

Thomas Hardy

The Return Of The Native

PREFACE

The date at which the following events are assumed to have occurred may be set down as between 1840 and 1850, when the old watering place herein called "Budmouth" still retained sufficient afterglow from its Georgian gaiety and prestige to lend it an absorbing attractiveness to the romantic and imaginative soul of a lonely dweller inland.

Under the general name of "Egdon Heath," which has been given to the sombre scene of the story, are united or typified heaths of various real names, to the number of at least a dozen; these being virtually one in character and aspect, though their original unity, or partial unity, is now somewhat disguised by intrusive strips and slices brought under the plough with varying degrees of success, or planted to woodland.

It is pleasant to dream that some spot in the extensive tract whose southwestern quarter is here described, may be the heath of that traditionary King of Wessex-Lear.

July, 1895.

"To sorrow
I bade good morrow,
And thought to leave her far away behind;

But cheerly, cheerly,
She loves me dearly;
She is so constant to me, and so kind.
I would deceive her,
And so leave her,
But ah! she is so constant and so kind.”

BOOK ONE — THE THREE WOMEN

1

— A Face on Which Time Makes but Little Impression

A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight, and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath embrowned itself moment by moment. Overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was as a tent which had the whole heath for its floor.

The heaven being spread with this pallid screen and the earth with the darkest vegetation, their meeting-line at the horizon was clearly marked. In such contrast the heath wore the appearance of an instalment of night which had taken up its place before its astronomical hour was come: darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while day stood distinct in the

sky. Looking upwards, a furze-cutter would have been inclined to continue work; looking down, he would have decided to finish his faggot and go home. The distant rims of the world and of the firmament seemed to be a division in time no less than a division in matter. The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half an hour to evening; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread.

In fact, precisely at this transitional point of its nightly roll into darkness the great and particular glory of the Egdon waste began, and nobody could be said to understand the heath who had not been there at such a time. It could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen, its complete effect and explanation lying in this and the succeeding hours before the next dawn; then, and only then, did it tell its true tale. The spot was, indeed, a near relation of night, and when night showed itself an apparent tendency to gravitate together could be perceived in its shades and the scene. The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it. And so the obscurity in the air and the obscurity in the land closed together in a black fraternization towards which each advanced halfway.

The place became full of a watchful intentness

now; for when other things sank bleeding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis-the final overthrow.

It was a spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it with an aspect of peculiar and kindly congruity. Smiling champaigns of flowers and fruit hardly do this, for they are permanently harmonious only with an existence of better reputation as to its issues than the present. Twilight combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity. The qualifications which frequently invest the facade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the facade of a palace double its size lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting. Fair prospects wed happily with fair times; but alas, if times be not fair! Men have oftener suffered from, the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings oversadly tinged. Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming and fair.

Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of

this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule; human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. And ultimately, to the commonest tourist, spots like Iceland may become what the vineyards and myrtle gardens of South Europe are to him now; and Heidelberg and Baden be passed unheeded as he hastens from the Alps to the sand dunes of Scheveningen.

The most thoroughgoing ascetic could feel that he had a natural right to wander on Egdon—he was keeping within the line of legitimate indulgence when he laid himself open to influences such as these. Colours and beauties so far subdued were, at least, the birthright of all. Only in summer days of highest feather did its mood touch the level of gaiety. Intensity was more usually reached by way of the solemn than by way of the brilliant, and such a sort of intensity was often arrived at during winter darkness, tempests, and mists. Then Egdon was aroused to reciprocity; for the storm was its lover, and the wind its friend. Then it became the home of strange phantoms; and it was found to be the hitherto unrecognized original of those wild regions

of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster, and are never thought of after the dream till revived by scenes like this.

It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature-neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly; neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face, suggesting tragical possibilities.

This obscure, obsolete, superseded country figures in Domesday. Its condition is recorded therein as that of heathy, furzy, briary wilderness-"Bruaria." Then follows the length and breadth in leagues; and, though some uncertainty exists as to the exact extent of this ancient lineal measure, it appears from the figures that the area of Egdon down to the present day has but little diminished. "Turbaria Bruaria"-the right of cutting heath-turf-occurs in charters relating to the district. "Overgrown with heth and mosse," says Leland of the same dark sweep of country.

Here at least were intelligible facts regarding landscape-far-reaching proofs productive of genuine satisfaction. The untameable, Ishmaelitish thing that Egdon now was it always had been. Civilization was its enemy; and ever since the beginning of vegetation its

soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the particular formation. In its venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human vanity in clothes. A person on a heath in raiment of modern cut and colours has more or less an anomalous look. We seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive.

To recline on a stump of thorn in the central valley of Egdon, between afternoon and night, as now, where the eye could reach nothing of the world outside the summits and shoulders of heathland which filled the whole circumference of its glance, and to know that everything around and underneath had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead, gave ballast to the mind adrift on change, and harassed by the irrepressible New. The great inviolate place had an ancient permanence which the sea cannot claim. Who can say of a particular sea that it is old? Distilled by the sun, kneaded by the moon, it is renewed in a year, in a day, or in an hour. The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet Egdon remained. Those surfaces were neither so steep as to be destructible by weather, nor so flat as to be the victims of floods and deposits. With the exception of an aged highway, and a still more aged barrow presently to be referred to-themselves almost crystallized to natural products by long

continuance—even the trifling irregularities were not caused by pickaxe, plough, or spade, but remained as the very finger-touches of the last geological change.

The above-mentioned highway traversed the lower levels of the heath, from one horizon to another. In many portions of its course it overlaid an old vicinal way, which branched from the great Western road of the Romans, the Via Iceniana, or Ikenild Street, hard by. On the evening under consideration it would have been noticed that, though the gloom had increased sufficiently to confuse the minor features of the heath, the white surface of the road remained almost as clear as ever.

2

— Humanity Appears upon the Scene, Hand in Hand with Trouble

Along the road walked an old man. He was white-headed as a mountain, bowed in the shoulders, and faded in general aspect. He wore a glazed hat, an ancient boat-cloak, and shoes; his brass buttons bearing an anchor upon their face. In his hand was a silver-headed walking stick, which he used as a veritable third leg, perseveringly dotting the ground with its point at every few inches' interval. One would have said that he had been, in his day, a naval officer of some sort or other.

Before him stretched the long, laborious road, dry, empty, and white. It was quite open to the heath on each side, and bisected that vast dark surface like the parting-line on a head of black hair, diminishing and bending away on the furthest horizon.

The old man frequently stretched his eyes ahead to gaze over the tract that he had yet to traverse. At length he discerned, a long distance in front of him, a moving spot, which appeared to be a vehicle, and it proved to be going the same way as that in which he himself was journeying. It was the single atom of life that the scene contained, and it only served to render the general loneliness more evident. Its rate of advance was slow, and the old man gained upon it sensibly.

When he drew nearer he perceived it to be a spring van, ordinary in shape, but singular in colour, this being a lurid red. The driver walked beside it; and, like his van, he was completely red. One dye of that tincture covered his clothes, the cap upon his head, his boots, his face, and his hands. He was not temporarily overlaid with the colour; it permeated him.

The old man knew the meaning of this. The traveller with the cart was a reddleman—a person whose vocation it was to supply farmers with redding for their sheep. He was one of a class rapidly becoming extinct in Wessex, filling at present in the rural world the place which, during the last century, the dodo occupied in the world of animals. He is a curious, interesting, and

nearly perished link between obsolete forms of life and those which generally prevail.

The decayed officer, by degrees, came up alongside his fellow-wayfarer, and wished him good evening. The reddleman turned his head, and replied in sad and occupied tones. He was young, and his face, if not exactly handsome, approached so near to handsome that nobody would have contradicted an assertion that it really was so in its natural colour. His eye, which glared so strangely through his stain, was in itself attractive-keen as that of a bird of prey, and blue as autumn mist. He had neither whisker nor moustache, which allowed the soft curves of the lower part of his face to be apparent. His lips were thin, and though, as it seemed, compressed by thought, there was a pleasant twitch at their corners now and then. He was clothed throughout in a tight-fitting suit of corduroy, excellent in quality, not much worn, and well-chosen for its purpose, but deprived of its original colour by his trade. It showed to advantage the good shape of his figure. A certain well-to-do air about the man suggested that he was not poor for his degree. The natural query of an observer would have been, Why should such a promising being as this have hidden his prepossessing exterior by adopting that singular occupation?

After replying to the old man's greeting he showed no inclination to continue in talk, although they still walked side by side, for the elder traveller seemed

to desire company. There were no sounds but that of the booming wind upon the stretch of tawny herbage around them, the crackling wheels, the tread of the men, and the footsteps of the two shaggy ponies which drew the van. They were small, hardy animals, of a breed between Galloway and Exmoor, and were known as "heath-croppers" here.

Now, as they thus pursued their way, the reddleman occasionally left his companion's side, and, stepping behind the van, looked into its interior through a small window. The look was always anxious. He would then return to the old man, who made another remark about the state of the country and so on, to which the reddleman again abstractedly replied, and then again they would lapse into silence. The silence conveyed to neither any sense of awkwardness; in these lonely places wayfarers, after a first greeting, frequently plod on for miles without speech; contiguity amounts to a tacit conversation where, otherwise than in cities, such contiguity can be put an end to on the merest inclination, and where not to put an end to it is intercourse in itself.

Possibly these two might not have spoken again till their parting, had it not been for the reddleman's visits to his van. When he returned from his fifth time of looking in the old man said, "You have something inside there besides your load?"

"Yes."

“Somebody who wants looking after?”

“Yes.”

Not long after this a faint cry sounded from the interior. The reddleman hastened to the back, looked in, and came away again.

“You have a child there, my man?”

“No, sir, I have a woman.”

“The deuce you have! Why did she cry out?”

“Oh, she has fallen asleep, and not being used to traveling, she's uneasy, and keeps dreaming.”

“A young woman?”

“Yes, a young woman.”

“That would have interested me forty years ago. Perhaps she's your wife?”

“My wife!” said the other bitterly. “She's above mating with such as I. But there's no reason why I should tell you about that.”

