Part Fourth

AT SHASTON

"Whoso prefers either Matrimony or other Ordinance before the Good of Man and the plain Exigence of Charity, let him profess Papist, or Protestant, or what he will, he is no better than a Pharisee."--J. MILTON.

I

Shaston, the ancient British Palladour,

From whose foundation first such strange reports arise,

(as Drayton sang it), was, and is, in itself the city of a dream. Vague imaginings of its castle, its three mints, its magnificent apsidal abbey, the chief glory of South Wessex, its twelve churches, its shrines, chantries, hospitals, its gabled freestone mansions--all

now ruthlessly swept away--throw the visitor, even against his will, into a pensive melancholy, which the stimulating atmosphere and limitless landscape around him can scarcely dispel. The spot was the burial-place of a king and a queen, of abbots and abbesses, saints and bishops, knights and squires. The bones of King Edward "the Martyr," carefully removed hither for holy preservation, brought Shaston a renown which made it the resort of pilgrims from every part of Europe, and enabled it to maintain a reputation extending far beyond English shores. To this fair creation of the great Middle-Age the Dissolution was, as historians tell us, the death-knell. With the destruction of the enormous abbey the whole place collapsed in a general ruin: the Martyr's bones met with the fate of the sacred pile that held them, and not a stone is now left to tell where they lie.

The natural picturesqueness and singularity of the town still remain; but strange to say these qualities, which were noted by many writers in ages when scenic beauty is said to have been unappreciated, are passed over in this, and one of the queerest and quaintest spots in England stands virtually unvisited to-day.

It has a unique position on the summit of a steep and imposing scarp, rising on the north, south, and west sides of the borough out of the deep alluvial Vale of Blackmoor, the view from the Castle Green over three counties of verdant pasture--South, Mid, and Nether Wessex--being as sudden a surprise to the unexpectant traveller's eyes as the medicinal air is to his lungs. Impossible to a railway,

it can best be reached on foot, next best by light vehicles; and it is hardly accessible to these but by a sort of isthmus on the north-east, that connects it with the high chalk table-land on that side.

Such is, and such was, the now world-forgotten Shaston or Palladour. Its situation rendered water the great want of the town; and within living memory, horses, donkeys and men may have been seen toiling up the winding ways to the top of the height, laden with tubs and barrels filled from the wells beneath the mountain, and hawkers retailing their contents at the price of a halfpenny a bucketful.

This difficulty in the water supply, together with two other odd facts, namely, that the chief graveyard slopes up as steeply as a roof behind the church, and that in former times the town passed through a curious period of corruption, conventual and domestic, gave rise to the saying that Shaston was remarkable for three consolations to man, such as the world afforded not elsewhere. It was a place where the churchyard lay nearer heaven than the church steeple, where beer was more plentiful than water, and where there were more wanton women than honest wives and maids. It is also said that after the Middle Ages the inhabitants were too poor to pay their priests, and hence were compelled to pull down their churches, and refrain altogether from the public worship of God; a necessity which they bemoaned over their cups in the settles of their inns on Sunday afternoons. In those days the Shastonians were apparently not

without a sense of humour.

There was another peculiarity--this a modern one--which Shaston appeared to owe to its site. It was the resting-place and headquarters of the proprietors of wandering vans, shows, shooting-galleries, and other itinerant concerns, whose business lay largely at fairs and markets. As strange wild birds are seen assembled on some lofty promontory, meditatively pausing for longer flights, or to return by the course they followed thither, so here, in this cliff-town, stood in stultified silence the yellow and green caravans bearing names not local, as if surprised by a change in the landscape so violent as to hinder their further progress; and here they usually remained all the winter till they turned to seek again their old tracks in the following spring.

It was to this breezy and whimsical spot that Jude ascended from the nearest station for the first time in his life about four o'clock one afternoon, and entering on the summit of the peak after a toilsome climb, passed the first houses of the aerial town; and drew towards the school-house. The hour was too early; the pupils were still in school, humming small, like a swarm of gnats; and he withdrew a few steps along Abbey Walk, whence he regarded the spot which fate had made the home of all he loved best in the world. In front of the schools, which were extensive and stone-built, grew two enormous beeches with smooth mouse-coloured trunks, as such trees will only grow on chalk uplands. Within the mullioned and transomed windows he

could see the black, brown, and flaxen crowns of the scholars over the sills, and to pass the time away he walked down to the level terrace where the abbey gardens once had spread, his heart throbbing in spite of him.

Unwilling to enter till the children were dismissed he remained here till young voices could be heard in the open air, and girls in white pinafores over red and blue frocks appeared dancing along the paths which the abbess, prioress, subprioress, and fifty nuns had demurely paced three centuries earlier. Retracing his steps he found that he had waited too long, and that Sue had gone out into the town at the heels of the last scholar, Mr. Phillotson having been absent all the afternoon at a teachers' meeting at Shottsford.

Jude went into the empty schoolroom and sat down, the girl who was sweeping the floor having informed him that Mrs. Phillotson would be back again in a few minutes. A piano stood near--actually the old piano that Phillotson had possessed at Marygreen--and though the dark afternoon almost prevented him seeing the notes Jude touched them in his humble way, and could not help modulating into the hymn which had so affected him in the previous week.

A figure moved behind him, and thinking it was still the girl with the broom Jude took no notice, till the person came close and laid her fingers lightly upon his bass hand. The imposed hand was a little one he seemed to know, and he turned.

"Don't stop," said Sue. "I like it. I learnt it before I left Melchester. They used to play it in the training school."

"I can't strum before you! Play it for me."

"Oh well--I don't mind."

Sue sat down, and her rendering of the piece, though not remarkable, seemed divine as compared with his own. She, like him, was evidently touched--to her own surprise--by the recalled air; and when she had finished, and he moved his hand towards hers, it met his own half-way. Jude grasped it--just as he had done before her marriage.

"It is odd," she said, in a voice quite changed, "that I should care about that air; because--"

"Because what?"

"I am not that sort--quite."

"Not easily moved?"

"I didn't quite mean that."

"Oh, but you ARE one of that sort, for you are just like me at

heart!"

"But not at head."

She played on and suddenly turned round; and by an unpremeditated instinct each clasped the other's hand again.

She uttered a forced little laugh as she relinquished his quickly. "How funny!" she said. "I wonder what we both did that for?"

"I suppose because we are both alike, as I said before."

"Not in our thoughts! Perhaps a little in our feelings."

"And they rule thoughts... Isn't it enough to make one blaspheme that the composer of that hymn is one of the most commonplace men I ever met!"

"What--you know him?"

"I went to see him."

"Oh, you goose--to do just what I should have done! Why did you?"

"Because we are not alike," he said drily.

"Now we'll have some tea," said Sue. "Shall we have it here instead of in my house? It is no trouble to get the kettle and things brought in. We don't live at the school you know, but in that ancient dwelling across the way called Old-Grove Place. It is so antique and dismal that it depresses me dreadfully. Such houses are very well to visit, but not to live in--I feel crushed into the earth by the weight of so many previous lives there spent. In a new place like these schools there is only your own life to support. Sit down, and I'll tell Ada to bring the tea-things across."

He waited in the light of the stove, the door of which she flung open before going out, and when she returned, followed by the maiden with tea, they sat down by the same light, assisted by the blue rays of a spirit-lamp under the brass kettle on the stand.

"This is one of your wedding-presents to me," she said, signifying the latter.

"Yes," said Jude.

The kettle of his gift sang with some satire in its note, to his mind; and to change the subject he said, "Do you know of any good readable edition of the uncanonical books of the New Testament? You don't read them in the school I suppose?"

"Oh dear no!--'twould alarm the neighbourhood... Yes, there is one.

I am not familiar with it now, though I was interested in it when my former friend was alive. Cowper's Apocryphal Gospels."

"That sounds like what I want." His thoughts, however reverted with a twinge to the "former friend"--by whom she meant, as he knew, the university comrade of her earlier days. He wondered if she talked of him to Phillotson.

"The Gospel of Nicodemus is very nice," she went on to keep him from his jealous thoughts, which she read clearly, as she always did. Indeed when they talked on an indifferent subject, as now, there was ever a second silent conversation passing between their emotions, so perfect was the reciprocity between them. "It is quite like the genuine article. All cut up into verses, too; so that it is like one of the other evangelists read in a dream, when things are the same, yet not the same. But, Jude, do you take an interest in those questions still? Are you getting up Apologetica?"

"Yes. I am reading Divinity harder than ever."

She regarded him curiously.

"Why do you look at me like that?" said Jude.

"Oh--why do you want to know?"

"I am sure you can tell me anything I may be ignorant of in that subject. You must have learnt a lot of everything from your dear dead friend!"

"We won't get on to that now!" she coaxed. "Will you be carving out at that church again next week, where you learnt the pretty hymn?"

"Yes, perhaps."

"That will be very nice. Shall I come and see you there? It is in this direction, and I could come any afternoon by train for half an hour?"

"No. Don't come!"

"What--aren't we going to be friends, then, any longer, as we used to be?"

"No."

"I didn't know that. I thought you were always going to be kind to me!"

"No, I am not."

"What have I done, then? I am sure I thought we two--" The

tremolo in her voice caused her to break off.

"Sue, I sometimes think you are a flirt," said he abruptly.

There was a momentary pause, till she suddenly jumped up; and to his surprise he saw by the kettle-flame that her face was flushed.

"I can't talk to you any longer, Jude!" she said, the tragic contralto note having come back as of old. "It is getting too dark to stay together like this, after playing morbid Good Friday tunes that make one feel what one shouldn't! ... We mustn't sit and talk in this way any more. Yes--you must go away, for you mistake me! I am very much the reverse of what you say so cruelly--Oh, Jude, it WAS cruel to say that! Yet I can't tell you the truth--I should shock you by letting you know how I give way to my impulses, and how much I feel that I shouldn't have been provided with attractiveness unless it were meant to be exercised! Some women's love of being loved is insatiable; and so, often, is their love of loving; and in the last case they may find that they can't give it continuously to the chamber-officer appointed by the bishop's licence to receive it. But you are so straightforward, Jude, that you can't understand me! ... Now you must go. I am sorry my husband is not at home."

"Are you?"

"I perceive I have said that in mere convention! Honestly I don't

think I am sorry. It does not matter, either way, sad to say!"

As they had overdone the grasp of hands some time sooner, she touched his fingers but lightly when he went out now. He had hardly gone from the door when, with a dissatisfied look, she jumped on a form and opened the iron casement of a window beneath which he was passing in the path without. "When do you leave here to catch your train, Jude?" she asked.

He looked up in some surprise. "The coach that runs to meet it goes in three-quarters of an hour or so."

"What will you do with yourself for the time?"

"Oh--wander about, I suppose. Perhaps I shall go and sit in the old church."

"It does seem hard of me to pack you off so! You have thought enough of churches, Heaven knows, without going into one in the dark. Stay there."

"Where?"

"Where you are. I can talk to you better like this than when you were inside... It was so kind and tender of you to give up half a day's work to come to see me! ... You are Joseph the dreamer of

dreams, dear Jude. And a tragic Don Quixote. And sometimes you are St. Stephen, who, while they were stoning him, could see Heaven opened. Oh, my poor friend and comrade, you'll suffer yet!"

