michael Mail !'

'Then why not stop for fellow-craters—going to thy own father's house too, as we be, and knowen us so well ?'

Young Dick Dewy faced about and continued his tune in an under-whistle, implying that the business of his mouth could not be checked at a moment's notice by the placid emotion of friendship.

Having escaped both trees and hedge, he could now be distinctly seen rising against the sky, his profile appearing on the light background like the portrait of a gentleman in black cardboard. It assumed the form of a low-crowned hat, an ordinary-shaped nose, an ordinary chin, an ordi-

nary neck, and ordinary shoulders. What he consisted of farther down was invisible from lack of sky low enough to picture him on.

Shuffling, halting, irregular footsteps of various kinds were now heard, coming up the hill from the dark interior of the grove, and presently there emerged severally five men of different ages and gaits, all of them working villagers of the parish of Mellstock. They too had lost their rotundity with the daylight, and advanced against the sky in flat outlines, like some procession in Assyrian or Egyptian incised work. They represented the chief portion of Mellstock parish choir.

The first was a bowed and bent man, who carried a fiddle under his arm, and walked as if engaged in studying some subject connected with the surface of the road. He was Michael Mail, the man who had hallooed to Dick.

The next was Mr. Robert Penny, boot-

and shoe-maker, a little man, who though rather round-shouldered, walked as if that fact had not come to his own knowledge, moving on with his back very hollow and his face fixed on the north quarter of the heavens before him, so that his lower waist-coat-buttons came first, and then the remainder of his figure. His features were invisible, yet when he occasionally looked round, two faint moons of light gleamed for an instant from the precincts of his eyes, denoting that he wore spectacles of a circular form.

The third was Elias Spinks, who walked perpendicularly and dramatically. The fourth outline was that of Joseph Bowman, who had now no distinctive appearance beyond that of a human being. Finally came a weak lath-like form, trotting and stumbling along with one shoulder forward and his head inclined to the left, his arms dang-

ling nervelessly in the wind as if they were empty sleeves. This was Thomas Leaf.

'Where be the boys?' said Dick to this somewhat indifferently-matched assembly.

The eldest of the group, Michael Mail, cleared his throat from a great depth.

'We told them to keep back at home for a time, thinken they wouldn't be wanted yet awhile; and we could choose the tuens, and so on.'

'Father and grandfather William have expected ye a little sooner. I have just been for a run to warm my feet.'

'To be sure father did! To be sure 'a did expect us — to taste the little barrel beyond compare that he's going to tap.'

''Od rabbit it all! Never heard a word of it!' said Mr. Penny, small gleams of delight appearing upon his spectacle-glasses, Dick meanwhile singing parenthetically,

'The lads and the lasses a-sheep-shearing go.'

'Neighbours, there's time enough to drink a sight of drink now afore bedtime,' said Mail.

'Trew, trew — time enough to get as drunk as lords!' replied Bowman cheerfully.

This argument being convincing, they all advanced between the varying hedges and the trees dotting them here and there, kicking their toes occasionally among the crumpled leaves. Soon appeared glimmering indications of the few cottages forming the small hamlet of Lewgate, for which they were bound, whilst the faint sound of church-bells ringing a Christmas peal could be heard floating over upon the breeze from the direction of Mintfield parish on the other side of the hills. A little wicket admitted them to a garden, and they proceeded up the path to Dick's house.

CHAPTER II.

THE TRANTER'S.

It was a small low cottage with a thatched pyramidal roof, and having dormer windows breaking up into the eaves, a single chimney standing in the very midst. The window-shutters were not yet closed, and the fire- and candle-light within radiated forth upon the bushes of variegated box and thick laurestinus growing in a throng outside, and upon the bare boughs of several codlin-trees hanging above in various distorted shapes, the result of early training as espaliers, combined with careless climbing

into their boughs in later years. The walls of the dwelling were for the most part covered with creepers, though these were rather beaten back from the doorway—a feature which was worn and scratched by much passing in and out, giving it by day the appearance of an old keyhole. Light streamed through the cracks and joints of a wooden shed at the end of the cottage, a sight which nourished a fancy that the purpose of the erection must be rather to veil bright attractions than to shelter unsightly necessaries. The noise of a beetle and wedges and the splintering of wood was periodically heard from this direction; and at the other end of the house a steady regular munching and the occasional scurr of a rope betokened a stable, and horses feeding within it.

The choir stamped severally on the doorstone to shake from their boots any frag-

ment of dirt or leaf adhering thereto, then entered the house, and looked around to survey the condition of things. Through the open doorway of a small inner room on the left hand, of a character between pantry and cellar, was Dick Dewy's father, Reuben, by vocation a 'tranter,' or irregular carrier. He was a stout florid man about forty years of age, who surveyed people up and down when first making their acquaintance, and generally smiled at the horizon or other distant object during conversations with friends, walking about with a steady sway, and turning out his toes very considerably. Being now occupied in bending over a hogshead, that stood in the pantry ready horsed for the process of broaching, he did not take the trouble to turn or raise his eyes at the entry of his visitors, well knowing by their footsteps that they were the expected old acquaintance.

The main room, on the right, was decked with bunches of holly and other evergreens, and from the middle of the huge beam bisecting the ceiling hung the mistletoe, of a size out of all proportion to the room, and extending so low that it became necessary for a full-grown person to walk round it in passing, or run the risk of entangling his hair. This apartment contained Mrs. Dewy the tranter's wife, and the four remaining children, Susan, Jim, Bessy, and Charley, graduating uniformly though at wide stages from the age of sixteen to that of four years —the eldest of the series being separated from Dick the firstborn by a nearly equal interval.

Some circumstance having apparently caused much grief to Charley just previous to the entry of the choir, he had absently taken down a looking-glass, and was holding it before his face to see how the human

countenance appeared when engaged in crying, which survey led him to pause at the various points in each wail that were more than ordinarily striking, for a more thorough appreciation of the general effect. Bessy was leaning against a chair, and glancing under the plaits about the waist of the plaid frock she wore, to notice the original unfaded pattern of the material as there preserved, her face bearing an expression of regret that the brightness had passed away from the visible portions. Mrs. Dewy sat in a brown settle by the side of the glowing wood fire—so glowing that with a doubting compression of the lips she would now and then rise and put her hand upon the hams and flitches of bacon lining the chimney, to reassure herself that they were not being broiled instead of smoked, —a misfortune that had been known to happen at Christmas-time.

'Hullo, my sonnies, here you be, then!' said Reuben Dewy at length, standing up and blowing forth a vehement gust of breath. 'How the blood do puff up in anybody's head, to be sure, stooping like that! I was just coming athwart to hunt ye out.' He then carefully began to wind a strip of brown paper round a brass tap he held in his hand. 'This in the cask here is a drop o' the right sort' (tapping the cask); ''tis a real drop o' cordial from the best picked apples—Horner's and Cadbury's —you d'mind the sort, Michael?' (Michael nodded.) 'And there's a sprinkling of they that grow down by the orchard-rails—streaked ones—rail apples we d'call 'em, as 'tis by the rails they grow, and not knowing the right name. The water-cider from 'em is as good as most people's best cider is.'

'Ay, and of the same make too,' said Bowman. 'It rained when we wrung it

out, and the water got into it, folk will say. But 'tis on'y an excuse. Watered cider is too common among us.'

'Yes, yes; too common it is!' said Spinks with an inward sigh, whilst his eyes seemed to be looking at the world in an abstract form rather than at the scene before him. 'Such poor liquor makes a man's throat feel very melancholy—and is a disgrace to the name of stimmilent.'

'Come in, come in, and draw up to the fire; never mind your shoes,' said Mrs. Dewy, seeing that all except Dick had paused to wipe them upon the door-mat. 'I be glad that you've stepped up-along at last; and, Susan, you run across to Gammer Caytes's and see if you can borrow some larger candles than these fourteens. Tommy Leaf, don't ye be afeard! Come and sit here in the settle.'

This was addressed to the young man

before mentioned, consisting chiefly of a human skeleton and a smock-frock, and who was very awkward in his movements, apparently on account of having grown so very fast, that before he had had time to get used to his height he was higher.

'Hee—hee—ay!' replied Leaf, letting his mouth continue to smile for some time after his mind had done smiling, so that his teeth remained in view as the most conspicuous members of his body.

'Here, Mr. Penny,' continued Mrs. Dewy, 'you sit in this chair. And how's your daughter, Mrs. Brownjohn?'

'Well, I suppose I must say pretty fair,' adjusting his spectacles a quarter of an inch to the right. 'But she'll be worse before she's better, 'a b'lieve.'

'Indeed—poor soul! And how many will that make in all, four or five?'

'Five; they've buried three. Yes, five;

and she no more than a maid yet. However, 'twas to be, and none can gainsay it.'

Mrs. Dewy resigned Mr. Penny. 'Wonder where your grandfather James is?' she inquired of one of the children. 'He said he'd drop in to-night.'

'Out in fuel-house with grandfather William,' said Jimmy.

'Now let's see what we can do,' was heard spoken about this time by the tranter in a private voice to the barrel, beside which he had again established himself, and was stooping to cut away the cork.

'Reuben, don't make such a mess o' tapping that barrel as is mostly made in this house,' Mrs. Dewy cried from the fireplace. 'I'd tap a hundred without wasting more than you do in one. Such a squizzling and squirting job as 'tis in your hands. There, he always was such a clumsy man indoors.'

'Ay, ay; I know you'd tap a hundred, Ann—I know you would; two hundred, perhaps. But I can't promise. This is a old cask, and the wood's rotted away about the tap-hole. The husbird of a feller Sam Lawson—that ever I should call'n such, now he's dead and gone, pore old heart!—took me in completely upon the feat of buying this cask. "Reub," says he—'a always used to call me plain Reub, pore old heart!—"Reub," he said, says he, "that there cask, Reub, is as good as new; yes, good as new. 'Tis a wine-hogshead; the best port-wine in the commonwealth have been in that there cask; and you shall have en for ten shillens, Reub,"—'a said, says he—"he's worth twenty, ay, five-and-twenty, if he's worth one; and an iron hoop or two put round en among the wood ones will make en worth thirty shillens of any man's money, if—"'

'I think I should have used the eyes that Providence gave me to use afore I paid any ten shillens for a jimcrack wine-barrel; a saint is sinner enough not to be cheated. But 'tis like all your family were, so easy to be deceived.'

'That's as true as gospel of this member,' said Reuben.

Mrs. Dewy began a smile at the answer, then altering her lips and re-folding them so that it was not a smile, commenced smoothing little Bessy's hair; the tranter having meanwhile suddenly become oblivious to conversation, occupying himself in a deliberate cutting and arrangement of some more brown paper for the broaching operation.

'Ah, who can believe sellers!' said old Michael Mail in a carefully-cautious voice, by way of tiding over this critical point of affairs.

'No one at all,' said Joseph Bowman, in the tone of a man fully agreeing with everybody.

'Ay,' said Mail, in the tone of a man who did not agree with everybody as a rule, though he did now; 'I knowed an auctioneering feller once—a very friendly feller 'a was too. And so one day, as I was walking down the front street of Casterbridge, I passed a shop-door and see him inside, stuck upon his perch, a-selling off. I jist nodded to en in a friendly way as I passed, and went my way, and thought no more about it. Well, next day, as I was oilen my boots by fuel-house door, if a letter didn't come wi' a bill in en, charging me with a feather-bed, bolster, and pillers, that I had bid for at Mr. Taylor's sale. The slim-faced martel had knocked 'em down to me because I nodded to en in my friendly way; and I had to pay for 'em too. Now,

I hold that that was cutting it very close, Reuben?'

'''Twas close, there's no denying,' said the general voice.

'Too close, 'twas,' said Reuben, in the rear of the rest. 'And as to Sam Lawson —pore heart! now he's dead and gone too! —I'll warrant, that if so be I've spent one hour in making hoops for that barrel, I've spent fifty, first and last. That's one of my hoops'—touching it with his elbow—'that's one of mine, and that, and that, and all these.'

'Ah, Sam was a man!' said Mr. Penny, looking contemplatively at a small stool.

'Sam was!' said Bowman, shaking his head twice.

'Especially for a drap o' drink,' said the tranter.

'Good, but not religious-good,' suggested Mr. Penny.

The tranter nodded. Having at last

made the tap and hole quite ready, 'Now then, Suze, bring a mug,' he said. 'Here's luck to us, my sonnies!'

The tap went in, and the cider immediately squirted out in a horizontal shower over Reuben's hands, knees, and leggings, and into the eyes and neck of Charley, who, having temporarily put off his grief under pressure of more interesting proceedings, was squatting down and blinking near his father.

'There 'tis again!' said Mrs. Dewy.

'D—l take the hole, the cask, and Sam Lawson too, that good cider should be wasted like this!' exclaimed the tranter excitedly. 'Your thumb! Lend me your thumb, Michael! Ram it in here, Michael! I must get a bigger tap, my sonnies.'

'Idd it cold inthide te hole?' inquired Charley of Michael, as he continued in a stooping posture with his thumb in the cork-hole.

'What wonderful odds and ends that chiel has in his head to be sure!' Mrs. Dewy admiringly exclaimed from the distance. 'I lay a wager that he cares more about the climate inside that barrel than in all the other parts of the world put together.'

All persons present put on a speaking countenance of admiration for the cleverness alluded to, in the midst of which Reuben returned. The operation was then satisfactorily performed; when Michael arose, and stretched his head to the extremest fraction of height that his body would allow of, to restraighten his bent back and shoulders—thrusting out his arms and twisting his features to a mere mass of wrinkles at the same time, to emphasise the relief acquired. A quart or two of the beverage was then brought to table, at which all the new arrivals reseated themselves with wide-spread knees, their eyes meditatively seeking out

with excruciating precision any small speck or knot in the table upon which the gaze might precipitate itself.

'Whatever is father a-biding out in fuel-house so long for?' said the tranter. 'Never such a man as father for two things—cleaving up old dead apple-tree wood and playing the bass-viol. 'A'd pass his life between the two, that 'a would.' He stepped to the door and opened it.

'Father!'

'Ay!' rang thinly from round the corner.

'Here's the barrel tapped, and we all a-waiting!'

A series of dull thuds, that had been heard through the chimney-back for some time past, now ceased; and after the light of a lantern had passed the window and made wheeling rays upon the ceiling inside, the eldest of the Dewy family appeared.

CHAPTER III.

THE ASSEMBLED CHOIR.

William Dewy — otherwise grandfather William—was now about seventy; yet an ardent vitality still preserved a warm and roughened bloom upon his face, which reminded gardeners of the sunny side of a ripe ribstone-pippin; though a narrow strip of forehead, that was protected from the weather by lying above the line of his hat-brim, seemed to belong to some town man, so gentlemanly was its whiteness. His was a humorous and gentle nature, not unmixed with a frequent melancholy; and he had a firm religious faith. But to his neighbours he had no character in particular. If they

saw him pass by their windows when they had been bottling off old mead, or when they had just been called long-headed men who might do anything in the world if they chose, they thought concerning him, 'Ah, there's that good-hearted man—open as a child!' If they saw him just after losing a shilling or half-a-crown, or accidentally letting fall a piece of crockery, they thought, 'There's that poor weak-minded man Dewy again! Ah, he'll never do much in the world either!' If he passed when fortune neither smiled nor frowned on them, they merely thought him old William Dewy.

'Ah so's—here you be!—Ah, Michael and Joseph and John—and you too, Leaf! a merry Christmas all! We shall have a rare leg-wood fire directly, Reub, if it d'go by the toughness of the job I had in cleaving 'em.' As he spoke he threw down an armful of logs, which fell in the chimney-corner with

a rumble, and looked at them with something of the admiring enmity he would have bestowed on living people who had been very obstinate in holding their own. 'Come in, grandfather James.'

Old James (grandfather on the maternal side) had simply called as a visitor. He lived in a cottage by himself, and many people considered him a miser: some, rather slovenly in his habits. He now came forward from behind grandfather William, and his stooping figure formed a well-illuminated picture as he passed towards the fireplace. Being by trade a mason, he wore a long linen apron reaching almost to his toes, corduroy breeches and gaiters, which, together with his boots, graduated in tints of whitish-brown by constant friction against lime and stone. He also wore a very stiff fustian coat, having folds at the elbows and shoulders as unvarying in their arrange-

ment as those in a pair of bellows: the ridges and the projecting parts of the coat collectively exhibiting a shade different from that of the hollows, which were lined with small ditch-like accumulations of stone and mortar-dust. The extremely large side pockets, sheltered beneath wide flaps, bulged out convexly whether empty or full; and as he was often engaged to work at buildings far away—his breakfasts and dinners being eaten in a strange chimney-corner, by a garden wall, on a heap of stones, or walking along the road—he carried in these pockets a small tin canister of butter, a small canister of sugar, a small canister of tea, a paper of salt, and a paper of pepper: the bread, cheese, and meat, forming the substance of his meals, hanging up behind him in his basket among the hammers and chisels. If a passer-by looked hard at him when he was drawing forth any of these,

—'My larders,' he said, with a pinched smile.