“That's true. And there's no reason why you should not. What harm can I do to you or to her?”

The reddleman looked in the old man's face. “Well, sir,” he said at last, “I knew her before today, though perhaps it would have been better if I had not. But she's nothing to me, and I am nothing to her; and she wouldn't have been in my van if any better carriage had been there to take her.”

“Where, may I ask?”

“At Anglebury.”

“I know the town well. What was she doing

there?"

"Oh, not much-to gossip about. However, she's tired to death now, and not at all well, and that's what makes her so restless. She dropped off into a nap about an hour ago, and 'twill do her good."

"A nice-looking girl, no doubt?"

"You would say so."

The other traveller turned his eyes with interest towards the van window, and, without withdrawing them, said, "I presume I might look in upon her?"

"No," said the reddleman abruptly. "It is getting too dark for you to see much of her; and, more than that, I have no right to allow you. Thank God she sleeps so well, I hope she won't wake till she's home."

"Who is she? One of the neighbourhood?"

"'Tis no matter who, excuse me."

"It is not that girl of Blooms-End, who has been talked about more or less lately? If so, I know her; and I can guess what has happened."

"'Tis no matter... Now, sir, I am sorry to say that we shall soon have to part company. My ponies are tired, and I have further to go, and I am going to rest them under this bank for an hour."

The elder traveller nodded his head indifferently, and the reddleman turned his horses and van in upon the turf, saying, "Good night." The old man replied, and proceeded on his way as before.

The reddleman watched his form as it diminished

to a speck on the road and became absorbed in the thickening films of night. He then took some hay from a truss which was slung up under the van, and, throwing a portion of it in front of the horses, made a pad of the rest, which he laid on the ground beside his vehicle. Upon this he sat down, leaning his back against the wheel. From the interior a low soft breathing came to his ear. It appeared to satisfy him, and he musingly surveyed the scene, as if considering the next step that he should take.

To do things musingly, and by small degrees, seemed, indeed, to be a duty in the Egdon valleys at this transitional hour, for there was that in the condition of the heath itself which resembled protracted and halting dubiousness. It was the quality of the repose appertaining to the scene. This was not the repose of actual stagnation, but the apparent repose of incredible slowness. A condition of healthy life so nearly resembling the torpor of death is a noticeable thing of its sort; to exhibit the inertness of the desert, and at the same time to be exercising powers akin to those of the meadow, and even of the forest, awakened in those who thought of it the attentiveness usually engendered by understatement and reserve.

The scene before the reddleman's eyes was a gradual series of ascents from the level of the road backward into the heart of the heath. It embraced hillocks, pits, ridges, acclivities, one behind the other,

till all was finished by a high hill cutting against the still light sky. The traveller's eye hovered about these things for a time, and finally settled upon one noteworthy object up there. It was a barrow. This bossy projection of earth above its natural level occupied the loftiest ground of the loneliest height that the heath contained. Although from the vale it appeared but as a wart on an Atlantean brow, its actual bulk was great. It formed the pole and axis of this heathery world.

As the resting man looked at the barrow he became aware that its summit, hitherto the highest object in the whole prospect round, was surmounted by something higher. It rose from the semiglobular mound like a spike from a helmet. The first instinct of an imaginative stranger might have been to suppose it the person of one of the Celts who built the barrow, so far had all of modern date withdrawn from the scene. It seemed a sort of last man among them, musing for a moment before dropping into eternal night with the rest of his race.

There the form stood, motionless as the hill beneath. Above the plain rose the hill, above the hill rose the barrow, and above the barrow rose the figure. Above the figure was nothing that could be mapped elsewhere than on a celestial globe.

Such a perfect, delicate, and necessary finish did the figure give to the dark pile of hills that it seemed to be the only obvious justification of their outline.

Without it, there was the dome without the lantern; with it the architectural demands of the mass were satisfied. The scene was strangely homogeneous, in that the vale, the upland, the barrow, and the figure above it amounted only to unity. Looking at this or that member of the group was not observing a complete thing, but a fraction of a thing.

The form was so much like an organic part of the entire motionless structure that to see it move would have impressed the mind as a strange phenomenon. Immobility being the chief characteristic of that whole which the person formed portion of, the discontinuance of immobility in any quarter suggested confusion.

Yet that is what happened. The figure perceptibly gave up its fixity, shifted a step or two, and turned round. As if alarmed, it descended on the right side of the barrow, with the glide of a water-drop down a bud, and then vanished. The movement had been sufficient to show more clearly the characteristics of the figure, and that it was a woman's.

The reason of her sudden displacement now appeared. With her dropping out of sight on the right side, a newcomer, bearing a burden, protruded into the sky on the left side, ascended the tumulus, and deposited the burden on the top. A second followed, then a third, a fourth, a fifth, and ultimately the whole barrow was peopled with burdened figures.

The only intelligible meaning in this sky-backed

pantomime of silhouettes was that the woman had no relation to the forms who had taken her place, was sedulously avoiding these, and had come thither for another object than theirs. The imagination of the observer clung by preference to that vanished, solitary figure, as to something more interesting, more important, more likely to have a history worth knowing than these newcomers, and unconsciously regarded them as intruders. But they remained, and established themselves; and the lonely person who hitherto had been queen of the solitude did not at present seem likely to return.

3

— The Custom of the Country

Had a looker-on been posted in the immediate vicinity of the barrow, he would have learned that these persons were boys and men of the neighbouring hamlets. Each, as he ascended the barrow, had been heavily laden with furze faggots, carried upon the shoulder by means of a long stake sharpened at each end for impaling them easily—two in front and two behind. They came from a part of the heath a quarter of a mile to the rear, where furze almost exclusively prevailed as a product.

Every individual was so involved in furze by his method of carrying the faggots that he appeared like a

bush on legs till he had thrown them down. The party had marched in trail, like a travelling flock of sheep; that is to say, the strongest first, the weak and young behind.

The loads were all laid together, and a pyramid of furze thirty feet in circumference now occupied the crown of the tumulus, which was known as Rainbarrow for many miles round. Some made themselves busy with matches, and in selecting the driest tufts of furze, others in loosening the bramble bonds which held the faggots together. Others, again, while this was in progress, lifted their eyes and swept the vast expanse of country commanded by their position, now lying nearly obliterated by shade. In the valleys of the heath nothing save its own wild face was visible at any time of day; but this spot commanded a horizon enclosing a tract of far extent, and in many cases lying beyond the heath country. None of its features could be seen now, but the whole made itself felt as a vague stretch of remoteness.

While the men and lads were building the pile, a change took place in the mass of shade which denoted the distant landscape. Red suns and tufts of fire one by one began to arise, flecking the whole country round. They were the bonfires of other parishes and hamlets that were engaged in the same sort of commemoration. Some were distant, and stood in a dense atmosphere, so that bundles of pale straw-like beams radiated around them in the shape of a fan. Some were large and near,

glowing scarlet-red from the shade, like wounds in a black hide. Some were Maenades, with winy faces and blown hair. These tintured the silent bosom of the clouds above them and lit up their ephemeral caves, which seemed thenceforth to become scalding caldrons. Perhaps as many as thirty bonfires could be counted within the whole bounds of the district; and as the hour may be told on a clock-face when the figures themselves are invisible, so did the men recognize the locality of each fire by its angle and direction, though nothing of the scenery could be viewed.

The first tall flame from Rainbarrow sprang into the sky, attracting all eyes that had been fixed on the distant conflagrations back to their own attempt in the same kind. The cheerful blaze streaked the inner surface of the human circle—now increased by other stragglers, male and female—with its own gold livery, and even overlaid the dark turf around with a lively luminousness, which softened off into obscurity where the barrow rounded downwards out of sight. It showed the barrow to be the segment of a globe, as perfect as on the day when it was thrown up, even the little ditch remaining from which the earth was dug. Not a plough had ever disturbed a grain of that stubborn soil. In the heath's barrenness to the farmer lay its fertility to the historian. There had been no obliteration, because there had been no tending.

It seemed as if the bonfire-makers were standing

in some radiant upper story of the world, detached from and independent of the dark stretches below. The heath down there was now a vast abyss, and no longer a continuation of what they stood on; for their eyes, adapted to the blaze, could see nothing of the deeps beyond its influence. Occasionally, it is true, a more vigorous flare than usual from their faggots sent darting lights like aides-de-camp down the inclines to some distant bush, pool, or patch of white sand, kindling these to replies of the same colour, till all was lost in darkness again. Then the whole black phenomenon beneath represented Limbo as viewed from the brink by the sublime Florentine in his vision, and the muttered articulations of the wind in the hollows were as complaints and petitions from the "souls of mighty worth" suspended therein.

It was as if these men and boys had suddenly dived into past ages, and fetched therefrom an hour and deed which had before been familiar with this spot. The ashes of the original British pyre which blazed from that summit lay fresh and undisturbed in the barrow beneath their tread. The flames from funeral piles long ago kindled there had shone down upon the lowlands as these were shining now. Festival fires to Thor and Woden had followed on the same ground and duly had their day. Indeed, it is pretty well known that such blazes as this the heathmen were now enjoying are rather the lineal descendants from jumbled Druidical

rites and Saxon ceremonies than the invention of popular feeling about Gunpowder Plot.

Moreover to light a fire is the instinctive and resistant act of man when, at the winter ingress, the curfew is sounded throughout Nature. It indicates a spontaneous, Promethean rebelliousness against that fiat that this recurrent season shall bring foul times, cold darkness, misery and death. Black chaos comes, and the fettered gods of the earth say, Let there be light.

The brilliant lights and sooty shades which struggled upon the skin and clothes of the persons standing round caused their lineaments and general contours to be drawn with Dureresque vigour and dash. Yet the permanent moral expression of each face it was impossible to discover, for as the nimble flames towered, nodded, and swooped through the surrounding air, the blots of shade and flakes of light upon the countenances of the group changed shape and position endlessly. All was unstable; quivering as leaves, evanescent as lightning. Shadowy eye-sockets, deep as those of a death's head, suddenly turned into pits of lustre: a lantern-jaw was cavernous, then it was shining; wrinkles were emphasized to ravines, or obliterated entirely by a changed ray. Nostrils were dark wells; sinews in old necks were gilt mouldings; things with no particular polish on them were glazed; bright objects, such as the tip of a furze-hook one of the men carried, were as glass; eyeballs glowed like little lanterns.