Now that the high window-sill was between them, so that he could not get at her, she seemed not to mind indulging in a frankness she had feared at close quarters.

"I have been thinking," she continued, still in the tone of one brimful of feeling, "that the social moulds civilization fits us into have no more relation to our actual shapes than the conventional shapes of the constellations have to the real star-patterns. I am called Mrs. Richard Phillotson, living a calm wedded life with my counterpart of that name. But I am not really Mrs. Richard Phillotson, but a woman tossed about, all alone, with aberrant passions, and unaccountable antipathies... Now you mustn't wait longer, or you will lose the coach. Come and see me again. You must come to the house then."

"Yes!" said Jude. "When shall it be?"

"To-morrow week. Good-bye--good-bye!" She stretched out her hand and stroked his forehead pitifully--just once. Jude said good-bye, and went away into the darkness.

Passing along Bimport Street he thought he heard the wheels of the

coach departing, and, truly enough, when he reached the Duke's Arms in the Market Place the coach had gone. It was impossible for him to get to the station on foot in time for this train, and he settled himself perforce to wait for the next--the last to Melchester that night.

He wandered about awhile, obtained something to eat; and then, having another half-hour on his hands, his feet involuntarily took him through the venerable graveyard of Trinity Church, with its avenues of limes, in the direction of the schools again. They were entirely in darkness. She had said she lived over the way at Old-Grove Place, a house which he soon discovered from her description of its antiquity.

A glimmering candlelight shone from a front window, the shutters being yet unclosed. He could see the interior clearly--the floor sinking a couple of steps below the road without, which had become raised during the centuries since the house was built. Sue, evidently just come in, was standing with her hat on in this front parlour or sitting-room, whose walls were lined with wainscoting of panelled oak reaching from floor to ceiling, the latter being crossed by huge moulded beams only a little way above her head. The mantelpiece was of the same heavy description, carved with Jacobean pilasters and scroll-work. The centuries did, indeed, ponderously overhang a young wife who passed her time here.

She had opened a rosewood work-box, and was looking at a photograph. Having contemplated it a little while she pressed it against her bosom, and put it again in its place.

Then becoming aware that she had not obscured the windows she came forward to do so, candle in hand. It was too dark for her to see Jude without, but he could see her face distinctly, and there was an unmistakable tearfulness about the dark, long-lashed eyes.

She closed the shutters, and Jude turned away to pursue his solitary journey home. "Whose photograph was she looking at?" he said. He had once given her his; but she had others, he knew. Yet it was his, surely?

He knew he should go to see her again, according to her invitation. Those earnest men he read of, the saints, whom Sue, with gentle irreverence, called his demi-gods, would have shunned such encounters if they doubted their own strength. But he could not. He might fast and pray during the whole interval, but the human was more powerful in him than the Divine.

II

However, if God disposed not, woman did. The next morning but one brought him this note from her:

> Don't come next week. On your own account don't! We were too free, under the influence of that morbid hymn and the twilight. Think no more than you can help of
>
> SUSANNA FLORENCE MARY.

The disappointment was keen. He knew her mood, the look of her face, when she subscribed herself at length thus. But whatever her mood he could not say she was wrong in her view. He replied:

> I acquiesce. You are right. It is a lesson in renunciation which I suppose I ought to learn at this season.
>
> JUDE.

He despatched the note on Easter Eve, and there seemed a finality in their decisions. But other forces and laws than theirs were in operation. On Easter Monday morning he received a message from the

Widow Edlin, whom he had directed to telegraph if anything serious happened:

Your aunt is sinking. Come at once.

He threw down his tools and went. Three and a half hours later he was crossing the downs about Marygreen, and presently plunged into the concave field across which the short cut was made to the village. As he ascended on the other side a labouring man, who had been watching his approach from a gate across the path, moved uneasily, and prepared to speak. "I can see in his face that she is dead," said Jude. "Poor Aunt Drusilla!"

It was as he had supposed, and Mrs. Edlin had sent out the man to break the news to him.

"She wouldn't have knowed 'ee. She lay like a doll wi' glass eyes; so it didn't matter that you wasn't here," said he.

Jude went on to the house, and in the afternoon, when everything was done, and the layers-out had finished their beer, and gone, he sat down alone in the silent place. It was absolutely necessary to communicate with Sue, though two or three days earlier they had agreed to mutual severance. He wrote in the briefest terms:

Aunt Drusilla is dead, having been taken almost suddenly.

The funeral is on Friday afternoon.

He remained in and about Marygreen through the intervening days, went out on Friday morning to see that the grave was finished, and wondered if Sue would come. She had not written, and that seemed to signify rather that she would come than that she would not. Having timed her by her only possible train, he locked the door about mid-day, and crossed the hollow field to the verge of the upland by the Brown House, where he stood and looked over the vast prospect northwards, and over the nearer landscape in which Alfredston stood. Two miles behind it a jet of white steam was travelling from the left to the right of the picture.

There was a long time to wait, even now, till he would know if she had arrived. He did wait, however, and at last a small hired vehicle pulled up at the bottom of the hill, and a person alighted, the conveyance going back, while the passenger began ascending the hill. He knew her; and she looked so slender to-day that it seemed as if she might be crushed in the intensity of a too passionate embrace--such as it was not for him to give. Two-thirds of the way up her head suddenly took a solicitous poise, and he knew that she had at that moment recognized him. Her face soon began a pensive

smile, which lasted till, having descended a little way, he met her.

"I thought," she began with nervous quickness, "that it would be so sad to let you attend the funeral alone! And so--at the last moment--I came."

"Dear faithful Sue!" murmured Jude.

With the elusiveness of her curious double nature, however, Sue did not stand still for any further greeting, though it wanted some time to the burial. A pathos so unusually compounded as that which attached to this hour was unlikely to repeat itself for years, if ever, and Jude would have paused, and meditated, and conversed. But Sue either saw it not at all, or, seeing it more than he, would not allow herself to feel it.

The sad and simple ceremony was soon over, their progress to the church being almost at a trot, the bustling undertaker having a more important funeral an hour later, three miles off. Drusilla was put into the new ground, quite away from her ancestors. Sue and Jude had gone side by side to the grave, and now sat down to tea in the familiar house; their lives united at least in this last attention to the dead.

"She was opposed to marriage, from first to last, you say?" murmured Sue.

"Yes. Particularly for members of our family."

Her eyes met his, and remained on him awhile.

"We are rather a sad family, don't you think, Jude?"

"She said we made bad husbands and wives. Certainly we make unhappy ones. At all events, I do, for one!"

Sue was silent. "Is it wrong, Jude," she said with a tentative tremor, "for a husband or wife to tell a third person that they are unhappy in their marriage? If a marriage ceremony is a religious thing, it is possibly wrong; but if it is only a sordid contract, based on material convenience in householding, rating, and taxing, and the inheritance of land and money by children, making it necessary that the male parent should be known--which it seems to be--why surely a person may say, even proclaim upon the housetops, that it hurts and grieves him or her?"

"I have said so, anyhow, to you."

Presently she went on: "Are there many couples, do you think, where one dislikes the other for no definite fault?"

"Yes, I suppose. If either cares for another person, for instance."

"But even apart from that? Wouldn't the woman, for example, be very bad-natured if she didn't like to live with her husband; merely"--her voice undulated, and he guessed things--"merely because she had a personal feeling against it--a physical objection--a fastidiousness, or whatever it may be called--although she might respect and be grateful to him? I am merely putting a case. Ought she to try to overcome her pruderies?"

Jude threw a troubled look at her. He said, looking away: "It would be just one of those cases in which my experiences go contrary to my dogmas. Speaking as an order-loving man--which I hope I am, though I fear I am not--I should say, yes. Speaking from experience and unbiased nature, I should say, no.... Sue, I believe you are not happy!"

"Of course I am!" she contradicted. "How can a woman be unhappy who has only been married eight weeks to a man she chose freely?"

"'Chose freely!'"

"Why do you repeat it? ... But I have to go back by the six o'clock train. You will be staying on here, I suppose?"

"For a few days to wind up Aunt's affairs. This house is gone now. Shall I go to the train with you?"

A little laugh of objection came from Sue. "I think not. You may come part of the way."

"But stop--you can't go to-night! That train won't take you to Shaston. You must stay and go back to-morrow. Mrs. Edlin has plenty of room, if you don't like to stay here?"

"Very well," she said dubiously. "I didn't tell him I would come for certain."

Jude went to the widow's house adjoining, to let her know; and returning in a few minutes sat down again.

"It is horrible how we are circumstanced, Sue--horrible!" he said abruptly, with his eyes bent to the floor.

"No! Why?"

"I can't tell you all my part of the gloom. Your part is that you ought not to have married him. I saw it before you had done it, but I thought I mustn't interfere. I was wrong. I ought to have!"

"But what makes you assume all this, dear?"

"Because--I can see you through your feathers, my poor little bird!"

Her hand lay on the table, and Jude put his upon it. Sue drew hers away.

"That's absurd, Sue," cried he, "after what we've been talking about! I am more strict and formal than you, if it comes to that; and that you should object to such an innocent action shows that you are ridiculously inconsistent!"

"Perhaps it was too prudish," she said repentantly. "Only I have fancied it was a sort of trick of ours--too frequent perhaps. There, you may hold it as much as you like. Is that good of me?"

"Yes; very."

"But I must tell him."

"Who?"

"Richard."

"Oh--of course, if you think it necessary. But as it means nothing it may be bothering him needlessly."

"Well--are you sure you mean it only as my cousin?"

"Absolutely sure. I have no feelings of love left in me."

"That's news. How has it come to be?"

"I've seen Arabella."

She winced at the hit; then said curiously, "When did you see her?"

"When I was at Christminster."

"So she's come back; and you never told me! I suppose you will live with her now?"

"Of course--just as you live with your husband."

She looked at the window pots with the geraniums and cactuses, withered for want of attention, and through them at the outer distance, till her eyes began to grow moist. "What is it?" said Jude, in a softened tone.

"Why should you be so glad to go back to her if--if what you used to say to me is still true--I mean if it were true then! Of course it is not now! How could your heart go back to Arabella so soon?"

"A special Providence, I suppose, helped it on its way."

"Ah--it isn't true!" she said with gentle resentment. "You are teasing me--that's all--because you think I am not happy!"

"I don't know. I don't wish to know."

"If I were unhappy it would be my fault, my wickedness; not that I should have a right to dislike him! He is considerate to me in everything; and he is very interesting, from the amount of general knowledge he has acquired by reading everything that comes in his way.... Do you think, Jude, that a man ought to marry a woman his own age, or one younger than himself--eighteen years--as I am than he?"

"It depends upon what they feel for each other."

He gave her no opportunity of self-satisfaction, and she had to go on unaided, which she did in a vanquished tone, verging on tears:

"I--I think I must be equally honest with you as you have been with me. Perhaps you have seen what it is I want to say?--that though I like Mr. Phillotson as a friend, I don't like him--it is a torture to me to--live with him as a husband!--There, now I have let it out--I couldn't help it, although I have been--pretending I am happy.--Now you'll have a contempt for me for ever, I suppose!" She bent down her face upon her hands as they lay upon the cloth, and silently sobbed in little jerks that made the fragile three-legged table

quiver.

