Part Fifth

AT ALDBRICKHAM AND ELSEWHERE

"Thy aerial part, and all the fiery parts which are mingled in thee, though by nature they have an upward tendency, still in obedience to the disposition of the universe they are over-powered here in the compound mass the body."--M. ANTONINUS (Long).

I

How Gillingham's doubts were disposed of will most quickly appear by passing over the series of dreary months and incidents that followed the events of the last chapter, and coming on to a Sunday in the February of the year following.

Sue and Jude were living in Aldbrickham, in precisely the same relations that they had established between themselves when she left Shaston to join him the year before. The proceedings in the law-courts had reached their consciousness, but as a distant sound

and an occasional missive which they hardly understood.

They had met, as usual, to breakfast together in the little house with Jude's name on it, that he had taken at fifteen pounds a year, with three-pounds-ten extra for rates and taxes, and furnished with his aunt's ancient and lumbering goods, which had cost him about their full value to bring all the way from Marygreen. Sue kept house, and managed everything.

As he entered the room this morning Sue held up a letter she had just received.

"Well; and what is it about?" he said after kissing her.

"That the decree nisi in the case of Phillotson versus Phillotson and Fawley, pronounced six months ago, has just been made absolute."

"Ah," said Jude, as he sat down.

The same concluding incident in Jude's suit against Arabella had occurred about a month or two earlier. Both cases had been too insignificant to be reported in the papers, further than by name in a long list of other undefended cases.

"Now then, Sue, at any rate, you can do what you like!" He looked at his sweetheart curiously.

"Are we--you and I--just as free now as if we had never married at all?"

"Just as free--except, I believe, that a clergyman may object personally to remarry you, and hand the job on to somebody else."

"But I wonder--do you think it is really so with us? I know it is generally. But I have an uncomfortable feeling that my freedom has been obtained under false pretences!"

"How?"

"Well--if the truth about us had been known, the decree wouldn't have been pronounced. It is only, is it, because we have made no defence, and have led them into a false supposition? Therefore is my freedom lawful, however proper it may be?"

"Well--why did you let it be under false pretences? You have only yourself to blame," he said mischievously.

"Jude--don't! You ought not to be touchy about that still. You must take me as I am."

"Very well, darling: so I will. Perhaps you were right. As to your question, we were not obliged to prove anything. That was their

business. Anyhow we are living together."

"Yes. Though not in their sense."

"One thing is certain, that however the decree may be brought about, a marriage is dissolved when it is dissolved. There is this advantage in being poor obscure people like us--that these things are done for us in a rough and ready fashion. It was the same with me and Arabella. I was afraid her criminal second marriage would have been discovered, and she punished; but nobody took any interest in her--nobody inquired, nobody suspected it. If we'd been patented nobilities we should have had infinite trouble, and days and weeks would have been spent in investigations."

By degrees Sue acquired her lover's cheerfulness at the sense of freedom, and proposed that they should take a walk in the fields, even if they had to put up with a cold dinner on account of it. Jude agreed, and Sue went up-stairs and prepared to start, putting on a joyful coloured gown in observance of her liberty; seeing which Jude put on a lighter tie.

"Now we'll strut arm and arm," he said, "like any other engaged couple. We've a legal right to."

They rambled out of the town, and along a path over the low-lying lands that bordered it, though these were frosty now, and the

extensive seed-fields were bare of colour and produce. The pair, however, were so absorbed in their own situation that their surroundings were little in their consciousness.

"Well, my dearest, the result of all this is that we can marry after a decent interval."

"Yes; I suppose we can," said Sue, without enthusiasm.

"And aren't we going to?"

"I don't like to say no, dear Jude; but I feel just the same about it now as I have done all along. I have just the same dread lest an iron contract should extinguish your tenderness for me, and mine for you, as it did between our unfortunate parents."

"Still, what can we do? I do love you, as you know, Sue."

"I know it abundantly. But I think I would much rather go on living always as lovers, as we are living now, and only meeting by day. It is so much sweeter--for the woman at least, and when she is sure of the man. And henceforward we needn't be so particular as we have been about appearances."

"Our experiences of matrimony with others have not been encouraging, I own," said he with some gloom; "either owing to our own

dissatisfied, unpractical natures, or by our misfortune. But we two--"

"Should be two dissatisfied ones linked together, which would be twice as bad as before... I think I should begin to be afraid of you, Jude, the moment you had contracted to cherish me under a Government stamp, and I was licensed to be loved on the premises by you--Ugh, how horrible and sordid! Although, as you are, free, I trust you more than any other man in the world."

"No, no--don't say I should change!" he expostulated; yet there was misgiving in his own voice also.

"Apart from ourselves, and our unhappy peculiarities, it is foreign to a man's nature to go on loving a person when he is told that he must and shall be that person's lover. There would be a much likelier chance of his doing it if he were told not to love. If the marriage ceremony consisted in an oath and signed contract between the parties to cease loving from that day forward, in consideration of personal possession being given, and to avoid each other's society as much as possible in public, there would be more loving couples than there are now. Fancy the secret meetings between the perjuring husband and wife, the denials of having seen each other, the clambering in at bedroom windows, and the hiding in closets! There'd be little cooling then."

"Yes; but admitting this, or something like it, to be true, you are not the only one in the world to see it, dear little Sue. People go on marrying because they can't resist natural forces, although many of them may know perfectly well that they are possibly buying a month's pleasure with a life's discomfort. No doubt my father and mother, and your father and mother, saw it, if they at all resembled us in habits of observation. But then they went and married just the same, because they had ordinary passions. But you, Sue, are such a phantasmal, bodiless creature, one who--if you'll allow me to say it--has so little animal passion in you, that you can act upon reason in the matter, when we poor unfortunate wretches of grosser substance can't."

"Well," she sighed, "you've owned that it would probably end in misery for us. And I am not so exceptional a woman as you think. Fewer women like marriage than you suppose, only they enter into it for the dignity it is assumed to confer, and the social advantages it gains them sometimes--a dignity and an advantage that I am quite willing to do without."

Jude fell back upon his old complaint--that, intimate as they were, he had never once had from her an honest, candid declaration that she loved or could love him. "I really fear sometimes that you cannot," he said, with a dubiousness approaching anger. "And you are so reticent. I know that women are taught by other women that they must never admit the full truth to a man. But the highest form of

affection is based on full sincerity on both sides. Not being men, these women don't know that in looking back on those he has had tender relations with, a man's heart returns closest to her who was the soul of truth in her conduct. The better class of man, even if caught by airy affectations of dodging and parrying, is not retained by them. A Nemesis attends the woman who plays the game of elusiveness too often, in the utter contempt for her that, sooner or later, her old admirers feel; under which they allow her to go unlamented to her grave."

Sue, who was regarding the distance, had acquired a guilty look; and she suddenly replied in a tragic voice: "I don't think I like you to-day so well as I did, Jude!"

"Don't you? Why?"

"Oh, well--you are not nice--too sermony. Though I suppose I am so bad and worthless that I deserve the utmost rigour of lecturing!"

"No, you are not bad. You are a dear. But as slippery as an eel when I want to get a confession from you."

"Oh yes I am bad, and obstinate, and all sorts! It is no use your pretending I am not! People who are good don't want scolding as I do... But now that I have nobody but you, and nobody to defend me, it is very hard that I mustn't have my own way in deciding how I'll

live with you, and whether I'll be married or no!"

"Sue, my own comrade and sweetheart, I don't want to force you either to marry or to do the other thing--of course I don't! It is too wicked of you to be so pettish! Now we won't say any more about it, and go on just the same as we have done; and during the rest of our walk we'll talk of the meadows only, and the floods, and the prospect of the farmers this coming year."

After this the subject of marriage was not mentioned by them for several days, though living as they were with only a landing between them it was constantly in their minds. Sue was assisting Jude very materially now: he had latterly occupied himself on his own account in working and lettering headstones, which he kept in a little yard at the back of his little house, where in the intervals of domestic duties she marked out the letters full size for him, and blacked them in after he had cut them. It was a lower class of handicraft than were his former performances as a cathedral mason, and his only patrons were the poor people who lived in his own neighbourhood, and knew what a cheap man this "Jude Fawley: Monumental Mason" (as he called himself on his front door) was to employ for the simple memorials they required for their dead. But he seemed more independent than before, and it was the only arrangement under which Sue, who particularly wished to be no burden on him, could render any assistance.

II

It was an evening at the end of the month, and Jude had just returned home from hearing a lecture on ancient history in the public hall not far off. When he entered, Sue, who had been keeping indoors during his absence, laid out supper for him. Contrary to custom she did not speak. Jude had taken up some illustrated paper, which he perused till, raising his eyes, he saw that her face was troubled.

"Are you depressed, Sue?" he said.

She paused a moment. "I have a message for you," she answered.

"Somebody has called?"

"Yes. A woman." Sue's voice quavered as she spoke, and she suddenly sat down from her preparations, laid her hands in her lap, and looked into the fire. "I don't know whether I did right or not!" she continued. "I said you were not at home, and when she said she would wait, I said I thought you might not be able to see her."

"Why did you say that, dear? I suppose she wanted a headstone. Was she in mourning?"

"No. She wasn't in mourning, and she didn't want a headstone; and I thought you couldn't see her." Sue looked critically and imploringly at him.

"But who was she? Didn't she say?"

"No. She wouldn't give her name. But I know who she was--I think I do! It was Arabella!"

"Heaven save us! What should Arabella come for? What made you think it was she?"

"Oh, I can hardly tell. But I know it was! I feel perfectly certain it was--by the light in her eyes as she looked at me. She was a fleshy, coarse woman."

"Well--I should not have called Arabella coarse exactly, except in speech, though she may be getting so by this time under the duties of the public house. She was rather handsome when I knew her."

"Handsome! But yes!--so she is!"

"I think I heard a quiver in your little mouth. Well, waiving that, as she is nothing to me, and virtuously married to another man, why should she come troubling us?"

"Are you sure she's married? Have you definite news of it?"

"No--not definite news. But that was why she asked me to release her. She and the man both wanted to lead a proper life, as I understood."

"Oh Jude--it was, it WAS Arabella!" cried Sue, covering her eyes with her hand. "And I am so miserable! It seems such an ill omen, whatever she may have come for. You could not possibly see her, could you?"

"I don't really think I could. It would be so very painful to talk to her now--for her as much as for me. However, she's gone. Did she say she would come again?"

"No. But she went away very reluctantly."

Sue, whom the least thing upset, could not eat any supper, and when Jude had finished his he prepared to go to bed. He had no sooner raked out the fire, fastened the doors, and got to the top of the stairs than there came a knock. Sue instantly emerged from her room, which she had but just entered.

"There she is again!" Sue whispered in appalled accents.

"How do you know?"

"She knocked like that last time."

They listened, and the knocking came again. No servant was kept in the house, and if the summons were to be responded to one of them would have to do it in person. "I'll open a window," said Jude. "Whoever it is cannot be expected to be let in at this time."

He accordingly went into his bedroom and lifted the sash. The lonely street of early retiring workpeople was empty from end to end save of one figure--that of a woman walking up and down by the lamp a few yards off.

"Who's there?" he asked.

"Is that Mr. Fawley?" came up from the woman, in a voice which was unmistakably Arabella's.

Jude replied that it was.

"Is it she?" asked Sue from the door, with lips apart.

"Yes, dear," said Jude. "What do you want, Arabella?" he inquired.

"I beg your pardon, Jude, for disturbing you," said Arabella humbly.

"But I called earlier--I wanted particularly to see you to-night, if I could. I am in trouble, and have nobody to help me!"

"In trouble, are you?"

"Yes."

There was a silence. An inconvenient sympathy seemed to be rising in Jude's breast at the appeal. "But aren't you married?" he said.

Arabella hesitated. "No, Jude, I am not," she returned. "He wouldn't, after all. And I am in great difficulty. I hope to get another situation as barmaid soon. But it takes time, and I really am in great distress because of a sudden responsibility that's been sprung upon me from Australia; or I wouldn't trouble you--believe me I wouldn't. I want to tell you about it."