Those whom Nature had depicted as merely quaint became grotesque, the grotesque became preternatural; for all was in extremity.

Hence it may be that the face of an old man, who had like others been called to the heights by the rising flames, was not really the mere nose and chin that it appeared to be, but an appreciable quantity of human countenance. He stood complacently sunning himself in the heat. With a speaker, or stake, he tossed the outlying scraps of fuel into the conflagration, looking at the midst of the pile, occasionally lifting his eyes to measure the height of the flame, or to follow the great sparks which rose with it and sailed away into darkness. The beaming sight, and the penetrating warmth, seemed to breed in him a cumulative cheerfulness, which soon amounted to delight. With his stick in his hand he began to jig a private minuet, a bunch of copper seals shining and swinging like a pendulum from under his waistcoat: he also began to sing, in the voice of a bee up a flue-

“The king' call'd down' his no-bles all',
By one', by two', by three';
Earl Mar'-shal, I'll' go shrive'-the queen',
And thou' shalt wend' with me'.

“A boon', a boon', quoth Earl' Mar'-shal',
And fell' on his bend'-ded knee',

That what'-so-e'er' the queen' shall say',
No harm' there-of' may be'."

Want of breath prevented a continuance of the song; and the breakdown attracted the attention of a firm-standing man of middle age, who kept each corner of his crescent-shaped mouth rigorously drawn back into his cheek, as if to do away with any suspicion of mirthfulness which might erroneously have attached to him.

"A fair stave, Grandfer Cattle; but I am afeard 'tis too much for the mouldy weasand of such a old man as you," he said to the wrinkled reveller. "Dostn't wish th' wast three sixes again, Grandfer, as you was when you first learnt to sing it?"

"Hey?" said Grandfer Cattle, stopping in his dance.

"Dostn't wish wast young again, I say? There's a hole in thy poor bellows nowadays seemingly."

"But there's good art in me? If I couldn't make a little wind go a long ways I should seem no younger than the most aged man, should I, Timothy?"

"And how about the new-married folks down there at the Quiet Woman Inn?" the other inquired, pointing towards a dim light in the direction of the distant highway, but considerably apart from where the reddleman was at that moment resting. "What's the rights of the matter about 'em? You ought to know,

being an understanding man.”

“But a little rakish, hey? I own to it. Master Cante is that, or he's nothing. Yet 'tis a gay fault, neighbour Fairway, that age will cure.”

“I heard that they were coming home tonight. By this time they must have come. What besides?”

“The next thing is for us to go and wish 'em joy, I suppose?”

“Well, no.”

“No? Now, I thought we must. I must, or 'twould be very unlike me—the first in every spree that's going!

“Do thou' put on' a fri'-ar's coat',
And I'll' put on' a-no'-ther,
And we' will to' Queen Ele'anor go',
Like Fri'ar and' his bro'ther.

I met Mis'ess Yeobright, the young bride's aunt, last night, and she told me that her son Clym was coming home a' Christmas. Wonderful clever, 'a believe-ah, I should like to have all that's under that young man's hair. Well, then, I spoke to her in my well-known merry way, and she said, 'O that what's shaped so venerable should talk like a fool!'-that's what she said to me. I don't care for her, be jowned if I do, and so I told her. 'Be jowned if I care for 'ee,' I said. I had her there-hey?”

“I rather think she had you,” said Fairway.

“No,” said Grandfer Cante, his countenance slightly flagging. “Tisn't so bad as that with me?”

“Seemingly 'tis, however, is it because of the wedding that Clym is coming home a' Christmas-to make a new arrangement because his mother is now left in the house alone?”

“Yes, yes-that's it. But, Timothy, hearken to me,” said the Grandfer earnestly. “Though known as such a joker, I be an understanding man if you catch me serious, and I am serious now. I can tell 'ee lots about the married couple. Yes, this morning at six o'clock they went up the country to do the job, and neither vell nor mark have been seen of 'em since, though I reckon that this afternoon has brought 'em home again man and woman-wife, that is. Isn't it spoke like a man, Timothy, and wasn't Mis'ess Yeobright wrong about me?”

“Yes, it will do. I didn't know the two had walked together since last fall, when her aunt forbad the banns. How long has this new set-to been in mangling then? Do you know, Humphrey?”

“Yes, how long?” said Grandfer Cantle smartly, likewise turning to Humphrey. “I ask that question.”

“Ever since her aunt altered her mind, and said she might have the man after all,” replied Humphrey, without removing his eyes from the fire. He was a somewhat solemn young fellow, and carried the hook and leather gloves of a furze-cutter, his legs, by reason of that occupation, being sheathed in bulging leggings as stiff as the Philistine's greaves of brass. “That's why they went away to be married, I count. You see, after

kicking up such a nunny-watch and forbidding the banns 'twould have made Mis'ess Yeobright seem foolish-like to have a banging wedding in the same parish all as if she'd never gainsaid it."

"Exactly-seem foolish-like; and that's very bad for the poor things that be so, though I only guess as much, to be sure," said Grandfer Cattle, still strenuously preserving a sensible bearing and mien.

"Ah, well, I was at church that day," said Fairway, "which was a very curious thing to happen."

"If 'twasn't my name's Simple," said the Grandfer emphatically. "I ha'n't been there to-year; and now the winter is a-coming on I won't say I shall."

"I ha'n't been these three years," said Humphrey; "for I'm so dead sleepy of a Sunday; and 'tis so terrible far to get there; and when you do get there 'tis such a mortal poor chance that you'll be chose for up above, when so many bain't, that I bide at home and don't go at all."

"I not only happened to be there," said Fairway, with a fresh collection of emphasis, "but I was sitting in the same pew as Mis'ess Yeobright. And though you may not see it as such, it fairly made my blood run cold to hear her. Yes, it is a curious thing; but it made my blood run cold, for I was close at her elbow." The speaker looked round upon the bystanders, now drawing closer to hear him, with his lips gathered tighter than ever in the rigorousness of his descriptive

moderation.

“’Tis a serious job to have things happen to 'ee there,” said a woman behind.

“Ye are to declare it,' was the parson's words,” Fairway continued. “And then up stood a woman at my side-a-touching of me. 'Well, be damned if there isn't Mis'ess Yeobright a-standing up,' I said to myself. Yes, neighbours, though I was in the temple of prayer that's what I said. 'Tis against my conscience to curse and swear in company, and I hope any woman here will overlook it. Still what I did say I did say, and 'twould be a lie if I didn't own it.”

“So 'twould, neighbour Fairway.”

“Be damned if there isn't Mis'ess Yeobright a-standing up,' I said,” the narrator repeated, giving out the bad word with the same passionless severity of face as before, which proved how entirely necessity and not gusto had to do with the iteration. “And the next thing I heard was, 'I forbid the banns,' from her. 'I'll speak to you after the service,' said the parson, in quite a homely way-yes, turning all at once into a common man no holier than you or I. Ah, her face was pale! Maybe you can call to mind that monument in Weatherbury church-the cross-legged soldier that have had his arm knocked away by the schoolchildren? Well, he would about have matched that woman's face, when she said, 'I forbid the banns.'”

The audience cleared their throats and tossed a

few stalks into the fire, not because these deeds were urgent, but to give themselves time to weigh the moral of the story.

“I'm sure when I heard they'd been forbid I felt as glad as if anybody had gied me sixpence,” said an earnest voice—that of Olly Dowden, a woman who lived by making heath brooms, or besoms. Her nature was to be civil to enemies as well as to friends, and grateful to all the world for letting her remain alive.

“And now the maid have married him just the same,” said Humphrey.

“After that Mis'ess Yeobright came round and was quite agreeable,” Fairway resumed, with an unheeding air, to show that his words were no appendage to Humphrey's, but the result of independent reflection.

“Supposing they were ashamed, I don't see why they shouldn't have done it here-right,” said a wide-spread woman whose stays creaked like shoes whenever she stooped or turned. “'Tis well to call the neighbours together and to hae a good racket once now and then; and it may as well be when there's a wedding as at tide-times. I don't care for close ways.”

“Ah, now, you'd hardly believe it, but I don't care for gay weddings,” said Timothy Fairway, his eyes again travelling round. “I hardly blame Thomasin Yeobright and neighbour Wildeve for doing it quiet, if I must own it. A wedding at home means five and

six-handed reels by the hour; and they do a man's legs no good when he's over forty."

"True. Once at the woman's house you can hardly say nay to being one in a jig, knowing all the time that you be expected to make yourself worth your victuals."

"You be bound to dance at Christmas because 'tis the time o' year; you must dance at weddings because 'tis the time o' life. At christenings folk will even smuggle in a reel or two, if 'tis no further on than the first or second chiel. And this is not naming the songs you've got to sing... For my part I like a good hearty funeral as well as anything. You've as splendid victuals and drink as at other parties, and even better. And it don't wear your legs to stumps in talking over a poor fellow's ways as it do to stand up in hornpipes."

"Nine folks out of ten would own 'twas going too far to dance then, I suppose?" suggested Grandfer Cante.

"'Tis the only sort of party a staid man can feel safe at after the mug have been round a few times."

"Well, I can't understand a quiet ladylike little body like Tamsin Yeobright caring to be married in such a mean way," said Susan Nunsuch, the wide woman, who preferred the original subject. "'Tis worse than the poorest do. And I shouldn't have cared about the man, though some may say he's good-looking."

"To give him his due he's a clever, learned fellow in his way-a'most as clever as Clym Yeobright used to

be. He was brought up to better things than keeping the Quiet Woman. An engineer—that's what the man was, as we know; but he threw away his chance, and so 'a took a public house to live. His learning was no use to him at all."

"Very often the case," said Olly, the besom-maker. "And yet how people do strive after it and get it! The class of folk that couldn't use to make a round O to save their bones from the pit can write their names now without a sputter of the pen, oftentimes without a single blot—what do I say? — why, almost without a desk to lean their stomachs and elbows upon."