'Better try over number seventy-eight before we start, I suppose?' said William, pointing to a heap of old Christmas-carol books on a side table.

'Wi' all my heart,' said the choir generally.

'Number seventy-eight was always a teaser—always. I can mind him ever since I was growing up a hard boy-chap.'

'But he's a good tune, and worth a mint o' practice,' said Michael.

'He is; though I've been mad enough wi' that tune at times to seize en and tear en all to linnet. Ay, he's a splendid carrel —there's no denying that.'

'The first line is well enough,' said Mr. Spinks; 'but when you come to "O, thou man," you make a mess o't.'

'We'll have another go into en, and see

what we can make of the martel. Half an hour's hammering at en will conquer the toughness of en; I'll warn it.'

''Od rabbit it all!' said Mr. Penny, interrupting with a flash of his spectacles, and at the same time clawing at something in the depths of a large side pocket. 'If so be I hadn't been as scatter-brained and thirtingill as a chiel, I should have called at the schoolhouse wi' a boot as I cam up-along. Whatever is coming to me I really can't estimate at all!'

'The brain hev its weaknesses,' murmured Mr. Spinks, waving his head ominously.

'Well, I must call with en the first thing to-morrow. And I'll empt my pocket o' this last too, if you don't mind, Mrs. Dewy.' He drew forth a last, and placed it on a table at his elbow. The eyes of three or four followed it.

'Well,' said the shoemaker, seeming to perceive that the sum-total of interest the object had excited was greater than he had anticipated, and warranted the last's being taken up again and exhibited, 'now, whose foot do ye suppose this last was made for? It was made for Geoffrey Day's father, over at Yalbury Wood. Ah, many's the pair o' boots he've had off the last! Well, when 'a died, I used the last for Geoffrey, and have ever since, though a little doctoring was wanted to make it do. Yes, a very quaint humorous last it is now, 'a b'lieve,' he continued, turning it over caressingly. 'Now, you notice that there' (pointing to a lump of leather bradded to the toe)—'that's a very bad bunion that he've had ever since 'a was a boy. Now, this remarkable large piece' (pointing to a patch nailed to the side) 'shows an accident he received by the tread of a horse, that squashed his foot a'most

to a pomace. The horseshoe cam full-butt on this point, you see. And so I've just been over to Geoffrey's, to know if he wanted his bunion altered or made bigger in the new pair I'm making.'

During the latter part of this speech, Mr. Penny's left hand wandered towards the cider-cup, as if the hand had no connection with the person speaking; and bringing his sentence to an abrupt close, all but the extreme margin of the bootmaker's face was eclipsed by the circular brim of the vessel.

'However, I was going to say,' continued Penny, putting down the cup, 'I ought to have called at the school'—here he went groping again in the depths of his pocket—'to leave this without fail, though I suppose the first thing to-morrow will do.'

He now drew forth and placed upon the table a boot — small, light, and prettily

shaped—upon the heel of which he had been operating. 'The new schoolmistress's!'

'Ay, no less; Miss Fancy Day: as nate a little figure of fun as ever I see, and just husband-high.'

'Never Geoffrey's daughter Fancy?' said Bowman, as all glances present converged like wheel-spokes upon the boot in the centre of them.

'Yes, sure,' resumed Mr. Penny, regarding the boot as if that alone were his auditor; ''tis she that's come here schoolmistress. You knowed his daughter was in training?'

'Strange, isn't it, for her to be here Christmas-night, Master Penny?'

'Yes; but here she is, 'a b'lieve.'

'I know how she d'come here—so I do!' chirruped one of the children.

'Why?' Dick inquired, with subtle interest.

'Parson Maybold was afraid he couldn't

manage us all to-morrow at the dinner, and he talked o' getting her jist to come over and help him hand about the plates, and see we didn't make beasts of ourselves; and that's what she's come for!'

'And that's the boot, then,' continued its mender imaginatively, 'that she'll walk to church in to-morrow morning. I don't care to mend boots I don't make; but there's no knowing what it may lead to, and her father always comes to me.'

There, between the cider-mug and the candle, stood this interesting receptacle of the little unknown's foot; and a very pretty boot it was. A character, in fact—the flexible bend at the instep, the rounded localities of the small nestling toes, scratches from careless scampers now forgotten—all, as repeated in the tell-tale leather, evidencing a nature and a bias. Dick surveyed it with a delicate feeling that he had no

right to do so without having first asked the owner of the foot's permission.

'Now, naibours, though no common eye can see it,' the shoemaker went on, 'a man in the trade can see the likeness between this boot and that last, although that is so deformed as hardly to be called one of God's creatures, and this is one of as pretty a pair as you'd get for ten-and-sixpence in Casterbridge. To you, nothing; but 'tis father's foot and daughter's foot to me, as plain as houses.'

'I don't doubt there's a likeness, Master Penny—a mild likeness—a far-remote likeness—still, a likeness as far as that goes,' said Spinks. 'But *I* haven't imagination enough to see it, perhaps.'

Mr. Penny adjusted his spectacles.

'Now, I'll tell you what happened to me once on this very point. You used to know Johnson the dairyman, William?'

'Ay, sure; that I did.'

'Well, 'twasn't opposite his house, but a little lower down—by his pigsty, in front o' Parkmaze Pool. I was a-walking down the lane, and lo and behold, there was a man just brought out o' the Pool, dead; he had been bathing, and gone in flop over his head. Men looked at en; women looked at en; children looked at en; nobody knowed en. He was covered in a cloth; but I catched sight of his foot, just showing out as they carried en along. "I don't care what name that man went by," I said, in my bold way, "but he's John Woodward's brother; I can swear to the family foot." At that very moment, up comes John Woodward, weeping and crying, "I've lost my brother! I've lost my brother!"'

'Only to think of that!' said Mrs. Dewy.

''Tis well enough to know this foot and that foot,' said Mr. Spinks. ''Tis some-

thing, in fact, as far as that goes. I know little, 'tis true—I say no more; but show *me* a man's foot, and I'll tell you that man's heart.'

'You must be a cleverer feller, then, than mankind in jineral,' said the tranter.

'Well, that's nothing for me to speak of,' returned Mr. Spinks solemnly. 'A man acquires. Maybe I've read a leaf or two in my time. I don't wish to say anything large, mind you; but nevertheless, maybe I have.'

'Yes, I know,' said Michael soothingly, 'and all the parish knows, that ye've read something of everything almost. Learning's a worthy thing, and ye've got it, Master Spinks.'

'I make no boast, though I may have read and thought a little; and I know—it may be from much perusing, but I make no boast—that by the time a man's head is

finished, 'tis almost time for him to creep underground. I am over forty-five.'

Mr. Spinks emitted a look to signify that if his head was not finished, nobody's head ever could be.

'Talk of knowing people by their feet!' said Reuben. 'Rot me, my sonnies, then, if I can tell what a man is from all his members put together, oftentimes.'

'But still, look is a good deal,' observed grandfather William absently, moving and balancing his head till the tip of grandfather James's nose was exactly in a right line with William's eye and the mouth of a miniature cavern he was discerning in the fire. 'By the way,' he continued in a fresher voice, and looking up, 'that young crater, the schoolmistress, must be sung to to-night wi' the rest? If her ear is as fine as her face, we shall have enough to do to be up-sides with her.'

'What about her face?' said young Dewy.

'Well, as to that,' Mr. Spinks replied, ''tis a face you can hardly gainsay. A very good face—and a pink face, as far as that goes. Still, only a face, when all is said and done.'

'Come, come, Elias Spinks, say she's a pretty maid, and have done wi' her,' said the tranter, again preparing to visit the cider-barrel.

CHAPTER IV.

GOING THE ROUNDS.

SHORTLY after ten o'clock, the singing-boys arrived at the tranter's house, which was invariably the place of meeting, and preparations were made for the start. The older men and musicians wore thick coats, with stiff perpendicular collars, and coloured handkerchiefs wound round and round the neck till the end came to hand, over all which they just showed their ears and noses, like people looking over a wall. The remainder, stalwart ruddy men and boys, were mainly dressed in snow-white smock-frocks, embroidered upon the shoulders and breasts, in ornamental forms of hearts,

diamonds, and zigzags. The cider-mug was emptied for the ninth time, the music-books were arranged, and the pieces finally decided upon. The boys in the mean time put the old horn-lanterns in order, cut candles into short lengths to fit the lanterns; and a thin fleece of snow having fallen since the early part of the evening, those who had no leggings went to the stable and wound wisps of hay round their ankles to keep the insidious flakes from the interior of their boots.

Mellstock was a parish of considerable acreage, the hamlets composing it lying at a much greater distance from each other than is ordinarily the case. Hence several hours were consumed in playing and singing within hearing of every family, even if but a single air were bestowed on each. There was East Mellstock, the main village; half a mile from this were the church and the vicarage, called West Mellstock, and

originally the most thickly-populated portion. A mile north-east lay the hamlet of Lewgate, where the tranter lived; and at other points knots of cottages, besides solitary farmsteads and dairies.

Old William Dewy, with the violoncello, played the bass; his grandson Dick the treble violin; and Reuben and Michael Mail the tenor and second violins respectively. The singers consisted of four men and seven boys, upon whom devolved the task of carrying and attending to the lanterns, and holding the books open for the players. Directly music was the theme, old William ever and instinctively came to the front.

'Now mind, naibours,' he said, as they all went out one by one at the door, he himself holding it ajar and regarding them with a critical face as they passed, like a shepherd counting out his sheep. 'You two counter-boys, keep your ears open to Michael's fin-

gering, and don't ye go straying into the treble part along o' Dick and his set, as ye did last year; and mind this especially when we be in "Arise, and hail." Billy Chimlen, don't you sing quite so raving mad as you fain would; and, all o' ye, whatever ye do, keep from making a great scuffle on the ground when we go in at people's gates; but go quietly, so as to strik' up all of a sudden, like spirits.'

'Farmer Ledlow's first?'

'Farmer Ledlow's first; the rest as usual.'

'And, Voss,' said the tranter terminatively, 'you keep house here till about half-past two; then heat the metheglin and cider in the warmer you'll find turned up upon the copper; and bring it wi' the victuals to church-porch, as th'st know.'

Just before the clock struck twelve, they

lighted the lanterns and started. The moon, in her third quarter, had risen since the snow-storm; but the dense accumulation of snow-cloud weakened her power to a faint twilight, which was rather pervasive of the landscape than traceable to the sky. The breeze had gone down, and the rustle of their feet, and tones of their speech, echoed with an alert rebound from every post, boundary-stone, and ancient wall they passed, even where the distance of the echo's origin was less than a few yards. Beyond their own slight noises nothing was to be heard, save the occasional howl of foxes in the direction of Yalbury Wood, or the brush of a rabbit among the grass now and then, as it scampered out of their way.

Most of the outlying homesteads and hamlets had been visited by about two o'clock: they then passed across the Home Plantation toward the main village. Pur-

suing no recognised track, great care was necessary in walking lest their faces should come in contact with the low-hanging boughs of the old trees, which in many spots formed dense overgrowths of interlaced branches.

'Times have changed from the times they used to be,' said Mail, regarding nobody can tell what interesting old panoramas with an inward eye, and letting his outward glance rest on the ground, because it was as convenient a position as any. 'People don't care much about us now! I've been thinking, we must be almost the last left in the county of the old string players. Barrel-organs, and they next door to 'em that you blow wi' your foot, have come in terribly of late years.'

'Ah!' said Bowman, shaking his head; and old William, on seeing him, did the same thing.

'More's the pity,' replied another. 'Time

was—long and merry ago now!—when not one of the varmits was to be heard of; but it served some of the choirs right. They should have stuck to strings as we did, and keep out clar'nets, and done away with serpents. If you'd thrive in musical religion, stick to strings, says I.'

'Strings are well enough, as far as that goes,' said Mr. Spinks.

'There's worse things than serpents,' said Mr. Penny. 'Old things pass away, 'tis true; but a serpent was a good old note: a deep rich note was the serpent.'

'Clar'nets, however, be bad at all times,' said Michael Mail. 'One Christmas—years agone now, years—I went the rounds wi' the Dibbeach choir. 'Twas a hard frosty night, and the keys of all the clar'nets froze—ah, they did freeze!—so that 'twas like drawing a cork every time a key was opened; the players o' 'em had to go into a hedger and ditcher's chimley-corner, and

thaw their clar'nets every now and then. An icicle o' spet hung down from the end of every man's clar'net a span long; and as to fingers—well, there, if ye'll believe me, we had no fingers at all, to our knowledge.'

'I can well bring back to my mind,' said Mr. Penny, 'what I said to poor Joseph Ryme (who took the tribble part in High-Story Church for two-and-forty year) when they thought of having clar'nets there. "Joseph," I said, says I, "depend upon't, if so be you have them tooting clar'nets you'll spoil the whole set-out. Clar'nets were not made for the service of Providence; you can see it by looking at 'em," I said. And what cam o't? Why, my dear souls, the parson set up a barrel-organ on his own account within two years o' the time I spoke, and the old choir went to nothing.'

'As far as look is concerned,' said the tranter, 'I don't for my part see that a fid-

dle is much nearer heaven than a clar'net. 'Tis farther off. There's always a rakish, scampish countenance about a fiddle that seems to say the Wicked One had a hand in making o'en; while angels be supposed to play clar'nets in heaven, or som'at like 'em, if ye may believe picters.'

'Robert Penny, you were in the right,' broke in the eldest Dewy. They should ha' stuck to strings. Your brass-man, is brass —well and good; your reed-man, is reed—well and good; your percussion-man, is percussion—good again. But I don't care who hears me say it, nothing will speak to your heart wi' the sweetness of the man of strings!'

'Strings for ever!' said little Jimmy.

'Strings alone would have held their ground against all the new comers in creation.' ('True, true!' said Bowman.) 'But clar'nets was death.' ('Death they was!' said

Mr. Penny.) 'And harmoniums,' William continued in a louder voice, and getting excited by these signs of approval, 'harmoniums and barrel-organs' ('Ah!' and groans from Spinks) 'be miserable—what shall I call 'em?—miserable—'

'Sinners,' suggested Jimmy, who made large strides like the men, and did not lag behind like the other little boys.

'Miserable machines for such a divine thing as music!'

'Right, William, and so they be!' said the choir with earnest unanimity.

By this time they were crossing to a wicket in the direction of the school, which, standing on a slight eminence on the opposite side of a cross lane, now rose in unvarying and dark flatness against the sky. The instruments were retuned, and all the band entered the enclosure, enjoined by old William to keep upon the grass.

'Number seventy-eight,' he softly gave out as they formed round in a semicircle, the boys opening the lanterns to get a clearer light, and directing their rays on the books.

Then passed forth into the quiet night an ancient and well-worn hymn, embodying Christianity in words peculiarly befitting the simple and honest hearts of the quaint characters who sang them so earnestly.

'Remember Adam's fall,
O thou man:
Remember Adam's fall
From Heaven to Hell.
Remember Adam's fall;
How he hath condemn'd all
In Hell perpetual
Therefore to dwell.

Remember God's goodnesse,
O thou man:
Remember God's goodnesse,
His promise made.
Remember God's goodnesse;
He sent his Son sinlesse
Our ails for to redress,
Our hearts to aid.

In Bethlehem he was born,
O thou man:
In Bethlehem he was born,
For mankind's sake.
In Bethlehem he was born,
Christmas-day i' the morn:
Our Saviour did not scorn
Our faults to take.

Give thanks to God alway,
O thou man:
Give thanks to God alway
With heart-felt joy.
Give thanks to God alway
On this our joyful day:
Let all men sing and say,
Holy, Holy!'

Having concluded the last note, they listened for a minute or two, but found that no sound issued from the school-house.

'Forty breaths, and then, "O, what unbounded goodness!" number fifty-nine,' said William.

This was duly gone through, and no notice whatever seemed to be taken of the performance.

'Surely 'tisn't an empty house, as befell us in the year thirty-nine and forty-three!' said old Dewy, with much disappointment.

'Perhaps she's jist come from some noble city, and sneers at our doings,' the tranter whispered.

''Od rabbit her!' said Mr. Penny, with an annihilating look at a corner of the school chimney, 'I don't quite stomach her, if this is it. Your plain music well done is as worthy as your other sort done bad, a' b'lieve souls; so say I.'

'Forty breaths, and then the last,' said the leader authoritatively. '"Rejoice, ye tenants of the earth," number sixty-four.'

At the close, waiting yet another minute, he said in a clear loud voice, as he had said in the village at that hour and season for the previous forty years:

'A merry Christmas to ye!'

CHAPTER V.

THE LISTENERS.

When the expectant stillness consequent upon the exclamation had nearly died out of them all, an increasing light made itself visible in one of the windows of the upper floor. It came so close to the blind that the exact position of the flame could be perceived from the outside. Remaining steady for an instant, the blind went upward from before it, revealing to thirty concentrated eyes a young girl, framed as a picture by the window-architrave, and unconsciously illuminating her countenance

to a vivid brightness by a candle she held in her left hand, close to her face, her right hand being extended to the side of the window. She was wrapped in a white robe of some kind, whilst down her shoulders fell a twining profusion of marvellously rich hair, in a wild disorder which proclaimed it to be only during the invisible hours of the night that such a condition was discoverable. Her bright eyes were looking into the gray world outside with an uncertain expression, oscillating between courage and shyness, which, as she recognised the semicircular group of dark forms gathered before her, transformed itself into pleasant resolution.