"I have only been married a month or two!" she went on, still remaining bent upon the table, and sobbing into her hands. "And it is said that what a woman shrinks from--in the early days of her marriage--she shakes down to with comfortable indifference in half a dozen years. But that is much like saying that the amputation of a limb is no affliction, since a person gets comfortably accustomed to the use of a wooden leg or arm in the course of time!"

Jude could hardly speak, but he said, "I thought there was something wrong, Sue! Oh, I thought there was!"

"But it is not as you think!--there is nothing wrong except my own wickedness, I suppose you'd call it--a repugnance on my part, for a reason I cannot disclose, and what would not be admitted as one by the world in general! ... What tortures me so much is the necessity of being responsive to this man whenever he wishes, good as he is morally!--the dreadful contract to feel in a particular way in a matter whose essence is its voluntariness! ... I wish he would beat me, or be faithless to me, or do some open thing that I could talk about as a justification for feeling as I do! But he does nothing, except that he has grown a little cold since he has found out how I feel. That's why he didn't come to the funeral... Oh, I am very miserable--I don't know what to do! ... Don't come near me, Jude, because you mustn't. Don't--don't!"

But he had jumped up and put his face against hers--or rather against her ear, her face being inaccessible.

"I told you not to, Jude!"

"I know you did--I only wish to--console you! It all arose through my being married before we met, didn't it? You would have been my wife, Sue, wouldn't you, if it hadn't been for that?"

Instead of replying she rose quickly, and saying she was going to walk to her aunt's grave in the churchyard to recover herself, went out of the house. Jude did not follow her. Twenty minutes later he saw her cross the village green towards Mrs. Edlin's, and soon she sent a little girl to fetch her bag, and tell him she was too tired to see him again that night.

In the lonely room of his aunt's house, Jude sat watching the cottage of the Widow Edlin as it disappeared behind the night shade. He knew that Sue was sitting within its walls equally lonely and disheartened; and again questioned his devotional motto that all was for the best.

He retired to rest early, but his sleep was fitful from the sense that Sue was so near at hand. At some time near two o'clock, when he was beginning to sleep more soundly, he was aroused by a shrill

squeak that had been familiar enough to him when he lived regularly at Marygreen. It was the cry of a rabbit caught in a gin. As was the little creature's habit, it did not soon repeat its cry; and probably would not do so more than once or twice; but would remain bearing its torture till the morrow when the trapper would come and knock it on the head.

He who in his childhood had saved the lives of the earthworms now began to picture the agonies of the rabbit from its lacerated leg. If it were a "bad catch" by the hind-leg, the animal would tug during the ensuing six hours till the iron teeth of the trap had stripped the leg-bone of its flesh, when, should a weak-springed instrument enable it to escape, it would die in the fields from the mortification of the limb. If it were a "good catch," namely, by the fore-leg, the bone would be broken and the limb nearly torn in two in attempts at an impossible escape.

Almost half an hour passed, and the rabbit repeated its cry. Jude could rest no longer till he had put it out of its pain, so dressing himself quickly he descended, and by the light of the moon went across the green in the direction of the sound. He reached the hedge bordering the widow's garden, when he stood still. The faint click of the trap as dragged about by the writhing animal guided him now, and reaching the spot he struck the rabbit on the back of the neck with the side of his palm, and it stretched itself out dead.

He was turning away when he saw a woman looking out of the open casement at a window on the ground floor of the adjacent cottage. "Jude!" said a voice timidly--Sue's voice. "It is you--is it not?"

"Yes, dear!"

"I haven't been able to sleep at all, and then I heard the rabbit, and couldn't help thinking of what it suffered, till I felt I must come down and kill it! But I am so glad you got there first... They ought not to be allowed to set these steel traps, ought they!"

Jude had reached the window, which was quite a low one, so that she was visible down to her waist. She let go the casement-stay and put her hand upon his, her moonlit face regarding him wistfully.

"Did it keep you awake?" he said.

"No--I was awake."

"How was that?"

"Oh, you know--now! I know you, with your religious doctrines, think that a married woman in trouble of a kind like mine commits a mortal sin in making a man the confidant of it, as I did you. I wish I hadn't, now!"

"Don't wish it, dear," he said. "That may have BEEN my view; but my doctrines and I begin to part company."

"I knew it--I knew it! And that's why I vowed I wouldn't disturb your belief. But--I am SO GLAD to see you!--and, oh, I didn't mean to see you again, now the last tie between us, Aunt Drusilla, is dead!"

Jude seized her hand and kissed it. "There is a stronger one left!" he said. "I'll never care about my doctrines or my religion any more! Let them go! Let me help you, even if I do love you, and even if you..."

"Don't say it!--I know what you mean; but I can't admit so much as that. There! Guess what you like, but don't press me to answer questions!"

"I wish you were happy, whatever I may be!"

"I CAN'T be! So few could enter into my feeling--they would say 'twas my fanciful fastidiousness, or something of that sort, and condemn me... It is none of the natural tragedies of love that's love's usual tragedy in civilized life, but a tragedy artificially manufactured for people who in a natural state would find relief in parting! ... It would have been wrong, perhaps, for me to tell my distress to you, if I had been able to tell it to anybody else. But

I have nobody. And I MUST tell somebody! Jude, before I married him I had never thought out fully what marriage meant, even though I knew. It was idiotic of me--there is no excuse. I was old enough, and I thought I was very experienced. So I rushed on, when I had got into that training school scrape, with all the cock-sureness of the fool that I was! ... I am certain one ought to be allowed to undo what one had done so ignorantly! I daresay it happens to lots of women, only they submit, and I kick... When people of a later age look back upon the barbarous customs and superstitions of the times that we have the unhappiness to live in, what WILL they say!"

"You are very bitter, darling Sue! How I wish--I wish--"

"You must go in now!"

In a moment of impulse she bent over the sill, and laid her face upon his hair, weeping, and then imprinting a scarcely perceptible little kiss upon the top of his head, withdrawing quickly, so that he could not put his arms round her, as otherwise he unquestionably would have done. She shut the casement, and he returned to his cottage.

III

Sue's distressful confession recurred to Jude's mind all the night as being a sorrow indeed.

The morning after, when it was time for her to go, the neighbours saw her companion and herself disappearing on foot down the hill path which led into the lonely road to Alfredston. An hour passed before he returned along the same route, and in his face there was a look of exaltation not unmixed with recklessness. An incident had occurred.

They had stood parting in the silent highway, and their tense and passionate moods had led to bewildered inquiries of each other on how far their intimacy ought to go; till they had almost quarrelled, and she said tearfully that it was hardly proper of him as a parson in embryo to think of such a thing as kissing her even in farewell as he now wished to do. Then she had conceded that the fact of the kiss would be nothing: all would depend upon the spirit of it. If given in the spirit of a cousin and a friend she saw no objection: if in the spirit of a lover she could not permit it. "Will you swear that it will not be in that spirit?" she had said.

No: he would not. And then they had turned from each other in estrangement, and gone their several ways, till at a distance of twenty or thirty yards both had looked round simultaneously. That look behind was fatal to the reserve hitherto more or less maintained. They had quickly run back, and met, and embracing most unpremeditatedly, kissed close and long. When they parted for good

it was with flushed cheeks on her side, and a beating heart on his.

The kiss was a turning-point in Jude's career. Back again in the cottage, and left to reflection, he saw one thing: that though his kiss of that aerial being had seemed the purest moment of his faultful life, as long as he nourished this unlicensed tenderness it was glaringly inconsistent for him to pursue the idea of becoming the soldier and servant of a religion in which sexual love was regarded as at its best a frailty, and at its worst damnation. What Sue had said in warmth was really the cold truth. When to defend his affection tooth and nail, to persist with headlong force in impassioned attentions to her, was all he thought of, he was condemned ipso facto as a professor of the accepted school of morals. He was as unfit, obviously, by nature, as he had been by social position, to fill the part of a propounder of accredited dogma.

Strange that his first aspiration--towards academical proficiency--had been checked by a woman, and that his second aspiration--towards apostleship--had also been checked by a woman. "Is it," he said, "that the women are to blame; or is it the artificial system of things, under which the normal sex-impulses are turned into devilish domestic gins and springs to noose and hold back those who want to progress?"

It had been his standing desire to become a prophet, however humble,

to his struggling fellow-creatures, without any thought of personal gain. Yet with a wife living away from him with another husband, and himself in love erratically, the loved one's revolt against her state being possibly on his account, he had sunk to be barely respectable according to regulation views.

It was not for him to consider further: he had only to confront the obvious, which was that he had made himself quite an impostor as a law-abiding religious teacher.

At dusk that evening he went into the garden and dug a shallow hole, to which he brought out all the theological and ethical works that he possessed, and had stored here. He knew that, in this country of true believers, most of them were not saleable at a much higher price than waste-paper value, and preferred to get rid of them in his own way, even if he should sacrifice a little money to the sentiment of thus destroying them. Lighting some loose pamphlets to begin with, he cut the volumes into pieces as well as he could, and with a three-pronged fork shook them over the flames. They kindled, and lighted up the back of the house, the pigsty, and his own face, till they were more or less consumed.

Though he was almost a stranger here now, passing cottagers talked to him over the garden hedge.

"Burning up your awld aunt's rubbidge, I suppose? Ay; a lot gets

heaped up in nooks and corners when you've lived eighty years in one house."

It was nearly one o'clock in the morning before the leaves, covers, and binding of Jeremy Taylor, Butler, Doddridge, Paley, Pusey, Newman and the rest had gone to ashes, but the night was quiet, and as he turned and turned the paper shreds with the fork, the sense of being no longer a hypocrite to himself afforded his mind a relief which gave him calm. He might go on believing as before, but he professed nothing, and no longer owned and exhibited engines of faith which, as their proprietor, he might naturally be supposed to exercise on himself first of all. In his passion for Sue he could not stand as an ordinary sinner, and not as a whited sepulchre.

Meanwhile Sue, after parting from him earlier in the day, had gone along to the station, with tears in her eyes for having run back and let him kiss her. Jude ought not to have pretended that he was not a lover, and made her give way to an impulse to act unconventionally, if not wrongly. She was inclined to call it the latter; for Sue's logic was extraordinarily compounded, and seemed to maintain that before a thing was done it might be right to do, but that being done it became wrong; or, in other words, that things which were right in theory were wrong in practice.

"I have been too weak, I think!" she jerked out as she pranced on, shaking down tear-drops now and then. "It was burning, like a

lover's--oh, it was! And I won't write to him any more, or at least for a long time, to impress him with my dignity! And I hope it will hurt him very much--expecting a letter to-morrow morning, and the next, and the next, and no letter coming. He'll suffer then with suspense--won't he, that's all!--and I am very glad of it!"--Tears of pity for Jude's approaching sufferings at her hands mingled with those which had surged up in pity for herself.

Then the slim little wife of a husband whose person was disagreeable to her, the ethereal, fine-nerved, sensitive girl, quite unfitted by temperament and instinct to fulfil the conditions of the matrimonial relation with Phillotson, possibly with scarce any man, walked fitfully along, and panted, and brought weariness into her eyes by gazing and worrying hopelessly.