"True-'tis amazing what a polish the world have been brought to," said Humphrey.

"Why, afore I went a soldier in the Bang-up Locals (as we was called), in the year four," chimed in Grandfer Cattle brightly, "I didn't know no more what the world was like than the commonest man among ye. And now, jown it all, I won't say what I bain't fit for, hey?"

"Couldst sign the book, no doubt," said Fairway, "if wast young enough to join hands with a woman again, like Wildeve and Mis'ess Tamsin, which is more than Humph there could do, for he follows his father in learning. Ah, Humph, well I can mind when I was married how I zid thy father's mark staring me in the face as I went to put down my name. He and your

mother were the couple married just afore we were and there stood they father's cross with arms stretched out like a great banging scarecrow. What a terrible black cross that was-thy father's very likeness in en! To save my soul I couldn't help laughing when I zid en, though all the time I was as hot as dog-days, what with the marrying, and what with the woman a-hanging to me, and what with Jack Changley and a lot more chaps grinning at me through church window. But the next moment a strawmote would have knocked me down, for I called to mind that if thy father and mother had had high words once, they'd been at it twenty times since they'd been man and wife, and I zid myself as the next poor stunpoll to get into the same mess... Ah-well, what a day 'twas!"

"Wildevé is older than Tamsin Yeobright by a good-few summers. A pretty maid too she is. A young woman with a home must be a fool to tear her smock for a man like that."

The speaker, a peat- or turf-cutter, who had newly joined the group, carried across his shoulder the singular heart-shaped spade of large dimensions used in that species of labour, and its well-whetted edge gleamed like a silver bow in the beams of the fire.

"A hundred maidens would have had him if he'd asked 'em," said the wide woman.

"Didst ever know a man, neighbour, that no woman at all would marry?" inquired Humphrey.

“I never did,” said the turf-cutter.

“Nor I,” said another.

“Nor I,” said Grandfer Cattle.

“Well, now, I did once,” said Timothy Fairway, adding more firmness to one of his legs. “I did know of such a man. But only once, mind.” He gave his throat a thorough rake round, as if it were the duty of every person not to be mistaken through thickness of voice. “Yes, I knew of such a man,” he said.

“And what ghastly gallicrow might the poor fellow have been like, Master Fairway?” asked the turf-cutter.

“Well, 'a was neither a deaf man, nor a dumb man, nor a blind man. What 'a was I don't say.”

“Is he known in these parts?” said Olly Dowden.

“Hardly,” said Timothy; “but I name no name... Come, keep the fire up there, youngsters.”

“Whatever is Christian Cattle's teeth a-chattering for?” said a boy from amid the smoke and shades on the other side of the blaze. “Be ye a-cold, Christian?”

A thin jibbering voice was heard to reply, “No, not at all.”

“Come forward, Christian, and show yourself. I didn't know you were here,” said Fairway, with a humane look across towards that quarter.

Thus requested, a faltering man, with reedy hair, no shoulders, and a great quantity of wrist and ankle beyond his clothes, advanced a step or two by his own

will, and was pushed by the will of others half a dozen steps more. He was Grandfer Cattle's youngest son.

“What be ye quaking for, Christian?” said the turf-cutter kindly.

“I'm the man.”

“What man?”

“The man no woman will marry.”

“The deuce you be!” said Timothy Fairway, enlarging his gaze to cover Christian's whole surface and a great deal more, Grandfer Cattle meanwhile staring as a hen stares at the duck she has hatched.

“Yes, I be he; and it makes me afeard,” said Christian. “D'ye think 'twill hurt me? I shall always say I don't care, and swear to it, though I do care all the while.”

“Well, be damned if this isn't the queerest start ever I know'd,” said Mr. Fairway. “I didn't mean you at all. There's another in the country, then! Why did ye reveal yer misfortune, Christian?”

“'Twas to be if 'twas, I suppose. I can't help it, can I?” He turned upon them his painfully circular eyes, surrounded by concentric lines like targets.

“No, that's true. But 'tis a melancholy thing, and my blood ran cold when you spoke, for I felt there were two poor fellows where I had thought only one. 'Tis a sad thing for ye, Christian. How'st know the women won't hae thee?”

“I've asked 'em.”

“Sure I should never have thought you had the face. Well, and what did the last one say to ye? Nothing that can't be got over, perhaps, after all?”

“Get out of my sight, you slack-twisted, slim-looking maphrotight fool,' was the woman's words to me.”

“Not encouraging, I own,” said Fairway. “Get out of my sight, you slack-twisted, slim-looking maphrotight fool,' is rather a hard way of saying No. But even that might be overcome by time and patience, so as to let a few grey hairs show themselves in the hussy's head. How old be you, Christian?”

“Thirty-one last tatie-digging, Mister Fairway.”

“Not a boy-not a boy. Still there's hope yet.”

“That's my age by baptism, because that's put down in the great book of the Judgment that they keep in church vestry; but Mother told me I was born some time afore I was christened.”

“Ah!”

“But she couldn't tell when, to save her life, except that there was no moon.”

“No moon-that's bad. Hey, neighbours, that's bad for him!”

“Yes, 'tis bad,” said Grandfer Cattle, shaking his head.

“Mother know'd 'twas no moon, for she asked another woman that had an almanac, as she did whenever a boy was born to her, because of the saying,

'No moon, no man,' which made her afeard every man-child she had. Do ye really think it serious, Mister Fairway, that there was no moon?"

"Yes. 'No moon, no man.' 'Tis one of the truest sayings ever spit out. The boy never comes to anything that's born at new moon. A bad job for thee, Christian, that you should have showed your nose then of all days in the month."

"I suppose the moon was terrible full when you were born?" said Christian, with a look of hopeless admiration at Fairway.

"Well, 'a was not new," Mr. Fairway replied, with a disinterested gaze.

"I'd sooner go without drink at Lammas-tide than be a man of no moon," continued Christian, in the same shattered recitative. "'Tis said I be only the rames of a man, and no good for my race at all; and I suppose that's the cause o't."

"Ay," said Grandfer Cante, somewhat subdued in spirit; "and yet his mother cried for scores of hours when 'a was a boy, for fear he should outgrow hissself and go for a soldier."

"Well, there's many just as bad as he." said Fairway.

"Wethers must live their time as well as other sheep, poor soul."

"So perhaps I shall rub on? Ought I to be afeared o' nights, Master Fairway?"

“You'll have to lie alone all your life; and 'tis not to married couples but to single sleepers that a ghost shows himself when 'a do come. One has been seen lately, too. A very strange one.”

“No-don't talk about it if 'tis agreeable of ye not to! 'Twill make my skin crawl when I think of it in bed alone. But you will-ah, you will, I know, Timothy; and I shall dream all night o't! A very strange one? What sort of a spirit did ye mean when ye said, a very strange one, Timothy? — no, no-don't tell me.”

“I don't half believe in spirits myself. But I think it ghostly enough-what I was told. 'Twas a little boy that zid it.”

“What was it like? — no, don't-”

“A red one. Yes, most ghosts be white; but this is as if it had been dipped in blood.”

Christian drew a deep breath without letting it expand his body, and Humphrey said, “Where has it been seen?”

“Not exactly here; but in this same heth. But 'tisn't a thing to talk about. What do ye say,” continued Fairway in brisker tones, and turning upon them as if the idea had not been Grandfer Cattle's-“what do you say to giving the new man and wife a bit of a song tonight afore we go to bed-being their wedding-day? When folks are just married 'tis as well to look glad o't, since looking sorry won't unjoin 'em. I am no drinker, as we know, but when the womenfolk and youngsters

have gone home we can drop down across to the Quiet Woman, and strike up a ballet in front of the married folks' door. 'Twill please the young wife, and that's what I should like to do, for many's the skinful I've had at her hands when she lived with her aunt at Blooms-End."

"Hey? And so we will!" said Grandfer Cattle, turning so briskly that his copper seals swung extravagantly. "I'm as dry as a kex with biding up here in the wind, and I haven't seen the colour of drink since nammet-time today. 'Tis said that the last brew at the Woman is very pretty drinking. And, neighbours, if we should be a little late in the finishing, why, tomorrow's Sunday, and we can sleep it off?"

"Grandfer Cattle! you take things very careless for an old man," said the wide woman.

"I take things careless; I do-too careless to please the women! Kik! I'll sing the 'Jovial Crew,' or any other song, when a weak old man would cry his eyes out. Jown it; I am up for anything.

"The king' look'd o'-ver his left' shoul-der',
And a grim' look look'-ed hee',
Earl Mar'-shal, he said', but for' my oath'
Or hang'-ed thou' shouldst bee'."

"Well, that's what we'll do," said Fairway. "We'll give 'em a song, an' it please the Lord. What's the good

of Thomasin's cousin Clym a-coming home after the deed's done? He should have come afore, if so be he wanted to stop it, and marry her himself.”

“Perhaps he's coming to bide with his mother a little time, as she must feel lonely now the maid's gone.”

“Now, 'tis very odd, but I never feel lonely-no, not at all,” said Grandfer Cante. “I am as brave in the nighttime as a' admiral!”

The bonfire was by this time beginning to sink low, for the fuel had not been of that substantial sort which can support a blaze long. Most of the other fires within the wide horizon were also dwindling weak. Attentive observation of their brightness, colour, and length of existence would have revealed the quality of the material burnt, and through that, to some extent the natural produce of the district in which each bonfire was situate. The clear, kingly effulgence that had characterized the majority expressed a heath and furze country like their own, which in one direction extended an unlimited number of miles; the rapid flares and extinctions at other points of the compass showed the lightest of fuel-straw, beanstalks, and the usual waste from arable land. The most enduring of all-steady unaltering eyes like Planets-signified wood, such as hazel-branches, thorn-faggots, and stout billets. Fires of the last-mentioned materials were rare, and though comparatively small in magnitude beside the transient

blazes, now began to get the best of them by mere long continuance. The great ones had perished, but these remained. They occupied the remotest visible positions-sky-backed summits rising out of rich coppice and plantation districts to the north, where the soil was different, and heath foreign and strange.