Sue remained at gaze, in painful tension, hearing every word, but speaking none.

"You are not really in want of money, Arabella?" he asked, in a distinctly softened tone.

"I have enough to pay for the night's lodging I have obtained, but barely enough to take me back again."

"Where are you living?"

"In London still." She was about to give the address, but she said, "I am afraid somebody may hear, so I don't like to call out particulars of myself so loud. If you could come down and walk a little way with me towards the Prince Inn, where I am staying to-night, I would explain all. You may as well, for old time's sake!"

"Poor thing! I must do her the kindness of hearing what's the matter, I suppose," said Jude in much perplexity. "As she's going back to-morrow it can't make much difference."

"But you can go and see her to-morrow, Jude! Don't go now, Jude!" came in plaintive accents from the doorway. "Oh, it is only to entrap you, I know it is, as she did before! Don't go, dear! She is such a low-passioned woman--I can see it in her shape, and hear it in her voice!

"But I shall go," said Jude. "Don't attempt to detain me, Sue. God knows I love her little enough now, but I don't want to be cruel to her." He turned to the stairs.

"But she's not your wife!" cried Sue distractedly. "And I--"

"And you are not either, dear, yet," said Jude.

"Oh, but are you going to her? Don't! Stay at home! Please, please stay at home, Jude, and not go to her, now she's not your wife any more than I!"

"Well, she is, rather more than you, come to that," he said, taking his hat determinedly. "I've wanted you to be, and I've waited with the patience of Job, and I don't see that I've got anything by my self-denial. I shall certainly give her something, and hear what it is she is so anxious to tell me; no man could do less!"

There was that in his manner which she knew it would be futile to oppose. She said no more, but, turning to her room as meekly as a martyr, heard him go downstairs, unbolt the door, and close it behind him. With a woman's disregard of her dignity when in the presence of nobody but herself, she also trotted down, sobbing articulately as she went. She listened. She knew exactly how far it was to the inn that Arabella had named as her lodging. It would occupy about seven minutes to get there at an ordinary walking pace; seven to come back again. If he did not return in fourteen minutes he would have lingered. She looked at the clock. It was twenty-five minutes to eleven. He MIGHT enter the inn with Arabella, as they would reach it before closing time; she might get him to drink with her; and Heaven only knew what disasters would befall him then.

In a still suspense she waited on. It seemed as if the whole time

had nearly elapsed when the door was opened again, and Jude appeared.

Sue gave a little ecstatic cry. "Oh, I knew I could trust you!--how good you are!"--she began.

"I can't find her anywhere in this street, and I went out in my slippers only. She has walked on, thinking I've been so hard-hearted as to refuse her requests entirely, poor woman. I've come back for my boots, as it is beginning to rain."

"Oh, but why should you take such trouble for a woman who has served you so badly!" said Sue in a jealous burst of disappointment.

"But, Sue, she's a woman, and I once cared for her; and one can't be a brute in such circumstances."

"She isn't your wife any longer!" exclaimed Sue, passionately excited. "You MUSTN'T go out to find her! It isn't right! You CAN'T join her, now she's a stranger to you. How can you forget such a thing, my dear, dear one!"

"She seems much the same as ever--an erring, careless, unreflecting fellow-creature," he said, continuing to pull on his boots. "What those legal fellows have been playing at in London makes no difference in my real relations to her. If she was my wife while she was away in Australia with another husband she's my wife now."

"But she wasn't! That's just what I hold! There's the absurdity!--Well--you'll come straight back, after a few minutes, won't you, dear? She is too low, too coarse for you to talk to long, Jude, and was always!"

"Perhaps I am coarse too, worse luck! I have the germs of every human infirmity in me, I verily believe--that was why I saw it was so preposterous of me to think of being a curate. I have cured myself of drunkenness I think; but I never know in what new form a suppressed vice will break out in me! I do love you, Sue, though I have danced attendance on you so long for such poor returns! All that's best and noblest in me loves you, and your freedom from everything that's gross has elevated me, and enabled me to do what I should never have dreamt myself capable of, or any man, a year or two ago. It is all very well to preach about self-control, and the wickedness of coercing a woman. But I should just like a few virtuous people who have condemned me in the past, about Arabella and other things, to have been in my tantalizing position with you through these late weeks!--they'd believe, I think, that I have exercised some little restraint in always giving in to your wishes--living here in one house, and not a soul between us."

"Yes, you have been good to me, Jude; I know you have, my dear protector."

"Well--Arabella has appealed to me for help. I must go out and speak to her, Sue, at least!"

"I can't say any more!--Oh, if you must, you must!" she said, bursting out into sobs that seemed to tear her heart. "I have nobody but you, Jude, and you are deserting me! I didn't know you were like this--I can't bear it, I can't! If she were yours it would be different!"

"Or if you were."

"Very well then--if I must I must. Since you will have it so, I agree! I will be. Only I didn't mean to! And I didn't want to marry again, either! ... But, yes--I agree, I agree! I do love you. I ought to have known that you would conquer in the long run, living like this!"

She ran across and flung her arms round his neck. "I am not a cold-natured, sexless creature, am I, for keeping you at such a distance? I am sure you don't think so! Wait and see! I do belong to you, don't I? I give in!"

"And I'll arrange for our marriage to-morrow, or as soon as ever you wish."

"Yes, Jude."

"Then I'll let her go," said he, embracing Sue softly. "I do feel that it would be unfair to you to see her, and perhaps unfair to her. She is not like you, my darling, and never was: it is only bare justice to say that. Don't cry any more. There; and there; and there!" He kissed her on one side, and on the other, and in the middle, and rebolted the front door.

The next morning it was wet.

"Now, dear," said Jude gaily at breakfast; "as this is Saturday I mean to call about the banns at once, so as to get the first publishing done to-morrow, or we shall lose a week. Banns will do? We shall save a pound or two."

Sue absently agreed to banns. But her mind for the moment was running on something else. A glow had passed away from her, and depression sat upon her features.

"I feel I was wickedly selfish last night!" she murmured. "It was sheer unkindness in me--or worse--to treat Arabella as I did. I didn't care about her being in trouble, and what she wished to tell you! Perhaps it was really something she was justified in telling you. That's some more of my badness, I suppose! Love has its own

dark morality when rivalry enters in--at least, mine has, if other people's hasn't... I wonder how she got on? I hope she reached the inn all right, poor woman."

"Oh yes: she got on all right," said Jude placidly.

"I hope she wasn't shut out, and that she hadn't to walk the streets in the rain. Do you mind my putting on my waterproof and going to see if she got in? I've been thinking of her all the morning."

"Well--is it necessary? You haven't the least idea how Arabella is able to shift for herself. Still, darling, if you want to go and inquire you can."

There was no limit to the strange and unnecessary penances which Sue would meekly undertake when in a contrite mood; and this going to see all sorts of extraordinary persons whose relation to her was precisely of a kind that would have made other people shun them was her instinct ever, so that the request did not surprise him.

"And when you come back," he added, "I'll be ready to go about the banns. You'll come with me?"

Sue agreed, and went off under cloak and umbrella letting Jude kiss her freely, and returning his kisses in a way she had never done before. Times had decidedly changed. "The little bird is caught at

last!" she said, a sadness showing in her smile.

"No--only nested," he assured her.

She walked along the muddy street till she reached the public house mentioned by Arabella, which was not so very far off. She was informed that Arabella had not yet left, and in doubt how to announce herself so that her predecessor in Jude's affections would recognize her, she sent up word that a friend from Spring Street had called, naming the place of Jude's residence. She was asked to step upstairs, and on being shown into a room found that it was Arabella's bedroom, and that the latter had not yet risen. She halted on the turn of her toe till Arabella cried from the bed, "Come in and shut the door," which Sue accordingly did.

Arabella lay facing the window, and did not at once turn her head: and Sue was wicked enough, despite her penitence, to wish for a moment that Jude could behold her forerunner now, with the daylight full upon her. She may have seemed handsome enough in profile under the lamps, but a frowsiness was apparent this morning; and the sight of her own fresh charms in the looking-glass made Sue's manner bright, till she reflected what a meanly sexual emotion this was in her, and hated herself for it.

"I've just looked in to see if you got back comfortably last night, that's all," she said gently. "I was afraid afterwards that you

might have met with any mishap?"

"Oh--how stupid this is! I thought my visitor was--your friend--your husband--Mrs. Fawley, as I suppose you call yourself?" said Arabella, flinging her head back upon the pillows with a disappointed toss, and ceasing to retain the dimple she had just taken the trouble to produce.

"Indeed I don't," said Sue.

"Oh, I thought you might have, even if he's not really yours. Decency is decency, any hour of the twenty-four."

"I don't know what you mean," said Sue stiffly. "He is mine, if you come to that!"

"He wasn't yesterday."

Sue coloured roseate, and said, "How do you know?"

"From your manner when you talked to me at the door. Well, my dear, you've been quick about it, and I expect my visit last night helped it on--ha-ha! But I don't want to get him away from you."

Sue looked out at the rain, and at the dirty toilet-cover, and at the detached tail of Arabella's hair hanging on the looking-glass, just

as it had done in Jude's time; and wished she had not come. In the pause there was a knock at the door, and the chambermaid brought in a telegram for "Mrs. Cartlett."

Arabella opened it as she lay, and her ruffled look disappeared.

"I am much obliged to you for your anxiety about me," she said blandly when the maid had gone; "but it is not necessary you should feel it. My man finds he can't do without me after all, and agrees to stand by the promise to marry again over here that he has made me all along. See here! This is in answer to one from me." She held out the telegram for Sue to read, but Sue did not take it. "He asks me to come back. His little corner public in Lambeth would go to pieces without me, he says. But he isn't going to knock me about when he has had a drop, any more after we are spliced by English law than before! ... As for you, I should coax Jude to take me before the parson straight off, and have done with it, if I were in your place. I say it as a friend, my dear."

"He's waiting to, any day," returned Sue, with frigid pride.

"Then let him, in Heaven's name. Life with a man is more businesslike after it, and money matters work better. And then, you see, if you have rows, and he turns you out of doors, you can get the law to protect you, which you can't otherwise, unless he half-runs you through with a knife, or cracks your noddle with a poker. And

if he bolts away from you--I say it friendly, as woman to woman, for there's never any knowing what a man med do--you'll have the sticks o' furniture, and won't be looked upon as a thief. I shall marry my man over again, now he's willing, as there was a little flaw in the first ceremony. In my telegram last night which this is an answer to, I told him I had almost made it up with Jude; and that frightened him, I expect! Perhaps I should quite have done it if it hadn't been for you," she said laughing; "and then how different our histories might have been from to-day! Never such a tender fool as Jude is if a woman seems in trouble, and coaxes him a bit! Just as he used to be about birds and things. However, as it happens, it is just as well as if I had made it up, and I forgive you. And, as I say, I'd advise you to get the business legally done as soon as possible. You'll find it an awful bother later on if you don't."

"I have told you he is asking me to marry him--to make our natural marriage a legal one," said Sue, with yet more dignity. "It was quite by my wish that he didn't the moment I was free."

"Ah, yes--you are a oneyer too, like myself," said Arabella, eyeing her visitor with humorous criticism. "Bolted from your first, didn't you, like me?"

"Good morning!--I must go," said Sue hastily.

"And I, too, must up and off!" replied the other, springing out of

bed so suddenly that the soft parts of her person shook. Sue jumped aside in trepidation. "Lord, I am only a woman--not a six-foot sojer! ... Just a moment, dear," she continued, putting her hand on Sue's arm. "I really did want to consult Jude on a little matter of business, as I told him. I came about that more than anything else. Would he run up to speak to me at the station as I am going? You think not. Well, I'll write to him about it. I didn't want to write it, but never mind--I will."

III

When Sue reached home Jude was awaiting her at the door to take the initial step towards their marriage. She clasped his arm, and they went along silently together, as true comrades oft-times do. He saw that she was preoccupied, and forbore to question her.

