

achievement but by tendency. Moreover, the figure near at hand suffers on such occasion, because it shows up its sorriest without shade; while vague figures afar off are honoured, in that their distance makes artistic virtues of their stains. In considering what Tess was not, he overlooked what she was, and forgot that the defective can be more than the entire.

XL

At breakfast Brazil was the topic, and all endeavoured to take a hopeful view of Clare's proposed experiment with that country's soil, notwithstanding the discouraging reports of some farm-labourers who had emigrated thither and returned home within the twelve months. After breakfast Clare went into the little town to wind up such trifling matters as he was concerned with there, and to get from the local bank all the money he possessed. On his way back he encountered Miss Mercy Chant by the church, from whose walls she seemed to be a sort of emanation. She was carrying an armful of Bibles for her class, and such was her view of life that events which produced heartache in others wrought beatific smiles upon her--an enviable result, although, in the opinion of Angel, it was obtained by a curiously unnatural sacrifice of humanity to mysticism.

She had learnt that he was about to leave England, and observed what an excellent and promising scheme it seemed to be.

"Yes; it is a likely scheme enough in a commercial sense, no doubt," he replied. "But, my dear Mercy, it snaps the continuity of existence. Perhaps a cloister would be preferable."

"A cloister! O, Angel Clare!"

"Well?"

"Why, you wicked man, a cloister implies a monk, and a monk Roman Catholicism."

"And Roman Catholicism sin, and sin damnation. Thou art in a parlous state, Angel Clare."

"\_I\_ glory in my Protestantism!" she said severely.

Then Clare, thrown by sheer misery into one of the demoniacal moods in which a man does despite to his true principles, called her close to him, and fiendishly whispered in her ear the most heterodox ideas he could think of. His momentary laughter at the horror which appeared on her fair face ceased when it merged in pain and anxiety for his welfare.

"Dear Mercy," he said, "you must forgive me. I think I am going crazy!"

She thought that he was; and thus the interview ended, and Clare re-entered the Vicarage. With the local banker he deposited the jewels till happier days should arise. He also paid into the bank thirty pounds--to be sent to Tess in a few months, as she might require; and wrote to her at her parents' home in Blackmoor Vale to inform her of what he had done. This amount, with the sum he had already placed in her hands--about fifty pounds--he hoped would be amply sufficient for her wants just at present, particularly as in an emergency she had been directed to apply to his father.

He deemed it best not to put his parents into communication with her by informing them of her address; and, being unaware of what had really happened to estrange the two, neither his father nor his mother suggested that he should do so. During the day he left the parsonage, for what he had to complete he wished to get done quickly.

As the last duty before leaving this part of England it was necessary for him to call at the Wellbridge farmhouse, in which he had spent with Tess the first three days of their marriage, the trifle of rent having to be paid, the key given up of the rooms they had occupied, and two or three small articles fetched away that they had left behind. It was under this roof that the deepest shadow ever thrown upon his life had stretched its gloom over him. Yet when he had

unlocked the door of the sitting-room and looked into it, the memory which returned first upon him was that of their happy arrival on a similar afternoon, the first fresh sense of sharing a habitation conjointly, the first meal together, the chatting by the fire with joined hands.

The farmer and his wife were in the field at the moment of his visit, and Clare was in the rooms alone for some time. Inwardly swollen with a renewal of sentiment that he had not quite reckoned with, he went upstairs to her chamber, which had never been his. The bed was smooth as she had made it with her own hands on the morning of leaving. The mistletoe hung under the tester just as he had placed it. Having been there three or four weeks it was turning colour, and the leaves and berries were wrinkled. Angel took it down and crushed it into the grate. Standing there, he for the first time doubted whether his course in this conjecture had been a wise, much less a generous, one. But had he not been cruelly blinded? In the incoherent multitude of his emotions he knelt down at the bedside wet-eyed. "O Tess! If you had only told me sooner, I would have forgiven you!" he mourned.

Hearing a footstep below, he rose and went to the top of the stairs. At the bottom of the flight he saw a woman standing, and on her turning up her face recognized the pale, dark-eyed Izz Huett.