Save one; and this was the nearest of any, the moon of the whole shining through. It lay in a direction precisely opposite to that of the little window in the vale below. Its nearness was such that, notwithstanding its actual smallness, its glow infinitely transcended theirs.

This quiet eye had attracted attention from time to time; and when their own fire had become sunken and dim it attracted more; some even of the wood fires more recently lighted had reached their decline, but no change was perceptible here.

“To be sure, how near that fire is!” said Fairway. “Seemingly. I can see a fellow of some sort walking round it. Little and good must be said of that fire, surely.”

“I can throw a stone there,” said the boy.

“And so can I!” said Grandfer Cattle.

“No, no, you can't, my sonnies. That fire is not much less than a mile off, for all that 'a seems so near.”

“'Tis in the heath, but no furze,” said the turf-cutter.

“'Tis cleft-wood, that's what 'tis,” said Timothy

Fairway. "Nothing would burn like that except clean timber. And 'tis on the knap afore the old captain's house at Mistover. Such a queer mortal as that man is! To have a little fire inside your own bank and ditch, that nobody else may enjoy it or come anigh it! And what a zany an old chap must be, to light a bonfire when there's no youngsters to please."

"Cap'n Vye has been for a long walk today, and is quite tired out," said Grandfer Cante, "so 'tisn't likely to be he."

"And he would hardly afford good fuel like that," said the wide woman.

"Then it must be his granddaughter," said Fairway. "Not that a body of her age can want a fire much."

"She is very strange in her ways, living up there by herself, and such things please her," said Susan.

"She's a well-favoured maid enough," said Humphrey the furze-cutter, "especially when she's got one of her dandy gowns on."

"That's true," said Fairway. "Well, let her bonfire burn an't will. Ours is well-nigh out by the look o't."

"How dark 'tis now the fire's gone down!" said Christian Cante, looking behind him with his hare eyes. "Don't ye think we'd better get home-along, neighbours? The heth isn't haunted, I know; but we'd better get home... Ah, what was that?"

"Only the wind," said the turf-cutter.

“I don't think Fifth-of-Novembers ought to be kept up by night except in towns. It should be by day in outstep, ill-accounted places like this!”

“Nonsense, Christian. Lift up your spirits like a man! Susy, dear, you and I will have a jig-hey, my honey? — before 'tis quite too dark to see how well-favoured you be still, though so many summers have passed since your husband, a son of a witch, snapped you up from me.”

This was addressed to Susan Nunsuch; and the next circumstance of which the beholders were conscious was a vision of the matron's broad form whisking off towards the space whereon the fire had been kindled. She was lifted bodily by Mr. Fairway's arm, which had been flung round her waist before she had become aware of his intention. The site of the fire was now merely a circle of ashes flecked with red embers and sparks, the furze having burnt completely away. Once within the circle he whirled her round and round in a dance. She was a woman noisily constructed; in addition to her enclosing framework of whalebone and lath, she wore pattens summer and winter, in wet weather and in dry, to preserve her boots from wear; and when Fairway began to jump about with her, the clicking of the pattens, the creaking of the stays, and her screams of surprise, formed a very audible concert.

“'Till crack thy numskull for thee, you mandy chap!” said Mrs. Nunsuch, as she helplessly danced

round with him, her feet playing like drumsticks among the sparks. "My ankles were all in a fever before, from walking through that prickly furze, and now you must make 'em worse with these vlinkers!"

The vagary of Timothy Fairway was infectious. The turf-cutter seized old Olly Dowden, and, somewhat more gently, pousetted with her likewise. The young men were not slow to imitate the example of their elders, and seized the maids; Grandfer Cante and his stick jiggled in the form of a three-legged object among the rest; and in half a minute all that could be seen on Rainbarrow was a whirling of dark shapes amid a boiling confusion of sparks, which leapt around the dancers as high as their waists. The chief noises were women's shrill cries, men's laughter, Susan's stays and pattens, Olly Dowden's "heu-heu-heu!" and the strumming of the wind upon the furze-bushes, which formed a kind of tune to the demoniac measure they trod. Christian alone stood aloof, uneasily rocking himself as he murmured, "They ought not to do it-how the vlinkers do fly! 'tis tempting the Wicked one, 'tis."

"What was that?" said one of the lads, stopping.

"Ah-where?" said Christian, hastily closing up to the rest.

The dancers all lessened their speed.

"'Twas behind you, Christian, that I heard it-down here."

"Yes-'tis behind me!" Christian said. "Matthew,

Mark, Luke, and John, bless the bed that I lie on; four angels guard-”

“Hold your tongue. What is it?” said Fairway.

“Hoi-i-i-i!” cried a voice from the darkness.

“Halloo-o-o-o!” said Fairway.

“Is there any cart track up across here to Mis'ess Yeobright's, of Blooms-End?” came to them in the same voice, as a long, slim indistinct figure approached the barrow.

“Ought we not to run home as hard as we can, neighbours, as 'tis getting late?” said Christian. “Not run away from one another, you know; run close together, I mean.”

“Scrape up a few stray locks of furze, and make a blaze, so that we can see who the man is,” said Fairway.

When the flame arose it revealed a young man in tight raiment, and red from top to toe. “Is there a track across here to Mis'ess Yeobright's house?” he repeated.

“Ay-keep along the path down there.”

“I mean a way two horses and a van can travel over?”

“Well, yes; you can get up the vale below here with time. The track is rough, but if you've got a light your horses may pick along wi' care. Have ye brought your cart far up, neighbour reddleman?”

“I've left it in the bottom, about half a mile back, I stepped on in front to make sure of the way, as 'tis

night-time, and I han't been here for so long."

"Oh, well you can get up," said Fairway. "What a turn it did give me when I saw him!" he added to the whole group, the reddleman included. "Lord's sake, I thought, whatever fiery mommet is this come to trouble us? No slight to your looks, reddleman, for ye bain't bad-looking in the groundwork, though the finish is queer. My meaning is just to say how curious I felt. I half thought it 'twas the devil or the red ghost the boy told of."

"It gied me a turn likewise," said Susan Nunsuch, "for I had a dream last night of a death's head."

"Don't ye talk o't no more," said Christian. "If he had a handkerchief over his head he'd look for all the world like the Devil in the picture of the Temptation."

"Well, thank you for telling me," said the young reddleman, smiling faintly. "And good night t'ye all."

He withdrew from their sight down the barrow.

"I fancy I've seen that young man's face before," said Humphrey. "But where, or how, or what his name is, I don't know."

The reddleman had not been gone more than a few minutes when another person approached the partially revived bonfire. It proved to be a well-known and respected widow of the neighbourhood, of a standing which can only be expressed by the word genteel. Her face, encompassed by the blackness of the receding heath, showed whitely, and with-out

half-lights, like a cameo.

She was a woman of middle-age, with well-formed features of the type usually found where perspicacity is the chief quality enthroned within. At moments she seemed to be regarding issues from a Nebo denied to others around. She had something of an estranged mien; the solitude exhaled from the heath was concentrated in this face that had risen from it. The air with which she looked at the heathmen betokened a certain unconcern at their presence, or at what might be their opinions of her for walking in that lonely spot at such an hour, thus indirectly implying that in some respect or other they were not up to her level. The explanation lay in the fact that though her husband had been a small farmer she herself was a curate's daughter, who had once dreamt of doing better things.

Persons with any weight of character carry, like planets, their atmospheres along with them in their orbits; and the matron who entered now upon the scene could, and usually did, bring her own tone into a company. Her normal manner among the heathfolk had that reticence which results from the consciousness of superior communicative power. But the effect of coming into society and light after lonely wandering in darkness is a sociability in the comer above its usual pitch, expressed in the features even more than in words.

“Why, 'tis Mis'ess Yeobright,” said Fairway.

“Mis'ess Yeobright, not ten minutes ago a man was here asking for you-a reddleman.”

“What did he want?” said she.

“He didn't tell us.”

“Something to sell, I suppose; what it can be I am at a loss to understand.”

“I am glad to hear that your son Mr. Clym is coming home at Christmas, ma'am,” said Sam, the turf-cutter. “What a dog he used to be for bonfires!”

“Yes. I believe he is coming,” she said.

“He must be a fine fellow by this time,” said Fairway.

“He is a man now,” she replied quietly.

“'Tis very lonesome for 'ee in the heth tonight, mis'ess,” said Christian, coming from the seclusion he had hitherto maintained. “Mind you don't get lost. Egdon Heth is a bad place to get lost in, and the winds do huffle queerer tonight than ever I heard 'em afore. Them that know Egdon best have been pixy-led here at times.”

“Is that you, Christian?” said Mrs. Yeobright. “What made you hide away from me?”

“'Twas that I didn't know you in this light, mis'ess; and being a man of the mournfullest make, I was scared a little, that's all. Oftentimes if you could see how terrible down I get in my mind, 'twould make 'ee quite nervous for fear I should die by my hand.”

“You don't take after your father,” said Mrs.

Yeobright, looking towards the fire, where Grandfer Cante, with some want of originality, was dancing by himself among the sparks, as the others had done before.

“Now, Grandfer,” said Timothy Fairway, “we are ashamed of ye. A reverent old patriarch man as you be-seventy if a day-to go hornpiping like that by yourself!”

“A harrowing old man, Mis'ess Yeobright,” said Christian despondingly. “I wouldn't live with him a week, so playward as he is, if I could get away.”

“Twould be more seemly in ye to stand still and welcome Mis'ess Yeobright, and you the venerablest here, Grandfer Cante,” said the besom-woman.

“Faith, and so it would,” said the reveller checking himself repentantly. “I've such a bad memory, Mis'ess Yeobright, that I forget how I'm looked up to by the rest of 'em. My spirits must be wonderful good, you'll say? But not always. 'Tis a weight upon a man to be looked up to as commander, and I often feel it.”

“I am sorry to stop the talk,” said Mrs. Yeobright. “But I must be leaving you now. I was passing down the Anglebury Road, towards my niece's new home, who is returning tonight with her husband; and seeing the bonfire and hearing Olly's voice among the rest I came up here to learn what was going on. I should like her to walk with me, as her way is mine.”