"Oh Jude--I've been talking to her," she said at last. "I wish I hadn't! And yet it is best to be reminded of things."

"I hope she was civil."

"Yes. I--I can't help liking her--just a little bit! She's not an ungenerous nature; and I am so glad her difficulties have all

suddenly ended." She explained how Arabella had been summoned back, and would be enabled to retrieve her position. "I was referring to our old question. What Arabella has been saying to me has made me feel more than ever how hopelessly vulgar an institution legal marriage is--a sort of trap to catch a man--I can't bear to think of it. I wish I hadn't promised to let you put up the banns this morning!"

"Oh, don't mind me. Any time will do for me. I thought you might like to get it over quickly, now."

"Indeed, I don't feel any more anxious now than I did before. Perhaps with any other man I might be a little anxious; but among the very few virtues possessed by your family and mine, dear, I think I may set staunchness. So I am not a bit frightened about losing you, now I really am yours and you really are mine. In fact, I am easier in my mind than I was, for my conscience is clear about Richard, who now has a right to his freedom. I felt we were deceiving him before."

"Sue, you seem when you are like this to be one of the women of some grand old civilization, whom I used to read about in my bygone, wasted, classical days, rather than a denizen of a mere Christian country. I almost expect you to say at these times that you have just been talking to some friend whom you met in the Via Sacra, about the latest news of Octavia or Livia; or have been listening to

Aspasia's eloquence, or have been watching Praxiteles chiselling away at his latest Venus, while Phryne made complaint that she was tired of posing."

They had now reached the house of the parish clerk. Sue stood back, while her lover went up to the door. His hand was raised to knock when she said: "Jude!"

He looked round.

"Wait a minute, would you mind?"

He came back to her.

"Just let us think," she said timidly. "I had such a horrid dream one night! ... And Arabella--"

"What did Arabella say to you?" he asked.

"Oh, she said that when people were tied up you could get the law of a man better if he beat you--and how when couples quarrelled... Jude, do you think that when you must have me with you by law, we shall be so happy as we are now? The men and women of our family are very generous when everything depends upon their goodwill, but they always kick against compulsion. Don't you dread the attitude that insensibly arises out of legal obligation?

Don't you think it is destructive to a passion whose essence is its gratuitousness?"

"Upon my word, love, you are beginning to frighten me, too, with all this foreboding! Well, let's go back and think it over."

Her face brightened. "Yes--so we will!" said she. And they turned from the clerk's door, Sue taking his arm and murmuring as they walked on homeward:

Can you keep the bee from ranging,
Or the ring-dove's neck from changing?
No! Nor fetter'd love ...

They thought it over, or postponed thinking. Certainly they postponed action, and seemed to live on in a dreamy paradise. At the end of a fortnight or three weeks matters remained unadvanced, and no banns were announced to the ears of any Aldbrickham congregation.

Whilst they were postponing and postponing thus a letter and a newspaper arrived before breakfast one morning from Arabella. Seeing the handwriting Jude went up to Sue's room and told her, and as soon as she was dressed she hastened down. Sue opened the

newspaper; Jude the letter. After glancing at the paper she held across the first page to him with her finger on a paragraph; but he was so absorbed in his letter that he did not turn awhile.

"Look!" said she.

He looked and read. The paper was one that circulated in South London only, and the marked advertisement was simply the announcement of a marriage at St. John's Church, Waterloo Road, under the names, "CARTLETT--DONN"; the united pair being Arabella and the inn-keeper.

"Well, it is satisfactory," said Sue complacently. "Though, after this, it seems rather low to do likewise, and I am glad. However, she is provided for now in a way, I suppose, whatever her faults, poor thing. It is nicer that we are able to think that, than to be uneasy about her. I ought, too, to write to Richard and ask him how he is getting on, perhaps?"

But Jude's attention was still absorbed. Having merely glanced at the announcement he said in a disturbed voice: "Listen to this letter. What shall I say or do?"

THE THREE HORNS, LAMBETH.

DEAR JUDE (I won't be so distant as to call you Mr.

Fawley),--I send to-day a newspaper, from which useful document you will learn that I was married over again to Cartlett last Tuesday. So that business is settled right and tight at last. But what I write about more particular is that private affair I wanted to speak to you on when I came down to Aldbrickham. I couldn't very well tell it to your lady friend, and should much have liked to let you know it by word of mouth, as I could have explained better than by letter. The fact is, Jude, that, though I have never informed you before, there was a boy born of our marriage, eight months after I left you, when I was at Sydney, living with my father and mother. All that is easily provable. As I had separated from you before I thought such a thing was going to happen, and I was over there, and our quarrel had been sharp, I did not think it convenient to write about the birth. I was then looking out for a good situation, so my parents took the child, and he has been with them ever since. That was why I did not mention it when I met you in Christminster, nor at the law proceedings. He is now of an intelligent age, of course, and my mother and father have lately written to say that, as they have rather a hard struggle over there, and I am settled comfortably here, they don't see why they should be encumbered with the child any longer, his parents being alive. I would have him with me here in a moment, but he is not old enough to be of any use in

the bar nor will be for years and years, and naturally Cartlett might think him in the way. They have, however, packed him off to me in charge of some friends who happened to be coming home, and I must ask you to take him when he arrives, for I don't know what to do with him. He is lawfully yours, that I solemnly swear. If anybody says he isn't, call them brimstone liars, for my sake. Whatever I may have done before or afterwards, I was honest to you from the time we were married till I went away, and I remain, yours, &c.,

ARABELLA CARTLETT.

Sue's look was one of dismay. "What will you do, dear?" she asked faintly.

Jude did not reply, and Sue watched him anxiously, with heavy breaths.

"It hits me hard!" said he in an under-voice. "It MAY be true! I can't make it out. Certainly, if his birth was exactly when she says, he's mine. I cannot think why she didn't tell me when I met her at Christminster, and came on here that evening with her! ... Ah--I do remember now that she said something about having a thing on her mind that she would like me to know, if ever we lived

together again."

"The poor child seems to be wanted by nobody!" Sue replied, and her eyes filled.

Jude had by this time come to himself. "What a view of life he must have, mine or not mine!" he said. "I must say that, if I were better off, I should not stop for a moment to think whose he might be. I would take him and bring him up. The beggarly question of parentage--what is it, after all? What does it matter, when you come to think of it, whether a child is yours by blood or not? All the little ones of our time are collectively the children of us adults of the time, and entitled to our general care. That excessive regard of parents for their own children, and their dislike of other people's, is, like class-feeling, patriotism, save-your-own-soul-ism, and other virtues, a mean exclusiveness at bottom."

Sue jumped up and kissed Jude with passionate devotion. "Yes--so it is, dearest! And we'll have him here! And if he isn't yours it makes it all the better. I do hope he isn't--though perhaps I ought not to feel quite that! If he isn't, I should like so much for us to have him as an adopted child!"

"Well, you must assume about him what is most pleasing to you, my curious little comrade!" he said. "I feel that, anyhow, I don't like to leave the unfortunate little fellow to neglect. Just think of

his life in a Lambeth pothouse, and all its evil influences, with a parent who doesn't want him, and has, indeed, hardly seen him, and a stepfather who doesn't know him. 'Let the day perish wherein I was born, and the night in which it was said, There is a man child conceived!' That's what the boy--MY boy, perhaps, will find himself saying before long!"

"Oh no!"

"As I was the petitioner, I am really entitled to his custody, I suppose."

"Whether or no, we must have him. I see that. I'll do the best I can to be a mother to him, and we can afford to keep him somehow. I'll work harder. I wonder when he'll arrive?"

"In the course of a few weeks, I suppose."

"I wish--When shall we have courage to marry, Jude?"

"Whenever you have it, I think I shall. It remains with you entirely, dear. Only say the word, and it's done."

"Before the boy comes?"

"Certainly."

"It would make a more natural home for him, perhaps," she murmured.

Jude thereupon wrote in purely formal terms to request that the boy should be sent on to them as soon as he arrived, making no remark whatever on the surprising nature of Arabella's information, nor vouchsafing a single word of opinion on the boy's paternity, nor on whether, had he known all this, his conduct towards her would have been quite the same.

In the down-train that was timed to reach Aldbrickham station about ten o'clock the next evening, a small, pale child's face could be seen in the gloom of a third-class carriage. He had large, frightened eyes, and wore a white woollen cravat, over which a key was suspended round his neck by a piece of common string: the key attracting attention by its occasional shine in the lamplight. In the band of his hat his half-ticket was stuck. His eyes remained mostly fixed on the back of the seat opposite, and never turned to the window even when a station was reached and called. On the other seat were two or three passengers, one of them a working woman who held a basket on her lap, in which was a tabby kitten. The woman opened the cover now and then, whereupon the kitten would put out its head, and indulge in playful antics. At these the fellow-passengers laughed, except the solitary boy bearing the key and ticket, who, regarding the kitten with his saucer eyes, seemed mutely to say: "All laughing comes from misapprehension. Rightly

looked at there is no laughable thing under the sun."

Occasionally at a stoppage the guard would look into the compartment and say to the boy, "All right, my man. Your box is safe in the van." The boy would say, "Yes," without animation, would try to smile, and fail.

He was Age masquerading as Juvenility, and doing it so badly that his real self showed through crevices. A ground-swell from ancient years of night seemed now and then to lift the child in this his morning-life, when his face took a back view over some great Atlantic of Time, and appeared not to care about what it saw.

When the other travellers closed their eyes, which they did one by one--even the kitten curling itself up in the basket, weary of its too circumscribed play--the boy remained just as before. He then seemed to be doubly awake, like an enslaved and dwarfed divinity, sitting passive and regarding his companions as if he saw their whole rounded lives rather than their immediate figures.

This was Arabella's boy. With her usual carelessness she had postponed writing to Jude about him till the eve of his landing, when she could absolutely postpone no longer, though she had known for weeks of his approaching arrival, and had, as she truly said, visited Aldbrickham mainly to reveal the boy's existence and his near home-coming to Jude. This very day on which she had received her

former husband's answer at some time in the afternoon, the child reached the London Docks, and the family in whose charge he had come, having put him into a cab for Lambeth and directed the cabman to his mother's house, bade him good-bye, and went their way.

On his arrival at the Three Horns, Arabella had looked him over with an expression that was as good as saying, "You are very much what I expected you to be," had given him a good meal, a little money, and, late as it was getting, dispatched him to Jude by the next train, wishing her husband Cartlett, who was out, not to see him.

The train reached Aldbrickham, and the boy was deposited on the lonely platform beside his box. The collector took his ticket and, with a meditative sense of the unfitness of things, asked him where he was going by himself at that time of night.

"Going to Spring Street," said the little one impassively.

"Why, that's a long way from here; a'most out in the country; and the folks will be gone to bed."

"I've got to go there."

"You must have a fly for your box."

"No. I must walk."

"Oh well: you'd better leave your box here and send for it. There's a 'bus goes half-way, but you'll have to walk the rest."

"I am not afraid."

"Why didn't your friends come to meet 'ee?"

"I suppose they didn't know I was coming."

"Who is your friends?"

"Mother didn't wish me to say."

"All I can do, then, is to take charge of this. Now walk as fast as you can."

Saying nothing further the boy came out into the street, looking round to see that nobody followed or observed him. When he had walked some little distance he asked for the street of his destination. He was told to go straight on quite into the outskirts of the place.

The child fell into a steady mechanical creep which had in it an impersonal quality--the movement of the wave, or of the breeze, or of the cloud. He followed his directions literally, without an

inquiring gaze at anything. It could have been seen that the boy's ideas of life were different from those of the local boys. Children begin with detail, and learn up to the general; they begin with the contiguous, and gradually comprehend the universal. The boy seemed to have begun with the generals of life, and never to have concerned himself with the particulars. To him the houses, the willows, the obscure fields beyond, were apparently regarded not as brick residences, pollards, meadows; but as human dwellings in the abstract, vegetation, and the wide dark world.

He found the way to the little lane, and knocked at the door of Jude's house. Jude had just retired to bed, and Sue was about to enter her chamber adjoining when she heard the knock and came down.