"Mr Clare," she said, "I've called to see you and Mrs Clare, and to

inquire if ye be well. I thought you might be back here again."

This was a girl whose secret he had guessed, but who had not yet guessed his; an honest girl who loved him--one who would have made as good, or nearly as good, a practical farmer's wife as Tess.

"I am here alone," he said; "we are not living here now." Explaining why he had come, he asked, "Which way are you going home, Izz?"

"I have no home at Talbothays Dairy now, sir," she said.

"Why is that?"

Izz looked down.

"It was so dismal there that I left! I am staying out this way."

She pointed in a contrary direction, the direction in which he was journeying.

"Well--are you going there now? I can take you if you wish for a lift."

Her olive complexion grew richer in hue.

"Thank 'ee, Mr Clare," she said.

He soon found the farmer, and settled the account for his rent and the few other items which had to be considered by reason of the sudden abandonment of the lodgings. On Clare's return to his horse and gig, Izz jumped up beside him.

"I am going to leave England, Izz," he said, as they drove on.

"Going to Brazil."

"And do Mrs Clare like the notion of such a journey?" she asked.

"She is not going at present--say for a year or so. I am going out to reconnoitre--to see what life there is like."

They sped along eastward for some considerable distance, Izz making no observation.

"How are the others?" he inquired. "How is Retty?"

"She was in a sort of nervous state when I zid her last; and so thin and hollow-cheeked that 'a do seem in a decline. Nobody will ever fall in love wi' her any more," said Izz absently.

"And Marian?"

Izz lowered her voice.

"Marian drinks."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. The dairyman has got rid of her."

"And you!"

"I don't drink, and I bain't in a decline. But--I am no great things at singing afore breakfast now!"

"How is that? Do you remember how neatly you used to turn "'Twas down in Cupid's Gardens' and 'The Tailor's Breeches' at morning milking?"

"Ah, yes! When you first came, sir, that was. Not when you had been there a bit."

"Why was that falling-off?"

Her black eyes flashed up to his face for one moment by way of answer.

"Izz!--how weak of you--for such as I!" he said, and fell into reverie. "Then--suppose I had asked YOU to marry me?"

"If you had I should have said 'Yes', and you would have married a woman who loved 'ee!"

"Really!"

"Down to the ground!" she whispered vehemently. "O my God! did you never guess it till now!"

By-and-by they reached a branch road to a village.

"I must get down. I live out there," said Izz abruptly, never having spoken since her avowal.

Clare slowed the horse. He was incensed against his fate, bitterly disposed towards social ordinances; for they had cooped him up in a corner, out of which there was no legitimate pathway. Why not be revenged on society by shaping his future domesticities loosely, instead of kissing the pedagogic rod of convention in this ensnaring manner?

"I am going to Brazil alone, Izz," said he. "I have separated from my wife for personal, not voyaging, reasons. I may never live with her again. I may not be able to love you; but--will you go with me instead of her?"

"You truly wish me to go?"



"I do. I have been badly used enough to wish for relief. And you at least love me disinterestedly."

"Yes--I will go," said Izz, after a pause.

"You will? You know what it means, Izz?"

"It means that I shall live with you for the time you are over there--that's good enough for me."

"Remember, you are not to trust me in morals now. But I ought to remind you that it will be wrong-doing in the eyes of civilization--Western civilization, that is to say."

"I don't mind that; no woman do when it comes to agony-point, and there's no other way!"

"Then don't get down, but sit where you are."

He drove past the cross-roads, one mile, two miles, without showing any signs of affection.

"You love me very, very much, Izz?" he suddenly asked.

"I do--I have said I do! I loved you all the time we was at the

dairy together!"

"More than Tess?"

She shook her head.

"No," she murmured, "not more than she."

"How's that?"

"Because nobody could love 'ee more than Tess did! ... She would have laid down her life for 'ee. I could do no more."

Like the prophet on the top of Peor, Izz Huett would fain have spoken perversely at such a moment, but the fascination exercised over her rougher nature by Tess's character compelled her to grace.