“Ay, sure, ma'am, I'm just thinking of moving,”

said Olly.

“Why, you'll be safe to meet the reddleman that I told ye of,” said Fairway. “He's only gone back to get his van. We heard that your niece and her husband were coming straight home as soon as they were married, and we are going down there shortly, to give 'em a song o' welcome.”

“Thank you indeed,” said Mrs. Yeobright.

“But we shall take a shorter cut through the furze than you can go with long clothes; so we won't trouble you to wait.”

“Very well—are you ready, Olly?”

“Yes, ma'am. And there's a light shining from your niece's window, see. It will help to keep us in the path.”

She indicated the faint light at the bottom of the valley which Fairway had pointed out; and the two women descended the tumulus.

4

— The Halt on the Turnpike Road

Down, downward they went, and yet further down—their descent at each step seeming to outmeasure their advance. Their skirts were scratched noisily by the furze, their shoulders brushed by the ferns, which, though dead and dry, stood erect as when alive, no sufficient winter weather having as yet arrived to beat

them down. Their Tartarean situation might by some have been called an imprudent one for two unattended women. But these shaggy recesses were at all seasons a familiar surrounding to Olly and Mrs. Yeobright; and the addition of darkness lends no frightfulness to the face of a friend.

“And so Tamsin has married him at last,” said Olly, when the incline had become so much less steep that their foot-steps no longer required undivided attention.

Mrs. Yeobright answered slowly, “Yes; at last.”

“How you will miss her-living with 'ee as a daughter, as she always have.”

“I do miss her.”

Olly, though without the tact to perceive when remarks were untimely, was saved by her very simplicity from rendering them offensive. Questions that would have been resented in others she could ask with impunity. This accounted for Mrs. Yeobright's acquiescence in the revival of an evidently sore subject.

“I was quite strook to hear you'd agreed to it, ma'am, that I was,” continued the besom-maker.

“You were not more struck by it than I should have been last year this time, Olly. There are a good many sides to that wedding. I could not tell you all of them, even if I tried.”

“I felt myself that he was hardly solid-going enough to mate with your family. Keeping an inn-what

is it? But 'a's clever, that's true, and they say he was an engineering gentleman once, but has come down by being too outwardly given."

"I saw that, upon the whole, it would be better she should marry where she wished."

"Poor little thing, her feelings got the better of her, no doubt. 'Tis nature. Well, they may call him what they will—he've several acres of heth-ground broke up here, besides the public house, and the heth-croppers, and his manners be quite like a gentleman's. And what's done cannot be undone."

"It cannot," said Mrs. Yeobright. "See, here's the wagon-track at last. Now we shall get along better."

The wedding subject was no further dwelt upon; and soon a faint diverging path was reached, where they parted company, Olly first begging her companion to remind Mr. Wildeve that he had not sent her sick husband the bottle of wine promised on the occasion of his marriage. The besom-maker turned to the left towards her own house, behind a spur of the hill, and Mrs. Yeobright followed the straight track, which further on joined the highway by the Quiet Woman Inn, whither she supposed her niece to have returned with Wildeve from their wedding at Anglebury that day.

She first reached Wildeve's Patch, as it was called, a plot of land redeemed from the heath, and after long and laborious years brought into cultivation. The man who had discovered that it could be tilled died of

the labour; the man who succeeded him in possession ruined himself in fertilizing it. Wildeve came like Amerigo Vespucci, and received the honours due to those who had gone before.

When Mrs. Yeobright had drawn near to the inn, and was about to enter, she saw a horse and vehicle some two hundred yards beyond it, coming towards her, a man walking alongside with a lantern in his hand. It was soon evident that this was the reddleman who had inquired for her. Instead of entering the inn at once, she walked by it and towards the van.

The conveyance came close, and the man was about to pass her with little notice, when she turned to him and said, "I think you have been inquiring for me? I am Mrs. Yeobright of Blooms-End."

The reddleman started, and held up his finger. He stopped the horses, and beckoned to her to withdraw with him a few yards aside, which she did, wondering.

"You don't know me, ma'am, I suppose?" he said.

"I do not," said she. "Why, yes, I do! You are young Venn-your father was a dairyman somewhere here?"

"Yes; and I knew your niece, Miss Tamsin, a little. I have something bad to tell you."

"About her-no! She has just come home, I believe, with her husband. They arranged to return this afternoon-to the inn beyond here."

"She's not there."

“How do you know?”

“Because she's here. She's in my van,” he added slowly.

“What new trouble has come?” murmured Mrs. Yeobright, putting her hand over her eyes.

“I can't explain much, ma'am. All I know is that, as I was going along the road this morning, about a mile out of Anglebury, I heard something trotting after me like a doe, and looking round there she was, white as death itself. 'Oh, Diggory Venn!' she said, 'I thought 'twas you-will you help me? I am in trouble.'”

“How did she know your Christian name?” said Mrs. Yeobright doubtingly.

“I had met her as a lad before I went away in this trade. She asked then if she might ride, and then down she fell in a faint. I picked her up and put her in, and there she has been ever since. She has cried a good deal, but she has hardly spoke; all she has told me being that she was to have been married this morning. I tried to get her to eat something, but she couldn't; and at last she fell asleep.”

“Let me see her at once,” said Mrs. Yeobright, hastening towards the van.

The reddleman followed with the lantern, and, stepping up first, assisted Mrs. Yeobright to mount beside him. On the door being opened she perceived at the end of the van an extemporized couch, around which was hung apparently all the drapery that the

reddleman possessed, to keep the occupant of the little couch from contact with the red materials of his trade. A young girl lay thereon, covered with a cloak. She was asleep, and the light of the lantern fell upon her features.

A fair, sweet, and honest country face was revealed, reposing in a nest of wavy chestnut hair. It was between pretty and beautiful. Though her eyes were closed, one could easily imagine the light necessarily shining in them as the culmination of the luminous workmanship around. The groundwork of the face was hopefulness; but over it now I lay like a foreign substance a film of anxiety and grief. The grief had been there so shortly as to have abstracted nothing of the bloom, and had as yet but given a dignity to what it might eventually undermine. The scarlet of her lips had not had time to abate, and just now it appeared still more intense by the absence of the neighbouring and more transient colour of her cheek. The lips frequently parted, with a murmur of words. She seemed to belong rightly to a madrigal-to require viewing through rhyme and harmony.

One thing at least was obvious: she was not made to be looked at thus. The reddleman had appeared conscious of as much, and, while Mrs. Yeobright looked in upon her, he cast his eyes aside with a delicacy which well became him. The sleeper apparently thought so too, for the next moment she

opened her own.

The lips then parted with something of anticipation, something more of doubt; and her several thoughts and fractions of thoughts, as signalled by the changes on her face, were exhibited by the light to the utmost nicety. An ingenuous, transparent life was disclosed, as if the flow of her existence could be seen passing within her. She understood the scene in a moment.

“O yes, it is I, Aunt,” she cried. “I know how frightened you are, and how you cannot believe it; but all the same, it is I who have come home like this!”

“Tamsin, Tamsin!” said Mrs. Yeobright, stooping over the young woman and kissing her. “O my dear girl!”

Thomasin was now on the verge of a sob, but by an unexpected self-command she uttered no sound. With a gentle panting breath she sat upright.

“I did not expect to see you in this state, any more than you me,” she went on quickly. “Where am I, Aunt?”

“Nearly home, my dear. In Egdon Bottom. What dreadful thing is it?”

“I’ll tell you in a moment. So near, are we? Then I will get out and walk. I want to go home by the path.”

“But this kind man who has done so much will, I am sure, take you right on to my house?” said the aunt, turning to the reddleman, who had withdrawn from the

front of the van on the awakening of the girl, and stood in the road.

“Why should you think it necessary to ask me? I will, of course,” said he.

“He is indeed kind,” murmured Thomasin. “I was once acquainted with him, Aunt, and when I saw him today I thought I should prefer his van to any conveyance of a stranger. But I'll walk now. Reddleman, stop the horses, please.”

The man regarded her with tender reluctance, but stopped them

Aunt and niece then descended from the van, Mrs. Yeobright saying to its owner, “I quite recognize you now. What made you change from the nice business your father left you?”

“Well, I did,” he said, and looked at Thomasin, who blushed a little. “Then you'll not be wanting me any more tonight, ma'am?”

Mrs. Yeobright glanced around at the dark sky, at the hills, at the perishing bonfires, and at the lighted window of the inn they had neared. “I think not,” she said, “since Thomasin wishes to walk. We can soon run up the path and reach home—we know it well.”

And after a few further words they parted, the reddleman moving onwards with his van, and the two women remaining standing in the road. As soon as the vehicle and its driver had withdrawn so far as to be beyond all possible reach of her voice, Mrs. Yeobright

turned to her niece.

“Now, Thomasin,” she said sternly, “what's the meaning of this disgraceful performance?”

5

— Perplexity among Honest People

Thomasin looked as if quite overcome by her aunt's change of manner. “It means just what it seems to mean: I am-not married,” she replied faintly. “Excuse me-for humiliating you, Aunt, by this mishap-I am sorry for it. But I cannot help it.”

“Me? Think of yourself first.”

“It was nobody's fault. When we got there the parson wouldn't marry us because of some trifling irregularity in the license.”

“What irregularity?”

“I don't know. Mr. Wildeve can explain. I did not think when I went away this morning that I should come back like this.” It being dark, Thomasin allowed her emotion to escape her by the silent way of tears, which could roll down her cheek unseen.

“I could almost say that it serves you right-if I did not feel that you don't deserve it,” continued Mrs. Yeobright, who, possessing two distinct moods in close contiguity, a gentle mood and an angry, flew from one to the other without the least warning. “Remember, Thomasin, this business was none of my seeking; from

the very first, when you began to feel foolish about that man, I warned you he would not make you happy. I felt it so strongly that I did what I would never have believed myself capable of doing—stood up in the church, and made myself the public talk for weeks. But having once consented, I don't submit to these fancies without good reason. Marry him you must after this.”