Phillotson met her at the arrival station, and, seeing that she was troubled, thought it must be owing to the depressing effect of her aunt's death and funeral. He began telling her of his day's doings, and how his friend Gillingham, a neighbouring schoolmaster whom he had not seen for years, had called upon him. While ascending to the town, seated on the top of the omnibus beside him, she said suddenly and with an air of self-chastisement, regarding the white road and its bordering bushes of hazel:

"Richard--I let Mr. Fawley hold my hand a long while. I don't know whether you think it wrong?"

He, waking apparently from thoughts of far different mould, said vaguely, "Oh, did you? What did you do that for?"

"I don't know. He wanted to, and I let him."

"I hope it pleased him. I should think it was hardly a novelty."

They lapsed into silence. Had this been a case in the court of an omniscient judge, he might have entered on his notes the curious fact that Sue had placed the minor for the major indiscretion, and had not said a word about the kiss.

After tea that evening Phillotson sat balancing the school registers. She remained in an unusually silent, tense, and restless condition, and at last, saying she was tired, went to bed early. When Phillotson arrived upstairs, weary with the drudgery of the attendance-numbers, it was a quarter to twelve o'clock. Entering their chamber, which by day commanded a view of some thirty or forty miles over the Vale of Blackmoor, and even into Outer Wessex, he went to the window, and, pressing his face against the pane, gazed with hard-breathing fixity into the mysterious darkness which now covered the far-reaching scene. He was musing, "I think," he said at last, without turning his head, "that I must get the committee to change the school-stationer. All the copybooks are sent wrong this time."

There was no reply. Thinking Sue was dozing he went on:

"And there must be a rearrangement of that ventilator in the class-room. The wind blows down upon my head unmercifully and gives me the ear-ache."

As the silence seemed more absolute than ordinarily he turned round. The heavy, gloomy oak wainscot, which extended over the walls upstairs and down in the dilapidated "Old-Grove Place," and the massive chimney-piece reaching to the ceiling, stood in odd contrast to the new and shining brass bedstead, and the new suite of birch furniture that he had bought for her, the two styles seeming to nod to each other across three centuries upon the shaking floor.

"Soo!" he said (this being the way in which he pronounced her name).

She was not in the bed, though she had apparently been there--the clothes on her side being flung back. Thinking she might have forgotten some kitchen detail and gone downstairs for a moment to see to it, he pulled off his coat and idled quietly enough for a few minutes, when, finding she did not come, he went out upon the landing, candle in hand, and said again "Soo!"

"Yes!" came back to him in her voice, from the distant kitchen quarter.

"What are you doing down there at midnight--tiring yourself out for nothing!"

"I am not sleepy; I am reading; and there is a larger fire here."

He went to bed. Some time in the night he awoke. She was not there, even now. Lighting a candle he hastily stepped out upon the landing, and again called her name.

She answered "Yes!" as before, but the tones were small and confined, and whence they came he could not at first understand. Under the staircase was a large clothes-closet, without a window; they seemed to come from it. The door was shut, but there was no lock or other fastening. Phillotson, alarmed, went towards it, wondering if she had suddenly become deranged.

"What are you doing in there?" he asked.

"Not to disturb you I came here, as it was so late."

"But there's no bed, is there? And no ventilation! Why, you'll be suffocated if you stay all night!"

"Oh no, I think not. Don't trouble about me."

"But--" Phillotson seized the knob and pulled at the door. She had

fastened it inside with a piece of string, which broke at his pull. There being no bedstead she had flung down some rugs and made a little nest for herself in the very cramped quarters the closet afforded.

When he looked in upon her she sprang out of her lair, great-eyed and trembling.

"You ought not to have pulled open the door!" she cried excitedly. "It is not becoming in you! Oh, will you go away; please will you!"

She looked so pitiful and pleading in her white nightgown against the shadowy lumber-hole that he was quite worried. She continued to beseech him not to disturb her.

He said: "I've been kind to you, and given you every liberty; and it is monstrous that you should feel in this way!"

"Yes," said she, weeping. "I know that! It is wrong and wicked of me, I suppose! I am very sorry. But it is not I altogether that am to blame!"

"Who is then? Am I?"

"No--I don't know! The universe, I suppose--things in general, because they are so horrid and cruel!"

"Well, it is no use talking like that. Making a man's house so unseemly at this time o' night! Eliza will hear if we don't mind." (He meant the servant.) "Just think if either of the parsons in this town was to see us now! I hate such eccentricities, Sue. There's no order or regularity in your sentiments! ... But I won't intrude on you further; only I would advise you not to shut the door too tight, or I shall find you stifled to-morrow."

On rising the next morning he immediately looked into the closet, but Sue had already gone downstairs. There was a little nest where she had lain, and spiders' webs hung overhead. "What must a woman's aversion be when it is stronger than her fear of spiders!" he said bitterly.

He found her sitting at the breakfast-table, and the meal began almost in silence, the burghers walking past upon the pavement--or rather roadway, pavements being scarce here--which was two or three feet above the level of the parlour floor. They nodded down to the happy couple their morning greetings, as they went on.

"Richard," she said all at once; "would you mind my living away from you?"

"Away from me? Why, that's what you were doing when I married you. What then was the meaning of marrying at all?"

"You wouldn't like me any the better for telling you."

"I don't object to know."

"Because I thought I could do nothing else. You had got my promise a long time before that, remember. Then, as time went on, I regretted I had promised you, and was trying to see an honourable way to break it off. But as I couldn't I became rather reckless and careless about the conventions. Then you know what scandals were spread, and how I was turned out of the training school you had taken such time and trouble to prepare me for and get me into; and this frightened me and it seemed then that the one thing I could do would be to let the engagement stand. Of course I, of all people, ought not to have cared what was said, for it was just what I fancied I never did care for. But I was a coward--as so many women are--and my theoretic unconventionality broke down. If that had not entered into the case it would have been better to have hurt your feelings once for all then, than to marry you and hurt them all my life after... And you were so generous in never giving credit for a moment to the rumour."

"I am bound in honesty to tell you that I weighed its probability and inquired of your cousin about it."

"Ah!" she said with pained surprise.

"I didn't doubt you."

"But you inquired!"

"I took his word."

Her eyes had filled. "HE wouldn't have inquired!" she said. "But you haven't answered me. Will you let me go away? I know how irregular it is of me to ask it--"

"It is irregular."

"But I do ask it! Domestic laws should be made according to temperaments, which should be classified. If people are at all peculiar in character they have to suffer from the very rules that produce comfort in others! ... Will you let me?"

"But we married--"

"What is the use of thinking of laws and ordinances," she burst out, "if they make you miserable when you know you are committing no sin?"

"But you are committing a sin in not liking me."

"I DO like you! But I didn't reflect it would be--that it would be so much more than that... For a man and woman to live on intimate

terms when one feels as I do is adultery, in any circumstances, however legal. There--I've said it! ... Will you let me, Richard?"

"You distress me, Susanna, by such importunity!"

"Why can't we agree to free each other? We made the compact, and surely we can cancel it--not legally of course; but we can morally, especially as no new interests, in the shape of children, have arisen to be looked after. Then we might be friends, and meet without pain to either. Oh Richard, be my friend and have pity! We shall both be dead in a few years, and then what will it matter to anybody that you relieved me from constraint for a little while? I daresay you think me eccentric, or super-sensitive, or something absurd. Well--why should I suffer for what I was born to be, if it doesn't hurt other people?"

"But it does--it hurts ME! And you vowed to love me."

"Yes--that's it! I am in the wrong. I always am! It is as culpable to bind yourself to love always as to believe a creed always, and as silly as to vow always to like a particular food or drink!"

"And do you mean, by living away from me, living by yourself?"

"Well, if you insisted, yes. But I meant living with Jude."

"As his wife?"

"As I choose."

Phillotson writhed.

Sue continued: "She, or he, 'who lets the world, or his own portion of it, choose his plan of life for him, has no need of any other faculty than the apelike one of imitation.' J. S. Mill's words, those are. I have been reading it up. Why can't you act upon them? I wish to, always."

"What do I care about J. S. Mill!" moaned he. "I only want to lead a quiet life! Do you mind my saying that I have guessed what never once occurred to me before our marriage--that you were in love, and are in love, with Jude Fawley!"

"You may go on guessing that I am, since you have begun. But do you suppose that if I had been I should have asked you to let me go and live with him?"

The ringing of the school bell saved Phillotson from the necessity of replying at present to what apparently did not strike him as being such a convincing argumentum ad verecundiam as she, in her loss of courage at the last moment, meant it to appear. She was beginning to be so puzzling and unstateable that he was ready to throw in with her

other little peculiarities the extremest request which a wife could make.

They proceeded to the schools that morning as usual, Sue entering the class-room, where he could see the back of her head through the glass partition whenever he turned his eyes that way. As he went on giving and hearing lessons his forehead and eyebrows twitched from concentrated agitation of thought, till at length he tore a scrap from a sheet of scribbling paper and wrote:

> Your request prevents my attending to work at all. I don't know what I am doing! Was it seriously made?

He folded the piece of paper very small, and gave it to a little boy to take to Sue. The child toddled off into the class-room. Phillotson saw his wife turn and take the note, and the bend of her pretty head as she read it, her lips slightly crisped, to prevent undue expression under fire of so many young eyes. He could not see her hands, but she changed her position, and soon the child returned, bringing nothing in reply. In a few minutes, however, one of Sue's class appeared, with a little note similar to his own. These words only were pencilled therein:

I am sincerely sorry to say that it was seriously made.

Phillotson looked more disturbed than before, and the meeting-place of his brows twitched again. In ten minutes he called up the child he had just sent to her, and dispatched another missive:

God knows I don't want to thwart you in any reasonable way. My whole thought is to make you comfortable and happy. But I cannot agree to such a preposterous notion as your going to live with your lover. You would lose everybody's respect and regard; and so should I!

After an interval a similar part was enacted in the class-room, and an answer came:

I know you mean my good. But I don't want to be respectable! To produce "Human development in its richest diversity" (to quote your Humboldt) is to my mind far above respectability. No doubt my tastes are low--in your view--hopelessly low! If you won t let me go to him, will you grant me this one request--allow me to live in your house in a separate way?

To this he returned no answer.

She wrote again:

> I know what you think. But cannot you have pity on me? I beg you to; I implore you to be merciful! I would not ask if I were not almost compelled by what I can't bear! No poor woman has ever wished more than I that Eve had not fallen, so that (as the primitive Christians believed) some harmless mode of vegetation might have peopled Paradise. But I won't trifle! Be kind to me--even though I have not been kind to you! I will go away, go abroad, anywhere, and never trouble you.

Nearly an hour passed, and then he returned an answer:

> I do not wish to pain you. How well you KNOW I don't! Give me a little time. I am disposed to agree to your last request.

One line from her:

Thank you from my heart, Richard. I do not deserve your kindness.

All day Phillotson bent a dazed regard upon her through the glazed partition; and he felt as lonely as when he had not known her.

But he was as good as his word, and consented to her living apart in the house. At first, when they met at meals, she had seemed more composed under the new arrangement; but the irksomeness of their position worked on her temperament, and the fibres of her nature seemed strained like harp-strings. She talked vaguely and indiscriminately to prevent his talking pertinently.

IV

Phillotson was sitting up late, as was often his custom, trying to get together the materials for his long-neglected hobby of Roman antiquities. For the first time since reviving the subject he felt a return of his old interest in it. He forgot time and place, and when he remembered himself and ascended to rest it was nearly two o'clock.