Opening the window, she said lightly and warmly:

'Thank you, singers, thank you!'

Together went the window quickly and quietly, and the blind started downward

on its return to its place. Her fair forehead and eyes vanished; her little mouth; her neck and shoulders; all of her. Then the spot of candlelight shone nebulously as before; then it moved away.

'How pretty!' exclaimed Dick Dewy.

'If she'd been rale wexwork she couldn't ha' been comelier,' said Michael Mail.

'As near a thing to a spiritual vision as ever I wish to see!' said tranter Dewy fervently.

'O, sich I never, never see!' said Leaf.

All the rest, after clearing their throats and adjusting their hats, agreed that such a sight was worth singing for.

'Now to Farmer Shinar's, and then replenish our insides, father,' said the tranter.

'Wi' all my heart,' said old William, shouldering his bass-viol.

Farmer Shinar's was a queer lump of a house, standing at the corner of a lane that

ran obliquely into the principal thoroughfare. The upper windows were much wider than they were high, and this feature, together with a broad bay-window where the door might have been expected, gave it by day the aspect of a human countenance turned askance, and wearing a sly and wicked leer. To-night nothing was visible but the outline of the roof upon the sky.

The front of this building was reached, and the preliminaries arranged as usual.

'Forty breaths, and number thirty-two, —"Behold the morning star,"' said old William.

They had reached the end of the second verse, and the fiddlers were doing the up bow-stroke previously to pouring forth the opening chord of the third verse, when, without a light appearing or any signal being given, a roaring voice exclaimed:

'Shut up! Don't make your blaring

row here. A feller wi' a headache enough to split likes a quiet night.'

Slam went the window.

'Hullo, that's an ugly blow for we artists!' said the tranter, in a keenly appreciative voice, and turning to his companions.

'Finish the carrel, all who be friends of harmony!' said old William commandingly; and they continued to the end.

'Forty breaths, and number nineteen!' said William firmly. 'Give it him well; the choir can't be insulted in this manner!'

A light now flashed into existence, the window opened, and the farmer stood revealed as one in a terrific passion.

'Drown en!—drown en!' the tranter cried, fiddling frantically. 'Play fortissimy, and drown his spaking!'

'Fortissimy!' said Michael Mail, and the music and singing waxed so loud that it was impossible to know what Mr. Shinar

had said, was saying, or was about to say; but wildly flinging his arms and body about in the form of capital Xs and Ys, he appeared to utter enough invectives to consign the whole parish to perdition.

'Very unseemly—very!' said old William, as they retired. 'Never such a dreadful scene in the whole round o' my carrel practice—never! And he a churchwarden!'

'Only a drap o' drink got into his head,' said the tranter. 'Man's well enough when he's in his religious frame. He's in his worldly frame now. Must ask en to our bit of a party to-morrer night, I suppose, and so put en in track again. We bear no martel man ill-will.'

They now crossed Twenty-acres to proceed to the lower village, and met Voss with the hot mead and bread-and-cheese as they were crossing the churchyard. This determined them to eat and drink before

proceeding farther, and they entered the belfry. The lanterns were opened, and the whole body sat round against the walls on benches and whatever else was available, and made a hearty meal. In the pauses of conversation could be heard through the floor overhead a little world of undertones and creaks from the halting clockwork, which never spread farther than the tower they were born in, and raised in the more meditative minds a fancy that here lay the direct pathway of Time.

Having done eating and drinking, the instruments were again tuned, and once more the party emerged into the night air.

'Where's Dick?' said old Dewy.

Every man looked round upon every other man, as if Dick might have been transmuted into one or the other; and then they said they didn't know.

'Well now, that's what I call very nasty

of Master Dicky, that I do so,' said Michael Mail.

'He've clinked off home-along, depend upon 't,' another suggested, though not quite believing that he had.

'Dick!' exclaimed the tranter, and his voice rolled sonorously forth among the yews.

He suspended his muscles rigid as stone whilst listening for an answer, and finding he listened in vain, turned to the assemblage.

'The tribble man too! Now if he'd been a tinner or counter chap, we might ha' contrived the rest o't without en, you see. But for a choir to lose the tribble, why, my sonnies, you may so well lose your . . . .' The tranter paused, unable to mention an image vast enough for the occasion.

'Your head at once,' suggested Mr. Penny.

The tranter moved a pace, as if it were puerile of people to complete sentences when there were more pressing things to be done.

'Was ever heard such a thing as a young man leaving his work half done and turning tail like this!'

'Never,' replied Bowman, in a tone signifying that he was the last man in the world to wish to withhold the formal finish required of him.

'I hope no fatal tragedy has overtook the lad!' said his grandfather.

'O no,' replied tranter Dewy placidly. 'Wonder where he've put that there fiddle of his. Why that fiddle cost thirty shillens, and good words besides. Somewhere in the damp, without doubt; that there instrument will be unglued and spoilt in ten minutes—ten! ay, two.'

'What in the name o' righteousness can

have happened ?' said old William still more uneasily.

Leaving their lanterns and instruments in the belfry they retraced their steps. 'A strapping lad like Dick d'know better than let anything happen onawares,' Reuben remarked. 'There's sure to be some poor little scram reason for't staring us in the face all the while.' He lowered his voice to a mysterious tone: 'Naibours, have ye noticed any sign of a scornful woman in his head, or suchlike ?'

'Not a glimmer of such a body. He's as clear as water yet.'

'And Dicky said he should never marry,' cried Jimmy, 'but live at home always along wi' mother and we !'

'Ay, ay, my sonny; every lad has said that in his time.'

They had now again reached the precincts of Mr. Shinar's, but hearing nobody

in that direction, one or two went across to the school-house. A light was still burning in the bedroom, and though the blind was down, the window had been slightly opened, as if to admit the distant notes of the carollers to the ears of the occupant of the room.

Opposite the window, leaning motionless against a wall, was the lost man, his arms folded, his head thrown back, his eyes fixed upon the illuminated lattice.

'Why, Dick, is that thee? What's doing here?'

Dick's body instantly flew into a more rational attitude, and his head was seen to turn east and west in the gloom, as if endeavouring to discern some proper answer to that question; and at last he said in rather feeble accents,

'Nothing, father.'

'Th'st take long enough time about it then, upon my body,' said the tranter, as they all turned towards the vicarage.

'I thought you hadn't done having snap in the belfry,' said Dick.

'Why, we've been traypsing and rambling about, looking everywhere like anything, and thinking you'd done fifty horrid things, and here have you been at nothing at all!'

'The insult lies in the nothingness of the deed,' murmured Mr. Spinks.

The vicarage garden was their next field of operation, and Mr. Maybold, the lately-arrived incumbent, duly received his share of the night's harmonies. It was hoped that by reason of his profession he would have been led to open the window, and an extra carol in quick time was added to draw him forth. But Mr. Maybold made no stir.

'A bad sign!' said old William, shaking his head.

However, at that same instant a musical voice was heard exclaiming from inner depths of bedclothes,

'Thanks, villagers!'

'What did he say?' asked Bowman, who was rather dull of hearing. Bowman's voice, being therefore loud, had been heard by the vicar within.

'I said, "Thanks, villagers!"' cried the vicar again.

'Beg yer pardon; didn't hear ye the first time!' cried Bowman.

'Now don't for heaven's sake spoil the young man's temper by answering like that!' said the tranter.

'You won't do that, my friends!' the vicar shouted.

'Well to be sure, what ears!' said Mr. Penny in a whisper. 'Beats any horse or

dog in the parish, and depend upon't, that's a sign he's a proper clever chap.'

'We shall see that in time,' said the tranter.

Old William, in his gratitude for such thanks from a comparatively new inhabitant, was anxious to play all the tunes over again; but renounced his desire on being reminded by Reuben that it would be best to leave well alone.

'Now putting two and two together,' the tranter continued, as they wended their way to the other portion of the village, 'that is, in the form of that young vision we seed just now, and this young tinner-voiced parson, my belief is she'll wind en round her finger, and twist the pore young feller about like the figure of 8—that she will so, my sonnies.'

CHAPTER VI.

CHRISTMAS MORNING.

The choir at last reached their beds, and slept like the rest of the parish. Dick's slumbers, through the three or four hours remaining for rest, were disturbed and slight; an exhaustive variation upon the incidents that had passed that night in connection with the school-window going on in his brain every moment of the time.

In the morning, do what he would—go upstairs, downstairs, out of doors, speak of the wind and weather, or what not—he could not refrain from an unceasing renewal, in imagination, of that interesting enactment. Tilted on the edge of one foot he stood

beside the fireplace, watching his mother grilling rashers; but there was nothing in grilling, he thought, unless the Vision grilled. The limp rasher hung down between the bars of the gridiron like a cat in a child's arms; but there was nothing in similes. He looked at the daylight shadows of a yellow hue, dancing with the firelight shadows in blue on the whitewashed chimney corner, but there was nothing in shadows. 'Perhaps the new young wom—sch—Miss Fancy Day will sing in church with us this morning,' he said.

The tranter looked a long time before he replied, 'I fancy she will; and yet I fancy she won't.'

Dick implied that such a remark was rather to be tolerated than admired; though the slight meagreness observable in the information conveyed disappointed him less than may be expected, deliberateness in

speech being known to have, as a rule, more to do with the machinery of the tranter's throat than with the matter enunciated.

They made preparations for going to church as usual; Dick with extreme alacrity, though he would not definitely consider why he was so religious. His wonderful nicety in brushing and cleaning his best light boots had features which elevated it to the rank of an art. Every particle and speck of last week's mud was scraped and brushed from toe and heel; new blacking from the packet was carefully mixed and made use of, regardless of expense. A coat was laid on and polished; then another coat for increased blackness; and lastly a third, to give the perfect and mirror-like jet which the hoped-for rencontre demanded.

It being Christmas-day, the tranter prepared himself with Sunday particularity.

Loud sousing and snorting noises were heard to proceed from the back quarters of the dwelling, proclaiming that he was there performing his great Sunday wash, lasting half an hour, to which his washings on working-day mornings were mere flashes in the pan. Vanishing into the outhouse with a large brown basin, and the above-named bubblings and snortings being carried on for about twenty minutes, the tranter would appear round the edge of the door, smelling like a summer fog, and looking as if he had just narrowly escaped a watery grave with the loss of hat and neckerchief, having since been weeping bitterly till his eyes were red; a crystal drop of water hanging ornamentally at the bottom of each ear, one at the tip of his nose, and others in the form of spangles about his hair.

After a great deal of crunching upon the sanded stone floor by the feet of father, son,

and grandson as they moved to and fro in these preparations, the bass-viol and fiddles were taken from their nook, and the strings examined and screwed a little above concert pitch, that they might keep their tone when service commenced, to obviate the awkward contingency of having to retune them at the back of the gallery during a cough, sneeze, or amen—an inconvenience which had been known to arise in damp wintry weather.

The three left the door and paced down Mellstock-lane, bearing under their arms the instruments in faded green-baize bags, and old brown music-books in their hands; Dick continually finding himself in advance of the other two, and the tranter moving on with toes turned outwards to an enormous angle.

Seven human heads in a row were now observable over a hedge of laurel, which proved to be the choristers waiting; sitting occasionally on the churchyard-wall and

letting their heels dangle against it, to pass the time. The musicians being now in sight, the youthful party scampered off and rattled up the old wooden stairs of the gallery like a regiment of cavalry; the other boys of the parish waiting outside looking at birds, cats, and other creatures till the vicar entered, when they suddenly subsided into sober church-goers, and passed down the aisle with echoing heels.

The gallery of Mellstock Church had a status and sentiment of its own. A stranger there was regarded with a feeling altogether differing from that of the congregation below towards him. Banished from the nave as an intruder whom no originality could make interesting, he was received above as a curiosity that no unfitness could render dull. The gallery, too, looked down upon and knew the habits of the nave to its remotest peculiarity, and had an extensive

stock of exclusive information about it; whilst the nave knew nothing of the gallery people, as gallery people, beyond their loud-sounding minims and chest notes. Such topics as that the clerk was always chewing tobacco except at the moment of crying amen; that he had a dust-hole in his pew; that during the sermon certain young daughters of the village had left off caring to read anything so mild as the marriage service for some years, and now regularly studied the one which chronologically follows it; that a pair of lovers touched fingers through a knot-hole between their pews in the manner ordained by their great exemplars, Pyramus and Thisbe; that Mrs. Ledlow, the farmer's wife, counted her money and reckoned her week's marketing expenses during the first lesson—all news to those below—were stale subjects here.

Old William sat in the centre of the

front row, his violoncello between his knees, and two singers on each hand. Behind him, on the left, came the treble singers and Dick; and on the right the tranter and the tenors. Farther back was old Mail with the altos and supernumeraries.

But before they had taken their places, and whilst they were standing in a circle at the back of the gallery practising a psalm or two, Dick cast his eyes over his grandfather's shoulder, and saw the vision of the past night enter the porch-door as methodically as if she had never been a vision at all. A new atmosphere seemed suddenly to be puffed into the ancient edifice by her movement, which made Dick's body and soul tingle with novel sensations. Directed by Shinar, the churchwarden, she proceeded to the short aisle on the north side of the chancel, a spot now allotted to a throng of Sunday-school girls, and distinctly visible

from the gallery-front by looking under the curve of the furthermost arch on that side.

Before this moment the church had seemed comparatively empty—now it was thronged; and as Miss Fancy rose from her knees and looked around her for a permanent place in which to deposit herself—finally choosing the remotest corner—Dick began to breathe more freely the warm new air she had brought with her; to feel rushings of blood, and to have impressions that there was a tie between her and himself visible to all the congregation.

Ever afterwards the young man could recollect individually each part of the service of that bright Christmas morning, and the minute occurrences which took place as its hours slowly drew along; the duties of that day dividing themselves by a complete line from the services of other times. The

tunes they that morning essayed remained with him for years, apart from all others; also the text; also the appearance of the layer of dust upon the capitals of the piers; that the holly-bough in the chancel archway was hung a little out of the centre—all the ideas, in short, that creep into the mind when reason is only exercising its lowest activity through the eye.

By chance or by fate, another young man who attended Mellstock Church on that Christmas morning had towards the end of the service the same instinctive perception of an interesting presence, in the shape of the same bright maiden, though his emotion reached a far less-developed stage. And there was this difference, too, that the person in question was surprised at his condition, and sedulously endeavoured to reduce himself to his normal state of mind. He was the young vicar, Mr. Maybold.

The music on Christmas mornings was frequently below the standard of church-performances at other times. The boys were sleepy from the heavy exertions of the night; the men were slightly wearied; and now, in addition to these constant reasons, there was a dampness in the atmosphere that still farther aggravated the evil. Their strings, from the recent long exposure to the night air, rose whole semitones, and snapped with a loud twang at the most silent moment; which necessitated more retiring than ever to the back of the gallery, and made the gallery throats quite husky with the quantity of coughing and hemming required for tuning in. The vicar looked cross.

When the singing was in progress, there was suddenly discovered to be a strong and shrill reinforcement from some point, ultimately found to be the school-girls' aisle.

At every attempt it grew bolder and more distinct. At the third time of singing, these intrusive feminine voices were as mighty as those of the regular singers; in fact, the flood of sound from this quarter assumed such an individuality, that it had a time, a key, almost a tune of its own, surging upwards when the gallery plunged downwards, and the reverse.

Now this had never happened before within the memory of man. The girls, like the rest of the congregation, had always been humble and respectful followers of the gallery; singing at sixes and sevens if without gallery leaders; never interfering with the ordinances of these practised artists—having no will, union, power, or proclivity except it was given them from the established choir enthroned above them.

A good deal of desperation became noticeable in the gallery throats and strings,

which continued throughout the musical portion of the service. Directly the fiddles were laid down, Mr. Penny's spectacles put in their sheath, and the text had been given out, an indignant whispering began.

'Did ye hear that, souls?' Mr. Penny said in a groaning breath.

'Brazen-faced hussies!' said Bowman.

'Trew; why, they were every note as loud as we, fiddles and all, if not louder.'

'Fiddles and all,' echoed Bowman bitterly.

'Shall anything bolder be found than united woman?' Mr. Spinks murmured.

'What I want to know is,' said the tranter (as if he knew already, but that civilisation required the form of words), 'what business people have to tell maidens to sing like that when they don't sit in a gallery, and never have entered one in their lives? That's the question, my sonnies.'

'Tis the gallery have got to sing, all the world knows,' said Mr. Penny. 'Why, souls, what's the use o' the ancients spending scores of pounds to build galleries if people down in the lowest depths of the church sing like that at a moment's notice?'