“Do you think I wish to do otherwise for one moment?” said Thomasin, with a heavy sigh. “I know how wrong it was of me to love him, but don't pain me by talking like that, Aunt! You would not have had me stay there with him, would you? — and your house is the only home I have to return to. He says we can be married in a day or two.”

“I wish he had never seen you.”

“Very well; then I will be the miserablest woman in the world, and not let him see me again. No, I won't have him!”

“It is too late to speak so. Come with me. I am going to the inn to see if he has returned. Of course I shall get to the bottom of this story at once. Mr. Wildeve must not suppose he can play tricks upon me, or any belonging to me.”

“It was not that. The license was wrong, and he couldn't get another the same day. He will tell you in a moment how it was, if he comes.”

“Why didn't he bring you back?”

“That was me!” again sobbed Thomasin. “When I

found we could not be married I didn't like to come back with him, and I was very ill. Then I saw Diggory Venn, and was glad to get him to take me home. I cannot explain it any better, and you must be angry with me if you will.”

“I shall see about that,” said Mrs. Yeobright; and they turned towards the inn, known in the neighbourhood as the Quiet Woman, the sign of which represented the figure of a matron carrying her head under her arm, beneath which gruesome design was written the couplet so well known to frequenters of the inn:-

SINCE THE WOMAN'S QUIET LET NO MAN BREED A RIOT.(1)

(1) The inn which really bore this sign and legend stood

some miles to the northwest of the present scene, wherein

the house more immediately referred to is now no longer an

inn; and the surroundings are much changed. But another inn,

some of whose features are also embodied in this description, the RED LION at Winfrith, still remains as a

haven for the wayfarer (1912).

The front of the house was towards the heath and Rainbarrow, whose dark shape seemed to threaten it from the sky. Upon the door was a neglected brass plate, bearing the unexpected inscription, "Mr. Wildeve, Engineer"-a useless yet cherished relic from the time when he had been started in that profession in an office at Budmouth by those who had hoped much from him, and had been disappointed. The garden was at the back, and behind this ran a still deep stream, forming the margin of the heath in that direction, meadow-land appearing beyond the stream.

But the thick obscurity permitted only skylines to be visible of any scene at present. The water at the back of the house could be heard, idly spinning whirlpools in its creep between the rows of dry feather-headed reeds which formed a stockade along each bank. Their presence was denoted by sounds as of a congregation praying humbly, produced by their rubbing against each other in the slow wind.

The window, whence the candlelight had shone up the vale to the eyes of the bonfire group, was uncurtained, but the sill lay too high for a pedestrian on the outside to look over it into the room. A vast shadow, in which could be dimly traced portions of a masculine contour, blotted half the ceiling.

"He seems to be at home," said Mrs. Yeobright.

"Must I come in, too, Aunt?" asked Thomasin faintly. "I suppose not; it would be wrong."

“You must come, certainly-to confront him, so that he may make no false representations to me. We shall not be five minutes in the house, and then we'll walk home.”

Entering the open passage, she tapped at the door of the private parlour, unfastened it, and looked in.

The back and shoulders of a man came between Mrs. Yeobright's eyes and the fire. Wildeve, whose form it was, immediately turned, arose, and advanced to meet his visitors.

He was quite a young man, and of the two properties, form and motion, the latter first attracted the eye in him. The grace of his movement was singular-it was the pantomimic expression of a lady-killing career. Next came into notice the more material qualities, among which was a profuse crop of hair impending over the top of his face, lending to his forehead the high-cornered outline of an early Gothic shield; and a neck which was smooth and round as a cylinder. The lower half of his figure was of light build. Altogether he was one in whom no man would have seen anything to admire, and in whom no woman would have seen anything to dislike.

He discerned the young girl's form in the passage, and said, “Thomasin, then, has reached home. How could you leave me in that way, darling?” And turning to Mrs. Yeobright-“It was useless to argue with her. She would go, and go alone.”

“But what's the meaning of it all?” demanded Mrs. Yeobright haughtily.

“Take a seat,” said Wildeve, placing chairs for the two women. “Well, it was a very stupid mistake, but such mistakes will happen. The license was useless at Anglebury. It was made out for Budmouth, but as I didn't read it I wasn't aware of that.”

“But you had been staying at Anglebury?”

“No. I had been at Budmouth-till two days ago-and that was where I had intended to take her; but when I came to fetch her we decided upon Anglebury, forgetting that a new license would be necessary. There was not time to get to Budmouth afterwards.”

“I think you are very much to blame,” said Mrs. Yeobright.

“It was quite my fault we chose Anglebury,” Thomasin pleaded. “I proposed it because I was not known there.”

“I know so well that I am to blame that you need not remind me of it,” replied Wildeve shortly.

“Such things don't happen for nothing,” said the aunt. “It is a great slight to me and my family; and when it gets known there will be a very unpleasant time for us. How can she look her friends in the face tomorrow? It is a very great injury, and one I cannot easily forgive. It may even reflect on her character.”

“Nonsense,” said Wildeve.

Thomasin's large eyes had flown from the face of

one to the face of the other during this discussion, and she now said anxiously, "Will you allow me, Aunt, to talk it over alone with Damon for five minutes? Will you, Damon?"

"Certainly, dear," said Wildeve, "if your aunt will excuse us." He led her into an adjoining room, leaving Mrs. Yeobright by the fire.

As soon as they were alone, and the door closed, Thomasin said, turning up her pale, tearful face to him, "It is killing me, this, Damon! I did not mean to part from you in anger at Anglebury this morning; but I was frightened and hardly knew what I said. I've not let Aunt know how much I suffered today; and it is so hard to command my face and voice, and to smile as if it were a slight thing to me; but I try to do so, that she may not be still more indignant with you. I know you could not help it, dear, whatever Aunt may think."

"She is very unpleasant."

"Yes," Thomasin murmured, "and I suppose I seem so now... Damon, what do you mean to do about me?"

"Do about you?"

"Yes. Those who don't like you whisper things which at moments make me doubt you. We mean to marry, I suppose, don't we?"

"Of course we do. We have only to go to Budmouth on Monday, and we marry at once."

"Then do let us go! — O Damon, what you make

me say!" She hid her face in her handkerchief. "Here am I asking you to marry me, when by rights you ought to be on your knees imploring me, your cruel mistress, not to refuse you, and saying it would break your heart if I did. I used to think it would be pretty and sweet like that; but how different!"

"Yes, real life is never at all like that."

"But I don't care personally if it never takes place," she added with a little dignity; "no, I can live without you. It is Aunt I think of. She is so proud, and thinks so much of her family respectability, that she will be cut down with mortification if this story should get abroad before-it is done. My cousin Clym, too, will be much wounded."

"Then he will be very unreasonable. In fact, you are all rather unreasonable."

Thomasin coloured a little, and not with love. But whatever the momentary feeling which caused that flush in her, it went as it came, and she humbly said, "I never mean to be, if I can help it. I merely feel that you have my aunt to some extent in your power at last."

"As a matter of justice it is almost due to me," said Wildeve. "Think what I have gone through to win her consent; the insult that it is to any man to have the banns forbidden-the double insult to a man unlucky enough to be cursed with sensitiveness, and blue demons, and Heaven knows what, as I am. I can never forget those banns. A harsher man would rejoice now in

the power I have of turning upon your aunt by going no further in the business.”

She looked wistfully at him with her sorrowful eyes as he said those words, and her aspect showed that more than one person in the room could deplore the possession of sensitiveness. Seeing that she was really suffering he seemed disturbed and added, “This is merely a reflection you know. I have not the least intention to refuse to complete the marriage, Tamsie mine-I could not bear it.”

“You could not, I know!” said the fair girl, brightening. “You, who cannot bear the sight of pain in even an insect, or any disagreeable sound, or unpleasant smell even, will not long cause pain to me and mine.”

“I will not, if I can help it.”

“Your hand upon it, Damon.”

He carelessly gave her his hand.

“Ah, by my crown, what's that?” he said suddenly.

There fell upon their ears the sound of numerous voices singing in front of the house. Among these, two made themselves prominent by their peculiarity: one was a very strong bass, the other a wheezy thin piping. Thomasin recognized them as belonging to Timothy Fairway and Grandfer Cattle respectively.

“What does it mean-it is not skimmity-riding, I hope?” she said, with a frightened gaze at Wildeve.

“Of course not; no, it is that the heath-folk have

come to sing to us a welcome. This is intolerable!" He began pacing about, the men outside singing cheerily-

"He told' her that she' was the joy' of his life',
And if' she'd con-sent' he would make her his wife'; She
could' not refuse' him; to church' so they went', Young
Will was forgot', and young Sue' was content'; And
then' was she kiss'd' and set down' on his knee', No
man' in the world' was so lov'-ing as he'!"

Mrs. Yeobright burst in from the outer room. "Thomasin, Thomasin!" she said, looking indignantly at Wildeve; "here's a pretty exposure! Let us escape at once. Come!"

It was, however, too late to get away by the passage. A rugged knocking had begun upon the door of the front room. Wildeve, who had gone to the window, came back.

"Stop!" he said imperiously, putting his hand upon Mrs. Yeobright's arm. "We are regularly besieged. There are fifty of them out there if there's one. You stay in this room with Thomasin; I'll go out and face them. You must stay now, for my sake, till they are gone, so that it may seem as if all was right. Come, Tamsie dear, don't go making a scene-we must marry after this; that you can see as well as I. Sit still, that's all-and don't speak much. I'll manage them. Blundering fools!"

He pressed the agitated girl into a seat, returned to the outer room and opened the door. Immediately

outside, in the passage, appeared Grandfer Cattle singing in concert with those still standing in front of the house. He came into the room and nodded abstractedly to Wildeve, his lips still parted, and his features excruciatingly strained in the emission of the chorus. This being ended, he said heartily, "Here's welcome to the new-made couple, and God bless 'em!"

"Thank you," said Wildeve, with dry resentment, his face as gloomy as a thunderstorm.

At the Grandfer's heels now came the rest of the group, which included Fairway, Christian, Sam the turf-cutter, Humphrey, and a dozen others. All smiled upon Wildeve, and upon his tables and chairs likewise, from a general sense of friendliness towards the articles as well as towards their owner.

