

the destiny which, no doubt, when they were among the Olympians of the county, they had caused to descend many a time, and severely enough, upon the heads of such landless ones as they themselves were now. So do flux and reflux--the rhythm of change--alternate and persist in everything under the sky.

LI

At length it was the eve of Old Lady-Day, and the agricultural world was in a fever of mobility such as only occurs at that particular date of the year. It is a day of fulfilment; agreements for outdoor service during the ensuing year, entered into at Candlemas, are to be now carried out. The labourers--or "work-folk", as they used to call themselves immemorially till the other word was introduced from without--who wish to remain no longer in old places are removing to the new farms.

These annual migrations from farm to farm were on the increase here. When Tess's mother was a child the majority of the field-folk about Marlott had remained all their lives on one farm, which had been the home also of their fathers and grandfathers; but latterly the desire for yearly removal had risen to a high pitch. With the younger families it was a pleasant excitement which might possibly be an

advantage. The Egypt of one family was the Land of Promise to the family who saw it from a distance, till by residence there it became it turn their Egypt also; and so they changed and changed.

However, all the mutations so increasingly discernible in village life did not originate entirely in the agricultural unrest. A depopulation was also going on. The village had formerly contained, side by side with the agricultural labourers, an interesting and better-informed class, ranking distinctly above the former--the class to which Tess's father and mother had belonged--and including the carpenter, the smith, the shoemaker, the huckster, together with nondescript workers other than farm-labourers; a set of people who owed a certain stability of aim and conduct to the fact of their being lifeholders like Tess's father, or copyholders, or occasionally, small freeholders. But as the long holdings fell in, they were seldom again let to similar tenants, and were mostly pulled down, if not absolutely required by the farmer for his hands. Cottagers who were not directly employed on the land were looked upon with disfavour, and the banishment of some starved the trade of others, who were thus obliged to follow. These families, who had formed the backbone of the village life in the past, who were the depositaries of the village traditions, had to seek refuge in the large centres; the process, humorously designated by statisticians as "the tendency of the rural population towards the large towns", being really the tendency of water to flow uphill when forced by machinery.

The cottage accommodation at Marlott having been in this manner considerably curtailed by demolitions, every house which remained standing was required by the agriculturist for his work-people. Ever since the occurrence of the event which had cast such a shadow over Tess's life, the Durbeyfield family (whose descent was not credited) had been tacitly looked on as one which would have to go when their lease ended, if only in the interests of morality. It was, indeed, quite true that the household had not been shining examples either of temperance, soberness, or chastity. The father, and even the mother, had got drunk at times, the younger children seldom had gone to church, and the eldest daughter had made queer unions. By some means the village had to be kept pure. So on this, the first Lady-Day on which the Durbeyfields were expellable, the house, being roomy, was required for a carter with a large family; and Widow Joan, her daughters Tess and 'Liza-Lu, the boy Abraham, and the younger children had to go elsewhere.

On the evening preceding their removal it was getting dark betimes by reason of a drizzling rain which blurred the sky. As it was the last night they would spend in the village which had been their home and birthplace, Mrs Durbeyfield, 'Liza-Lu, and Abraham had gone out to bid some friends goodbye, and Tess was keeping house till they should return.

She was kneeling in the window-bench, her face close to the casement, where an outer pane of rain-water was sliding down the inner pane of

glass. Her eyes rested on the web of a spider, probably starved long ago, which had been mistakenly placed in a corner where no flies ever came, and shivered in the slight draught through the casement. Tess was reflecting on the position of the household, in which she perceived her own evil influence. Had she not come home, her mother and the children might probably have been allowed to stay on as weekly tenants. But she had been observed almost immediately on her return by some people of scrupulous character and great influence: they had seen her idling in the churchyard, restoring as well as she could with a little trowel a baby's obliterated grave. By this means they had found that she was living here again; her mother was scolded for "harbouring" her; sharp retorts had ensued from Joan, who had independently offered to leave at once; she had been taken at her word; and here was the result.

"I ought never to have come home," said Tess to herself, bitterly.