'Really, I think we useless ones had better march out of church, fiddles and all!' said Mr. Spinks, with a laugh which, to a stranger, would have sounded mild and real. Only the initiated body of men he addressed could understand the horrible bitterness of irony that lurked under the quiet words 'useless ones,' and the ghastliness of the laughter apparently so natural.

'Never mind! Let 'em sing too—'twill make it all the louder—hee, hee!' said Leaf.

'Thomas Leaf, Thomas Leaf! Where have you lived all your life?' said grandfather William sternly.

The quailing Leaf tried to look as if he had lived nowhere at all.

'When all's said and done, my sonnies,' Reuben said, 'there'd have been no real harm in their singing if they had let nobody hear 'em, and only jined in now and then.'

'None at all,' said Mr. Penny. 'But though I don't wish to accuse people wrongfully, I'd say before my lord judge that I could hear every note o' that last psalm come from 'em as much as from us —every note as if 'twas their own.'

'Know it! ah, I should think I did know it!' Mr. Spinks was heard to observe at this moment, without reference to his fellow-creatures—shaking his head at some idea he seemed to see floating before him, and smiling as if he were attending a funeral at the time. 'Ah, do I or don't I know it!'

No one said 'Know what?' because all were aware from experience that what he knew would declare itself in process of time.

'I could fancy last night that we should have some trouble wi' that young man,' said the tranter, pending the continuance of Spinks's speech, and looking towards the unconscious Mr. Maybold in the pulpit.

'*I* fancy,' said old William, rather severely, 'I fancy there's too much whispering going on to be of any spiritual use to gentle or simple.' Then folding his lips and concentrating his glance on the vicar, he implied that none but the ignorant would speak again; and accordingly there was silence in the gallery, Mr. Spinks's telling speech remaining for ever unspoken.

Dick had said nothing, and the tranter little, on this episode of the morning; for Mrs. Dewy at breakfast expressed it as

her intention to invite the youthful leader of the culprits to the small party it was customary with them to have on Christmas-night — a piece of knowledge which had given a particular brightness to Dick's reflections since he had received it. And in the tranter's slightly cynical nature, party feeling was weaker than in the other members of the choir, though friendliness and faithful partnership still sustained in him a hearty earnestness on their account.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRANTER'S PARTY.

During the afternoon unusual activity was seen to prevail about the precincts of tranter Dewy's house. The flagstone floor was swept of dust, and a sprinkling of the finest yellow sand from the innermost stratum of the adjoining sand-pit lightly scattered thereupon. Then were produced large knives and forks, which had been shrouded in darkness and grease since the last occasion of the kind, and bearing upon their sides, 'Shear-steel, warranted,' in such emphatic letters of assurance, that the cutler's name

was not required as further proof, and not given. The key was left in the tap of the cider-barrel, instead of being carried in a pocket. And finally the tranter had to stand up in the room and let his wife wheel him round like a turnstile, to see if anything discreditable was visible in his appearance.

'Stand still till I've been for the scissors,' said Mrs. Dewy.

The tranter stood as still as a sentinel at the challenge.

The only repairs necessary were a trimming of one or two whiskers that had extended beyond the general contour of the mass; a like trimming of a slightly frayed edge visible on his shirt-collar; and a final tug at a gray hair—to all of which operations he submitted in resigned silence, except the last, which produced a mild 'Come, come, Ann,' by way of expostulation.

'Really, Reuben, 'tis quite a disgrace to

see such a man,' said Mrs. Dewy, with the severity justifiable in a long-tried companion, giving him another turn round, and picking several of Smiler's hairs from the shoulder of his coat. Reuben's thoughts seemed engaged elsewhere, and he yawned. 'And the collar of your coat is a shame to behold—so plastered with dirt, or dust, or grease, or something. Why, wherever could you have got it?'

''Tis my warm nater in summer-time, I suppose. I always did get in such a heat when I bustle about.'

'Ay, the Dewys always were such a coarse-skinned family. There's your brother Bob—as fat as a porpoise—just as bad; wi' his low, mean, "How'st do, Ann?" whenever he meets me. I'd "How'st do" him, indeed! If the sun only shines out a minute, there be you all streaming in the face—I never see!'

'If I be hot week-days, I must be hot Sundays.'

'If any of the girls should turn after their father 'twill be a poor look-out for 'em, poor things! None of my family was sich vulgar perspirers, not one of 'em. But, Lord-a-mercy, the Dewys! I don't know how ever I came into such a family.'

'Your woman's weakness when I asked ye to jine us. That's how it was, I suppose;' but the tranter appeared to have heard some such words from his wife before, and hence his answer had not the energy it might have possessed if the inquiry had possessed the charm of novelty.

'You never did look so well in a pair o' trousers as in them,' she continued in the same unimpassioned voice, so that the unfriendly criticism of the Dewy family seemed to have been more normal than spontaneous. 'Such a cheap pair as 'twas too. As big

as any man could wish to have, and lined inside, and double-lined in the lower parts, and an extra piece of stiffening at the bottom. And 'tis a nice high cut that comes up right under your armpits, and there's enough turned down inside the seams to make half a pair more, besides a piece of stuff left that will make an honest waistcoat—all by my contriving in buying the stuff at a bargain, and having it made up under my eye. It only shows what may be done by taking a little trouble, and not going straight to the rascally tailors.'

The discourse was cut short by the sudden appearance of Charley on the scene with a face and hands of hideous blackness, and a nose guttering like a candle. Why, on that particularly cleanly afternoon, he should have discovered that the chimney-crook and chain from which the hams were suspended should have possessed more merits

and general interest as playthings than any other article in the house, is a question for nursing mothers to decide. However, the humour seemed to lie in the result being, as has been seen, that any given player with these articles was in the long-run daubed with soot. The last that was seen of Charley by daylight after this piece of ingenuity was when in the act of vanishing from his father's presence round the corner of the house,—looking back over his shoulder with an expression of great sin on his face, like Cain as the Outcast in Bible pictures.

The guests had all assembled, and the tranter's party had reached that degree of development which accords with ten o'clock P.M. in rural assemblies. At that hour the sound of a fiddle in process of tuning was heard from the inner pantry.

'That's Dick,' said the tranter. 'That lad's crazy for a jig.'

'Dick! Now I cannot—really, I cannot allow any dancing at all till Christmas-day is out,' said old William emphatically. 'When the clock ha' done striking twelve, dance as much as ye like.'

'Well, I must say there's reason in that, William,' said Mrs. Penny. 'If you do have a party on Christmas-day-night, 'tis only fair and honourable to the Church of England to have it a sit-still party. Jigging parties be all very well, and this, that, and therefore; but a jigging party looks suspicious. O, yes; stop till the clock strikes, young folk—so say I.'

It happened that some warm mead accidentally got into Mr. Spinks's head about this time.

'Dancing,' he said, 'is a most strengthening, enlivening, and courting movement,

especially with a little beverage added! And dancing is good. But why disturb what is ordained, Richard and Reuben, and the company zhinerally? Why, I ask, as far as that goes?'

'Then nothing till after twelve,' said William.

Though Reuben and his wife ruled on social points, religious questions were mostly disposed of by the old man, whose firmness on this head quite counterbalanced a certain weakness in his handling of domestic matters. The hopes of the younger members of the household were therefore relegated to a distance of one hour and three-quarters—a result that took visible shape in them by a remote and listless look about the eyes—the singing of songs being permitted in the interim.

At five minutes to twelve the soft tuning was again heard in the back quarters;

and when at length the clock had whizzed forth the last stroke, Dick appeared ready primed, and the instruments were boldly handled; old William very readily taking the bass-viol from its accustomed nail, and touching the strings as irreligiously as could be desired.

The country-dance called the 'Triumph, or Follow my Lover,' was the figure with which they opened. The tranter took for his partner Mrs. Penny, and Mrs. Dewy was chosen by Mr. Penny, who made so much of his limited height by a judicious carriage of the head, straightening of the back, and important flashes of his spectacle-glasses, that he seemed almost as tall as the tranter. Mr. Shinar, age about thirty-five, farmer and churchwarden, a character principally composed of watch-chain, with a mouth always hanging on a smile but never smiling, had come quite willingly to

the party, and showed a wondrous obliviousness of all his antics on the previous night. But the comely, slender, prettily-dressed prize Fancy Day fell to Dick's lot, in spite of some private machinations of the farmer, for the reason that Mr. Shinar, as a richer man, had shown too much assurance in asking the favour, whilst Dick had been duly courteous.

We gain a good view of our heroine as she advances to her place in the ladies' line. She belonged to the taller division of middle height. Flexibility was her first characteristic, by which she appeared to enjoy the most easeful rest when she was in gliding motion. Her dark eyes—arched by brows of so keen, slender, and soft a curve, that they resembled nothing so much as two slurs in music—showed primarily a bright sparkle each. This was softened by a frequent thoughtfulness, yet not so frequent as

to do away, for more than a few minutes at a time, with a certain coquettishness; which in its turn was never so decided as to banish honesty. Her lips imitated her brows in their clearly-cut outline and softness of curve; and her nose was well shaped—which is saying a great deal, when it is remembered that there are a hundred pretty mouths and eyes for one pretty nose. Add to this, plentiful knots of dark-brown hair, a gauzy dress of white, with blue facings; and the slightest idea may be gained of the young maiden who showed, amidst the rest of the dancing-ladies, like a flower among vegetables. And so the dance proceeded. Mr. Shinar, according to the interesting rule laid down, deserted his own partner, and made off down the middle with this fair one of Dick's—the pair appearing from the top of the room like two persons tripping down a lane to be married. Dick trotted behind with what

was intended to be a look of composure, but which was, in fact, a rather silly expression of feature—implying, with too much earnestness, that such an elopement could not be tolerated. Then they turned and came back, when Dick grew more rigid around his mouth, and blushed with ingenuous ardour as he joined hands with the rival and formed the arch over his lady's head; relinquishing her again at setting to partners, when Mr. Shinar's new chain quivered in every link, and all the loose flesh upon the tranter—who here came into action again—shook like jelly. Mrs. Penny, being always rather concerned for her personal safety when she danced with the tranter, fixed her face to a chronic smile of timidity the whole time it lasted—a peculiarity which filled her features with wrinkles, and reduced her eyes to little straight lines like hyphens, as she jigged up and down opposite him; repeating

in her own person not only his proper movements, but also the minor flourishes which the richness of the tranter's imagination led him to introduce from time to time—an imitation which had about it something of slavish obedience, not unmixed with fear.

The ear-rings of the ladies now flung themselves wildly about, turning violent summersaults, banging this way and that, and then swinging quietly against the ears sustaining them. Mrs. Crumpler—a heavy woman, who, for some reason which nobody ever thought worth inquiry, danced in a clean apron—moved so smoothly through the figure that her feet were never seen; conveying to imaginative minds the idea that she rolled on castors.

Minute after minute glided by, and the party reached the period when ladies' back-hair begins to look forgotten and dissipated; when a perceptible dampness makes itself apparent upon the faces even of delicate

girls—a ghastly dew having for some time rained from the features of their masculine partners; when skirts begin to be torn out of their gathers; when elderly people, who have stood up to please their juniors, begin to feel sundry small tremblings in the region of the knees, and to wish the interminable dance was at Jericho; when (at country parties) waistcoats begin to be unbuttoned, and when the fiddlers' chairs have been wriggled, by the frantic bowing of their occupiers, to a distance of about two feet from where they originally stood.

Fancy was dancing with Mr. Shinar. Dick knew that Fancy, by the law of good manners, was bound to dance as pleasantly with one partner as with another; yet he could not help suggesting to himself that she need not have put *quite* so much spirit into her steps, nor smiled *quite* so frequently whilst in the farmer's hands.

'I'm afraid you didn't cast off,' said Dick mildly to Mr. Shinar, before the latter man's watch-chain had done vibrating from a recent whirl.

Fancy made a motion of accepting the correction; but her partner took no notice, and proceeded with the next movement, with an affectionate bend towards her.

'That Shinar's too fond of her,' the young man said to himself as he watched them. They came to the top again, Fancy smiling warmly towards her partner, and went to their places.

'Mr. Shinar, you didn't cast off,' said Dick, for want of something else to demolish him with; casting off himself, and being put out at the farmer's irregularity.

'Perhaps I sha'n't cast off for any man,' said Mr. Shinar.

'I think you ought to, sir.'

Dick's partner, a young lady of the name of Lizzy—called Lizz for short—tried to mollify.

'I can't say that I myself have much feeling for casting off,' she said.

'Nor I,' said Mrs. Penny, following up the argument; 'especially if a friend and naibour is set against it. Not but that 'tis a terrible tasty thing in good hands and well done; yes, indeed, so say I.'

'All I meant was,' said Dick, rather sorry that he had spoken correctingly to a guest, 'that 'tis in the dance; and a man has hardly any right to hack and mangle what was ordained by the regular dance-maker, who, I daresay, got his living by making 'em, and thought of nothing else all his life.'

'I don't like casting off: then very well; I cast off for no dance-maker that ever lived.'

Dick now appeared to be doing mental arithmetic, the act being really an effort to present to himself, in an abstract form, how far an argument with a formidable rival ought to be carried, when that rival was his mother's guest. The dead-lock was put an end to by the stamping arrival up the middle of the tranter, who, despising minutiæ on principle, started a theme of his own.

'I assure you, naibours,' he said, 'the heat of my frame no tongue can tell!' He looked around, and endeavoured to give, by a forcible gaze of self-sympathy, some faint idea of the truth.

Mrs. Dewy formed one of the next couple.

'Yes,' she said in an auxiliary tone, 'Reuben always was such a hot man.'

Mrs. Penny implied the correct species of sympathy that such a class of affliction

required, by trying to smile and to look grieved at the same time.

'If he only walk round the garden of a Sunday morning, his shirt-collar is as limp as no starch at all,' continued Mrs. Dewy, her countenance lapsing parenthetically into a housewifely expression of concern at the reminiscence.

'Come, come, you wimmen-folk; 'tis hands-across—come, come!' said the tranter; and the conversation ceased for the present.

CHAPTER VIII.

THEY DANCE MORE WILDLY.

Dick had at length secured Fancy for that most delightful of country-dances, beginning with six-hands-round.

'Before we begin,' said the tranter, 'my proposal is, that 'twould be a right and proper plan for every martel man in the dance to pull off his jacket, considering the heat.'

'Such low notions as you have, Reuben! Nothing but strip will go down with you when you are a-dancing. Such a hot man as he is!'

'Well, now, look here, my sonnies,' he

argued to his wife, whom he often addressed in the plural masculine for convenience of epithet merely; 'I don't see that. You dance and get hot as fire; therefore you lighten your clothes. Isn't that nater and reason for gentle and simple? If I strip by myself and not necessary, 'tis rather pothousey, I own; but if we stout chaps strip one and all, why, 'tis the native manners of the country, which no man can gainsay. Hey—what do you say, my sonnies?'

'Strip we will!' said the three other heavy men; and their coats were accordingly taken off and hung in the passage, whence the four sufferers from heat soon reappeared, marching in close column, with flapping shirt-sleeves, and having, as common to them all, a general glance of being now a match for any man or dancer in England or Ireland. Dick, fearing to lose ground in Fancy's good opinion, retained

his coat; and Mr. Shinar did the same from superior knowledge.

And now a further phase of rural revelry had disclosed itself. It was the time of night when a guest may write his name in the dust upon the tables and chairs, and a bluish mist pervades the atmosphere, becoming a distinct halo round the candles; when people's nostrils, wrinkles, and crevices in general, seem to be getting gradually plastered up; when the very fiddlers as well as the dancers get red in the face, the dancers having advanced farther still towards incandescence, and entered the cadaverous phase; the fiddlers no longer sit down, but kick back their chairs and saw madly at the strings, with legs firmly spread and eyes closed, regardless of the visible world. Again and again did Dick share his Love's hand with another man, and wheel round; then, more delightfully, promenade in a cir-

cle with her all to himself, his arm holding her waist more firmly each time, and his elbow getting farther and farther behind her back, till the distance reached was rather noticeable; and, most blissful, swinging to places shoulder to shoulder, her breath curling round his neck like a summer zephyr that had strayed from its proper date. Threading the couples one by one they reached the bottom, when there arose in Dick's mind a minor misery lest the tune should end before they could work their way to the top again, and have anew the same exciting run down through. Dick's feelings on actually reaching the top in spite of his doubts were supplemented by a mortal fear that the fiddling might even stop at this supreme moment; which prompted him to convey a stealthy whisper to the far-gone musicians, to the effect that they were not to leave off till he and his partner had

reached the bottom of the dance once more, which remark was replied to by the nearest of those convulsed and quivering men by a private nod to the anxious young man between two semiquavers of the tune, and a simultaneous 'All right, ay, ay,' without opening his eyes. Fancy was now held so closely, that Dick and she were practically one person. The room became to Dick like a picture in a dream; all that he could remember of it afterwards being the look of the fiddlers going to sleep, as humming-tops sleep—by increasing their motion and hum, together with the figures of grandfather James and old Simon Crumpler sitting by the chimney-corner, talking and nodding in dumb-show, and beating the air to their emphatic sentences like people in a railway train.