Clare was silent; his heart had risen at these straightforward words from such an unexpected unimpeachable quarter. In his throat was something as if a sob had solidified there. His ears repeated, "SHE WOULD HAVE LAID DOWN HER LIFE FOR 'EE. I COULD DO NO MORE!"

"Forget our idle talk, Izz," he said, turning the horse's head suddenly. "I don't know what I've been saying! I will now drive you back to where your lane branches off."

"So much for honesty towards 'ee! O--how can I bear it--how can I--how can I!"

Izz Huett burst into wild tears, and beat her forehead as she saw what she had done.

"Do you regret that poor little act of justice to an absent one?  
O, Izz, don't spoil it by regret!"

She stilled herself by degrees.

"Very well, sir. Perhaps I didn't know what I was saying, either, wh--when I agreed to go! I wish--what cannot be!"

"Because I have a loving wife already."

"Yes, yes! You have!"

They reached the corner of the lane which they had passed half an hour earlier, and she hopped down.

"Izz--please, please forget my momentary levity!" he cried. "It was so ill-considered, so ill-advised!"

"Forget it? Never, never! O, it was no levity to me!"

He felt how richly he deserved the reproach that the wounded cry conveyed, and, in a sorrow that was inexpressible, leapt down and took her hand.

"Well, but, Izz, we'll part friends, anyhow? You don't know what I've had to bear!"

She was a really generous girl, and allowed no further bitterness to mar their adieux.

"I forgive 'ee, sir!" she said.

"Now, Izz," he said, while she stood beside him there, forcing himself to the mentor's part he was far from feeling; "I want you to tell Marian when you see her that she is to be a good woman, and not to give way to folly. Promise that, and tell Retty that there are more worthy men than I in the world, that for my sake she is to act wisely and well--remember the words--wisely and well--for my sake. I send this message to them as a dying man to the dying; for I shall never see them again. And you, Izzy, you have saved me by your honest words about my wife from an incredible impulse towards folly and treachery. Women may be bad, but they are not so bad as men in these things! On that one account I can never forget you. Be always the good and sincere girl you have hitherto been; and think of me as a worthless lover, but a faithful friend. Promise."

She gave the promise.

"Heaven bless and keep you, sir. Goodbye!"

He drove on; but no sooner had Izz turned into the lane, and Clare was out of sight, than she flung herself down on the bank in a fit of racking anguish; and it was with a strained unnatural face that she entered her mother's cottage late that night. Nobody ever was told how Izz spent the dark hours that intervened between Angel Clare's parting from her and her arrival home.

Clare, too, after bidding the girl farewell, was wrought to aching thoughts and quivering lips. But his sorrow was not for Izz. That evening he was within a feather-weight's turn of abandoning his road to the nearest station, and driving across that elevated dorsal line of South Wessex which divided him from his Tess's home. It was neither a contempt for her nature, nor the probable state of her heart, which deterred him.

No; it was a sense that, despite her love, as corroborated by Izz's admission, the facts had not changed. If he was right at first, he was right now. And the momentum of the course on which he had embarked tended to keep him going in it, unless diverted by a stronger, more sustained force than had played upon him this afternoon. He could soon come back to her. He took the train that night for London, and five days after shook hands in farewell of his

brothers at the port of embarkation.

## XLI

From the foregoing events of the winter-time let us press on to an October day, more than eight months subsequent to the parting of Clare and Tess. We discover the latter in changed conditions; instead of a bride with boxes and trunks which others bore, we see her a lonely woman with a basket and a bundle in her own portorage, as at an earlier time when she was no bride; instead of the ample means that were projected by her husband for her comfort through this probationary period, she can produce only a flattened purse.

After again leaving Marlott, her home, she had got through the spring and summer without any great stress upon her physical powers, the time being mainly spent in rendering light irregular service at dairy-work near Port-Bredy to the west of the Blackmoor Valley, equally remote from her native place and from Talbothays. She preferred this to living on his allowance. Mentally she remained in utter stagnation, a condition which the mechanical occupation rather fostered than checked. Her consciousness was at that other dairy, at that other season, in the presence of the tender lover who had confronted her there--he who, the moment she had grasped him to keep