His preoccupation was such that, though he now slept on the other

side of the house, he mechanically went to the room that he and his wife had occupied when he first became a tenant of Old-Grove Place, which since his differences with Sue had been hers exclusively. He entered, and unconsciously began to undress.

There was a cry from the bed, and a quick movement. Before the schoolmaster had realized where he was he perceived Sue starting up half-awake, staring wildly, and springing out upon the floor on the side away from him, which was towards the window. This was somewhat hidden by the canopy of the bedstead, and in a moment he heard her flinging up the sash. Before he had thought that she meant to do more than get air she had mounted upon the sill and leapt out. She disappeared in the darkness, and he heard her fall below.

Phillotson, horrified, ran downstairs, striking himself sharply against the newel in his haste. Opening the heavy door he ascended the two or three steps to the level of the ground, and there on the gravel before him lay a white heap. Phillotson seized it in his arms, and bringing Sue into the hall seated her on a chair, where he gazed at her by the flapping light of the candle which he had set down in the draught on the bottom stair.

She had certainly not broken her neck. She looked at him with eyes that seemed not to take him in; and though not particularly large in general they appeared so now. She pressed her side and rubbed her arm, as if conscious of pain; then stood up, averting her face, in

evident distress at his gaze.

"Thank God--you are not killed! Though it's not for want of trying--not much hurt I hope?"

Her fall, in fact, had not been a serious one, probably owing to the lowness of the old rooms and to the high level of the ground without. Beyond a scraped elbow and a blow in the side she had apparently incurred little harm.

"I was asleep, I think!" she began, her pale face still turned away from him. "And something frightened me--a terrible dream--I thought I saw you--" The actual circumstances seemed to come back to her, and she was silent.

Her cloak was hanging at the back of the door, and the wretched Phillotson flung it round her. "Shall I help you upstairs?" he asked drearily; for the significance of all this sickened him of himself and of everything.

"No thank you, Richard. I am very little hurt. I can walk."

"You ought to lock your door," he mechanically said, as if lecturing in school. "Then no one could intrude even by accident."

"I have tried--it won't lock. All the doors are out of order."

The aspect of things was not improved by her admission. She ascended the staircase slowly, the waving light of the candle shining on her. Phillotson did not approach her, or attempt to ascend himself till he heard her enter her room. Then he fastened up the front door, and returning, sat down on the lower stairs, holding the newel with one hand, and bowing his face into the other. Thus he remained for a long long time--a pitiable object enough to one who had seen him; till, raising his head and sighing a sigh which seemed to say that the business of his life must be carried on, whether he had a wife or no, he took the candle and went upstairs to his lonely room on the other side of the landing.

No further incident touching the matter between them occurred till the following evening, when, immediately school was over, Phillotson walked out of Shaston, saying he required no tea, and not informing Sue where he was going. He descended from the town level by a steep road in a north-westerly direction, and continued to move downwards till the soil changed from its white dryness to a tough brown clay. He was now on the low alluvial beds

Where Duncliffe is the traveller's mark,
And cloty Stour's a-rolling dark.

More than once he looked back in the increasing obscurity of evening. Against the sky was Shaston, dimly visible

On the grey-topp'd height
Of Paladore, as pale day wore
Away... [William Barnes.]

The new-lit lights from its windows burnt with a steady shine as if watching him, one of which windows was his own. Above it he could just discern the pinnacled tower of Trinity Church. The air down here, tempered by the thick damp bed of tenacious clay, was not as it had been above, but soft and relaxing, so that when he had walked a mile or two he was obliged to wipe his face with his handkerchief.

Leaving Duncliffe Hill on the left he proceeded without hesitation through the shade, as a man goes on, night or day, in a district over which he has played as a boy. He had walked altogether about four and a half miles

Where Stour receives her strength,
From six cleere fountains fed, [Drayton.]

when he crossed a tributary of the Stour, and reached Leddenton--a little town of three or four thousand inhabitants--where he went on to the boys' school, and knocked at the door of the master's residence.

A boy pupil-teacher opened it, and to Phillotson's inquiry if Mr. Gillingham was at home replied that he was, going at once off to his own house, and leaving Phillotson to find his way in as he could. He discovered his friend putting away some books from which he had been giving evening lessons. The light of the paraffin lamp fell on Phillotson's face--pale and wretched by contrast with his friend's, who had a cool, practical look. They had been schoolmates in boyhood, and fellow-students at Wintoncester Training College, many years before this time.

"Glad to see you, Dick! But you don't look well? Nothing the matter?"

Phillotson advanced without replying, and Gillingham closed the cupboard and pulled up beside his visitor.

"Why you haven't been here--let me see--since you were married? I called, you know, but you were out; and upon my word it is such a climb after dark that I have been waiting till the days are longer before lumpering up again. I am glad you didn't wait, however."

Though well-trained and even proficient masters, they occasionally used a dialect-word of their boyhood to each other in private.

"I've come, George, to explain to you my reasons for taking a step that I am about to take, so that you, at least, will understand my motives if other people question them anywhen--as they may, indeed certainly will... But anything is better than the present condition of things. God forbid that you should ever have such an experience as mine!"

"Sit down. You don't mean--anything wrong between you and Mrs. Phillotson?"

"I do... My wretched state is that I've a wife I love who not only does not love me, but--but-- Well, I won't say. I know her feeling! I should prefer hatred from her!"

"Ssh!"

"And the sad part of it is that she is not so much to blame as I. She was a pupil-teacher under me, as you know, and I took advantage of her inexperience, and toled her out for walks, and got her to agree to a long engagement before she well knew her own mind. Afterwards she saw somebody else, but she blindly fulfilled her engagement."

"Loving the other?"

"Yes; with a curious tender solicitude seemingly; though her exact feeling for him is a riddle to me--and to him too, I think--possibly to herself. She is one of the oddest creatures I ever met. However, I have been struck with these two facts; the extraordinary sympathy, or similarity, between the pair. He is her cousin, which perhaps accounts for some of it. They seem to be one person split in two! And with her unconquerable aversion to myself as a husband, even though she may like me as a friend, 'tis too much to bear longer. She has conscientiously struggled against it, but to no purpose. I cannot bear it--I cannot! I can't answer her arguments--she has read ten times as much as I. Her intellect sparkles like diamonds, while mine smoulders like brown paper... She's one too many for me!"

"She'll get over it, good-now?"

"Never! It is--but I won't go into it--there are reasons why she never will. At last she calmly and firmly asked if she might leave me and go to him. The climax came last night, when, owing to my entering her room by accident, she jumped out of window--so strong was her dread of me! She pretended it was a dream, but that was to soothe me. Now when a woman jumps out of window without caring whether she breaks her neck or no, she's not to be mistaken; and this being the case I have come to a conclusion: that it is wrong to so torture a fellow-creature any longer; and I won't be the inhuman wretch to do it, cost what it may!"

"What--you'll let her go? And with her lover?"

"Whom with is her matter. I shall let her go; with him certainly, if she wishes. I know I may be wrong--I know I can't logically, or religiously, defend my concession to such a wish of hers, or harmonize it with the doctrines I was brought up in. Only I know one thing: something within me tells me I am doing wrong in refusing her. I, like other men, profess to hold that if a husband gets such a so-called preposterous request from his wife, the only course that can possibly be regarded as right and proper and honourable in him is to refuse it, and put her virtuously under lock and key, and murder her lover perhaps. But is that essentially right, and proper, and honourable, or is it contemptibly mean and selfish? I don't profess to decide. I simply am going to act by instinct, and let principles take care of themselves. If a person who has blindly walked into a quagmire cries for help, I am inclined to give it, if possible."

"But--you see, there's the question of neighbours and society--what will happen if everybody--"

"Oh, I am not going to be a philosopher any longer! I only see what's under my eyes."

"Well--I don't agree with your instinct, Dick!" said Gillingham gravely. "I am quite amazed, to tell the truth, that such a sedate,

plodding fellow as you should have entertained such a craze for a moment. You said when I called that she was puzzling and peculiar: I think you are!"

"Have you ever stood before a woman whom you know to be intrinsically a good woman, while she has pleaded for release--been the man she has knelt to and implored indulgence of?"

"I am thankful to say I haven't."

"Then I don't think you are in a position to give an opinion. I have been that man, and it makes all the difference in the world, if one has any manliness or chivalry in him. I had not the remotest idea--living apart from women as I have done for so many years--that merely taking a woman to church and putting a ring upon her finger could by any possibility involve one in such a daily, continuous tragedy as that now shared by her and me!"

"Well, I could admit some excuse for letting her leave you, provided she kept to herself. But to go attended by a cavalier--that makes a difference."

"Not a bit. Suppose, as I believe, she would rather endure her present misery than be made to promise to keep apart from him? All that is a question for herself. It is not the same thing at all as the treachery of living on with a husband and playing him

false... However, she has not distinctly implied living with him as wife, though I think she means to... And to the best of my understanding it is not an ignoble, merely animal, feeling between the two: that is the worst of it; because it makes me think their affection will be enduring. I did not mean to confess to you that in the first jealous weeks of my marriage, before I had come to my right mind, I hid myself in the school one evening when they were together there, and I heard what they said. I am ashamed of it now, though I suppose I was only exercising a legal right. I found from their manner that an extraordinary affinity, or sympathy, entered into their attachment, which somehow took away all flavour of grossness. Their supreme desire is to be together--to share each other's emotions, and fancies, and dreams."

"Platonic!"

"Well no. Shelleyan would be nearer to it. They remind me of--what are their names--Laon and Cythna. Also of Paul and Virginia a little. The more I reflect, the more ENTIRELY I am on their side!"

"But if people did as you want to do, there'd be a general domestic disintegration. The family would no longer be the social unit."

"Yes--I am all abroad, I suppose!" said Phillotson sadly. "I was never a very bright reasoner, you remember.... And yet, I don't see why the woman and the children should not be the unit without the

man."

"By the Lord Harry!--Matriarchy! ... Does SHE say all this too?"

"Oh no. She little thinks I have out-Sued Sue in this--all in the last twelve hours!"

"It will upset all received opinion hereabout. Good God--what will Shaston say!"

"I don't say that it won't. I don't know--I don't know! ... As I say, I am only a feeler, not a reasoner."

"Now," said Gillingham, "let us take it quietly, and have something to drink over it." He went under the stairs, and produced a bottle of cider-wine, of which they drank a rummer each. "I think you are rafted, and not yourself," he continued. "Do go back and make up your mind to put up with a few whims. But keep her. I hear on all sides that she's a charming young thing."

"Ah yes! That's the bitterness of it! Well, I won't stay. I have a long walk before me."

Gillingham accompanied his friend a mile on his way, and at parting expressed his hope that this consultation, singular as its subject was, would be the renewal of their old comradeship. "Stick to her!"

were his last words, flung into the darkness after Phillotson; from which his friend answered "Aye, aye!"

But when Phillotson was alone under the clouds of night, and no sound was audible but that of the purling tributaries of the Stour, he said, "So Gillingham, my friend, you had no stronger arguments against it than those!"

"I think she ought to be smacked, and brought to her senses--that's what I think!" murmured Gillingham, as he walked back alone.

The next morning came, and at breakfast Phillotson told Sue:

"You may go--with whom you will. I absolutely and unconditionally agree."