"We be not here afore Mrs. Yeobright after all," said Fairway, recognizing the matron's bonnet through the glass partition which divided the public apartment they had entered from the room where the women sat. "We struck down across, d'ye see, Mr. Wildeve, and she went round by the path."

"And I see the young bride's little head!" said Grandfer, peeping in the same direction, and discerning Thomasin, who was waiting beside her aunt in a miserable and awkward way. "Not quite settled in yet-well, well, there's plenty of time."

Wildeve made no reply; and probably feeling that the sooner he treated them the sooner they would go, he

produced a stone jar, which threw a warm halo over matters at once.

“That's a drop of the right sort, I can see,” said Grandfer Cante, with the air of a man too well-mannered to show any hurry to taste it.

“Yes,” said Wildeve, “'tis some old mead. I hope you will like it.”

“O ay!” replied the guests, in the hearty tones natural when the words demanded by politeness coincide with those of deepest feeling. “There isn't a prettier drink under the sun.”

“I'll take my oath there isn't,” added Grandfer Cante. “All that can be said against mead is that 'tis rather heady, and apt to lie about a man a good while. But tomorrow's Sunday, thank God.”

“I feel'd for all the world like some bold soldier after I had had some once,” said Christian.

“You shall feel so again,” said Wildeve, with condescension, “Cups or glasses, gentlemen?”

“Well, if you don't mind, we'll have the beaker, and pass 'en round; 'tis better than heling it out in dribbles.”

“Jown the slippery glasses,” said Grandfer Cante. “What's the good of a thing that you can't put down in the ashes to warm, hey, neighbours; that's what I ask?”

“Right, Grandfer,” said Sam; and the mead then circulated.

“Well,” said Timothy Fairway, feeling demands upon his praise in some form or other, “’tis a worthy thing to be married, Mr. Wildeve; and the woman you’ve got is a dimant, so says I. Yes,” he continued, to Grandfer Cattle, raising his voice so as to be heard through the partition, “her father (inclining his head towards the inner room) was as good a feller as ever lived. He always had his great indignation ready against anything underhand.”

“Is that very dangerous?” said Christian.

“And there were few in these parts that were upsides with him,” said Sam. “Whenever a club walked he’d play the clarinet in the band that marched before ’em as if he’d never touched anything but a clarinet all his life. And then, when they got to church door he’d throw down the clarinet, mount the gallery, snatch up the bass viol, and rozum away as if he’d never played anything but a bass viol. Folk would say-folk that knowed what a true stave was-’Surely, surely that’s never the same man that I saw handling the clarinet so masterly by now!”

“I can mind it,” said the furze-cutter. “’Twas a wonderful thing that one body could hold it all and never mix the fingering.”

“There was Kingsbere church likewise,” Fairway recommenced, as one opening a new vein of the same mine of interest.

Wildeve breathed the breath of one intolerably

bored, and glanced through the partition at the prisoners.

“He used to walk over there of a Sunday afternoon to visit his old acquaintance Andrew Brown, the first clarinet there; a good man enough, but rather screechy in his music, if you can mind?”

“A was.”

“And neighbour Yeobright would take Andrey's place for some part of the service, to let Andrey have a bit of a nap, as any friend would naturally do.”

“As any friend would,” said Grandfer Cattle, the other listeners expressing the same accord by the shorter way of nodding their heads.

“No sooner was Andrey asleep and the first whiff of neighbour Yeobright's wind had got inside Andrey's clarinet than everyone in church feeled in a moment there was a great soul among 'em. All heads would turn, and they'd say, 'Ah, I thought 'twas he!' One Sunday I can well mind-a bass viol day that time, and Yeobright had brought his own. 'Twas the Hundred-and-thirty-third to 'Lydia'; and when they'd come to 'Ran down his beard and o'er his robes its costly moisture shed,' neighbour Yeobright, who had just warmed to his work, drove his bow into them strings that glorious grand that he e'en a'most sawed the bass viol into two pieces. Every winder in church rattled as if 'twere a thunderstorm. Old Pa'son Williams lifted his hands in his great holy surplice as natural as if

he'd been in common clothes, and seemed to say hisself, 'O for such a man in our parish!' But not a soul in Kingsbere could hold a candle to Yeobright."

"Was it quite safe when the winder shook?" Christian inquired.

He received no answer, all for the moment sitting rapt in admiration of the performance described. As with Farinelli's singing before the princesses, Sheridan's renowned Begum Speech, and other such examples, the fortunate condition of its being for ever lost to the world invested the deceased Mr. Yeobright's tour de force on that memorable afternoon with a cumulative glory which comparative criticism, had that been possible, might considerably have shorn down.

"He was the last you'd have expected to drop off in the prime of life," said Humphrey.

"Ah, well; he was looking for the earth some months afore he went. At that time women used to run for smocks and gown-pieces at Greenhill Fair, and my wife that is now, being a long-legged slithering maid, hardly husband-high, went with the rest of the maidens, for 'a was a good, runner afore she got so heavy. When she came home I said-we were then just beginning to walk together-'What have ye got, my honey?' 'I've won-well, I've won-a gown-piece,' says she, her colours coming up in a moment. 'Tis a smock for a crown, I thought; and so it turned out. Ay, when I think what she'll say to me now without a mossel of red in her

face, it do seem strange that 'a wouldn't say such a little thing then... However, then she went on, and that's what made me bring up the story. Well, whatever clothes I've won, white or figured, for eyes to see or for eyes not to see' ('a could do a pretty stroke of modesty in those days), 'I'd sooner have lost it than have seen what I have. Poor Mr. Yeobright was took bad directly he reached the fair ground, and was forced to go home again.' That was the last time he ever went out of the parish.”

“A faltered on from one day to another, and then we heard he was gone.”

“D'ye think he had great pain when 'a died?” said Christian.

“O no-quite different. Nor any pain of mind. He was lucky enough to be God A'mighty's own man.”

“And other folk-d'ye think 'twill be much pain to 'em, Mister Fairway?”

“That depends on whether they be afeard.”

“I bain't afeard at all, I thank God!” said Christian strenuously. “I'm glad I bain't, for then 'twon't pain me... I don't think I be afeard-or if I be I can't help it, and I don't deserve to suffer. I wish I was not afeard at all!”

There was a solemn silence, and looking from the window, which was unshuttered and unblinded, Timothy said, “Well, what a fess little bonfire that one is, out by Cap'n Vye's! 'Tis burning just the same now

as ever, upon my life.”

All glances went through the window, and nobody noticed that Wildeve disguised a brief, telltale look. Far away up the sombre valley of heath, and to the right of Rainbarrow, could indeed be seen the light, small, but steady and persistent as before.

“It was lighted before ours was,” Fairway continued; “and yet every one in the country round is out afore 'n.”

“Perhaps there's meaning in it!” murmured Christian.

“How meaning?” said Wildeve sharply.

Christian was too scattered to reply, and Timothy helped him.

“He means, sir, that the lonesome dark-eyed creature up there that some say is a witch-ever I should call a fine young woman such a name-is always up to some odd conceit or other; and so perhaps 'tis she.”

“I'd be very glad to ask her in wedlock, if she'd hae me and take the risk of her wild dark eyes ill-wishing me,” said Grandfer Cattle staunchly.

“Don't ye say it, Father!” implored Christian.

“Well, be dazed if he who do marry the maid won't hae an uncommon picture for his best parlour,” said Fairway in a liquid tone, placing down the cup of mead at the end of a good pull.

“And a partner as deep as the North Star,” said Sam, taking up the cup and finishing the little that

remained. "Well, really, now I think we must be moving," said Humphrey, observing the emptiness of the vessel.

"But we'll gie 'em another song?" said Grandfer Cante. "I'm as full of notes as a bird!"

"Thank you, Grandfer," said Wildeve. "But we will not trouble you now. Some other day must do for that-when I have a party."

"Be jown'd if I don't learn ten new songs for't, or I won't learn a line!" said Grandfer Cante. "And you may be sure I won't disappoint ye by biding away, Mr. Wildeve."

"I quite believe you," said that gentleman.

All then took their leave, wishing their entertainer long life and happiness as a married man, with recapitulations which occupied some time. Wildeve attended them to the door, beyond which the deep-dyed upward stretch of heath stood awaiting them, an amplitude of darkness reigning from their feet almost to the zenith, where a definite form first became visible in the lowering forehead of Rainbarrow. Diving into the dense obscurity in a line headed by Sam the turf-cutter, they pursued their trackless way home.

When the scratching of the furze against their leggings had fainted upon the ear, Wildeve returned to the room where he had left Thomasin and her aunt. The women were gone.

They could only have left the house in one way,

by the back window; and this was open.

Wildevé laughed to himself, remained a moment thinking, and idly returned to the front room. Here his glance fell upon a bottle of wine which stood on the mantelpiece. "Ah-old Dowden!" he murmured; and going to the kitchen door shouted, "Is anybody here who can take something to old Dowden?"

There was no reply. The room was empty, the lad who acted as his factotum having gone to bed. Wildevé came back put on his hat, took the bottle, and left the house, turning the key in the door, for there was no guest at the inn tonight. As soon as he was on the road the little bonfire on Mistover Knap again met his eye.

"Still waiting, are you, my lady?" he murmured.

However, he did not proceed that way just then; but leaving the hill to the left of him, he stumbled over a rutted road that brought him to a cottage which, like all other habitations on the heath at this hour, was only saved from being visible by a faint shine from its bedroom window. This house was the home of Olly Dowden, the besom-maker, and he entered.

The lower room was in darkness; but by feeling his way he found a table, whereon he placed the bottle, and a minute later emerged again upon the heath. He stood and looked northeast at the undying little fire-high up above him, though not so high as Rainbarrow.

We have been told what happens when a woman

deliberates; and the epigram is not always terminable with woman, provided that one be in the case, and that a fair one. Wildeve stood, and stood longer, and breathed perplexedly, and then said to himself with resignation, "Yes-by Heaven, I must go to her, I suppose!"

Instead of turning in the direction of home he pressed on rapidly by a path under Rainbarrow towards what was evidently a signal light.