The dance ended. 'Piph-h-h-h!' said tranter Dewy, blowing out his breath in

the very finest stream of vapour that a man's lips could form. 'A regular tightener, that one, sonnies!' He wiped his forehead, and went to the cider-mug on the table.

'Well!' said Mrs. Penny, flopping into a chair, 'my heart haven't been in such a thumping state of uproar since I used to sit up on old Midsummer-eves to see who my husband was going to be.'

'And that's getting on for a good few years ago now, from what I've heard you tell,' said the tranter without lifting his eyes from the cup he was filling. Being now engaged in the business of handing round refreshments, he was warranted in keeping his coat off still, though the other heavy men had resumed theirs.

'And a thing I never expected would come to pass, if you'll believe me, cam to pass then,' continued Mrs. Penny. 'Ah, the first spirit ever I see on a Midsummer-

eve was a puzzle to me when he appeared, a hard puzzle, so say I!'

'So I should have imagined; as far as that goes,' said Elias Spinks.

'Yes,' said Mrs. Penny, throwing her glance into past times, and talking on in a running tone of complacent abstraction, as if a listener were not a necessity. 'Yes; never was I in such a taking as on that Midsummer-eve! I sat up, quite determined to see if John Wildway was going to marry me or no. I put the bread-and-cheese and cider quite ready, as the witch's book ordered, and I opened the door, and I waited till the clock struck twelve, my nerves all alive, and so distinct that I could feel every one of 'em twitching like bell-wires. Yes, sure! and when the clock had struck, lo and behold, I could see through the door a *little small* man in the lane wi' a shoemaker's apron on.'

Here Mr. Penny stealthily enlarged himself half an inch.

'Now John Wildway,' Mrs. Penny continued, 'who courted me at that time, was a shoemaker, you see, but he was a very fair-sized man, and I couldn't believe that any such a little small man had anything to do wi' me, as anybody might. But on he came, and crossed the threshold—not John, but actually the same little small man in the shoemaker's apron—'

'You needn't be so mighty particular about little and small!' said her husband, pecking the air with his nose.

'In he walks, and down he sits, and O my goodness me, didn't I flee upstairs, body and soul hardly hanging together! Well, to cut a long story short, by-long and by-late, John Wildway and I had a miff and parted; and lo and behold, the coming man came! Penny asked me if I'd

go snacks with him, and afore I knew what I was about a'most, the thing was done.'

'I've fancied you never knew better in your life; but I may be mistaken,' said Mr. Penny in a murmur.

After Mrs. Penny had spoken, there being no new occupation for her eyes, she still let them stay idling on the past scenes just related, which were apparently visible to her in the candle-flame. Mr. Penny's remark received no reply.

During this discourse the tranter and his wife might have been observed standing in an unobtrusive corner, in mysterious closeness to each other, a just perceptible current of intelligence passing from each to each, which had apparently no relation whatever to the conversation of their guests, but much to their sustenance. A conclusion of some kind having at length been drawn, the palpable confederacy of man and wife was once more obliterated, the

tranter marching off into the pantry, humming a tune that he couldn't quite recollect, and then breaking into the words of a song of which he could remember about one line and a quarter. Mrs. Dewy mentioned a few words about preparations for a bit of supper.

That portion of the company which loved eating and drinking then put on a look to signify that till that moment they had quite forgotten that it was customary to eat suppers in this climate; going even farther than this politeness of feature, and abruptly starting irrelevant subjects, the exceeding flatness and forced tone of which rather betrayed their object. The younger members said they were quite hungry, and that supper would be delightful though it was so late.

Good luck attended Dick's love-passes during the meal. He sat next Fancy, and

had the thrilling pleasure of using permanently a glass which had been taken by Fancy in mistake ; of letting the outer edge of the sole of his boot touch the lower verge of her skirt; and to add to these delights, a cat, which had lain unobserved in her lap for several minutes, crept across into his own, touching him with the same portion of fur that had touched her hand a moment before. Besides these, there were some little pleasures in the shape of helping her to vegetable she didn't want, and when it had nearly alighted on her plate, taking it across for his own use, on the plea of waste not, want not. He also, from time to time, sipped sweet sly glances at her profile; noticing the set of her head, the curve of her throat, and other artistic properties of the lively goddess, who the while kept up a rather free, not to say too free, conversation with Mr. Shinar sit-

ting opposite; which, after some uneasy criticism, and much shifting of argument backwards and forwards in Dick's mind, he decided not to consider of alarming significance.

'A new music greets our ears now,' said Miss Fancy, alluding, with the sharpness that her position as village sharpener demanded, to the contrast between the rattle of knives and forks and the late notes of the fiddlers.

'Ay; and I don't know but that 'tis sweeter in tone when you get above forty,' said the tranter; 'except, in faith, 'tis as regards father there: never such a martel man as he for tunes. They move his soul; don't 'em, father?'

The eldest Dewy smiled across from his distant chair an assent to Reuben's remark.

'Spaking of being moved in soul,' said Mr. Penny, 'I shall never forget the first

time I heard the "Dead March." 'Twas at poor Corp'l Nineman's funeral at Casterbridge. It fairly made my hair creep and fidget about like a flock of sheep—ah, it did, souls! And when they had done, and the last trump had sounded, and the guns was fired over the dead hero's grave, an icy-cold drop of moist sweat hung upon my forehead, and another upon my jawbone. Ah, 'tis a very solemn thing!'

'Well, as to father in the corner there,' the tranter said, pointing to old William, who was in the act of filling his mouth; 'he'd starve to death for music's sake now, as much as when he was a boy-chap of fifteen.'

'Truly, now,' said Michael Mail, clearing the corner of his throat in the manner of a man who meant to be convincing; 'there's a friendly tie of some sort between music and eating.' He lifted the cup to his mouth,

and drank himself gradually backwards from a perpendicular position to a slanting one, during which time his looks performed a circuit from the wall opposite him to the ceiling overhead. Then clearing the other corner of his throat: 'Once I was sitting in the little kitchen of the Three Choughs at Casterbridge, having a bit of dinner, and a brass band struck up in the street. Sich a beautiful band as that were! I was sitting eating fried liver and lights, I well can mind—ah, I was! and to save my life, I couldn't help chawing to the tune. Band played six-eight time; six-eight chaws I, willynilly. Band plays common; common time went my teeth among the fried liver and lights as true as a hair. Beautiful 'twere! Ah, I shall never forget that there band!'

'That's as musical a circumstance as ever I heard of,' said grandfather James, with

the absent gaze which accompanies profound criticism.

'I don't like Michael's musical circumstances then,' said Mrs. Dewy. 'They are quite coarse to a person of decent taste.'

Old Michael's mouth twitched here and there, as if he wanted to smile but didn't know where to begin, which gradually settled to an expression that it was not displeasing for a nice woman like the tranter's wife to correct him.

'Well, now,' said Reuben, with decisive earnestness, 'that coarseness that's so upsetting to Ann's feelings is to my mind a recommendation; for it do always prove a story to be true. And for the same reason, I like a story with a bad moral. My sonnies, all true stories have a coarseness or a bad moral, depend upon't. If the story-tellers could have got decency and good morals from true stories, who'd ha' troubled to in-

vent parables?' Saying this the tranter arose to fetch a new stock of cider, mead, and home-made wines.

Mrs. Dewy sighed, and appended a remark (ostensibly behind her husband's back, though that the words should reach his ears distinctly was understood by both): 'Such a man as Dewy is! nobody do know the trouble I have to keep that man barely respectable. And did you ever hear too—just now at supper-time—talking about "taties" with Michael in such a labourer's way. Well, 'tis what I was never brought up to! With our family 'twas never less than "taters," and very often "pertatoes" outright; mother was so particular and nice with us girls: there was no family in the parish that kept theirselves up more than we.'

The hour of parting came. Fancy could not remain for the night, because she had

engaged a woman to wait up for her. She disappeared temporarily from the flagging party of dancers, and then came downstairs wrapped up and looking altogether a different person from whom she had been hitherto; in fact (to Dick's sadness and disappointment), a woman somewhat reserved and of a phlegmatic temperament—nothing left in her of the romping girl that she had been but a short quarter-hour before, who had not minded the weight of Dick's hand upon her waist, nor shirked the purlieus of the mistletoe.

'What a contradiction!' thought the young man—hoary cynic *pro tem.* 'What a miserable delusive contradiction between the manners of a maid's life at dancing times and at others! Look at this idol Fancy! during the whole past evening touchable, pressable—even kissable. For whole half-hours I held her so close to me that not a sheet

of paper could have been slipped between us; and I could feel her heart only just outside my own, her existence going on so close to mine, that I was aware of every breath in it. A flit is made to the bedroom —a hat and a cloak put on—and I no more dare to touch her than—' Thought failed him, and he returned to life.

But this was an endurable misery in comparison with what followed. Mr. Shinar and his watch-chain, taking the intrusive advantage that ardent males who are going homeward along the same road as a pretty young female always do take of that circumstance, came forward to assure Fancy —with a total disregard of Dick's emotions, and in tones which were certainly not frigid —that he (Shinar) was not the man to go to bed before seeing his Lady Fair safe within her own door — not he: nobody should say he was that;—and that he would

not leave her side an inch till the thing was done—drown him if he would. The proposal was assented to by Miss Day, in Dick's foreboding judgment with one degree—or at any rate, an appreciable fraction of a degree—of warmth beyond that required by a disinterested desire for protection from the dangers of the night.

All was over; and Dick surveyed the chair she had last occupied, looking now like a setting from which the gem has been torn. There stood her glass, and the romantic teaspoonful of elder wine at the bottom that she couldn't drink by trying ever so hard, in obedience to the mighty arguments of the tranter (his hand coming down upon her shoulder the while, like a Nasmyth hammer); but the drinker was there no longer. There were the nine or ten pretty little crumbs she had left on her plate; but the eater was no more seen.

There seemed to be a disagreeable closeness of relationship between himself and the members of his family, now that they were left alone again face to face. His father seemed quite offensive for appearing to be in just as high spirits as when the guests were there; and as for grandfather James (who had not yet left), he was quite fiendish in being rather glad they were gone.

'Really,' said the tranter, in a tone of placid satisfaction, 'I've had so little time to attend to myself all the evenen, that I mane to enjoy a quiet meal now! A slice of this here ham—neither too fat nor too lane—so; and then a drop of this vinegar and pickles—there, that's it—and I shall be as fresh as a lark again! And to tell the truth, my sonny, my inside 've a-been as dry as a lime-basket all night.'

'I like a party very well,' said Mrs. Dewy, leaving off the adorned tones she

had been bound to use throughout the evening, and returning to the natural marriage voice; 'but, lord, 'tis such a sight of heavy work next day! And what with the plates, and knives and forks, and bits kicked off your furniture, and I don't know what-all, why a body could a'most wish there were no such things as Christmases. Ah-h dear!' she yawned, till the clock in the corner had ticked several beats. She cast her eyes round upon the dust-laden furniture, and sank down overpowered at the sight.

'Well, I be getting all right by degrees, thank the Lord for't!' said the tranter cheerfully through a mangled mass of ham and bread, without lifting his eyes from his plate, and chopping away with his knife and fork as if he were felling trees. 'Ann, you may as well go on to bed at once, and not bide there making such sleepy faces;

you look as long-favoured as a fiddle, upon my life, Ann. There, you must be wearied out, 'tis true. I'll do the doors and wind up the clock; and you go on, or you'll be as white as a sheet to-morrow.'

'Ay; I don't know whether I sha'n't or no.' The matron passed her hand across her eyes to brush away the film of sleep till she got upstairs.

Dick wondered how it was that when people were married they could be so blind to romance; and was quite certain that if he ever took to wife that dear impossible Fancy, he and she would never be so dreadfully practical and undemonstrative of the Passion as his father and mother were. The most extraordinary thing was, that all the fathers and mothers he knew were just as undemonstrative as his own.

CHAPTER IX.

DICK CALLS AT THE SCHOOL.

THE early days of the year drew on, and Fancy, having passed the holiday weeks at home, returned again to Mellstock.

Every spare minute of the week following her return was spent by Dick in accidentally passing the school-house in his journeys about the neighbourhood; but not once did she make herself visible. A handkerchief belonging to her had been providentially found by his mother in clearing the rooms the day after that of the dance; and by much contrivance Dick got it handed over to him, to leave with her at any time

he was passing the school after her return. But he delayed taking the extreme measure of calling with it lest, had she really no sentiment of interest in him, it might be regarded as a slightly absurd errand, the reason guessed; and the sense of the ludicrous, which was rather keen in her, might do his dignity considerable injury in her eyes; and what she thought of him, even apart from the question of her loving, was all the world to him now.

But the hour came when the patience of love at twenty-one could endure no longer. One Saturday he approached the school with a mild air of indifference, and had the satisfaction of seeing the object of his quest at the farther end of her garden, trying, by the aid of a spade and gloves, to root a bramble that had intruded itself there.

He disguised his feelings from some sus-

picious-looking cottage-windows opposite, by endeavouring to appear like a man in a great hurry of business, who wished to leave the handkerchief and have done with such trifling errands.

This endeavour signally failed; for on approaching the gate, he found it locked to keep the children, who were playing prisoner's base in the front, from running into her private grounds.

She did not see him; and he could only think of one thing to be done, which was to shout her name.

'Miss Day!'

The words were uttered with a jerk and a look, which were meant to imply to the cottages opposite that he was simply a young man who liked shouting, as being a pleasant way of passing his time, without any reference at all to persons in gardens. The name died away, and the unconscious Miss

Day continued digging and pulling as before.

He screwed himself up to enduring the cottage-windows yet more stoically, and shouted again. Fancy took no notice whatever.

He shouted again the third time, with desperate vehemence; then turned suddenly about and retired a little distance, as if he had no connection with the school, but was standing there by chance.

This time she heard him, came down the garden, and entered the school at the back. Footsteps echoed across the interior, the door opened, and three-quarters of the blooming young schoolmistress's face and figure stood revealed before him; a perpendicular slice on her left-hand side being cut off by the edge of the door she held ajar. Having surveyed and recognised him, she came to the gate.

At sight of him had the pink of her cheeks increased, lessened, or did it continue to cover its normal area of ground? It was a question meditated several hundreds of times by her visitor in after-hours —the meditation, after wearying involutions, always ending in one way, that it was impossible to say.

'Your handkerchief: Miss Day: I called with.' He held it out spasmodically and awkwardly. 'Mother found it: under a chair.'

'O, thank you very much for bringing it, Mr. Dewy. I couldn't think where I had dropped it.'

Now Dick, not being an experienced lover—indeed, never before having been engaged in the practice of love-making at all, except in a small schoolboy way—could not take advantage of the situation; and out came the blunder, which afterwards

cost him so many bitter moments and three sleepless nights:—

'Good-morning, Miss Day.'

'Good-morning, Mr. Dewy.'

The gate was closed; she was gone; and Dick was standing outside, unchanged in his condition from what he had been before he called. Of course Angel was not to blame—a young woman living alone in a house could not ask him indoors unless she had known him better—he should have kept her outside. He wished that before he called he had realised more fully than he did the pleasure of being about to call; and turned away.

PART II.

SPRING.

CHAPTER I.

PASSING BY THE SCHOOL.

It followed that as the spring advanced, Dick walked abroad much more frequently than had hitherto been usual with him, and was continually finding that his nearest way to or from home lay across the field at the corner of the school. The first-fruits of his perseverance were that, on turning the angle on the nineteenth journey that way, he saw Miss Fancy's figure, clothed in a dark-gray dress, looking from a high open window upon the crown of his hat. The friendly greeting, which was the result of

this rencounter, was considered so valuable an elixir that Dick passed still oftener; and by the time he had trodden a little path in the grass where never a path was before, he was rewarded with an actual meeting face to face on the open ground. This brought another meeting, and another, Fancy faintly showing by her bearing that it was a pleasure to her of some kind to see him there; but the sort of pleasure she derived, whether exultation at the hope her exceeding fairness inspired, or the true feeling which was alone Dick's concern, he could not anyhow decide, although he meditated on her every little movement for hours after it was made.

CHAPTER II.

A MEETING OF THE CHOIR.

It was the evening of a fine spring day. The descending sun appeared as a nebulous blaze of amber light, its outline being lost in cloudy masses hanging round it, like wild locks of hair.

The chief members of Mellstock parish choir were standing in a group in front of Mr. Penny's workshop in the lower village. They were all brightly illuminated, and each was backed up by a shadow as long as a steeple; the lowness of the source of light rendering the brims of their hats of no use at all as a protection to the eyes.