"Is this where Father lives?" asked the child.

"Who?"

"Mr. Fawley, that's his name."

Sue ran up to Jude's room and told him, and he hurried down as soon as he could, though to her impatience he seemed long.

"What--is it he--so soon?" she asked as Jude came.

She scrutinized the child's features, and suddenly went away into the

little sitting-room adjoining. Jude lifted the boy to a level with himself, keenly regarded him with gloomy tenderness, and telling him he would have been met if they had known of his coming so soon, set him provisionally in a chair whilst he went to look for Sue, whose supersensitiveness was disturbed, as he knew. He found her in the dark, bending over an arm-chair. He enclosed her with his arm, and putting his face by hers, whispered, "What's the matter?"

"What Arabella says is true--true! I see you in him!"

"Well: that's one thing in my life as it should be, at any rate."

"But the other half of him is--SHE! And that's what I can't bear! But I ought to--I'll try to get used to it; yes, I ought!"

"Jealous little Sue! I withdraw all remarks about your sexlessness. Never mind! Time may right things... And Sue, darling; I have an idea! We'll educate and train him with a view to the university. What I couldn't accomplish in my own person perhaps I can carry out through him? They are making it easier for poor students now, you know."

"Oh you dreamer!" said she, and holding his hand returned to the child with him. The boy looked at her as she had looked at him. "Is it you who's my REAL mother at last?" he inquired.

"Why? Do I look like your father's wife?"

"Well, yes; 'cept he seems fond of you, and you of him. Can I call you Mother?"

Then a yearning look came over the child and he began to cry. Sue thereupon could not refrain from instantly doing likewise, being a harp which the least wind of emotion from another's heart could make to vibrate as readily as a radical stir in her own.

"You may call me Mother, if you wish to, my poor dear!" she said, bending her cheek against his to hide her tears.

"What's this round your neck?" asked Jude with affected calmness.

"The key of my box that's at the station."

They bustled about and got him some supper, and made him up a temporary bed, where he soon fell asleep. Both went and looked at him as he lay.

"He called you Mother two or three times before he dropped off," murmured Jude. "Wasn't it odd that he should have wanted to!"

"Well--it was significant," said Sue. "There's more for us to think about in that one little hungry heart than in all the stars of the

sky... I suppose, dear, we must pluck up courage, and get that ceremony over? It is no use struggling against the current, and I feel myself getting intertwined with my kind. Oh Jude, you'll love me dearly, won't you, afterwards! I do want to be kind to this child, and to be a mother to him; and our adding the legal form to our marriage might make it easier for me."

IV

Their next and second attempt thereat was more deliberately made, though it was begun on the morning following the singular child's arrival at their home.

Him they found to be in the habit of sitting silent, his quaint and weird face set, and his eyes resting on things they did not see in the substantial world.

"His face is like the tragic mask of Melpomene," said Sue. "What is your name, dear? Did you tell us?"

"Little Father Time is what they always called me. It is a nickname; because I look so aged, they say."

"And you talk so, too," said Sue tenderly. "It is strange, Jude, that these preternaturally old boys almost always come from new countries. But what were you christened?"

"I never was."

"Why was that?"

"Because, if I died in damnation, 'twould save the expense of a Christian funeral."

"Oh--your name is not Jude, then?" said his father with some disappointment.

The boy shook his head. "Never heerd on it."

"Of course not," said Sue quickly; "since she was hating you all the time!"

"We'll have him christened," said Jude; and privately to Sue: "The day we are married." Yet the advent of the child disturbed him.

Their position lent them shyness, and having an impression that a marriage at a superintendent registrar's office was more private than an ecclesiastical one, they decided to avoid a church this time. Both Sue and Jude together went to the office of the district to give

notice: they had become such companions that they could hardly do anything of importance except in each other's company.

Jude Fawley signed the form of notice, Sue looking over his shoulder and watching his hand as it traced the words. As she read the four-square undertaking, never before seen by her, into which her own and Jude's names were inserted, and by which that very volatile essence, their love for each other, was supposed to be made permanent, her face seemed to grow painfully apprehensive. "Names and Surnames of the Parties"--(they were to be parties now, not lovers, she thought). "Condition"--(a horrid idea)--"Rank or Occupation"--"Age"--"Dwelling at"--"Length of Residence"--"Church or Building in which the Marriage is to be solemnized"--"District and County in which the Parties respectively dwell."

"It spoils the sentiment, doesn't it!" she said on their way home. "It seems making a more sordid business of it even than signing the contract in a vestry. There is a little poetry in a church. But we'll try to get through with it, dearest, now."

"We will. 'For what man is he that hath betrothed a wife and hath not taken her? Let him go and return unto his house, lest he die in the battle, and another man take her.' So said the Jewish law-giver."

"How you know the Scriptures, Jude! You really ought to have been a

parson. I can only quote profane writers!"

During the interval before the issuing of the certificate Sue, in her housekeeping errands, sometimes walked past the office, and furtively glancing in saw affixed to the wall the notice of the purposed clinch to their union. She could not bear its aspect. Coming after her previous experience of matrimony, all the romance of their attachment seemed to be starved away by placing her present case in the same category. She was usually leading little Father Time by the hand, and fancied that people thought him hers, and regarded the intended ceremony as the patching up of an old error.

Meanwhile Jude decided to link his present with his past in some slight degree by inviting to the wedding the only person remaining on earth who was associated with his early life at Marygreen--the aged widow Mrs. Edlin, who had been his great-aunt's friend and nurse in her last illness. He hardly expected that she would come; but she did, bringing singular presents, in the form of apples, jam, brass snuffers, an ancient pewter dish, a warming-pan, and an enormous bag of goose feathers towards a bed. She was allotted the spare room in Jude's house, whither she retired early, and where they could hear her through the ceiling below, honestly saying the Lord's Prayer in a loud voice, as the Rubric directed.

As, however, she could not sleep, and discovered that Sue and Jude were still sitting up--it being in fact only ten o'clock--she dressed

herself again and came down, and they all sat by the fire till a late hour--Father Time included; though, as he never spoke, they were hardly conscious of him.

"Well, I bain't set against marrying as your great-aunt was," said the widow. "And I hope 'twill be a jocund wedding for ye in all respects this time. Nobody can hope it more, knowing what I do of your families, which is more, I suppose, than anybody else now living. For they have been unlucky that way, God knows."

Sue breathed uneasily.

"They was always good-hearted people, too--wouldn't kill a fly if they knowed it," continued the wedding guest. "But things happened to thwart 'em, and if everything wasn't vitty they were upset. No doubt that's how he that the tale is told of came to do what 'a did--if he WERE one of your family."

"What was that?" said Jude.

"Well--that tale, ye know; he that was gibbeted just on the brow of the hill by the Brown House--not far from the milestone between Marygreen and Alfredston, where the other road branches off. But Lord, 'twas in my grandfather's time; and it medn' have been one of your folk at all."

"I know where the gibbet is said to have stood, very well," murmured Jude. "But I never heard of this. What--did this man--my ancestor and Sue's--kill his wife?"

"'Twer not that exactly. She ran away from him, with their child, to her friends; and while she was there the child died. He wanted the body, to bury it where his people lay, but she wouldn't give it up. Her husband then came in the night with a cart, and broke into the house to steal the coffin away; but he was catched, and being obstinate, wouldn't tell what he broke in for. They brought it in burglary, and that's why he was hanged and gibbeted on Brown House Hill. His wife went mad after he was dead. But it medn't be true that he belonged to ye more than to me."

A small slow voice rose from the shade of the fireside, as if out of the earth: "If I was you, Mother, I wouldn't marry Father!" It came from little Time, and they started, for they had forgotten him.

"Oh, it is only a tale," said Sue cheeringly.

After this exhilarating tradition from the widow on the eve of the solemnization they rose, and, wishing their guest good-night, retired.

The next morning Sue, whose nervousness intensified with the hours, took Jude privately into the sitting-room before starting.

"Jude, I want you to kiss me, as a lover, incorporeally," she said, tremulously nestling up to him, with damp lashes. "It won't be ever like this any more, will it! I wish we hadn't begun the business. But I suppose we must go on. How horrid that story was last night! It spoilt my thoughts of to-day. It makes me feel as if a tragic doom overhung our family, as it did the house of Atreus."

"Or the house of Jeroboam," said the quondam theologian.

"Yes. And it seems awful temerity in us two to go marrying! I am going to vow to you in the same words I vowed in to my other husband, and you to me in the same as you used to your other wife; regardless of the deterrent lesson we were taught by those experiments!"

"If you are uneasy I am made unhappy," said he. "I had hoped you would feel quite joyful. But if you don't, you don't. It is no use pretending. It is a dismal business to you, and that makes it so to me!"

"It is unpleasantly like that other morning--that's all," she murmured. "Let us go on now."

They started arm in arm for the office aforesaid, no witness accompanying them except the Widow Edlin. The day was chilly and dull, and a clammy fog blew through the town from "Royal-tower'd Thame." On the steps of the office there were the muddy foot-marks

of people who had entered, and in the entry were damp umbrellas Within the office several persons were gathered, and our couple perceived that a marriage between a soldier and a young woman was just in progress. Sue, Jude, and the widow stood in the background while this was going on, Sue reading the notices of marriage on the wall. The room was a dreary place to two of their temperament, though to its usual frequenters it doubtless seemed ordinary enough. Law-books in musty calf covered one wall, and elsewhere were post-office directories, and other books of reference. Papers in packets tied with red tape were pigeon-holed around, and some iron safes filled a recess, while the bare wood floor was, like the door-step, stained by previous visitors.

The soldier was sullen and reluctant: the bride sad and timid; she was soon, obviously, to become a mother, and she had a black eye. Their little business was soon done, and the twain and their friends straggled out, one of the witnesses saying casually to Jude and Sue in passing, as if he had known them before: "See the couple just come in? Ha, ha! That fellow is just out of gaol this morning. She met him at the gaol gates, and brought him straight here. She's paying for everything."

Sue turned her head and saw an ill-favoured man, closely cropped, with a broad-faced, pock-marked woman on his arm, ruddy with liquor and the satisfaction of being on the brink of a gratified desire. They jocosely saluted the outgoing couple, and went forward in front

of Jude and Sue, whose diffidence was increasing. The latter drew back and turned to her lover, her mouth shaping itself like that of a child about to give way to grief:

"Jude--I don't like it here! I wish we hadn't come! The place gives me the horrors: it seems so unnatural as the climax of our love! I wish it had been at church, if it had to be at all. It is not so vulgar there!"

"Dear little girl," said Jude. "How troubled and pale you look!"

"It must be performed here now, I suppose?"

"No--perhaps not necessarily."

He spoke to the clerk, and came back. "No--we need not marry here or anywhere, unless we like, even now," he said. "We can be married in a church, if not with the same certificate with another he'll give us, I think. Anyhow, let us go out till you are calmer, dear, and I too, and talk it over."

They went out stealthily and guiltily, as if they had committed a misdemeanour, closing the door without noise, and telling the widow, who had remained in the entry, to go home and await them; that they would call in any casual passers as witnesses, if necessary. When in the street they turned into an unfrequented side alley where they

walked up and down as they had done long ago in the market-house at Melchester.

"Now, darling, what shall we do? We are making a mess of it, it strikes me. Still, ANYTHING that pleases you will please me."

"But Jude, dearest, I am worrying you! You wanted it to be there, didn't you?"

"Well, to tell the truth, when I got inside I felt as if I didn't care much about it. The place depressed me almost as much as it did you--it was ugly. And then I thought of what you had said this morning as to whether we ought."

They walked on vaguely, till she paused, and her little voice began anew: "It seems so weak, too, to vacillate like this! And yet how much better than to act rashly a second time... How terrible that scene was to me! The expression in that flabby woman's face, leading her on to give herself to that gaol-bird, not for a few hours, as she would, but for a lifetime, as she must. And the other poor soul--to escape a nominal shame which was owing to the weakness of her character, degrading herself to the real shame of bondage to a tyrant who scorned her--a man whom to avoid for ever was her only chance of salvation... This is our parish church, isn't it? This is where it would have to be, if we did it in the usual way? A service or something seems to be going on."