Having once come to this conclusion it seemed to Phillotson more and more indubitably the true one. His mild serenity at the sense that he was doing his duty by a woman who was at his mercy almost overpowered his grief at relinquishing her.

Some days passed, and the evening of their last meal together had come--a cloudy evening with wind--which indeed was very seldom absent in this elevated place. How permanently it was imprinted upon his vision; that look of her as she glided into the parlour to tea; a slim flexible figure; a face, strained from its roundness, and

marked by the pallors of restless days and nights, suggesting tragic possibilities quite at variance with her times of buoyancy; a trying of this morsel and that, and an inability to eat either. Her nervous manner, begotten of a fear lest he should be injured by her course, might have been interpreted by a stranger as displeasure that Phillotson intruded his presence on her for the few brief minutes that remained.

"You had better have a slice of ham or an egg, or something with your tea? You can't travel on a mouthful of bread and butter."

She took the slice he helped her to; and they discussed as they sat trivial questions of housekeeping, such as where he would find the key of this or that cupboard, what little bills were paid, and what not.

"I am a bachelor by nature, as you know, Sue," he said, in a heroic attempt to put her at her ease. "So that being without a wife will not really be irksome to me, as it might be to other men who have had one a little while. I have, too, this grand hobby in my head of writing 'The Roman Antiquities of Wessex,' which will occupy all my spare hours."

"If you will send me some of the manuscript to copy at any time, as you used to, I will do it with so much pleasure!" she said with amenable gentleness. "I should much like to be some help to you

still--as a--friend."

Phillotson mused, and said: "No, I think we ought to be really separate, if we are to be at all. And for this reason, that I don't wish to ask you any questions, and particularly wish you not to give me information as to your movements, or even your address... Now, what money do you want? You must have some, you know."

"Oh, of course, Richard, I couldn't think of having any of your money to go away from you with! I don't want any either. I have enough of my own to last me for a long while, and Jude will let me have--"

"I would rather not know anything about him, if you don't mind. You are free, absolutely; and your course is your own."

"Very well. But I'll just say that I have packed only a change or two of my own personal clothing, and one or two little things besides that are my very own. I wish you would look into my trunk before it is closed. Besides that I have only a small parcel that will go into Jude's portmanteau."

"Of course I shall do no such thing as examine your luggage! I wish you would take three-quarters of the household furniture. I don't want to be bothered with it. I have a sort of affection for a little of it that belonged to my poor mother and father. But the rest you are welcome to whenever you like to send for it."

"That I shall never do."

"You go by the six-thirty train, don't you? It is now a quarter to six."

"You... You don't seem very sorry I am going, Richard!"

"Oh no--perhaps not."

"I like you much for how you have behaved. It is a curious thing that directly I have begun to regard you as not my husband, but as my old teacher, I like you. I won't be so affected as to say I love you, because you know I don't, except as a friend. But you do seem that to me!"

Sue was for a few moments a little tearful at these reflections, and then the station omnibus came round to take her up. Phillotson saw her things put on the top, handed her in, and was obliged to make an appearance of kissing her as he wished her good-bye, which she quite understood and imitated. From the cheerful manner in which they parted the omnibus-man had no other idea than that she was going for a short visit.

When Phillotson got back into the house he went upstairs and opened the window in the direction the omnibus had taken. Soon the noise of

its wheels died away. He came down then, his face compressed like that of one bearing pain; he put on his hat and went out, following by the same route for nearly a mile. Suddenly turning round he came home.

He had no sooner entered than the voice of his friend Gillingham greeted him from the front room.

"I could make nobody hear; so finding your door open I walked in, and made myself comfortable. I said I would call, you remember."

"Yes. I am much obliged to you, Gillingham, particularly for coming to-night."

"How is Mrs.--"

"She is quite well. She is gone--just gone. That's her tea-cup, that she drank out of only an hour ago. And that's the plate she--" Phillotson's throat got choked up, and he could not go on. He turned and pushed the tea-things aside.

"Have you had any tea, by the by?" he asked presently in a renewed voice.

"No--yes--never mind," said Gillingham, preoccupied. "Gone, you say she is?"

"Yes... I would have died for her; but I wouldn't be cruel to her in the name of the law. She is, as I understand, gone to join her lover. What they are going to do I cannot say. Whatever it may be she has my full consent to."

There was a stability, a ballast, in Phillotson's pronouncement which restrained his friend's comment. "Shall I--leave you?" he asked.

"No, no. It is a mercy to me that you have come. I have some articles to arrange and clear away. Would you help me?"

Gillingham assented; and having gone to the upper rooms the schoolmaster opened drawers, and began taking out all Sue's things that she had left behind, and laying them in a large box. "She wouldn't take all I wanted her to," he continued. "But when I made up my mind to her going to live in her own way I did make up my mind."

"Some men would have stopped at an agreement to separate."

"I've gone into all that, and don't wish to argue it. I was, and am, the most old-fashioned man in the world on the question of marriage--in fact I had never thought critically about its ethics at all. But certain facts stared me in the face, and I couldn't go against them."

They went on with the packing silently. When it was done Phillotson closed the box and turned the key.

"There," he said. "To adorn her in somebody's eyes; never again in mine!"

V

Four-and-twenty hours before this time Sue had written the following note to Jude:

> It is as I told you; and I am leaving to-morrow evening. Richard and I thought it could be done with less obtrusiveness after dark. I feel rather frightened, and therefore ask you to be sure you are on the Melchester platform to meet me. I arrive at a little to seven. I know you will, of course, dear Jude; but I feel so timid that I can't help begging you to be punctual. He has been so VERY kind to me through it all!
>
> Now to our meeting!

S.

As she was carried by the omnibus farther and farther down from the mountain town--the single passenger that evening--she regarded the receding road with a sad face. But no hesitation was apparent therein.

The up-train by which she was departing stopped by signal only. To Sue it seemed strange that such a powerful organization as a railway train should be brought to a stand-still on purpose for her--a fugitive from her lawful home.

The twenty minutes' journey drew towards its close, and Sue began gathering her things together to alight. At the moment that the train came to a stand-still by the Melchester platform a hand was laid on the door and she beheld Jude. He entered the compartment promptly. He had a black bag in his hand, and was dressed in the dark suit he wore on Sundays and in the evening after work. Altogether he looked a very handsome young fellow, his ardent affection for her burning in his eyes.

"Oh Jude!" She clasped his hand with both hers, and her tense state caused her to simmer over in a little succession of dry sobs. "I--I am so glad! I get out here?"

"No. I get in, dear one! I've packed. Besides this bag I've only a big box which is labelled."

"But don't I get out? Aren't we going to stay here?"

"We couldn't possibly, don't you see. We are known here--I, at any rate, am well known. I've booked for Aldbrickham; and here's your ticket for the same place, as you have only one to here."

"I thought we should have stayed here," she repeated.

"It wouldn't have done at all."

"Ah! Perhaps not."

"There wasn't time for me to write and say the place I had decided on. Aldbrickham is a much bigger town--sixty or seventy thousand inhabitants--and nobody knows anything about us there."

"And you have given up your cathedral work here?"

"Yes. It was rather sudden--your message coming unexpectedly. Strictly, I might have been made to finish out the week. But I pleaded urgency and I was let off. I would have deserted any day at your command, dear Sue. I have deserted more than that for you!"

"I fear I am doing you a lot of harm. Ruining your prospects of the Church; ruining your progress in your trade; everything!"

"The Church is no more to me. Let it lie! I am not to be one of

The soldier-saints who, row on row,
Burn upward each to his point of bliss,

if any such there be! My point of bliss is not upward, but here."

"Oh I seem so bad--upsetting men's courses like this!" said she, taking up in her voice the emotion that had begun in his. But she recovered her equanimity by the time they had travelled a dozen miles.

"He has been so good in letting me go," she resumed. "And here's a note I found on my dressing-table, addressed to you."

"Yes. He's not an unworthy fellow," said Jude, glancing at the note. "And I am ashamed of myself for hating him because he married you."

"According to the rule of women's whims I suppose I ought to suddenly love him, because he has let me go so generously and unexpectedly,"

she answered smiling. "But I am so cold, or devoid of gratitude, or so something, that even this generosity hasn't made me love him, or repent, or want to stay with him as his wife; although I do feel I like his large-mindedness, and respect him more than ever."

"It may not work so well for us as if he had been less kind, and you had run away against his will," murmured Jude.

"That I NEVER would have done."

Jude's eyes rested musingly on her face. Then he suddenly kissed her; and was going to kiss her again. "No--only once now--please, Jude!"

"That's rather cruel," he answered; but acquiesced. "Such a strange thing has happened to me," Jude continued after a silence. "Arabella has actually written to ask me to get a divorce from her--in kindness to her, she says. She wants to honestly and legally marry that man she has already married virtually; and begs me to enable her to do it."

"What have you done?"

"I have agreed. I thought at first I couldn't do it without getting her into trouble about that second marriage, and I don't want to injure her in any way. Perhaps she's no worse than I am, after all!

But nobody knows about it over here, and I find it will not be a difficult proceeding at all. If she wants to start afresh I have only too obvious reasons for not hindering her."

"Then you'll be free?"

"Yes, I shall be free."

"Where are we booked for?" she asked, with the discontinuity that marked her to-night.

"Aldbrickham, as I said."

"But it will be very late when we get there?"

"Yes. I thought of that, and I wired for a room for us at the Temperance Hotel there."

"One?"

"Yes--one."

She looked at him. "Oh Jude!" Sue bent her forehead against the corner of the compartment. "I thought you might do it; and that I was deceiving you. But I didn't mean that!"

In the pause which followed, Jude's eyes fixed themselves with a stultified expression on the opposite seat. "Well!" he said... "Well!"

He remained in silence; and seeing how discomfited he was she put her face against his cheek, murmuring, "Don't be vexed, dear!"

"Oh--there's no harm done," he said. "But--I understood it like that... Is this a sudden change of mind?"

"You have no right to ask me such a question; and I shan't answer!" she said, smiling.

"My dear one, your happiness is more to me than anything--although we seem to verge on quarrelling so often!--and your will is law to me. I am something more than a mere--selfish fellow, I hope. Have it as you wish!" On reflection his brow showed perplexity. "But perhaps it is that you don't love me--not that you have become conventional! Much as, under your teaching, I hate convention, I hope it IS that, not the other terrible alternative!"

Even at this obvious moment for candour Sue could not be quite candid as to the state of that mystery, her heart. "Put it down to my timidity," she said with hurried evasiveness; "to a woman's natural timidity when the crisis comes. I may feel as well as you that I have a perfect right to live with you as you thought--from this

moment. I may hold the opinion that, in a proper state of society, the father of a woman's child will be as much a private matter of hers as the cut of her underlinen, on whom nobody will have any right to question her. But partly, perhaps, because it is by his generosity that I am now free, I would rather not be other than a little rigid. If there had been a rope-ladder, and he had run after us with pistols, it would have seemed different, and I may have acted otherwise. But don't press me and criticize me, Jude! Assume that I haven't the courage of my opinions. I know I am a poor miserable creature. My nature is not so passionate as yours!"