She was so intent upon these thoughts that she hardly at first took note of a man in a white mackintosh whom she saw riding down the street. Possibly it was owing to her face being near to the pane that he saw her so quickly, and directed his horse so close to the cottage-front that his hoofs were almost upon the narrow border for plants growing under the wall. It was not till he touched the window with his riding-crop that she observed him. The rain had nearly ceased, and she opened the casement in obedience to his gesture.

"Didn't you see me?" asked d'Urberville.

"I was not attending," she said. "I heard you, I believe, though I fancied it was a carriage and horses. I was in a sort of dream."

"Ah! you heard the d'Urberville Coach, perhaps. You know the legend, I suppose?"

"No. My--somebody was going to tell it me once, but didn't."

"If you are a genuine d'Urberville I ought not to tell you either, I suppose. As for me, I'm a sham one, so it doesn't matter. It is rather dismal. It is that this sound of a non-existent coach can only be heard by one of d'Urberville blood, and it is held to be of ill-omen to the one who hears it. It has to do with a murder, committed by one of the family, centuries ago."

"Now you have begun it, finish it."

"Very well. One of the family is said to have abducted some beautiful woman, who tried to escape from the coach in which he was carrying her off, and in the struggle he killed her--or she killed him--I forget which. Such is one version of the tale... I see that your tubs and buckets are packed. Going away, aren't you?"

"Yes, to-morrow--Old Lady Day."

"I heard you were, but could hardly believe it; it seems so sudden.

Why is it?"

"Father's was the last life on the property, and when that dropped we had no further right to stay. Though we might, perhaps, have stayed as weekly tenants--if it had not been for me."

"What about you?"

"I am not a--proper woman."

D'Urberville's face flushed.

"What a blasted shame! Miserable snobs! May their dirty souls be burnt to cinders!" he exclaimed in tones of ironic resentment.

"That's why you are going, is it? Turned out?"

"We are not turned out exactly; but as they said we should have to go soon, it was best to go now everybody was moving, because there are better chances."

"Where are you going to?"

"Kingsbere. We have taken rooms there. Mother is so foolish about father's people that she will go there."

"But your mother's family are not fit for lodgings, and in a little hole of a town like that. Now why not come to my garden-house at Trantridge? There are hardly any poultry now, since my mother's death; but there's the house, as you know it, and the garden. It can be whitewashed in a day, and your mother can live there quite comfortably; and I will put the children to a good school. Really I ought to do something for you!"

"But we have already taken the rooms at Kingsbere!" she declared.  
"And we can wait--"

"Wait--what for? For that nice husband, no doubt. Now look here, Tess, I know what men are, and, bearing in mind the grounds of your separation, I am quite positive he will never make it up with you. Now, though I have been your enemy, I am your friend, even if you won't believe it. Come to this cottage of mine. We'll get up a regular colony of fowls, and your mother can attend to them excellently; and the children can go to school."

Tess breathed more and more quickly, and at length she said--

"How do I know that you would do all this? Your views may change--and then--we should be--my mother would be--homeless again."

"O no--no. I would guarantee you against such as that in writing, if necessary. Think it over."

Tess shook her head. But d'Urberville persisted; she had seldom seen him so determined; he would not take a negative.

"Please just tell your mother," he said, in emphatic tones. "It is her business to judge--not yours. I shall get the house swept out and whitened to-morrow morning, and fires lit; and it will be dry by the evening, so that you can come straight there. Now mind, I shall expect you."

Tess again shook her head, her throat swelling with complicated emotion. She could not look up at d'Urberville.

"I owe you something for the past, you know," he resumed. "And you cured me, too, of that craze; so I am glad--"

"I would rather you had kept the craze, so that you had kept the practice which went with it!"

"I am glad of this opportunity of repaying you a little. To-morrow I shall expect to hear your mother's goods unloading... Give me your hand on it now--dear, beautiful Tess!"

With the last sentence he had dropped his voice to a murmur, and put



his hand in at the half-open casement. With stormy eyes she pulled the stay-bar quickly, and, in doing so, caught his arm between the casement and the stone mullion.

"Damnation--you are very cruel!" he said, snatching out his arm.

"No, no!--I know you didn't do it on purpose. Well I shall expect you, or your mother and children at least."

"I shall not come--I have plenty of money!" she cried.

"Where?"

"At my father-in-law's, if I ask for it."

"IF you ask for it. But you won't, Tess; I know you; you'll never ask for it--you'll starve first!"