Jude went up and looked in at the door. "Why--it is a wedding here too," he said. "Everybody seems to be on our tack to-day."

Sue said she supposed it was because Lent was just over, when there was always a crowd of marriages. "Let us listen," she said, "and find how it feels to us when performed in a church."

They stepped in, and entered a back seat, and watched the proceedings at the altar. The contracting couple appeared to belong to the well-to-do middle class, and the wedding altogether was of ordinary prettiness and interest. They could see the flowers tremble in the bride's hand, even at that distance, and could hear her mechanical murmur of words whose meaning her brain seemed to gather not at all under the pressure of her self-consciousness. Sue and Jude listened, and severally saw themselves in time past going through the same form of self-committal.

"It is not the same to her, poor thing, as it would be to me doing it over again with my present knowledge," Sue whispered. "You see, they are fresh to it, and take the proceedings as a matter of course. But having been awakened to its awful solemnity as we have, or at least as I have, by experience, and to my own too squeamish feelings perhaps sometimes, it really does seem immoral in me to go and undertake the same thing again with open eyes. Coming in here and seeing this has frightened me from a church wedding as much as the

other did from a registry one... We are a weak, tremulous pair, Jude, and what others may feel confident in I feel doubts of--my being proof against the sordid conditions of a business contract again!"

Then they tried to laugh, and went on debating in whispers the object-lesson before them. And Jude said he also thought they were both too thin-skinned--that they ought never to have been born--much less have come together for the most preposterous of all joint ventures for THEM--matrimony.

His betrothed shuddered; and asked him earnestly if he indeed felt that they ought not to go in cold blood and sign that life-undertaking again? "It is awful if you think we have found ourselves not strong enough for it, and knowing this, are proposing to perjure ourselves," she said.

"I fancy I do think it--since you ask me," said Jude. "Remember I'll do it if you wish, own darling." While she hesitated he went on to confess that, though he thought they ought to be able to do it, he felt checked by the dread of incompetency just as she did--from their peculiarities, perhaps, because they were unlike other people. "We are horribly sensitive; that's really what's the matter with us, Sue!" he declared.

"I fancy more are like us than we think!"

"Well, I don't know. The intention of the contract is good, and right for many, no doubt; but in our case it may defeat its own ends because we are the queer sort of people we are--folk in whom domestic ties of a forced kind snuff out cordiality and spontaneousness."

Sue still held that there was not much queer or exceptional in them: that all were so. "Everybody is getting to feel as we do. We are a little beforehand, that's all. In fifty, a hundred, years the descendants of these two will act and feel worse than we. They will see weltering humanity still more vividly than we do now, as

Shapes like our own selves hideously multiplied,

and will be afraid to reproduce them."

"What a terrible line of poetry! ... though I have felt it myself about my fellow-creatures, at morbid times."

Thus they murmured on, till Sue said more brightly:

"Well--the general question is not our business, and why should we plague ourselves about it? However different our reasons are we come to the same conclusion; that for us particular two, an irrevocable

oath is risky. Then, Jude, let us go home without killing our dream! Yes? How good you are, my friend: you give way to all my whims!"

"They accord very much with my own."

He gave her a little kiss behind a pillar while the attention of everybody present was taken up in observing the bridal procession entering the vestry; and then they came outside the building. By the door they waited till two or three carriages, which had gone away for a while, returned, and the new husband and wife came into the open daylight. Sue sighed.

"The flowers in the bride's hand are sadly like the garland which decked the heifers of sacrifice in old times!"

"Still, Sue, it is no worse for the woman than for the man. That's what some women fail to see, and instead of protesting against the conditions they protest against the man, the other victim; just as a woman in a crowd will abuse the man who crushes against her, when he is only the helpless transmitter of the pressure put upon him."

"Yes--some are like that, instead of uniting with the man against the common enemy, coercion." The bride and bridegroom had by this time driven off, and the two moved away with the rest of the idlers. "No--don't let's do it," she continued. "At least just now."

They reached home, and passing the window arm in arm saw the widow looking out at them. "Well," cried their guest when they entered, "I said to myself when I zeed ye coming so loving up to the door, 'They made up their minds at last, then!'"

They briefly hinted that they had not.

"What--and ha'n't ye really done it? Chok' it all, that I should have lived to see a good old saying like 'marry in haste and repent at leisure' spoiled like this by you two! 'Tis time I got back again to Marygreen--sakes if tidden--if this is what the new notions be leading us to! Nobody thought o' being afeard o' matrimony in my time, nor of much else but a cannon-ball or empty cupboard! Why when I and my poor man were married we thought no more o't than of a game o' dibs!"

"Don't tell the child when he comes in," whispered Sue nervously. "He'll think it has all gone on right, and it will be better that he should not be surprised and puzzled. Of course it is only put off for reconsideration. If we are happy as we are, what does it matter to anybody?"

V

The purpose of a chronicler of moods and deeds does not require him to express his personal views upon the grave controversy above given. That the twain were happy--between their times of sadness--was indubitable. And when the unexpected apparition of Jude's child in the house had shown itself to be no such disturbing event as it had looked, but one that brought into their lives a new and tender interest of an ennobling and unselfish kind, it rather helped than injured their happiness.

To be sure, with such pleasing anxious beings as they were, the boy's coming also brought with it much thought for the future, particularly as he seemed at present to be singularly deficient in all the usual hopes of childhood. But the pair tried to dismiss, for a while at least, a too strenuously forward view.

There is in Upper Wessex an old town of nine or ten thousand souls; the town may be called Stoke-Barehills. It stands with its gaunt, unattractive, ancient church, and its new red brick suburb, amid the open, chalk-soiled cornlands, near the middle of an imaginary triangle which has for its three corners the towns of Aldbrickham and Wintoncester, and the important military station of Quartershot. The great western highway from London passes through it, near a point where the road branches into two, merely to unite again some twenty miles further westward. Out of this bifurcation and reunion there used to arise among wheeled travellers, before railway days, endless

questions of choice between the respective ways. But the question is now as dead as the scot-and-lot freeholder, the road waggoner, and the mail coachman who disputed it; and probably not a single inhabitant of Stoke-Barehills is now even aware that the two roads which part in his town ever meet again; for nobody now drives up and down the great western highway dally.

The most familiar object in Stoke-Barehills nowadays is its cemetery, standing among some picturesque mediæval ruins beside the railway; the modern chapels, modern tombs, and modern shrubs having a look of intrusiveness amid the crumbling and ivy-covered decay of the ancient walls.

On a certain day, however, in the particular year which has now been reached by this narrative--the month being early June--the features of the town excite little interest, though many visitors arrive by the trains; some down-trains, in especial, nearly emptying themselves here. It is the week of the Great Wessex Agricultural Show, whose vast encampment spreads over the open outskirts of the town like the tents of an investing army. Rows of marquees, huts, booths, pavilions, arcades, porticoes--every kind of structure short of a permanent one--cover the green field for the space of a square half-mile, and the crowds of arrivals walk through the town in a mass, and make straight for the exhibition ground. The way thereto is lined with shows, stalls, and hawkers on foot, who make a market-place of the whole roadway to the show proper, and lead

some of the improvident to lighten their pockets appreciably before they reach the gates of the exhibition they came expressly to see.

It is the popular day, the shilling day, and of the fast arriving excursion trains two from different directions enter the two contiguous railway stations at almost the same minute. One, like several which have preceded it, comes from London: the other by a cross-line from Aldbrickham; and from the London train alights a couple; a short, rather bloated man, with a globular stomach and small legs, resembling a top on two pegs, accompanied by a woman of rather fine figure and rather red face, dressed in black material, and covered with beads from bonnet to skirt, that made her glisten as if clad in chain-mail.

They cast their eyes around. The man was about to hire a fly as some others had done, when the woman said, "Don't be in such a hurry, Cartlett. It isn't so very far to the show-yard. Let us walk down the street into the place. Perhaps I can pick up a cheap bit of furniture or old china. It is years since I was here--never since I lived as a girl at Aldbrickham, and used to come across for a trip sometimes with my young man."

"You can't carry home furniture by excursion train," said, in a thick voice, her husband, the landlord of The Three Horns, Lambeth; for they had both come down from the tavern in that "excellent, densely populated, gin-drinking neighbourhood," which they had occupied ever

since the advertisement in those words had attracted them thither. The configuration of the landlord showed that he, too, like his customers, was becoming affected by the liquors he retailed.

"Then I'll get it sent, if I see any worth having," said his wife.

They sauntered on, but had barely entered the town when her attention was attracted by a young couple leading a child, who had come out from the second platform, into which the train from Aldbrickham had steamed. They were walking just in front of the inn-keepers.

"Sakes alive!" said Arabella.

"What's that?" said Cartlett.

"Who do you think that couple is? Don't you recognize the man?"

"No."

"Not from the photos I have showed you?"

"Is it Fawley?"

"Yes--of course."

"Oh, well. I suppose he was inclined for a little sight-seeing like

the rest of us." Cartlett's interest in Jude whatever it might have been when Arabella was new to him, had plainly flagged since her charms and her idiosyncrasies, her supernumerary hair-coils, and her optional dimples, were becoming as a tale that is told.

Arabella so regulated her pace and her husband's as to keep just in the rear of the other three, which it was easy to do without notice in such a stream of pedestrians. Her answers to Cartlett's remarks were vague and slight, for the group in front interested her more than all the rest of the spectacle.

"They are rather fond of one another and of their child, seemingly," continued the publican.

"THEIR child! 'Tisn't their child," said Arabella with a curious, sudden covetousness. "They haven't been married long enough for it to be theirs!"

But although the smouldering maternal instinct was strong enough in her to lead her to quash her husband's conjecture, she was not disposed on second thoughts to be more candid than necessary. Mr. Cartlett had no other idea than that his wife's child by her first husband was with his grandparents at the Antipodes.

"Oh I suppose not. She looks quite a girl."

"They are only lovers, or lately married, and have the child in charge, as anybody can see."

All continued to move ahead. The unwitting Sue and Jude, the couple in question, had determined to make this agricultural exhibition within twenty miles of their own town the occasion of a day's excursion which should combine exercise and amusement with instruction, at small expense. Not regardful of themselves alone, they had taken care to bring Father Time, to try every means of making him kindle and laugh like other boys, though he was to some extent a hindrance to the delightfully unreserved intercourse in their pilgrimages which they so much enjoyed. But they soon ceased to consider him an observer, and went along with that tender attention to each other which the shyest can scarcely disguise, and which these, among entire strangers as they imagined, took less trouble to disguise than they might have done at home. Sue, in her new summer clothes, flexible and light as a bird, her little thumb stuck up by the stem of her white cotton sunshade, went along as if she hardly touched ground, and as if a moderately strong puff of wind would float her over the hedge into the next field. Jude, in his light grey holiday-suit, was really proud of her companionship, not more for her external attractiveness than for her sympathetic words and ways. That complete mutual understanding, in which every glance and movement was as effectual as speech for conveying intelligence between them, made them almost the two parts of a single whole.

The pair with their charge passed through the turnstiles, Arabella and her husband not far behind them. When inside the enclosure the publican's wife could see that the two ahead began to take trouble with the youngster, pointing out and explaining the many objects of interest, alive and dead; and a passing sadness would touch their faces at their every failure to disturb his indifference.

"How she sticks to him!" said Arabella. "Oh no--I fancy they are not married, or they wouldn't be so much to one another as that... I wonder!"

"But I thought you said he did marry her?"

"I heard he was going to--that's all, going to make another attempt, after putting it off once or twice... As far as they themselves are concerned they are the only two in the show. I should be ashamed of making myself so silly if I were he!"

"I don't see as how there's anything remarkable in their behaviour. I should never have noticed their being in love, if you hadn't said so."

"You never see anything," she rejoined. Nevertheless Cartlett's view of the lovers' or married pair's conduct was undoubtedly that of the general crowd, whose attention seemed to be in no way attracted by what Arabella's sharpened vision discerned.