He repeated simply! "I thought--what I naturally thought. But if we are not lovers, we are not. Phillotson thought so, I am sure. See, here is what he has written to me." He opened the letter she had brought, and read:

"I make only one condition--that you are tender and kind to her. I know you love her. But even love may be cruel at times. You are made for each other: it is obvious, palpable, to any unbiased older person. You were all along 'the shadowy third' in my short life with her. I repeat, take care of Sue."

"He's a good fellow, isn't he!" she said with latent tears. On reconsideration she added, "He was very resigned to letting me go--too resigned almost! I never was so near being in love with him as when he made such thoughtful arrangements for my being comfortable

on my journey, and offering to provide money. Yet I was not. If I loved him ever so little as a wife, I'd go back to him even now."

"But you don't, do you?"

"It is true--oh so terribly true!--I don't."

"Nor me neither, I half-fear!" he said pettishly. "Nor anybody perhaps! Sue, sometimes, when I am vexed with you, I think you are incapable of real love."

"That's not good and loyal of you!" she said, and drawing away from him as far as she could, looked severely out into the darkness. She added in hurt tones, without turning round: "My liking for you is not as some women's perhaps. But it is a delight in being with you, of a supremely delicate kind, and I don't want to go further and risk it by--an attempt to intensify it! I quite realized that, as woman with man, it was a risk to come. But, as me with you, I resolved to trust you to set my wishes above your gratification. Don't discuss it further, dear Jude!"

"Of course, if it would make you reproach yourself... but you do like me very much, Sue? Say you do! Say that you do a quarter, a tenth, as much as I do you, and I'll be content!"

"I've let you kiss me, and that tells enough."

"Just once or so!"

"Well--don't be a greedy boy."

He leant back, and did not look at her for a long time. That episode in her past history of which she had told him--of the poor Christminster graduate whom she had handled thus, returned to Jude's mind; and he saw himself as a possible second in such a torturing destiny.

"This is a queer elopement!" he murmured. "Perhaps you are making a cat's paw of me with Phillotson all this time. Upon my word it almost seems so--to see you sitting up there so prim!"

"Now you mustn't be angry--I won't let you!" she coaxed, turning and moving nearer to him. "You did kiss me just now, you know; and I didn't dislike you to, I own it, Jude. Only I don't want to let you do it again, just yet--considering how we are circumstanced, don't you see!"

He could never resist her when she pleaded (as she well knew). And they sat side by side with joined hands, till she aroused herself at some thought.

"I can't possibly go to that Temperance Inn, after your telegraphing

that message!"

"Why not?"

"You can see well enough!"

"Very well; there'll be some other one open, no doubt. I have sometimes thought, since your marrying Phillotson because of a stupid scandal, that under the affectation of independent views you are as enslaved to the social code as any woman I know!"

"Not mentally. But I haven't the courage of my views, as I said before. I didn't marry him altogether because of the scandal. But sometimes a woman's LOVE OF BEING LOVED gets the better of her conscience, and though she is agonized at the thought of treating a man cruelly, she encourages him to love her while she doesn't love him at all. Then, when she sees him suffering, her remorse sets in, and she does what she can to repair the wrong."

"You simply mean that you flirted outrageously with him, poor old chap, and then repented, and to make reparation, married him, though you tortured yourself to death by doing it."

"Well--if you will put it brutally!--it was a little like that--that and the scandal together--and your concealing from me what you ought to have told me before!"

He could see that she was distressed and tearful at his criticisms, and soothed her, saying: "There, dear; don't mind! Crucify me, if you will! You know you are all the world to me, whatever you do!"

"I am very bad and unprincipled--I know you think that!" she said, trying to blink away her tears.

"I think and know you are my dear Sue, from whom neither length nor breadth, nor things present nor things to come, can divide me!"

Though so sophisticated in many things she was such a child in others that this satisfied her, and they reached the end of their journey on the best of terms. It was about ten o'clock when they arrived at Aldbrickham, the county town of North Wessex. As she would not go to the Temperance Hotel because of the form of his telegram, Jude inquired for another; and a youth who volunteered to find one wheeled their luggage to the George farther on, which proved to be the inn at which Jude had stayed with Arabella on that one occasion of their meeting after their division for years.

Owing, however, to their now entering it by another door, and to his preoccupation, he did not at first recognize the place. When they had engaged their respective rooms they went down to a late supper. During Jude's temporary absence the waiting-maid spoke to Sue.

"I think, ma'am, I remember your relation, or friend, or whatever he is, coming here once before--late, just like this, with his wife--a lady, at any rate, that wasn't you by no manner of means--jest as med be with you now."

"Oh do you?" said Sue, with a certain sickness of heart. "Though I think you must be mistaken! How long ago was it?"

"About a month or two. A handsome, full-figured woman. They had this room."

When Jude came back and sat down to supper Sue seemed moping and miserable. "Jude," she said to him plaintively, at their parting that night upon the landing, "it is not so nice and pleasant as it used to be with us! I don't like it here--I can't bear the place! And I don't like you so well as I did!"

"How fidgeted you seem, dear! Why do you change like this?"

"Because it was cruel to bring me here!"

"Why?"

"You were lately here with Arabella. There, now I have said it!"

"Dear me, why--" said Jude looking round him. "Yes--it is the same!

I really didn't know it, Sue. Well--it is not cruel, since we have come as we have--two relations staying together."

"How long ago was it you were here? Tell me, tell me!"

"The day before I met you in Christminster, when we went back to Marygreen together. I told you I had met her."

"Yes, you said you had met her, but you didn't tell me all. Your story was that you had met as estranged people, who were not husband and wife at all in Heaven's sight--not that you had made it up with her."

"We didn't make it up," he said sadly. "I can't explain, Sue."

"You've been false to me; you, my last hope! And I shall never forget it, never!"

"But by your own wish, dear Sue, we are only to be friends, not lovers! It is so very inconsistent of you to--"

"Friends can be jealous!"

"I don't see that. You concede nothing to me and I have to concede everything to you. After all, you were on good terms with your husband at that time."

"No, I wasn't, Jude. Oh how can you think so! And you have taken me in, even if you didn't intend to." She was so mortified that he was obliged to take her into her room and close the door lest the people should hear. "Was it this room? Yes it was--I see by your look it was! I won't have it for mine! Oh it was treacherous of you to have her again! I jumped out of the window!"

"But Sue, she was, after all, my legal wife, if not--"

Slipping down on her knees Sue buried her face in the bed and wept.

"I never knew such an unreasonable--such a dog-in-the-manger feeling," said Jude. "I am not to approach you, nor anybody else!"

"Oh don't you UNDERSTAND my feeling! Why don't you! Why are you so gross! I jumped out of the window!"

"Jumped out of window?"

"I can't explain!"

It was true that he did not understand her feelings very well. But he did a little; and began to love her none the less.

"I--I thought you cared for nobody--desired nobody in the world but

me at that time--and ever since!" continued Sue.

"It is true. I did not, and don't now!" said Jude, as distressed as she.

"But you must have thought much of her! Or--"

"No--I need not--you don't understand me either--women never do! Why should you get into such a tantrum about nothing?"

Looking up from the quilt she pouted provokingly: "If it hadn't been for that, perhaps I would have gone on to the Temperance Hotel, after all, as you proposed; for I was beginning to think I did belong to you!"

"Oh, it is of no consequence!" said Jude distantly.

"I thought, of course, that she had never been really your wife since she left you of her own accord years and years ago! My sense of it was, that a parting such as yours from her, and mine from him, ended the marriage."

"I can't say more without speaking against her, and I don't want to do that," said he. "Yet I must tell you one thing, which would settle the matter in any case. She has married another man--really married him! I knew nothing about it till after the visit we made

here."

"Married another? ... It is a crime--as the world treats it, but does not believe."

"There--now you are yourself again. Yes, it is a crime--as you don't hold, but would fearfully concede. But I shall never inform against her! And it is evidently a prick of conscience in her that has led her to urge me to get a divorce, that she may remarry this man legally. So you perceive I shall not be likely to see her again."

"And you didn't really know anything of this when you saw her?" said Sue more gently, as she rose.

"I did not. Considering all things, I don't think you ought to be angry, darling!"

"I am not. But I shan't go to the Temperance Hotel!"

He laughed. "Never mind!" he said. "So that I am near you, I am comparatively happy. It is more than this earthly wretch called Me deserves--you spirit, you disembodied creature, you dear, sweet, tantalizing phantom--hardly flesh at all; so that when I put my arms round you I almost expect them to pass through you as through air! Forgive me for being gross, as you call it! Remember that our calling cousins when really strangers was a snare. The enmity of our

parents gave a piquancy to you in my eyes that was intenser even than the novelty of ordinary new acquaintance."

"Say those pretty lines, then, from Shelley's 'Epipsychidion' as if they meant me!" she solicited, slanting up closer to him as they stood. "Don't you know them?"

"I know hardly any poetry," he replied mournfully.

"Don't you? These are some of them:

There was a Being whom my spirit oft
Met on its visioned wanderings far aloft.

* * * * *

A seraph of Heaven, too gentle to be human,
Veiling beneath that radiant form of woman...

Oh it is too flattering, so I won't go on! But say it's me! Say it's me!"

"It is you, dear; exactly like you!"

"Now I forgive you! And you shall kiss me just once there--not very long." She put the tip of her finger gingerly to her cheek; and he did as commanded. "You do care for me very much, don't you, in spite of my not--you know?"

"Yes, sweet!" he said with a sigh; and bade her good-night.

VI

In returning to his native town of Shaston as schoolmaster Phillotson had won the interest and awakened the memories of the inhabitants, who, though they did not honour him for his miscellaneous aquirements as he would have been honoured elsewhere, retained for him a sincere regard. When, shortly after his arrival, he brought home a pretty wife--awkwardly pretty for him, if he did not take care, they said--they were glad to have her settle among them.

For some time after her flight from that home Sue's absence did not excite comment. Her place as monitor in the school was taken by another young woman within a few days of her vacating it, which substitution also passed without remark, Sue's services having been of a provisional nature only. When, however, a month had passed, and Phillotson casually admitted to an acquaintance that he did not know

where his wife was staying, curiosity began to be aroused; till, jumping to conclusions, people ventured to affirm that Sue had played him false and run away from him. The schoolmaster's growing languor and listlessness over his work gave countenance to the idea.

Though Phillotson had held his tongue as long as he could, except to his friend Gillingham, his honesty and directness would not allow him to do so when misapprehensions as to Sue's conduct spread abroad. On a Monday morning the chairman of the school committee called, and after attending to the business of the school drew Phillotson aside out of earshot of the children.

"You'll excuse my asking, Phillotson, since everybody is talking of it: is this true as to your domestic affairs--that your wife's going away was on no visit, but a secret elopement with a lover? If so, I condole with you."

"Don't," said Phillotson. "There was no secret about it."

"She has gone to visit friends?"

"No."

"Then what has happened?"

"She has gone away under circumstances that usually call for

condolence with the husband. But I gave my consent."

The chairman looked as if he had not apprehended the remark.

"What I say is quite true," Phillotson continued testily. "She asked leave to go away with her lover, and I let her. Why shouldn't I? A woman of full age, it was a question of her own conscience--not for me. I was not her gaoler. I can't explain any further. I don't wish to be questioned."