With these words he rode off. Just at the corner of the street he met the man with the paint-pot, who asked him if he had deserted the brethren.

"You go to the devil!" said d'Urberville.

Tess remained where she was a long while, till a sudden rebellious sense of injustice caused the region of her eyes to swell with the rush of hot tears thither. Her husband, Angel Clare himself, had,

like others, dealt out hard measure to her; surely he had! She had never before admitted such a thought; but he had surely! Never in her life--she could swear it from the bottom of her soul--had she ever intended to do wrong; yet these hard judgements had come. Whatever her sins, they were not sins of intention, but of inadvertence, and why should she have been punished so persistently?

She passionately seized the first piece of paper that came to hand, and scribbled the following lines:

O why have you treated me so monstrously, Angel! I do not deserve it. I have thought it all over carefully, and I can never, never forgive you! You know that I did not intend to wrong you--why have you so wronged me? You are cruel, cruel indeed! I will try to forget you. It is all injustice I have received at your hands!

T.

She watched till the postman passed by, ran out to him with her epistle, and then again took her listless place inside the window-panes.

It was just as well to write like that as to write tenderly. How could he give way to entreaty? The facts had not changed: there was

no new event to alter his opinion.

It grew darker, the fire-light shining over the room. The two biggest of the younger children had gone out with their mother; the four smallest, their ages ranging from three-and-a-half years to eleven, all in black frocks, were gathered round the hearth babbling their own little subjects. Tess at length joined them, without lighting a candle.

"This is the last night that we shall sleep here, dears, in the house where we were born," she said quickly. "We ought to think of it, oughtn't we?"

They all became silent; with the impressibility of their age they were ready to burst into tears at the picture of finality she had conjured up, though all the day hitherto they had been rejoicing in the idea of a new place. Tess changed the subject.

"Sing to me, dears," she said.

"What shall we sing?"

"Anything you know; I don't mind."

There was a momentary pause; it was broken, first, in one little tentative note; then a second voice strengthened it, and a third

and a fourth chimed in unison, with words they had learnt at the Sunday-school--

Here we suffer grief and pain,  
Here we meet to part again;  
In Heaven we part no more.

The four sang on with the phlegmatic passivity of persons who had long ago settled the question, and there being no mistake about it, felt that further thought was not required. With features strained hard to enunciate the syllables they continued to regard the centre of the flickering fire, the notes of the youngest straying over into the pauses of the rest.

Tess turned from them, and went to the window again. Darkness had now fallen without, but she put her face to the pane as though to peer into the gloom. It was really to hide her tears. If she could only believe what the children were singing; if she were only sure, how different all would now be; how confidently she would leave them to Providence and their future kingdom! But, in default of that, it behoved her to do something; to be their Providence; for to Tess, as to not a few millions of others, there was ghastly satire in the poet's lines--

Not in utter nakedness  
But trailing clouds of glory do we come.

To her and her like, birth itself was an ordeal of degrading personal compulsion, whose gratuitousness nothing in the result seemed to justify, and at best could only palliate.

In the shades of the wet road she soon discerned her mother with tall 'Liza-Lu and Abraham. Mrs Durbeyfield's pattens clicked up to the door, and Tess opened it.

"I see the tracks of a horse outside the window," said Joan. "Hev somebody called?"

"No," said Tess.

The children by the fire looked gravely at her, and one murmured--

"Why, Tess, the gentleman a-horseback!"

"He didn't call," said Tess. "He spoke to me in passing."

"Who was the gentleman?" asked the mother. "Your husband?"

"No. He'll never, never come," answered Tess in stony hopelessness.

"Then who was it?"

"Oh, you needn't ask. You've seen him before, and so have I."

"Ah! What did he say?" said Joan curiously.

"I will tell you when we are settled in our lodging at Kingsbere to-morrow--every word."

It was not her husband, she had said. Yet a consciousness that in a physical sense this man alone was her husband seemed to weigh on her more and more.

## LII

During the small hours of the next morning, while it was still dark, dwellers near the highways were conscious of a disturbance of their night's rest by rumbling noises, intermittently continuing till daylight--noises as certain to recur in this particular first week of the month as the voice of the cuckoo in the third week of the same. They were the preliminaries of the general removal, the passing of