"He's charmed by her as if she were some fairy!" continued Arabella. "See how he looks round at her, and lets his eyes rest on her. I am inclined to think that she don't care for him quite so much as he does for her. She's not a particular warm-hearted creature to my thinking, though she cares for him pretty middling much--as much as she's able to; and he could make her heart ache a bit if he liked to try--which he's too simple to do. There--now they are going across to the cart-horse sheds. Come along."

"I don't want to see the cart-horses. It is no business of ours to follow these two. If we have come to see the show let us see it in our own way, as they do in theirs."

"Well--suppose we agree to meet somewhere in an hour's time--say at that refreshment tent over there, and go about independent? Then you can look at what you choose to, and so can I."

Cartlett was not loath to agree to this, and they parted--he proceeding to the shed where malting processes were being exhibited, and Arabella in the direction taken by Jude and Sue. Before, however, she had regained their wake a laughing face met her own, and she was confronted by Anny, the friend of her girlhood.

Anny had burst out in hearty laughter at the mere fact of the chance encounter. "I am still living down there," she said, as soon as

she was composed. "I am soon going to be married, but my intended couldn't come up here to-day. But there's lots of us come by excursion, though I've lost the rest of 'em for the present."

"Have you met Jude and his young woman, or wife, or whatever she is? I saw 'em by now."

"No. Not a glimpse of un for years!"

"Well, they are close by here somewhere. Yes--there they are--by that grey horse!"

"Oh, that's his present young woman--wife did you say? Has he married again?"

"I don't know."

"She's pretty, isn't she!"

"Yes--nothing to complain of; or jump at. Not much to depend on, though; a slim, fidgety little thing like that."

"He's a nice-looking chap, too! You ought to ha' stuck to un, Arabella."

"I don't know but I ought," murmured she.

Anny laughed. "That's you, Arabella! Always wanting another man than your own."

"Well, and what woman don't I should like to know? As for that body with him--she don't know what love is--at least what I call love! I can see in her face she don't."

"And perhaps, Abby dear, you don't know what she calls love."

"I'm sure I don't wish to! ... Ah--they are making for the art department. I should like to see some pictures myself. Suppose we go that way?-- Why, if all Wessex isn't here, I verily believe! There's Dr. Vilbert. Haven't seen him for years, and he's not looking a day older than when I used to know him. How do you do, Physician? I was just saying that you don't look a day older than when you knew me as a girl."

"Simply the result of taking my own pills regular, ma'am. Only two and threepence a box--warranted efficacious by the Government stamp. Now let me advise you to purchase the same immunity from the ravages of time by following my example? Only two-and-three."

The physician had produced a box from his waistcoat pocket, and Arabella was induced to make the purchase.

"At the same time," continued he, when the pills were paid for, "you have the advantage of me, Mrs.-- Surely not Mrs. Fawley, once Miss Donn, of the vicinity of Marygreen?"

"Yes. But Mrs. Cartlett now."

"Ah--you lost him, then? Promising young fellow! A pupil of mine, you know. I taught him the dead languages. And believe me, he soon knew nearly as much as I."

"I lost him; but not as you think," said Arabella dryly. "The lawyers untied us. There he is, look, alive and lusty; along with that young woman, entering the art exhibition."

"Ah--dear me! Fond of her, apparently."

"They SAY they are cousins."

"Cousinship is a great convenience to their feelings, I should say?"

"Yes. So her husband thought, no doubt, when he divorced her... Shall we look at the pictures, too?"

The trio followed across the green and entered. Jude and Sue, with the child, unaware of the interest they were exciting, had gone up to a model at one end of the building, which they regarded

with considerable attention for a long while before they went on. Arabella and her friends came to it in due course, and the inscription it bore was: "Model of Cardinal College, Christminster; by J. Fawley and S. F. M. Bridehead."

"Admiring their own work," said Arabella. "How like Jude--always thinking of colleges and Christminster, instead of attending to his business!"

They glanced cursorily at the pictures, and proceeded to the band-stand. When they had stood a little while listening to the music of the military performers, Jude, Sue, and the child came up on the other side. Arabella did not care if they should recognize her; but they were too deeply absorbed in their own lives, as translated into emotion by the military band, to perceive her under her beaded veil. She walked round the outside of the listening throng, passing behind the lovers, whose movements had an unexpected fascination for her to-day. Scrutinizing them narrowly from the rear she noticed that Jude's hand sought Sue's as they stood, the two standing close together so as to conceal, as they supposed, this tacit expression of their mutual responsiveness.

"Silly fools--like two children!" Arabella whispered to herself morosely, as she rejoined her companions, with whom she preserved a preoccupied silence.

Anny meanwhile had jokingly remarked to Vilbert on Arabella's hankering interest in her first husband.

"Now," said the physician to Arabella, apart; "do you want anything such as this, Mrs. Cartlett? It is not compounded out of my regular pharmacopoeia, but I am sometimes asked for such a thing." He produced a small phial of clear liquid. "A love-philtre, such as was used by the ancients with great effect. I found it out by study of their writings, and have never known it to fail."

"What is it made of?" asked Arabella curiously.

"Well--a distillation of the juices of doves' hearts--otherwise pigeons'--is one of the ingredients. It took nearly a hundred hearts to produce that small bottle full."

"How do you get pigeons enough?"

"To tell a secret, I get a piece of rock-salt, of which pigeons are inordinately fond, and place it in a dovecot on my roof. In a few hours the birds come to it from all points of the compass--east, west, north, and south--and thus I secure as many as I require. You use the liquid by contriving that the desired man shall take about ten drops of it in his drink. But remember, all this is told you because I gather from your questions that you mean to be a purchaser. You must keep faith with me?"

"Very well--I don't mind a bottle--to give some friend or other to try it on her young man." She produced five shillings, the price asked, and slipped the phial in her capacious bosom. Saying presently that she was due at an appointment with her husband she sauntered away towards the refreshment bar, Jude, his companion, and the child having gone on to the horticultural tent, where Arabella caught a glimpse of them standing before a group of roses in bloom.

She waited a few minutes observing them, and then proceeded to join her spouse with no very amiable sentiments. She found him seated on a stool by the bar, talking to one of the gaily dressed maids who had served him with spirits.

"I should think you had enough of this business at home!" Arabella remarked gloomily. "Surely you didn't come fifty miles from your own bar to stick in another? Come, take me round the show, as other men do their wives! Dammy, one would think you were a young bachelor, with nobody to look after but yourself!"

"But we agreed to meet here; and what could I do but wait?"

"Well, now we have met, come along," she returned, ready to quarrel with the sun for shining on her. And they left the tent together, this pot-bellied man and florid woman, in the antipathetic, recriminatory mood of the average husband and wife of Christendom.

In the meantime the more exceptional couple and the boy still lingered in the pavilion of flowers--an enchanted palace to their appreciative taste--Sue's usually pale cheeks reflecting the pink of the tinted roses at which she gazed; for the gay sights, the air, the music, and the excitement of a day's outing with Jude had quickened her blood and made her eyes sparkle with vivacity. She adored roses, and what Arabella had witnessed was Sue detaining Jude almost against his will while she learnt the names of this variety and that, and put her face within an inch of their blooms to smell them.

"I should like to push my face quite into them--the dears!" she had said. "But I suppose it is against the rules to touch them--isn't it, Jude?"

"Yes, you baby," said he: and then playfully gave her a little push, so that her nose went among the petals.

"The policeman will be down on us, and I shall say it was my husband's fault!"

Then she looked up at him, and smiled in a way that told so much to Arabella.

"Happy?" he murmured.

She nodded.

"Why? Because you have come to the great Wessex Agricultural Show--or because WE have come?"

"You are always trying to make me confess to all sorts of absurdities. Because I am improving my mind, of course, by seeing all these steam-ploughs, and threshing-machines, and chaff-cutters, and cows, and pigs, and sheep."

Jude was quite content with a baffle from his ever evasive companion. But when he had forgotten that he had put the question, and because he no longer wished for an answer, she went on: "I feel that we have returned to Greek joyousness, and have blinded ourselves to sickness and sorrow, and have forgotten what twenty-five centuries have taught the race since their time, as one of your Christminster luminaries says... There is one immediate shadow, however--only one." And she looked at the aged child, whom, though they had taken him to everything likely to attract a young intelligence, they had utterly failed to interest.

He knew what they were saying and thinking. "I am very, very sorry, Father and Mother," he said. "But please don't mind!--I can't help it. I should like the flowers very very much, if I didn't keep on thinking they'd be all withered in a few days!"

VI

The unnoticed lives that the pair had hitherto led began, from the day of the suspended wedding onwards, to be observed and discussed by other persons than Arabella. The society of Spring Street and the neighbourhood generally did not understand, and probably could not have been made to understand, Sue and Jude's private minds, emotions, positions, and fears. The curious facts of a child coming to them unexpectedly, who called Jude "Father," and Sue "Mother," and a hitch in a marriage ceremony intended for quietness to be performed at a registrar's office, together with rumours of the undefended cases in the law-courts, bore only one translation to plain minds.

Little Time--for though he was formally turned into "Jude," the apt nickname stuck to him--would come home from school in the evening, and repeat inquiries and remarks that had been made to him by the other boys; and cause Sue, and Jude when he heard them, a great deal of pain and sadness.

The result was that shortly after the attempt at the registrar's the pair went off--to London it was believed--for several days, hiring somebody to look to the boy. When they came back they let it be understood indirectly, and with total indifference and weariness

of mien, that they were legally married at last. Sue, who had previously been called Mrs. Bridehead now openly adopted the name of Mrs. Fawley. Her dull, cowed, and listless manner for days seemed to substantiate all this.

But the mistake (as it was called) of their going away so secretly to do the business, kept up much of the mystery of their lives; and they found that they made not such advances with their neighbours as they had expected to do thereby. A living mystery was not much less interesting than a dead scandal.

The baker's lad and the grocer's boy, who at first had used to lift their hats gallantly to Sue when they came to execute their errands, in these days no longer took the trouble to render her that homage, and the neighbouring artizans' wives looked straight along the pavement when they encountered her.

Nobody molested them, it is true; but an oppressive atmosphere began to encircle their souls, particularly after their excursion to the show, as if that visit had brought some evil influence to bear on them. And their temperaments were precisely of a kind to suffer from this atmosphere, and to be indisposed to lighten it by vigorous and open statements. Their apparent attempt at reparation had come too late to be effective.

The headstone and epitaph orders fell off: and two or three months

later, when autumn came, Jude perceived that he would have to return to journey-work again, a course all the more unfortunate just now, in that he had not as yet cleared off the debt he had unavoidably incurred in the payment of the law-costs of the previous year.

One evening he sat down to share the common meal with Sue and the child as usual. "I am thinking," he said to her, "that I'll hold on here no longer. The life suits us, certainly; but if we could get away to a place where we are unknown, we should be lighter hearted, and have a better chance. And so I am afraid we must break it up here, however awkward for you, poor dear!"

Sue was always much affected at a picture of herself as an object of pity, and she saddened.

"Well--I am not sorry," said she presently. "I am much depressed by the way they look at me here. And you have been keeping on this house and furniture entirely for me and the boy! You don't want it yourself, and the expense is unnecessary. But whatever we do, wherever we go, you won't take him away from me, Jude dear? I could not let him go now! The cloud upon his young mind makes him so pathetic to me; I do hope to lift it some day! And he loves me so. You won't take him away from me?"

"Certainly I won't, dear little girl! We'll get nice lodgings, wherever we go. I shall be moving about probably--getting a job

here and a job there."

"I shall do something too, of course, till--till-- Well, now I can't be useful in the lettering it behoves me to turn my hand to something else."

"Don't hurry about getting employment," he said regretfully. "I don't want you to do that. I wish you wouldn't, Sue. The boy and yourself are enough for you to attend to."

There was a knock at the door, and Jude answered it. Sue could hear the conversation:

"Is Mr. Fawley at home? ... Biles and Willis the building contractors sent me to know if you'll undertake the relettering of the ten commandments in a little church they've been restoring lately in the country near here."