The children observed that much seriousness marked the faces of the two men, and went home and told their parents that something new had happened about Mrs. Phillotson. Then Phillotson's little maidservant, who was a schoolgirl just out of her standards, said that Mr. Phillotson had helped in his wife's packing, had offered her what money she required, and had written a friendly letter to her young man, telling him to take care of her. The chairman of committee thought the matter over, and talked to the other managers of the school, till a request came to Phillotson to meet them privately. The meeting lasted a long time, and at the end the school-master came home, looking as usual pale and worn. Gillingham was sitting in his house awaiting him.

"Well; it is as you said," observed Phillotson, flinging himself down wearily in a chair. "They have requested me to send in my resignation on account of my scandalous conduct in giving my tortured

wife her liberty--or, as they call it, condoning her adultery. But I shan't resign!"

"I think I would."

"I won't. It is no business of theirs. It doesn't affect me in my public capacity at all. They may expel me if they like."

"If you make a fuss it will get into the papers, and you'll never get appointed to another school. You see, they have to consider what you did as done by a teacher of youth--and its effects as such upon the morals of the town; and, to ordinary opinion, your position is indefensible. You must let me say that."

To this good advice, however, Phillotson would not listen.

"I don't care," he said. "I don't go unless I am turned out. And for this reason; that by resigning I acknowledge I have acted wrongly by her; when I am more and more convinced every day that in the sight of Heaven and by all natural, straightforward humanity, I have acted rightly."

Gillingham saw that his rather headstrong friend would not be able to maintain such a position as this; but he said nothing further, and in due time--indeed, in a quarter of an hour--the formal letter of dismissal arrived, the managers having remained behind to write it

after Phillotson's withdrawal. The latter replied that he should not accept dismissal; and called a public meeting, which he attended, although he looked so weak and ill that his friend implored him to stay at home. When he stood up to give his reasons for contesting the decision of the managers he advanced them firmly, as he had done to his friend, and contended, moreover, that the matter was a domestic theory which did not concern them. This they over-ruled, insisting that the private eccentricities of a teacher came quite within their sphere of control, as it touched the morals of those he taught. Phillotson replied that he did not see how an act of natural charity could injure morals.

All the respectable inhabitants and well-to-do fellow-natives of the town were against Phillotson to a man. But, somewhat to his surprise, some dozen or more champions rose up in his defence as from the ground.

It has been stated that Shaston was the anchorage of a curious and interesting group of itinerants, who frequented the numerous fairs and markets held up and down Wessex during the summer and autumn months. Although Phillotson had never spoken to one of these gentlemen they now nobly led the forlorn hope in his defence. The body included two cheap Jacks, a shooting-gallery proprietor and the ladies who loaded the guns, a pair of boxing-masters, a steam-roundabout manager, two travelling broom-makers, who called themselves widows, a gingerbread-stall keeper, a swing-boat owner,

and a "test-your-strength" man.

This generous phalanx of supporters, and a few others of independent judgment, whose own domestic experiences had been not without vicissitude, came up and warmly shook hands with Phillotson; after which they expressed their thoughts so strongly to the meeting that issue was joined, the result being a general scuffle, wherein a black board was split, three panes of the school windows were broken, an inkbottle was spilled over a town-councillor's shirt front, a churchwarden was dealt such a topper with the map of Palestine that his head went right through Samaria, and many black eyes and bleeding noses were given, one of which, to everybody's horror, was the venerable incumbent's, owing to the zeal of an emancipated chimney-sweep, who took the side of Phillotson's party. When Phillotson saw the blood running down the rector's face he deplored almost in groans the untoward and degrading circumstances, regretted that he had not resigned when called upon, and went home so ill that next morning he could not leave his bed.

The farcical yet melancholy event was the beginning of a serious illness for him; and he lay in his lonely bed in the pathetic state of mind of a middle-aged man who perceives at length that his life, intellectual and domestic, is tending to failure and gloom. Gillingham came to see him in the evenings, and on one occasion mentioned Sue's name.

"She doesn't care anything about me!" said Phillotson. "Why should she?"

"She doesn't know you are ill."

"So much the better for both of us."

"Where are her lover and she living?"

"At Melchester--I suppose; at least he was living there some time ago."

When Gillingham reached home he sat and reflected, and at last wrote an anonymous line to Sue, on the bare chance of its reaching her, the letter being enclosed in an envelope addressed to Jude at the diocesan capital. Arriving at that place it was forwarded to Marygreen in North Wessex, and thence to Aldbrickham by the only person who knew his present address--the widow who had nursed his aunt.

Three days later, in the evening, when the sun was going down in splendour over the lowlands of Blackmoor, and making the Shaston windows like tongues of fire to the eyes of the rustics in that vale, the sick man fancied that he heard somebody come to the house, and a few minutes after there was a tap at the bedroom door. Phillotson did not speak; the door was hesitatingly opened, and there

entered--Sue.

She was in light spring clothing, and her advent seemed ghostly--like the flitting in of a moth. He turned his eyes upon her, and flushed; but appeared to check his primary impulse to speak.

"I have no business here," she said, bending her frightened face to him. "But I heard you were ill--very ill; and--and as I know that you recognize other feelings between man and woman than physical love, I have come."

"I am not very ill, my dear friend. Only unwell."

"I didn't know that; and I am afraid that only a severe illness would have justified my coming!"

"Yes... yes. And I almost wish you had not come! It is a little too soon--that's all I mean. Still, let us make the best of it. You haven't heard about the school, I suppose?"

"No--what about it?"

"Only that I am going away from here to another place. The managers and I don't agree, and we are going to part--that's all."

Sue did not for a moment, either now or later, suspect what troubles

had resulted to him from letting her go; it never once seemed to cross her mind, and she had received no news whatever from Shaston. They talked on slight and ephemeral subjects, and when his tea was brought up he told the amazed little servant that a cup was to be set for Sue. That young person was much more interested in their history than they supposed, and as she descended the stairs she lifted her eyes and hands in grotesque amazement. While they sipped Sue went to the window and thoughtfully said, "It is such a beautiful sunset, Richard."

"They are mostly beautiful from here, owing to the rays crossing the mist of the vale. But I lose them all, as they don't shine into this gloomy corner where I lie."

"Wouldn't you like to see this particular one? It is like heaven opened."

"Ah yes! But I can't."

"I'll help you to."

"No--the bedstead can't be shifted."

"But see how I mean."

She went to where a swing-glass stood, and taking it in her hands

carried it to a spot by the window where it could catch the sunshine, moving the glass till the beams were reflected into Phillotson's face.

"There--you can see the great red sun now!" she said. "And I am sure it will cheer you--I do so hope it will!" She spoke with a childlike, repentant kindness, as if she could not do too much for him.

Phillotson smiled sadly. "You are an odd creature!" he murmured as the sun glowed in his eyes. "The idea of your coming to see me after what has passed!"

"Don't let us go back upon that!" she said quickly. "I have to catch the omnibus for the train, as Jude doesn't know I have come; he was out when I started; so I must return home almost directly. Richard, I am so very glad you are better. You don't hate me, do you? You have been such a kind friend to me!"

"I am glad to know you think so," said Phillotson huskily. "No. I don't hate you!"

It grew dusk quickly in the gloomy room during their intermittent chat, and when candles were brought and it was time to leave she put her hand in his or rather allowed it to flit through his; for she was significantly light in touch. She had nearly closed the door when he

said, "Sue!" He had noticed that, in turning away from him, tears were on her face and a quiver in her lip.

It was bad policy to recall her--he knew it while he pursued it. But he could not help it. She came back.

"Sue," he murmured, "do you wish to make it up, and stay? I'll forgive you and condone everything!"

"Oh you can't, you can't!" she said hastily. "You can't condone it now!"

"HE is your husband now, in effect, you mean, of course?"

"You may assume it. He is obtaining a divorce from his wife Arabella."

"His wife! It is altogether news to me that he has a wife."

"It was a bad marriage."

"Like yours."

"Like mine. He is not doing it so much on his own account as on hers. She wrote and told him it would be a kindness to her, since then she could marry and live respectably. And Jude has agreed."

"A wife... A kindness to her. Ah, yes; a kindness to her to release her altogether... But I don't like the sound of it. I can forgive, Sue."

"No, no! You can't have me back now I have been so wicked--as to do what I have done!"

There had arisen in Sue's face that incipient fright which showed itself whenever he changed from friend to husband, and which made her adopt any line of defence against marital feeling in him. "I MUST go now. I'll come again--may I?"

"I don't ask you to go, even now. I ask you to stay."

"I thank you, Richard; but I must. As you are not so ill as I thought, I CANNOT stay!"

"She's his--his from lips to heel!" said Phillotson; but so faintly that in closing the door she did not hear it. The dread of a reactionary change in the schoolmaster's sentiments, coupled, perhaps, with a faint shamefacedness at letting even him know what a slipshod lack of thoroughness, from a man's point of view, characterized her transferred allegiance, prevented her telling him of her, thus far, incomplete relations with Jude; and Phillotson lay writhing like a man in hell as he pictured the prettily dressed,

maddening compound of sympathy and averseness who bore his name, returning impatiently to the home of her lover.

Gillingham was so interested in Phillotson's affairs, and so seriously concerned about him, that he walked up the hill-side to Shaston two or three times a week, although, there and back, it was a journey of nine miles, which had to be performed between tea and supper, after a hard day's work in school. When he called on the next occasion after Sue's visit his friend was downstairs, and Gillingham noticed that his restless mood had been supplanted by a more fixed and composed one.

"She's been here since you called last," said Phillotson.

"Not Mrs. Phillotson?"

"Yes."

"Ah! You have made it up?"

"No... She just came, patted my pillow with her little white hand, played the thoughtful nurse for half an hour, and went away."

"Well--I'm hanged! A little hussy!"

"What do you say?"

"Oh--nothing!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, what a tantalizing, capricious little woman! If she were not your wife--"

"She is not; she's another man's except in name and law. And I have been thinking--it was suggested to me by a conversation I had with her--that, in kindness to her, I ought to dissolve the legal tie altogether; which, singularly enough, I think I can do, now she has been back, and refused my request to stay after I said I had forgiven her. I believe that fact would afford me opportunity of doing it, though I did not see it at the moment. What's the use of keeping her chained on to me if she doesn't belong to me? I know--I feel absolutely certain--that she would welcome my taking such a step as the greatest charity to her. For though as a fellow-creature she sympathizes with, and pities me, and even weeps for me, as a husband she cannot endure me--she loathes me--there's no use in mincing words--she loathes me, and my only manly, and dignified, and merciful course is to complete what I have begun... And for worldly reasons, too, it will be better for her to be independent. I have hopelessly ruined my prospects because of my decision as to what was best for us, though she does not know it; I see only dire poverty ahead from my feet to the grave; for I can be accepted as teacher no more. I

shall probably have enough to do to make both ends meet during the remainder of my life, now my occupation's gone; and I shall be better able to bear it alone. I may as well tell you that what has suggested my letting her go is some news she brought me--the news that Fawley is doing the same."

"Oh--he had a spouse, too? A queer couple, these lovers!"

"Well--I don't want your opinion on that. What I was going to say is that my liberating her can do her no possible harm, and will open up a chance of happiness for her which she has never dreamt of hitherto. For then they'll be able to marry, as they ought to have done at first."

Gillingham did not hurry to reply. "I may disagree with your motive," he said gently, for he respected views he could not share. "But I think you are right in your determination--if you can carry it out. I doubt, however, if you can."