Mr. Penny's was the last house in that portion of the parish, and stood in a hollow by the road-side; so that cart-wheels and horses' feet were about level with the sill of his shop-window. This was low and wide, and was open from morning till evening, Mr. Penny himself being invariably seen working inside, like a framed portrait of a shoemaker by some modern Moroni. He sat facing the road, with a boot on his knees and the awl in his hand, only looking up for a moment as he stretched out his arms and bent forward at the pull, when his spectacles flashed in the passer's face with a shine of flat whiteness, and then returned again to the boot as usual. Rows of lasts, small and large, stout and slender, covered the wall which formed the background, in the extreme shadow of which a kind of dummy was seen sitting, in the shape of an apprentice with a string tied round his hair (pro-

bably to keep it out of his eyes). He smiled at remarks that floated in from the outside, but was never known to answer them in Mr. Penny's presence. Outside the window, the upper-leather of a Wellington-boot was usually hung, pegged to a board as if to dry. No sign was over his door; in fact—as with old banks and mercantile houses—advertising in any shape was scorned; and it would have been felt as beneath his dignity to paint, for the benefit of strangers, the name of an establishment the trade of which came solely by connection based on personal respect.

His visitors now stood on the outside of his window, sometimes leaning against the sill, sometimes moving a pace or two backwards and forwards in front of it. They talked with deliberate gesticulations to Mr. Penny, enthroned in the shadow of the interior.

'I do like a man to stick to men who be in the same line o' life—o' Sundays, any way—that I do so.'

''Tis like all the doings of folk who don't know what a day's work is, that's what I say.'

'My belief is the man's not to blame; 'tis *she*—she's the bitter weed.'

'No, not altogether. He's a poor gawk-hammer. Look at his sermon yesterday.'

'His sermon was well enough, a very excellent sermon enough, only he couldn't put it into words and speak it. That's all was the matter wi' the sermon. He hadn't been able to get it past his pen.'

'Well—ay, the sermon might be good enough; for, ye see, the sermon of Old Ecclesiastes himself lay in Old Ecclesiastes's ink-bottle afore he got it out.'

Mr. Penny, being in the act of drawing the last stitch tight, could afford time to look up and throw in a word at this point.

'He's no spouter—that must be said, 'a b'lieve.'

''Tis a terrible muddle sometimes with the man, as far as that goes,' said Spinks.

'Well, we'll say nothing about that,' the tranter answered; 'for I don't believe 'twill make a penneth o' difference to we poor martels here or hereafter whether his sermons be good or bad, my sonnies.'

Mr. Penny made another hole with his awl, pushed in the thread, and looked up and spoke again at the extension of arms.

''Tis his goings-on, souls, that's what it is.' He clenched his features for an Herculean addition to the ordinary pull, and went on, 'The first thing he do when he cam here was to be hot and strong about church business.'

'Trew,' said Spinks; 'that was the very first thing he do.'

Mr. Penny, having now been offered the

ear of the assembly, accepted it, ceased stitching, swallowed an unimportant quantity of air as if it were a pill, and continued:

'The next thing he do is to think about altering the church, until he found 'twould be a matter o' cost and what not, and then not to think no more about it.'

'Trew: that was the next thing he do.'

'And the next thing was to tell the young chaps that they were not on no account to put their hats in the font during service.'

'Trew.'

'And then 'twas this, and then 'twas that, and now 'tis—'

Words were not forcible enough to conclude the sentence, and Mr. Penny gave a huge pull to signify the concluding word.

'Now 'tis to turn us out of the quire

neck and crop,' said the tranter after a silent interval of half a minute, not at all by way of explaining the pause and pull, which had been quite understood, but simply as a means of keeping the subject well before the meeting.

Mrs. Penny came to the door at this point in the discussion. Like all good wives, however much she was inclined to play the Tory to her husband's Whiggism, and *vice versâ*, in times of peace, she coalesced with him heartily enough in time of war.

'It must be owned he's not all there, she replied, in a general way, to the fragments of talk she had heard from indoors. 'Far below poor Mr. Grinham' (the late vicar).

'Ay, there was this to be said for him, that you were quite sure he'd never come mumbudgeting to see ye, just as you were

in the middle of your work, and put you out with his anxious trouble about you—so say I.'

'Never. But as for this new Mr. Maybold, he's a very singular, well-intentioned party in that respect, but unbearable; for as to sifting your cinders, scrubbing your floors, or emptying your soap-suds, why you can't do it. I assure you I've not been able to empt them for several days, unless I throw 'em up the chimley or out of winder; for as sure as the sun you meet him at the door, coming to ask how you be, and 'tis such a confusing thing to meet a gentleman at the door when ye are in the mess o' washing.'

''Tis only for want of knowing better, poor gentleman,' said the tranter. 'His maning's good enough. Ay, your parson comes by fate: 'tis heads or tails, like pitch-halfpenny, and no choosing; so we must take

en as he is, my sonnies, and thank God he's no worse, I suppose.'

'I fancy I've seen him look across at Miss Day in a warmer way than Christianity required,' said Mrs. Penny musingly; 'but I don't quite like to say it.'

'O, no; there's nothing in that,' said grandfather William.

'If there's nothing, we shall see nothing,' Mrs. Penny replied, in the tone of a woman who might possibly have private opinions still.

'Ah, Mr. Grinham was the man!' said Bowman. 'Why, he never troubled us wi' a visit from year's end to year's end. You might go anywhere, do anything: you'd be sure never to see him.'

''A was a right sensible parson,' said Michael. 'He never entered our door but once in his life, and that was to tell my poor wife—ay, poor soul, dead and gone

now, as we all shall!—that as she was such a old aged person, and lived so far from the church, he didn't at all expect her to come any more to the service.'

'And 'a was a very jinerous gentleman about choosing the psalms and hymns o' Sundays. "Confound ye," says he, "blare and scrape what ye like, but don't bother me!"'

'And he was a very honourable good man in not wanting any of us to come and hear him if we were all on-end for a jaunt or spree, or to bring the babies to be christened if they were inclined to squalling. There's virtue in a man's not putting a parish to spiritual trouble.'

'And there's this man never letting us have a bit of peace; but wanting us to be good and upright till 'tis carried to such a shameful pitch as I never see the like afore nor since!'.

'Still, for my part,' said old William,

'though he's arrayed against us, I like the hearty borus-snorus ways of the new pa'son.'

'You, ready to die for the quire,' said Bowman reproachfully, 'to stick up for the quire's enemy, William!'

'Nobody will feel the loss of our occupation so much as I,' said the old man firmly; 'that you d'all know. I've been in the quire man and boy ever since I was a chiel of eleven. But for all that 'tisn't in me to call the man a bad man, because I truly and sincerely believe en to be a good young feller.'

Some of the youthful sparkle that used to reside there animated William's eye as he uttered the words, and a certain nobility of aspect was also imparted to him by the setting sun, which gave him a Titanic shadow at least thirty feet in length, stretching away to the east in outlines of imposing magnitude, his head finally terminating upon the trunk of a grand old oak-tree.

'Mayble's a hearty feller,' the tranter replied, 'and will spak to you be you dirty or be you clane. The first time I met en was in a drong, and though 'a didn't know me no more than the dead, 'a passed the time of day. "D'ye do?" he said, says he, nodding his head, "A fine day." Then the second time I met en was full-buff in town street, when my breeches were tore all to strents and lippets by getting through a copse of thorns and brimbles for a short cut home-along; and not wanting to disgrace the man by spaking in that state, I fixed my eye on the weathercock to let en pass me as a stranger. But no: "How d'ye do, Reuben?" says he, right hearty. If I'd been dressed in silver spangles from top to toe, the man couldn't have been civiller.'

At this moment Dick was seen coming up the village-street, and they turned and watched him.

CHAPTER III.

A TURN IN THE DISCUSSION.

'I'm afraid Dick's a lost man,' said the tranter.

'What?—no!' said Mail, implying by his manner that it was a far commoner thing for his ears to report what was not said than that his judgment should be at fault.

'Ay,' said the tranter, still looking at Dick's unconscious advance. 'I don't at all like what I see! There's too many o' them looks out of the winder without noticing anything; too much shining of boots; too much peeping round corners; too much looking at the clock; telling

about clever things She did till you be sick of it, and then upon a hint to that effect a horrible silence about her. I've walked the path once in my life and know the country, naibours; and Dick's a lost man!' The tranter turned a quarter round and smiled a smile of miserable satire at the rising new moon, which happened to catch his eye.

The others' looks became far too serious at this announcement to allow them to speak; and they still regarded Dick in the distance.

''Twas his mother's fault,' the tranter continued, shaking his head two-and-half times, 'in asking the young woman to our party last Christmas. When I eyed the blue frock and light heels o' the maid, I had my thoughts directly. "God bless thee, Dicky my sonny," I said to myself, "there's a delusion for thee!"'

'They seemed to be rather distant in manner last Sunday, I thought,' said Mail

tentatively, as became one who was not a member of the family.

'Ay, that's a part of the illness. Distance belongs to it, slyness belongs to it, quarest things on earth belongs to it. There, 'tmay as well come early as late s'far as I know. The sooner begun, the sooner over; for come it will.'

'The question I ask is,' said Mr. Spinks, connecting into one thread the two subjects of discourse, as became a man learned in rhetoric, and beating with his hand in a way which signified that the manner rather than the matter of his speech was to be observed, 'how did Mr. Maybold know she could play the organ? You know we had it from her own lips, as far as that goes, that she has never, first or last, breathed such a thing to him; much less that she ever would play.'

In the midst of this puzzle Dick

joined the party, and the news which had caused such a convulsion among the ancient musicians was unfolded to him. 'Well,' he said, blushing at the allusion to Miss Day, 'I know by some words of hers that she has particularly wished not to play, because she is a friend of ours; and how the alteration comes, I don't know.'

'Now, this is my plan,' said the tranter, turning from Dick and reviving the spirit of the discussion by the infusion of new ideas, as was his custom. 'This is my plan; if you don't like it, no harm's done. We all know one another very well, don't we, naibours?'

That they knew one another very well was received as a statement of much relevance to the present subject, and one which, though very familiar, should not in the nature of things be omitted in introductory speeches.

'Then I say this'—and the tranter in his emphasis suddenly slapped down his hand on Mr. Spinks's shoulder with a momentum of several pounds, upon which Mr. Spinks tried to look not in the least startled by what had sent his nerves flying in all directions—'I say that we all move down-along straight as a line to Pa'son Mayble's when the clock have gone six to-morrow night. There we one and all stand in the passage, then one or two of us go in and spak to en, man and man; and say, "Pa'son Mayble, every tradesman d'like to have his own way in his workshop, and Mellstock Church is yours. Instead of turning us out neck and crop, let us stay on till Christmas, and we'll gie way to the young woman, Mr. Mayble, and make no more ado about it. And we shall always be quite willing to touch our hats when we meet ye, Mr.

Mayble, just as before." That sounds very well? Hey?'

'Excellent well in faith, Reuben Dewy.'

'And we won't sit down in his house; 'twould be looking too familiar when only just reconciled.'

'No need at all to sit down. Just do our duty man and man, turn round, and march out—he'll think all the more of us for it.'

'I hardly think Leaf had better go wi' us?' said Michael, turning to Leaf and taking his measure from top to bottom by the eye. 'He's so terrible silly that he might ruin the concern.'

'He don't want to go much; do ye, Thomas Leaf?' said William.

'Hee-hee! no; I don't want to.'

'I be martal afeard, Leaf, that you'll never be able to tell how many cuts d'take to sharpen a spar,' said Mail.

'I never had no head, never! that's how it happened to happen, hee-hee!'

They all assented to this, not with any sense of humiliating Leaf by disparaging him after an open confession, but because it was an accepted thing that Leaf didn't in the least mind having no head, that he habitually walked about without one being an unimpassioned matter of parish history.

'But I can sing my treble!' continued Thomas Leaf, quite delighted at being called a fool in such a friendly way; 'I can sing my treble as well as any maid, or married woman either, and better! And if Jim had lived, I should have had a clever brother! To-morrow is poor Jim's birthday. He'd ha' been twenty-six if he'd lived till to-morrow.'

'You always seem very sorry for Jim,' said old William musingly.

'Ah! I do. Such a stay to mother as

he'd always ha' been! She'd never have had to work in her old age if he had continued strong, poor Jim!'

'What was his age when 'a died?'

'Four hours and twenty minutes, poor Jim. 'A was born as might be at night; and 'a didn't last as might be till the morning. No, 'a didn't last. Mother called en Jim on the day that would ha' been his christening day if he had lived; and she's always thinking about en. You see he died so very young.'

'Well, 'twas rather youthful,' said Michael.

'Now to my mind that woman is very imaginative on the subject of children?' said the tranter, his eye precisely sweeping his audience as he spoke.

'Ah, well she may be,' said Leaf. 'She had twelve regularly one after another, and they all, except myself, died very young;

either before they was born or just afterwards.'

'Pore feller too. I suppose th'st want to come wi' us?' the tranter murmured.

'Well, Leaf, you shall come wi' us as yours is such a melancholy family,' said old William rather sadly.

'I never see such a melancholy family as that afore in my life,' said Reuben. 'There's Leaf's mother, pore woman! Every morning I see her eyes mooning out through the panes of glass like a pot-sick winderflower; and as Leaf sings a very high treble, and we don't know what we should do without en for upper G, we'll let en come as a trate, pore feller.'

'Ay, we'll let en come 'a b'lieve,' said Mr. Penny, looking up, as the pull happened to be at that moment.

'Now,' continued the tranter, dispersing

by a new tone of voice this digression about Leaf; 'as to going to see the pa'son, one of us might just call and ask en his maning, and 'twould be just as well done; but it will add a bit of a flourish to the cause if the quire waits on him as a body. Then the great thing to mind is, not for any of our fellers to be nervous; so before starting we'll one and all come to my house and have a rasher of bacon; then every man-jack het a pint of cider into his inside; then we'll warm up an extra drop wi' some mead and a bit of ginger; every man take a thimbleful—just a glimmer of a drop, mind ye, no more, to finish off his inner man—and march off to Pa'son Mayble. Why, sonnies, a man's not himself till he is fortified wi' a bit and a drop? We shall be able to look any gentleman in the face then without sin or shame.'

Mail just recovered from a deep meditation and downward glance into the earth in time to give a cordial approval to this line of action, and the meeting adjourned.

CHAPTER IV.

THE INTERVIEW WITH THE VICAR.

At six o'clock the next day, the whole body of men in the choir emerged from the tranter's door, and advanced with a firm step down the lane. This dignity of march gradually became obliterated as they went on, and by the time they reached the hill behind the vicarage, a faint resemblance to a flock of sheep might have been discerned in the venerable party. A word from the tranter, however, set them right again; and as they descended the hill, the regular tramp, tramp, tramp of the united feet was

clearly audible from the vicarage garden. At the opening of the gate there was another short interval of irregular shuffling, caused by a rather peculiar habit the gate had, when swung open quickly, of striking against the bank and slamming back into the opener's face.

'Now keep step again, will ye?' said the tranter solemnly. 'It looks better, and more becomes the high class of errand which has brought us here.' Thus they advanced to the door.

At Reuben's ring the more modest of the group turned aside, adjusted their hats, and looked critically at any shrub that happened to lie in the line of vision; endeavouring thus to give any one who chanced to look out of the windows the impression that their request, whatever it was going to be, was rather a casual thought occurring whilst they were inspecting the vicar's

shrubbery and grass-plot than a predetermined thing. The tranter, who, coming frequently to the vicarage with luggage, coals, firewood, &c., had none of the awe for its precincts that filled the breasts of most of the others, fixed his eyes with much strong feeling on the knocker during this interval of waiting. The knocker having no characteristic worthy of notice, he relinquished it for a knot in one of the door-panels, and studied the winding lines of the grain.

'O, sir, please, here's tranter Dewy, and old William Dewy, and young Richard Dewy, O, and all the quire too, sir, except the boys, a-come to see you!' said Mr. Maybold's maid-servant to Mr. Maybold, the pupils of her eyes dilating like circles in a pond.

'All the choir?' said the astonished vicar (who may be shortly described as a good-

looking young man with courageous eyes, timid mouth, and neutral nose), looking fixedly at his parlour-maid after speaking, like a man who fancied he had seen her face before but couldn't recollect where.

'And they looks very firm, and tranter Dewy do turn neither to the right hand nor to the left, but looked quite straight and solemn with his mind made up!'

'O, all the choir,' repeated the vicar to himself, trying by that simple device to trot out his thoughts on what the choir could come for.

'Yes; every man-jack of 'em, as I be alive!' (The parlour-maid was rather local in manner, having in fact been raised in the same village.) 'Really, sir, 'tis thoughted by many in town and country that—'

'Town and country!—Heavens, I had no idea that I was public property in this way!' said the vicar, his face acquiring a

hue somewhere between that of the rose and the peony. 'Well, "It is thought in town and country that—" '

'It is thought that you are going to get it hot and strong!—excusen my incivility, sir.'

The vicar suddenly recalled to his recollection that he had long ago settled it to be decidedly a mistake to encourage his servant Jane in giving personal opinions. The servant Jane saw by the vicar's face that he suddenly recalled this fact to his mind; and removing her forehead from the edge of the door, and rubbing away the indent that edge had made, vanished into the passage as Mr. Maybold remarked, 'Show them in, Jane.'