Jude reflected, and said he could undertake it.

"It is not a very artistic job," continued the messenger. "The clergyman is a very old-fashioned chap, and he has refused to let anything more be done to the church than cleaning and repairing."

"Excellent old man!" said Sue to herself, who was sentimentally opposed to the horrors of over-restoration.

"The Ten Commandments are fixed to the east end," the messenger went on, "and they want doing up with the rest of the wall there, since he won't have them carted off as old materials belonging to the contractor in the usual way of the trade."

A bargain as to terms was struck, and Jude came indoors. "There, you see," he said cheerfully. "One more job yet, at any rate, and you can help in it--at least you can try. We shall have all the church to ourselves, as the rest of the work is finished."

Next day Jude went out to the church, which was only two miles off. He found that what the contractor's clerk had said was true. The tables of the Jewish law towered sternly over the utensils of Christian grace, as the chief ornament of the chancel end, in the fine dry style of the last century. And as their framework was constructed of ornamental plaster they could not be taken down for repair. A portion, crumbled by damp, required renewal; and when this had been done, and the whole cleansed, he began to renew the lettering. On the second morning Sue came to see what assistance she could render, and also because they liked to be together.

The silence and emptiness of the building gave her confidence, and, standing on a safe low platform erected by Jude, which she was nevertheless timid at mounting, she began painting in the letters of the first Table while he set about mending a portion of the

second. She was quite pleased at her powers; she had acquired them in the days she painted illumined texts for the church-fitting shop at Christminster. Nobody seemed likely to disturb them; and the pleasant twitter of birds, and rustle of October leafage, came in through an open window, and mingled with their talk.

They were not, however, to be left thus snug and peaceful for long. About half-past twelve there came footsteps on the gravel without. The old vicar and his churchwarden entered, and, coming up to see what was being done, seemed surprised to discover that a young woman was assisting. They passed on into an aisle, at which time the door again opened, and another figure entered--a small one, that of little Time, who was crying. Sue had told him where he might find her between school-hours, if he wished. She came down from her perch, and said, "What's the matter, my dear?"

"I couldn't stay to eat my dinner in school, because they said--"
He described how some boys had taunted him about his nominal mother, and Sue, grieved, expressed her indignation to Jude aloft. The child went into the churchyard, and Sue returned to her work. Meanwhile the door had opened again, and there shuffled in with a businesslike air the white-aproned woman who cleaned the church. Sue recognized her as one who had friends in Spring Street, whom she visited. The church-cleaner looked at Sue, gaped, and lifted her hands; she had evidently recognized Jude's companion as the latter had recognized her. Next came two ladies, and after talking to the charwoman they

also moved forward, and as Sue stood reaching upward, watched her hand tracing the letters, and critically regarded her person in relief against the white wall, till she grew so nervous that she trembled visibly.

They went back to where the others were standing, talking in undertones: and one said--Sue could not hear which--"She's his wife, I suppose?"

"Some say Yes: some say No," was the reply from the charwoman.

"Not? Then she ought to be, or somebody's--that's very clear!"

"They've only been married a very few weeks, whether or no."

"A strange pair to be painting the Two Tables! I wonder Biles and Willis could think of such a thing as hiring those!"

The churchwarden supposed that Biles and Willis knew of nothing wrong, and then the other, who had been talking to the old woman, explained what she meant by calling them strange people.

The probable drift of the subdued conversation which followed was made plain by the churchwarden breaking into an anecdote, in a voice that everybody in the church could hear, though obviously suggested by the present situation:

"Well, now, it is a curious thing, but my grandfather told me a strange tale of a most immoral case that happened at the painting of the Commandments in a church out by Gaymead--which is quite within a walk of this one. In them days Commandments were mostly done in gilt letters on a black ground, and that's how they were out where I say, before the owld church was rebuilded. It must have been somewhere about a hundred years ago that them Commandments wanted doing up just as ours do here, and they had to get men from Aldbrickham to do 'em. Now they wished to get the job finished by a particular Sunday, so the men had to work late Saturday night, against their will, for overtime was not paid then as 'tis now. There was no true religion in the country at that date, neither among pa'sons, clerks, nor people, and to keep the men up to their work the vicar had to let 'em have plenty of drink during the afternoon. As evening drawed on they sent for some more themselves; rum, by all account. It got later and later, and they got more and more fuddled, till at last they went a-putting their rum-bottle and rummers upon the communion table, and drawed up a trestle or two, and sate round comfortable and poured out again right hearty bumpers. No sooner had they tossed off their glasses than, so the story goes they fell down senseless, one and all. How long they bode so they didn't know, but when they came to themselves there was a terrible thunder-storm a-raging, and they seemed to see in the gloom a dark figure with very thin legs and a curious voot, a-standing on the ladder, and finishing their work. When it got daylight they could see that the work was really

finished, and couldn't at all mind finishing it themselves. They went home, and the next thing they heard was that a great scandal had been caused in the church that Sunday morning, for when the people came and service began, all saw that the Ten Commandments wez painted with the 'nots' left out. Decent people wouldn't attend service there for a long time, and the Bishop had to be sent for to reconsecrate the church. That's the tradition as I used to hear it as a child. You must take it for what it is wo'th, but this case to-day has reminded me o't, as I say."

The visitors gave one more glance, as if to see whether Jude and Sue had left the "nots" out likewise, and then severally left the church, even the old woman at last. Sue and Jude, who had not stopped working, sent back the child to school, and remained without speaking; till, looking at her narrowly, he found she had been crying silently.

"Never mind, comrade!" he said. "I know what it is!"

"I can't BEAR that they, and everybody, should think people wicked because they may have chosen to live their own way! It is really these opinions that make the best intentioned people reckless, and actually become immoral!"

"Never be cast down! It was only a funny story."

"Ah, but we suggested it! I am afraid I have done you mischief, Jude, instead of helping you by coming!"

To have suggested such a story was certainly not very exhilarating, in a serious view of their position. However, in a few minutes Sue seemed to see that their position this morning had a ludicrous side, and wiping her eyes she laughed.

"It is droll, after all," she said, "that we two, of all people, with our queer history, should happen to be here painting the Ten Commandments! You a reprobate, and I--in my condition... O dear!" ... And with her hand over her eyes she laughed again silently and intermittently, till she was quite weak.

"That's better," said Jude gaily. "Now we are right again, aren't we, little girl!"

"Oh but it is serious, all the same!" she sighed as she took up the brush and righted herself. "But do you see they don't think we are married? They WON'T believe it! It is extraordinary!"

"I don't care whether they think so or not," said Jude. "I shan't take any more trouble to make them."

They sat down to lunch--which they had brought with them not to hinder time--and having eaten it were about to set to work anew when

a man entered the church, and Jude recognized in him the contractor Willis. He beckoned to Jude, and spoke to him apart.

"Here--I've just had a complaint about this," he said, with rather breathless awkwardness. "I don't wish to go into the matter--as of course I didn't know what was going on--but I am afraid I must ask you and her to leave off, and let somebody else finish this! It is best, to avoid all unpleasantness. I'll pay you for the week, all the same."

Jude was too independent to make any fuss; and the contractor paid him, and left. Jude picked up his tools, and Sue cleansed her brush. Then their eyes met.

"How could we be so simple as to suppose we might do this!" said she, dropping to her tragic note. "Of course we ought not--I ought not--to have come!"

"I had no idea that anybody was going to intrude into such a lonely place and see us!" Jude returned. "Well, it can't be helped, dear; and of course I wouldn't wish to injure Willis's trade-connection by staying." They sat down passively for a few minutes, proceeded out of the church, and overtaking the boy pursued their thoughtful way to Aldbrickham.

Fawley had still a pretty zeal in the cause of education, and, as was

natural with his experiences, he was active in furthering "equality of opportunity" by any humble means open to him. He had joined an Artizans' Mutual Improvement Society established in the town about the time of his arrival there; its members being young men of all creeds and denominations, including Churchmen, Congregationalists, Baptists, Unitarians, Positivists, and others--agnostics had scarcely been heard of at this time--their one common wish to enlarge their minds forming a sufficiently close bond of union. The subscription was small, and the room homely; and Jude's activity, uncustomary acquirements, and above all, singular intuition on what to read and how to set about it--begotten of his years of struggle against malignant stars--had led to his being placed on the committee.

A few evenings after his dismissal from the church repairs, and before he had obtained any more work to do, he went to attend a meeting of the aforesaid committee. It was late when he arrived: all the others had come, and as he entered they looked dubiously at him, and hardly uttered a word of greeting. He guessed that something bearing on himself had been either discussed or mooted. Some ordinary business was transacted, and it was disclosed that the number of subscriptions had shown a sudden falling off for that quarter. One member--a really well-meaning and upright man--began speaking in enigmas about certain possible causes: that it behoved them to look well into their constitution; for if the committee were not respected, and had not at least, in their differences, a common standard of CONDUCT, they would bring the institution to the ground.

Nothing further was said in Jude's presence, but he knew what this meant; and turning to the table wrote a note resigning his office there and then.

Thus the supersensitive couple were more and more impelled to go away. And then bills were sent in, and the question arose, what could Jude do with his great-aunt's heavy old furniture, if he left the town to travel he knew not whither? This, and the necessity of ready money, compelled him to decide on an auction, much as he would have preferred to keep the venerable goods.

The day of the sale came on; and Sue for the last time cooked her own, the child's, and Jude's breakfast in the little house he had furnished. It chanced to be a wet day; moreover Sue was unwell, and not wishing to desert her poor Jude in such gloomy circumstances, for he was compelled to stay awhile, she acted on the suggestion of the auctioneer's man, and ensconced herself in an upper room, which could be emptied of its effects, and so kept closed to the bidders. Here Jude discovered her; and with the child, and their few trunks, baskets, and bundles, and two chairs and a table that were not in the sale, the two sat in meditative talk.

Footsteps began stamping up and down the bare stairs, the comers inspecting the goods, some of which were of so quaint and ancient a make as to acquire an adventitious value as art. Their door was tried once or twice, and to guard themselves against intrusion Jude

wrote "Private" on a scrap of paper, and stuck it upon the panel.

They soon found that, instead of the furniture, their own personal histories and past conduct began to be discussed to an unexpected and intolerable extent by the intending bidders. It was not till now that they really discovered what a fools' paradise of supposed unrecognition they had been living in of late. Sue silently took her companion's hand, and with eyes on each other they heard these passing remarks--the quaint and mysterious personality of Father Time being a subject which formed a large ingredient in the hints and innuendoes. At length the auction began in the room below, whence they could hear each familiar article knocked down, the highly prized ones cheaply, the unconsidered at an unexpected price.

"People don't understand us," he sighed heavily. "I am glad we have decided to go."

"The question is, where to?"

"It ought to be to London. There one can live as one chooses."

"No--not London, dear! I know it well. We should be unhappy there."

"Why?"

"Can't you think?"

"Because Arabella is there?"

"That's the chief reason."

"But in the country I shall always be uneasy lest there should be some more of our late experience. And I don't care to lessen it by explaining, for one thing, all about the boy's history. To cut him off from his past I have determined to keep silence. I am sickened of ecclesiastical work now; and I shouldn't like to accept it, if offered me!"

"You ought to have learnt classic. Gothic is barbaric art, after all. Pugin was wrong, and Wren was right. Remember the interior of Christminster Cathedral--almost the first place in which we looked in each other's faces. Under the picturesqueness of those Norman details one can see the grotesque childishness of uncouth people trying to imitate the vanished Roman forms, remembered by dim tradition only."

"Yes--you have half-converted me to that view by what you have said before. But one can work, and despise what one does. I must do something, if not church-gothic."

"I wish we could both follow an occupation in which personal circumstances don't count," she said, smiling up wistfully. "I am

as disqualified for teaching as you are for ecclesiastical art. You must fall back upon railway stations, bridges, theatres, music-halls, hotels--everything that has no connection with conduct."

