

THE SLOW NATURE

(AN INCIDENT OF FROOM VALLEY)

"Thy husband--poor, poor Heart!--is dead--

Dead, out by Moreford Rise;

A bull escaped the barton-shed,

Gored him, and there he lies!"

- "Ha, ha--go away! 'Tis a tale, methink,

Thou joker Kit!" laughed she.

"I've known thee many a year, Kit Twink,

And ever hast thou fooled me!"

- "But, Mistress Damon--I can swear

Thy goodman John is dead!

And soon th'lt hear their feet who bear

His body to his bed."

So unwontedly sad was the merry man's face -

That face which had long deceived -

That she gazed and gazed; and then could trace

The truth there; and she believed.

She laid a hand on the dresser-ledge,

And scanned far Egdon-side;  
And stood; and you heard the wind-swept sedge  
And the rippling Froom; till she cried:

"O my chamber's untidied, unmade my bed  
Though the day has begun to wear!  
'What a slovenly hussif!' it will be said,  
When they all go up my stair!"

She disappeared; and the joker stood  
Depressed by his neighbour's doom,  
And amazed that a wife struck to widowhood  
Thought first of her unkempt room.

But a fortnight thence she could take no food,  
And she pined in a slow decay;  
While Kit soon lost his mournful mood  
And laughed in his ancient way.

1894.