A few minutes later a shuffling and jostling (reduced to as refined a form as was compatible with the nature of shuffles and jostles) was heard in the passage; then an earnest and prolonged wiping of shoes,

conveying the notion that volumes of mud had to be removed; but the roads being so clean that not a particle of dirt appeared on the choir's boots (those of all the elder members being newly oiled, and Dick's brightly polished), this wiping must be set down simply as a desire to show that these respectable men had no intention or wish to take a mean advantage of clean roads for curtailing proper ceremonies. Next there came a powerful whisper from the same quarter:—

'Now stand stock-still there, my sonnies, one and all! and don't make no noise; and keep your backs close to the wall, that company may pass in and out easy if they want to without squeezing through ye: and we two be enough to go in.' . . . . . The voice was the tranter's.

'I wish I could go in, too, and see the sight!' said a reedy voice—that of Leaf.

'Tis a pity Leaf is so terrible silly, or else he might,' another said.

'I never in my life seed a quire go into a study to have it out about the playing and singing,' pleaded Leaf; 'and I should like, too, to see it just once!'

'Very well; we'll let en come in,' said the tranter feelingly. 'You'll be like chips in porridge, Leaf—neither good nor hurt. All right, my sonny, come along;' and immediately himself, old William, and Leaf appeared in the room.

'We've took the liberty to come and see yé, sir,' said Reuben, letting his hat hang in his left hand, and touching with his right the brim of an imaginary one on his head. 'We've come to see ye, sir, man and man, and no offence, I hope?'

'None at all,' said Mr. Maybold.

'This old aged man standing by my side is father; William Dewy by name, sir.'

'Yes; I see it is,' said the vicar, nodding aside to old William, who smiled.

'I thought ye mightn't know en without his bass-viol,' said the tranter apologetically. 'You see, he always wears his best clothes and his bass-viol a-Sundays, and it do make such a difference in a old man's look.'

'And who's that young man?' the vicar said.

'Tell the pa'son yer name,' said the tranter, turning to Leaf, who stood with his elbows nailed back to a bookcase.

'Please, Thomas Leaf, your holiness!' said Leaf, trembling.

'I hope you'll excuse his looks being so very thin,' continued the tranter deprecatingly, turning to the vicar again. 'But 'tisn't his fault, pore feller. He's rather silly by nater, and could never get fat; though he's a excellent tribble, and so we keep him on.'

'I never had no head, sir,' said Leaf, eagerly grasping at this opportunity for being forgiven his existence.

'Ah, poor young man!' said Mr. Maybold.

'Bless you, he don't mind it a bit, if you don't, sir,' said the tranter assuringly. 'Do ye, Leaf?'

'Not I—not a morsel—hee, hee! I was afeard it mightn't please your holiness, sir, that's all.'

The tranter, finding Leaf get on so very well through his negative qualities, was tempted in a fit of generosity to advance him still higher, by giving him credit for positive ones. 'He's very clever for a silly chap, good-now, sir. You never knowed a young feller keep his smock-frocks so clane; very honest too. His ghastly looks is all there is against en, pore feller; but we can't help our looks, you know, sir.'

'True: we cannot. You live with your mother, I think, Leaf?'

The tranter looked at Leaf to express that the most friendly assistant to his tongue could do no more for him now, and that he must be left to his own resources.

'Yes, sir: a widder, sir. Ah, if brother Jim had lived she'd have had a clever son to keep her without work!'

'Indeed! poor woman. Give her this half-crown. I'll call and see your mother.'

'Say, "Thank you, sir,"' the tranter whispered imperatively towards Leaf.

'Thank you, sir!' said Leaf.

'That's it, then; sit down, Leaf,' said Mr. Maybold.

'Y-yes, sir!'

The tranter cleared his throat after this accidental parenthesis about Leaf, rectified his bodily position, and began his speech.

'Mr. Mayble,' he said, 'I hope you'll

excuse my common way, but I always like to look things in the face.'

Reuben made a point of fixing this sentence in the vicar's mind by giving a smart nod at the conclusion of it, and then gazing hard out of the window.

Mr. Maybold and old William looked in the same direction, apparently under the impression that the things' faces alluded to were there visible.

'What I have been thinking'—the tranter implied by this use of the past tense that he was hardly so discourteous as to be positively thinking it then—'is that the quire ought to be gie'd a little time, and not done away wi' till Christmas, as a fair thing between man and man. And, Mr. Mayble, I hope you'll excuse my common way?'

'I will, I will. Till Christmas,' the vicar murmured, stretching the two words

to a great length, as if the distance to Christmas might be measured in that way. 'Well, I want you all to understand that I have no personal fault to find, and that I don't wish to change the church music in a forcible way, or in a way which should hurt the feelings of any parishioners. Why I have at last spoken definitely on the subject is that a player has been brought under—I may say pressed upon—my notice several times by one of the churchwardens. And as the organ I brought with me is here waiting' (pointing to a cabinet-organ standing in the study), 'there is no reason for longer delay.'

'We made a mistake I suppose then, sir? But we understood the young lady didn't want to play particularly?' The tranter arranged his countenance to signify that he did not want to be inquisitive in the least.

'No, nor did she. Nor did I definitely

wish her to just yet; for your playing is very good. But as I said, one of the churchwardens has been so anxious for a change, that as matters stand, I couldn't consistently refuse my consent.'

Now for some reason or other, the vicar at this point seemed to have an idea that he had prevaricated; and as an honest vicar, it was a thing he determined not to do. He corrected himself, blushing as he did so, though why he should blush was not known to Reuben.

'Understand me rightly,' he said: 'the churchwarden proposed it to me, but I had thought myself of getting—Miss Day to play.'

'Which churchwarden might that be who proposed her, sir?—excusing my common way.' The tranter intimated by his tone, that so far from being inquisitive he did not even wish to ask a single question.

'Mr. Shinar, I believe.'

'Clk, my sonny!—beg your pardon, sir, that's only a form of words of mine, sir, and slipped out accidental—sir, he nourishes enmity against us for some reason or another; perhaps because we played rather hard upon en Christmas night. I don't know; but 'tis certain-sure that Mr. Shinar's rale love for music of a particular kind isn't his reason. He've no more ear than that chair. But let that pass.'

'I don't think you should conclude that, because Mr. Shinar wants a different music, he has any ill-feeling for you. I myself, I must own, prefer organ-music to any other. I consider it most proper, and feel justified in endeavouring to introduce it; but then, although other music is better, I don't say yours is not good.'

'Well then, Mr. Mayble, since death's

to be, we'll die like men any day you names, (excusing my common way).'

Mr. Maybold bowed his head.

'All we thought was, that for us old ancient singers to be finished off quietly at no time in particular, as now, in the Sundays after Easter, would seem rather mean in the eyes of other parishes, sir. But if we fell glorious with a bit of a flourish at Christmas, we should have a respectable end, and not dwindle away at some nameless paltry second-Sunday-after or Sunday-next-before something, that's got no name of his own.'

'Yes, yes, that's reasonable; I own it's reasonable.'

'You see, Mr. Mayble, we've got—do I keep you inconveniently long, sir?'

'No, no.'

'We've got our feelings—father there especially, Mr. Mayble.'

The tranter, in his eagerness to explain,

had advanced his person to within six inches of the vicar's.

'Certainly, certainly!' said Mr. Maybold, retreating a little for convenience of seeing. 'You are all enthusiastic on the subject, and I am all the more gratified to find you so. A Laodicean lukewarmness is worse than wrongheadedness itself.'

'Exactly, sir. In fact now, Mr. Mayble,' Reuben continued, more impressively, and advancing a little closer still to the vicar, 'father there is a perfect figure of wonder, in the way of being fond of music!'

The vicar drew back a little farther, the tranter suddenly also standing back a foot or two, to throw open the view of his father, and pointing to him at the same time.

Old William moved uneasily in the large chair, and constructing a minute smile on the mere edge of his lips, for good-manners, said he was indeed very fond of tunes.

'Now, sir, you see exactly how it is,' Reuben continued, appealing to Mr. Maybold's sense of justice by looking sideways into his eyes. The vicar seemed to see how it was so well, that the gratified tranter walked up to him again with even vehement eagerness, so that his waistcoat-buttons almost rubbed against the vicar's as he continued: 'As to father, if you or I, or any man or woman of the present generation, at the time music is playing, was to shake your fist in father's face, as might be this way, and say, "Don't you be delighted with that music!"'—the tranter went back to where Leaf was sitting, and held his fist so close to Leaf's face, that the latter pressed his head back against the wall: 'All right, Leaf, my sonny, I won't hurt you; 'tis just to show my maning to Mr. Mayble.—As I was saying, if you or I, or any man, was to shake your fist in father's face this way,

and say, "William, your life or your music!" he'd say, "My life!" Now that's father's nater all over; and you see, sir, it must hurt the feelings of a man of that kind, for him and his bass-viol to be done away wi' neck and crop.'

The tranter went back to the vicar's front, and looked earnestly at a very minute point in his face.

'True, true, Dewy,' Mr. Maybold answered, trying to withdraw his head and shoulders without moving his feet; but finding this impracticable, edging back another inch. These frequent retreats had at last jammed Mr. Maybold between his easy-chair and the edge of the table.

And at the moment of the announcement of the choir, Mr. Maybold had just re-dipped the pen he was using; at their entry, instead of wiping it, he had laid it on the table with the nib overhanging. At

the last retreat his coat-tails came in contact with the pen, and down it rolled, first against the back of the chair; thence turning a summersault into the seat; thence rolling to the floor with a rattle.

The vicar stooped for his pen, and the tranter, wishing to show that, however great their ecclesiastical differences, his mind was not so small as to let this affect his social feelings, stooped also.

'And have you anything else you want to explain to me, Dewy?' said Mr. Maybold from under the table.

'Nothing, sir. And, Mr. Mayble, you be not offended? I hope you see our desire is reason?' said the tranter from under the chair.

'Quite, quite; and I shouldn't think of refusing to listen to such a reasonable request,' the vicar replied. Seeing that Reuben had secured the pen, he resumed his vertical position, and added, 'You know,

Dewy, it is often said how difficult a matter it is to act up to our convictions and please all parties. It may be said with equal truth, that it is difficult for a man of any appreciativeness to have convictions at all. Now in my case, I see right in you, and right in Shinar. I see that violins are good, and that an organ is good; and when we introduce the organ, it will not be that fiddles were bad, but that an organ was better. That you'll clearly understand, Dewy?'

'I will; and thank you very much for such feelings, sir. Piph-h-h-h! How the blood do get into my head to be sure, whenever I quat down like that!' said Reuben, having also risen to his feet, sticking the pen vertically in the inkstand and almost through the bottom, that it might not roll down again under any circumstances whatever.

Now the ancient body of minstrels in

the passage felt their curiosity surging higher and higher as the minutes passed. Dick, not having much affection for this errand, soon grew tired, and went away in the direction of the school. Yet their sense of propriety would probably have restrained them from any attempt to discover what was going on in the study, had not the vicar's pen fallen to the floor. The conviction that the movement of chairs, &c. necessitated by the search, could only have been caused by the catastrophe of a bloody fight, overpowered all other considerations; and they advanced to the door, which had only just fallen to. Thus, when Mr. Maybold raised his eyes after the stooping, he beheld glaring through the door Mr. Penny in full-length portraiture, Mail's face and shoulders above Mr. Penny's head, Spinks's forehead and eyes over Mail's crown, and a fractional part of Bowman's countenance

under Spinks's arm—crescent-shaped portions of other heads and faces being visible behind these—the whole dozen and odd eyes bristling with eager inquiry.

Mr. Penny, as is the case with excitable bootmakers and men, on seeing the vicar look at him, and hearing no word spoken, thought it incumbent upon himself to say something of any kind. Nothing suggested itself till he had looked for about half a minute at the vicar.

'You'll excuse my naming it, sir,' he said, regarding with much commiseration the mere surface of the vicar's face; 'but perhaps you don't know, sir, that your chin have bust out a-bleeding where you cut yourself a-shaving this morning, sir.'

'Now, that was the stooping, depend upon't, Mr. Mayble,' the tranter suggested, also looking with much interest at the vicar's chin. 'Blood always will bust out

again if you hang down the member that ha' been bleeding.'

Old William raised his eyes and watched the vicar's bleeding chin likewise; and Leaf advanced two or three paces from the bookcase, absorbed in the contemplation of the same phenomenon, with parted lips and delighted eyes.

'Dear me, dear me!' said Mr. Maybold hastily, looking very red, and brushing his chin with his hand, then taking out his handkerchief and wiping the place.

'That's it, sir; all right again now, 'a b'lieve—a mere nothing,' said Mr. Penny. 'A little bit of fur off your hat will stop it in a minute if it should bust out again.'

'I'll let ye have a bit of fur off mine,' said Reuben, to show his good feeling; 'my hat isn't so new as yours, sir, and 'twon't hurt mine a bit.'

'No, no; thank you, thank you,' Mr. Maybold again nervously replied.

''Twas rather a deep cut seemingly, sir?' said Reuben, thinking these the kindest and best remarks he could make.

'O, no; not particularly.'

'Well, sir, your hand will shake sometimes a-shaving, and just when it comes into your head that you may cut yourself, there's the blood.'

'I have been revolving in my mind that question of the time at which we make the change,' said Mr. Maybold, 'and I know you'll meet me half-way. I think Christmas-day as much too late for me as the present time is too early for you. I suggest Michaelmas or thereabout as a convenient time for both parties; for I think your objection to a Sunday which has no name is not one of any real weight.'

'Very good, sir. I suppose martel men

mustn't expect their own way entirely; and I express in all our names that we'll make shift and be satisfied with what you say.' The tranter touched the brim of his imaginary hat again, and all the choir did the same. 'About Michaelmas, then, as far as you be concerned, sir, and then we make room for the next generation.'

'About Michaelmas,' said the vicar.

CHAPTER V.

RETURNING HOMEWARD.

'"A took it very well, then?" said Mail, as they all walked up the hill.

'He behaved like a man, 'a did so,' said the tranter. 'Supposing this tree here was Pa'son Mayble as might be, and here be I standing, and that large stone is father sitting in the easy-chair. "Dewy," says he, "I don't wish to change the church music in a forcible way."'

'Now, that was very nice o' the man.'

'Proper nice—out and out nice. The fact is,' said Reuben confidentially, ''tis

how you take a man. Everybody must be managed. Queens must be managed: kings must be managed; for men want managing almost as much as women, and that's saying a good deal.'

''Tis truly !' murmured the husbands.

'Pa'son Mayble and I were as good friends all through it as if we'd been sworn brothers. Ay, the man's well enough; 'tis what's in his head that spoils him.'

'There's really no believing half you hear about people nowadays.'

'Bless ye, my sonnies ! 'tisn't the pa'son's move at all. That gentleman over there' (the tranter nodded in the direction of Shinar's farm) 'is at the root of the mischief.'

'What ! Shinar ?'

'Ay; and I see what the pa'son don't see. Why, Shinar is for putting forward that young woman that only last night I

was saying was our Dick's sweetheart, but I suppose can't be, and making much of her in the sight of the congregation, and thinking he'll win her by showing her off; well, perhaps 'a will.'

'Then the music is second to the woman, the other churchwarden is second to Shinar, the pa'son is second to the churchwardens, and God A'mighty is nowhere at all.'

'That's true; and you see,' continued Reuben, 'at the very beginning it put me in a stud as to how to quarrel wi' en. In short, to save my soul, I couldn't quarrel wi' such a civil man without belying my conscience. Says he to father there, in a voice as quiet as a lamb's, "William, you are a old aged man, William, as all shall be," says he, "and sit down in my easy-chair, and rest yourself." And down father set. I could fain ha' laughed at thee, father; for thou'st take it

so unconcerned at first, and then looked so frightened when the chair-bottom sunk in.'

'Ye see,' said old William, hastening to explain, 'I was alarmed to find the bottom gie way—what should I know o' spring bottoms?—and thought I had broke it down: and of course as to breaking down a man's chair, I didn't wish any such thing.'

'And, naibours, when a feller, ever so much up for a miff, d'see his own father sitting in his enemy's easy-chair, and a pore chap like Leaf made the best of, as if he almost had brains—why, it knocks all the wind out of his sail at once: it did out of mine.'

'If that young figure of fun—Fance Day, I mean,' said Bowman, 'hadn't been so mighty forward wi' showing herself off to Shinar and Dick and the rest, 'tis my belief we should never ha' left the gallery.'

''Tis my belief that though Shinar fired

the bullets, the parson made 'em,' said Mr. Penny. 'My wife sticks to it that he's in love wi' her.'

'That's a thing we shall never know. I can't translate her, nohow.'

'Thou'st ought to be able to translate such a little chiel as she,' the tranter observed.

'The littler the maid, the bigger the riddle, to my mind. And coming of such a stock, too, she may well be a twister.'

'Yes; Geoffrey Day is a clever man if ever there was one. Never says anything: not he.'

'Never.'

'You might live wi' that man, my sonnies, a hundred years, and never know there was anything in him.'

'Ay; one o' these up-country London ink-bottle fellers would call Geoffrey a fool.'

'Ye never find out what's in that

man: never. Silent? ah, he is silent! He can keep silence well. That man's silence is wonderful to listen to.'

'There's so much sense in it. Every moment of it is brimming over with sound understanding.'

''A can keep a very clever silence—very clever truly,' echoed Leaf. ''A looks at me as if 'a could see my thoughts running round like the works of a clock.'

'Well, all will agree that the man can pause well in conversation, be it a long time or be it a short time. And though we can't expect his daughter to inherit his silence, she may have a few dribblets from his sense.'

'And his pocket, perhaps.'

'Yes; the nine hundred pound that everybody says he's worth; but I call it four hundred and fifty; for I never believe more than half I hear.'

'Well, 'tis to be believed he've made a pound or two, and I suppose the maid will have it, since there's nobody else. But 'tis rather sharp upon her, if she's born to fortune, to make her become as if not born for it, by using her to work so hard.'

''Tis all upon his principle. A long-headed feller!'

'Ah,' murmured Spinks, ''twould be sharper upon her if she were born for fortune, and not to it! I suffer from that affliction.'

CHAPTER VI.

YALBURY WOOD AND THE KEEPER'S HOUSE.

A MOOD of blitheness rarely experienced even by young men was Dick's on the following Monday morning. It was the week after the Easter holidays, and he was journeying along with Smart the mare and the light spring-cart, watching the damp slopes of the hill-sides as they streamed in the warmth of the sun, which at this unsettled season shone on the grass with the freshness of an occasional inspector rather than as an accustomed proprietor. His errand was to fetch Fancy, and some additional

household goods, to her dwelling at Mellstock. The distant view was darkly shaded with clouds; but the nearer parts of the landscape were whitely illumined by the visible rays of the sun streaming down across the heavy gray shade behind.

The tranter had not yet told his son of the state of Shinar's heart, that had been suggested to him by Shinar's movements. He preferred to let such delicate affairs right themselves; experience having taught him that the uncertain phenomenon of love, as it existed in other people, was not a groundwork upon which a single action of his own life could be founded.

The game-keeper, Geoffrey Day, lived in the depths of Yalbury Wood; but the wood was intersected by a lane at a place not far from the house, and some trees had of late years been felled, to give the solitary cottager a glimpse of the occasional passers-by.

It was a satisfaction to walk into the keeper's house, even as a stranger, on a fine spring morning like the present. A curl of wood-smoke came from the chimney, and drooped over the roof like a blue feather in a lady's hat; and the sun shone obliquely upon the patch of grass in front, which reflected its brightness through the open doorway and up the staircase opposite, lighting up each riser with a shiny green radiance, and leaving the top of each step in shade.

The window-sill of the front room was between four and five feet from the floor, dropping inwardly to a broad low bench, over which, as well as over the whole surface of the wall beneath, there always hung a deep shade, which was considered objectionable on every ground save one, namely, that the perpetual sprinkling of seeds and water by the caged canary above was not

noticed as an eyesore by visitors. The window was set with thickly-leaded diamond glazing, formed, especially in the lower panes, of knotty glass of various shades of green. Nothing was better known to Fancy than the extravagant manner in which these circular knots or eyes distorted everything seen through them from the outside—lifting hats from heads, shoulders from bodies; scattering the spokes of cart-wheels, and bending the straight fir-trunks into semicircles. The ceiling was carried by a huge beam traversing its midst, from the side of which projected a large nail, used solely and constantly as a peg for Geoffrey's hat; the nail was arched by a rainbow-shaped stain, imprinted by the brim of the said hat when it was hung there dripping wet.

The most striking point about the room was the furniture. This was a repetition

upon inanimate objects of the old principle introduced by Noah, consisting for the most part of two articles of every sort. The duplicate system of furnishing owed its existence to the forethought of Fancy's mother, exercised from the date of Fancy's birthday onwards. The arrangement spoke for itself; nobody who knew the tone of the household could look at the goods without being aware that the second set was a provision for Fancy, when she should marry and have a house of her own. The most noticeable instance was a pair of green-faced eight-day clocks, ticking alternately, which were severally two and half minutes and three minutes striking the hour of twelve, one proclaiming, in Italian flourishes, Thomas Wood as the name of its maker, and the other—arched at the top and altogether of more cynical appearance—that of Ezekiel Sparrowgrass. These were

two departed clockmakers of Casterbridge, whose desperate rivalry throughout their lives was nowhere more emphatically perpetuated than here at Geoffrey's. These chief specimens of the marriage provision were supported on the right by a couple of kitchen dressers, each fitted complete with their cups, dishes, and plates, in their turn followed by two dumb-waiters, two family Bibles, two warming-pans, and two intermixed sets of chairs.

But the position last reached — the chimney-corner — was, after all, the most attractive side of the parallelogram. It was large enough to admit, in addition to Geoffrey himself, Geoffrey's wife, her chair, and her work-table, entirely within the line of the mantel, without danger or even inconvenience from the heat of the fire; and was spacious enough overhead to allow of the insertion of wood poles for the hanging

of bacon, which were cloaked with long shreds of soot, floating on the draught like the tattered banners on the walls of ancient aisles.

These points were common to most chimney corners of the neighbourhood; but one feature there was which made Geoffrey's fireside not only an object of interest to casual aristocratic visitors — to whom every cottage fireside was more or less a curiosity — but the admiration of friends who were accustomed to fireplaces of the ordinary hamlet model. This peculiarity was a little window in the chimney-back, almost over the fire, around which the smoke crept caressingly when it left the perpendicular course. The window-board was curiously stamped with black circles, burnt thereon by the heated bottoms of drinking-cups, which had rested there after previously standing on the hot ashes of the

hearth for the purpose of warming their contents, the result giving to the ledge the look of an envelope which has passed through innumerable post-offices.

Fancy was gliding about the room preparing dinner, her head inclining now to the right, now to the left, and singing the tips and ends of tunes that sprang up in her mind like mushrooms. The footsteps of Mrs. Day could be heard in the room overhead. Fancy went finally to the door.

'Father! Dinner.'

A tall spare figure was seen advancing by the window with periodical steps, and the keeper entered from the garden. He appeared to be a man who was always looking down, as if trying to recollect something he said yesterday. The surface of his face was fissured rather than wrinkled, and over and under his eyes were folds which seemed as a kind of exterior eyelids.

His nose had been thrown backwards by a blow in a poaching fray, so that when the sun was low and shining in his face, people could see far into his head. There was in him a quiet grimness, which would in his moments of displeasure have become surliness, had it not been tempered by honesty of soul, and which was often wrong-headedness because not allied with subtlety.

Although not an extraordinarily taciturn man among friends slightly richer than he, he never wasted words upon outsiders, and to his trapper Enoch his ideas were seldom conveyed by any other means than nods and shakes of the head. Their long acquaintance with each other's ways, and the nature of their labours, rendered words between them almost superfluous as vehicles of thought, whilst the coincidence of their horizons, and the astonishing

equality of their social views, by startling the keeper from time to time as very damaging to the theory of master and man, strictly forbade any indulgence in words as courtesies.

Behind the keeper came Enoch (who had been assisting in the garden) at the well-considered chronological distance of three minutes—an interval of non-appearance on the trapper's part not arrived at without some reflection. Four minutes had been found to express indifference to indoor arrangements, and simultaneousness had implied too great an anxiety about meals.

'A little earlier than usual, Fancy,' the keeper said, as he sat down and looked at the clocks. 'That Ezekiel Sparrowgrass o' thine is tearing on afore Thomas Wood again.'

'I kept in the middle between them,'

said Fancy, also looking at the two clocks.

'Better stick to Thomas,' said her father. 'There's a healthy beat in Thomas that would lead a man to swear by en off-hand. He is as true as the Squire's time. How is it your stap-mother isn't here?'

As Fancy was about to reply, the rattle of wheels was heard, and 'Weh-hey, Smart!' in Mr. Richard Dewy's voice rolled into the cottage from round the corner of the house.

'Hullo! there's Dewy's cart come for thee, Fancy—Dick driving—afore time, too. Well, ask the lad to have a bit and a drop with us.'

Dick on entering made a point of implying by his general bearing that he took an interest in Fancy simply as in one of the same race and country as himself; and they all sat down. Dick could have

wished her manner had not been so entirely free from all apparent consciousness of those accidental meetings of theirs; but he let the thought pass. Enoch sat diagonally at a table afar off, under the corner cupboard, and drank his cider from a long perpendicular pint cup, having tall fir-trees done in brown on its sides. He threw occasional remarks into the general tide of conversation, and with this advantage to himself, that he participated in the pleasures of a talk (slight as it was) at meal-times, without saddling himself with the responsibility of sustaining it.

'Why don't your stap-mother come down, Fancy?' said Geoffrey. 'You'll excuse her, Mister Dick, she's a little quare sometimes.'

'O yes,—quite,' said Richard, as if he were in the habit of excusing several people every day.

'She d'belong to that class of woman-kind that become second wives: a rum class rather.'

'Indeed,' said Dick, with sympathy for an indefinite something.

'Yes; and 'tis trying to a female, especially if you've been a first wife, as she hev.'

'Very trying it must be.'

'Yes: you see her first husband was a young man, who let her go too far; in fact, she used to kick up Bob's-a-dying at the least thing in the world. And when I'd married her and found it out, I thought, thinks I, "'Tis too late now to begin to cure ye;" and so I let her bide. But she's quare,—very quare, at times!'

'I'm sorry to hear that.'

'Yes: there; wives be such a provoking class of society, because though they be never right, they be never more than half wrong.'

Fancy seemed uneasy under the infliction

of this household moralising, which might tend to damage the airy-fairy nature that Dick, as maiden shrewdness told her, had accredited her with. Her dead silence impressed Geoffrey with the notion that something in his words did not agree with her educated ideas, and he changed the conversation.

'Did Fred Shinar send the cask o' drink, Fancy ?'

'I think he did: O yes, he did.'

'Nice solid feller, Fred Shinar!' said Geoffrey to Dick as he helped himself to gravy, bringing the spoon round to his plate by way of the potato-dish, to obviate a stain on the cloth in the event of a spill.

Geoffrey's eyes had been fixed upon his plate for the previous four or five minutes, and in removing them he had only carried them to the spoon, which, from its fulness and the distance of its transit, necessitated a

steady watching through the whole of the route. Just as intently as the keeper's eyes had been fixed on the spoon, Fancy's had been fixed on her father's, without premeditation or the slightest phase of furtiveness; but there they were fastened. This was the reason why:

Dick was sitting next to her on the right side, and on the side of the table opposite to her father. Fancy had laid her right hand lightly down upon the table-cloth for an instant, and to her alarm Dick, after dropping his fork and brushing his forehead as a reason, flung down his own left hand, overlapping a third of Fancy's with it, and keeping it there. So the innocent Fancy, instead of pulling her hand from the trap, settled her eyes on her father's, to guard against his discovery of this perilous game of Dick's. Dick finished his mouthful; Fancy finished her crumb, and nothing was done beyond watch-

ing Geoffrey's eyes. Then the hands slid apart; Fancy's going over six inches of cloth, Dick's over one. Geoffrey's eye had risen.

'I said Fred Shinar is a nice solid feller,' he repeated, more emphatically.

'He is; yes, he is,' stammered Dick; 'but to me he is little more than a stranger.'

'True. There, I know en as well as any man can be known. And you know en very well too, don't ye, Fancy?'

Geoffrey put on a tone expressing that these words signified at present about one hundred times the amount of meaning they conveyed literally.

Dick looked anxious.

'Will you pass me some bread?' said Fancy in a flurry, the red of her face becoming slightly disordered, and looking as solicitous as a human being could look about a piece of bread.

'Ay, that I will,' replied the unconscious

Geoffrey. 'Ay,' he continued, returning to the displaced idea, 'we be likely to remain friendly wi' Mr. Shinar if the wheels d'run smooth.'

'An excellent thing — a very capital thing, as I should say,' the youth answered with exceeding relevance, considering that his thoughts, instead of following Geoffrey's remark, were nestling at a distance of about two feet on his left the whole time.

'A young woman's face will turn the north wind, Master Richard: my heart if 'twon't.' Dick looked more anxious and was attentive in earnest at these words. 'Yes; turn the north wind,' added Geoffrey after an emphatic pause. 'And though she's one of my own flesh and blood. . . . .'

'Will you fetch down a bit of raw-mil' cheese from pantry-shelf,' Fancy interrupted, as if she were famishing.

'Ay, that I will, chiel, chiel, says I, and

Mr. Shinar only asking last Saturday night . . . . cheese you said, Fancy?'

Dick controlled his emotion at these mysterious allusions to Mr. Shinar,—the better enabled to do so by perceiving that Fancy's heart went not with her father's—and spoke like a stranger to the affairs of the neighbourhood. 'Yes, there's a great deal to be said upon the power of maiden faces in settling your courses,' he said as the keeper retreated for the cheese.

'The conversation is taking a very strange turn: nothing that *I* have ever done warrants such things being said,' murmured Fancy with emphasis, just loud enough to reach Dick's ears.

'You think to yourself, 'twas to be,' cried Enoch from his distant corner, by way of filling up the vacancy caused by Geoffrey's momentary absence. 'And so you marry her, Master Dewy, and there's an end o't.'

'Pray don't say such things, Enoch,' said Fancy severely, upon which Enoch relapsed into servitude.

'If we are doomed to marry, we marry; if we are doomed to remain single, we do,' replied Dick.

Geoffrey had by this time sat down again, and he now made his lips thin by severely straining them across his gums, and looked out of the fireplace window to the end of the paddock with solemn scrutiny. 'That's not the case with some folk,' he said at length, as if he read the words on a board at the farther end of the paddock.

Fancy looked interested, and Dick said, 'No?'

'There's that wife o' mine. It was her doom not to be nobody's wife at all in the wide universe. But she made up her mind that she would, and did it twice over. Doom? Doom is nothing beside a elderly woman—quite a chiel in her hands.'

A movement was now heard along the upstairs passage and footsteps descending. The door at the foot of the stairs opened and the second Mrs. Day appeared in view, looking fixedly at the table as she advanced towards it, with apparent obliviousness of the presence of any other human being than herself. In short, if the table had been the personages, and the persons the table, her glance would have been the most natural imaginable.

She showed herself to possess an ordinary woman's face, iron-gray hair, hardly any hips, and a great deal of cleanliness in a broad white apron-string, as it appeared upon the waist of her dark stuff dress.

'People will run away with a story now, I suppose,' she began saying, 'that Jane Day's tablecloths be as poor and ragged as any union beggar's!'

Dick now perceived that the tablecloth

was a little the worse for wear, and reflecting for a moment, concluded that 'people' in step-mother language probably meant himself. On lifting his eyes he found that Mrs. Day had vanished again upstairs, and presently returned with an armful of new damask-linen tablecloths, folded square and hard as boards by long compression. These she flounced down into a chair; then took one, shook it out from its folds, and spread it on the table by instalments, transferring the plates and dishes one by one from the old to the new cloth.

'And I suppose they'll say, too, that she hasn't a decent knife and fork in her house!'

'I shouldn't say any such ill-natured thing, I am sure—' began Dick. But Mrs. Day had vanished into the next room. Fancy appeared distressed.

'Very strange woman, isn't she?' said Geoffrey, quietly going on with his dinner.

'But 'tis too late to attempt curing. My heart! 'tis so growed into her that 'twould kill her to take it out. Ay, she's very quare: you'd be amazed to see what valuable goods we've got stowed away upstairs.'

Back again came Mrs. Day with a box of bright steel horn-handled knives, silver forks, carver, and all complete. These were wiped of the preservative oil which coated them, and then a knife and fork were laid down to each individual with a bang, the carving knife and fork thrust into the meat dish, and the old ones they had hitherto used tossed away.

Geoffrey placidly cut a slice with the new knife and fork, and asked Dick if he wanted any more.

The table had been spread for the mixed midday meal of dinner and tea, which is common among cottagers. 'The parishioners about here,' continued Mrs.

Day, not looking at any living being, but snatching up the brown delf tea-things, 'be the laziest, gossipest, poachest, jailest set of any ever I come among. And they'll talk about my teapot and tea-things next, I suppose!' She vanished with the teapot, cups, and saucers, and reappeared with a tea-service in white china, and a packet wrapped in brown paper. This was removed, together with folds of tissue-paper underneath; and a brilliant silver teapot appeared.

'I'll help to put the things right,' said Fancy soothingly, and rising from her seat. 'I ought to have laid out better things, I suppose. But' (here she enlarged her looks so as to include Dick) 'I have been away from home a good deal, and I make shocking blunders in my housekeeping.' Smiles and suavity were then dispensed all around by the bright little bird.

After a little more preparation and modification, Mrs. Day took her seat at the head of the table, and during the latter or tea division of the meal, presided with much composure. It may cause some surprise to learn that, now her vagary was over, she showed herself to be an excellent person with much common sense, and even a religious seriousness of tone on matters pertaining to her afflictions.

END OF VOL. I.

LONDON:
ROBSON AND SONS, PRINTERS, PANCRAS ROAD, N.W.