"I am not skilled in those... I ought to take to bread-baking. I grew up in the baking business with aunt, you know. But even a baker must be conventional, to get customers."

"Unless he keeps a cake and gingerbread stall at markets and fairs, where people are gloriously indifferent to everything except the quality of the goods."

Their thoughts were diverted by the voice of the auctioneer: "Now this antique oak settle--a unique example of old English furniture, worthy the attention of all collectors!"

"That was my great-grandfather's," said Jude. "I wish we could have kept the poor old thing!"

One by one the articles went, and the afternoon passed away. Jude and the other two were getting tired and hungry, but after the conversation they had heard they were shy of going out while the purchasers were in their line of retreat. However, the later lots drew on, and it became necessary to emerge into the rain soon, to take on Sue's things to their temporary lodging.

"Now the next lot: two pairs of pigeons, all alive and plump--a nice pie for somebody for next Sunday's dinner!"

The impending sale of these birds had been the most trying suspense of the whole afternoon. They were Sue's pets, and when it was found that they could not possibly be kept, more sadness was caused than by parting from all the furniture. Sue tried to think away her tears as she heard the trifling sum that her dears were deemed to be worth advanced by small stages to the price at which they were finally knocked down. The purchaser was a neighbouring poulterer, and they were unquestionably doomed to die before the next market day.

Noting her dissembled distress Jude kissed her, and said it was time to go and see if the lodgings were ready. He would go on with the boy, and fetch her soon.

When she was left alone she waited patiently, but Jude did not come back. At last she started, the coast being clear, and on passing the poulterer's shop, not far off, she saw her pigeons in a hamper by the door. An emotion at sight of them, assisted by the growing dusk of evening, caused her to act on impulse, and first looking around her quickly, she pulled out the peg which fastened down the cover, and went on. The cover was lifted from within, and the pigeons flew away with a clatter that brought the chagrined poulterer cursing and swearing to the door.

Sue reached the lodging trembling, and found Jude and the boy making it comfortable for her. "Do the buyers pay before they bring away the things?" she asked breathlessly.

"Yes, I think. Why?"

"Because, then, I've done such a wicked thing!" And she explained, in bitter contrition.

"I shall have to pay the poulterer for them, if he doesn't catch them," said Jude. "But never mind. Don't fret about it, dear."

"It was so foolish of me! Oh why should Nature's law be mutual butchery!"

"Is it so, Mother?" asked the boy intently.

"Yes!" said Sue vehemently.

"Well, they must take their chance, now, poor things," said Jude. "As soon as the sale-account is wound up, and our bills paid, we go."

"Where do we go to?" asked Time, in suspense.

"We must sail under sealed orders, that nobody may trace us... We mustn't go to Alfredston, or to Melchester, or to Shaston, or to

Christminster. Apart from those we may go anywhere."

"Why mustn't we go there, Father?"

"Because of a cloud that has gathered over us; though 'we have wronged no man, corrupted no man, defrauded no man!' Though perhaps we have 'done that which was right in our own eyes.'"

VII

From that week Jude Fawley and Sue walked no more in the town of Aldbrickham.

Whither they had gone nobody knew, chiefly because nobody cared to know. Any one sufficiently curious to trace the steps of such an obscure pair might have discovered without great trouble that they had taken advantage of his adaptive craftsmanship to enter on a shifting, almost nomadic, life, which was not without its pleasantness for a time.

Wherever Jude heard of free-stone work to be done, thither he went, choosing by preference places remote from his old haunts and Sue's. He laboured at a job, long or briefly, till it was finished; and

then moved on.

Two whole years and a half passed thus. Sometimes he might have been found shaping the mullions of a country mansion, sometimes setting the parapet of a town-hall, sometimes ashlaring an hotel at Sandbourne, sometimes a museum at Casterbridge, sometimes as far down as Exonbury, sometimes at Stoke-Barehills. Later still he was at Kennetbridge, a thriving town not more than a dozen miles south of Marygreen, this being his nearest approach to the village where he was known; for he had a sensitive dread of being questioned as to his life and fortunes by those who had been acquainted with him during his ardent young manhood of study and promise, and his brief and unhappy married life at that time.

At some of these places he would be detained for months, at others only a few weeks. His curious and sudden antipathy to ecclesiastical work, both episcopal and noncomformist, which had risen in him when suffering under a smarting sense of misconception, remained with him in cold blood, less from any fear of renewed censure than from an ultra-conscientiousness which would not allow him to seek a living out of those who would disapprove of his ways; also, too, from a sense of inconsistency between his former dogmas and his present practice, hardly a shred of the beliefs with which he had first gone up to Christminster now remaining with him. He was mentally approaching the position which Sue had occupied when he first met her.

On a Saturday evening in May, nearly three years after Arabella's recognition of Sue and himself at the agricultural show, some of those who there encountered each other met again.

It was the spring fair at Kennetbridge, and, though this ancient trade-meeting had much dwindled from its dimensions of former times, the long straight street of the borough presented a lively scene about midday. At this hour a light trap, among other vehicles, was driven into the town by the north road, and up to the door of a temperance inn. There alighted two women, one the driver, an ordinary country person, the other a finely built figure in the deep mourning of a widow. Her sombre suit, of pronounced cut, caused her to appear a little out of place in the medley and bustle of a provincial fair.

"I will just find out where it is, Anny," said the widow-lady to her companion, when the horse and cart had been taken by a man who came forward: "and then I'll come back, and meet you here; and we'll go in and have something to eat and drink. I begin to feel quite a sinking."

"With all my heart," said the other. "Though I would sooner have put up at the Chequers or The Jack. You can't get much at these temperance houses."

"Now, don't you give way to gluttonous desires, my child," said the woman in weeds reprovingly. "This is the proper place. Very well: we'll meet in half an hour, unless you come with me to find out where the site of the new chapel is?"

"I don't care to. You can tell me."

The companions then went their several ways, the one in crape walking firmly along with a mien of disconnection from her miscellaneous surroundings. Making inquiries she came to a hoarding, within which were excavations denoting the foundations of a building; and on the boards without one or two large posters announcing that the foundation-stone of the chapel about to be erected would be laid that afternoon at three o'clock by a London preacher of great popularity among his body.

Having ascertained thus much the immensely weeded widow retraced her steps, and gave herself leisure to observe the movements of the fair. By and by her attention was arrested by a little stall of cakes and ginger-breads, standing between the more pretentious erections of trestles and canvas. It was covered with an immaculate cloth, and tended by a young woman apparently unused to the business, she being accompanied by a boy with an octogenarian face, who assisted her.

"Upon my--senses!" murmured the widow to herself. "His wife Sue--if she is so!" She drew nearer to the stall. "How do you do, Mrs.

Fawley?" she said blandly.

Sue changed colour and recognized Arabella through the crape veil.

"How are you, Mrs. Cartlett?" she said stiffly. And then perceiving Arabella's garb her voice grew sympathetic in spite of herself. "What?--you have lost--"

"My poor husband. Yes. He died suddenly, six weeks ago, leaving me none too well off, though he was a kind husband to me. But whatever profit there is in public-house keeping goes to them that brew the liquors, and not to them that retail 'em... And you, my little old man! You don't know me, I expect?"

"Yes, I do. You be the woman I thought wer my mother for a bit, till I found you wasn't," replied Father Time, who had learned to use the Wessex tongue quite naturally by now.

"All right. Never mind. I am a friend."

"Juey," said Sue suddenly, "go down to the station platform with this tray--there's another train coming in, I think."

When he was gone Arabella continued: "He'll never be a beauty, will he, poor chap! Does he know I am his mother really?"

"No. He thinks there is some mystery about his parentage--that's all. Jude is going to tell him when he is a little older."

"But how do you come to be doing this? I am surprised."

"It is only a temporary occupation--a fancy of ours while we are in a difficulty."

"Then you are living with him still?"

"Yes."

"Married?"

"Of course."

"Any children?"

"Two."

"And another coming soon, I see."

Sue writhed under the hard and direct questioning, and her tender little mouth began to quiver.

"Lord--I mean goodness gracious--what is there to cry about? Some

folks would be proud enough!"

"It is not that I am ashamed--not as you think! But it seems such a terribly tragic thing to bring beings into the world--so presumptuous--that I question my right to do it sometimes!"

"Take it easy, my dear... But you don't tell me why you do such a thing as this? Jude used to be a proud sort of chap--above any business almost, leave alone keeping a standing."

"Perhaps my husband has altered a little since then. I am sure he is not proud now!" And Sue's lips quivered again. "I am doing this because he caught a chill early in the year while putting up some stonework of a music-hall, at Quartershot, which he had to do in the rain, the work having to be executed by a fixed day. He is better than he was; but it has been a long, weary time! We have had an old widow friend with us to help us through it; but she's leaving soon."

"Well, I am respectable too, thank God, and of a serious way of thinking since my loss. Why did you choose to sell gingerbreads?"

"That's a pure accident. He was brought up to the baking business, and it occurred to him to try his hand at these, which he can make without coming out of doors. We call them Christminster cakes. They are a great success."

"I never saw any like 'em. Why, they are windows and towers, and pinnacles! And upon my word they are very nice." She had helped herself, and was unceremoniously munching one of the cakes.

"Yes. They are reminiscences of the Christminster Colleges. Traceried windows, and cloisters, you see. It was a whim of his to do them in pastry."

"Still harping on Christminster--even in his cakes!" laughed Arabella. "Just like Jude. A ruling passion. What a queer fellow he is, and always will be!"

Sue sighed, and she looked her distress at hearing him criticized.

"Don't you think he is? Come now; you do, though you are so fond of him!"

"Of course Christminster is a sort of fixed vision with him, which I suppose he'll never be cured of believing in. He still thinks it a great centre of high and fearless thought, instead of what it is, a nest of commonplace schoolmasters whose characteristic is timid obsequiousness to tradition."

Arabella was quizzing Sue with more regard of how she was speaking than of what she was saying. "How odd to hear a woman selling cakes talk like that!" she said. "Why don't you go back to

school-keeping?"

She shook her head. "They won't have me."

"Because of the divorce, I suppose?"

"That and other things. And there is no reason to wish it. We gave up all ambition, and were never so happy in our lives till his illness came."

"Where are you living?"

"I don't care to say."

"Here in Kennetbridge?"

Sue's manner showed Arabella that her random guess was right.

"Here comes the boy back again," continued Arabella. "My boy and Jude's!"

Sue's eyes darted a spark. "You needn't throw that in my face!" she cried.

"Very well--though I half-feel as if I should like to have him with me! ... But Lord, I don't want to take him from 'ee--ever I should

sin to speak so profane--though I should think you must have enough of your own! He's in very good hands, that I know; and I am not the woman to find fault with what the Lord has ordained. I've reached a more resigned frame of mind."

"Indeed! I wish I had been able to do so."

"You should try," replied the widow, from the serene heights of a soul conscious not only of spiritual but of social superiority. "I make no boast of my awakening, but I'm not what I was. After Cartlett's death I was passing the chapel in the street next ours, and went into it for shelter from a shower of rain. I felt a need of some sort of support under my loss, and, as 'twas righter than gin, I took to going there regular, and found it a great comfort. But I've left London now, you know, and at present I am living at Alfredston, with my friend Anny, to be near my own old country. I'm not come here to the fair to-day. There's to be the foundation-stone of a new chapel laid this afternoon by a popular London preacher, and I drove over with Anny. Now I must go back to meet her."

Then Arabella wished Sue good-bye, and went on.

VIII

In the afternoon Sue and the other people bustling about Kennetbridge fair could hear singing inside the placarded hoarding farther down the street. Those who peeped through the opening saw a crowd of persons in broadcloth, with hymn-books in their hands, standing round the excavations for the new chapel-walls. Arabella Cartlett and her weeds stood among them. She had a clear, powerful voice, which could be distinctly heard with the rest, rising and falling to the tune, her inflated bosom being also seen doing likewise.

It was two hours later on the same day that Anny and Mrs. Cartlett, having had tea at the Temperance Hotel, started on their return journey across the high and open country which stretches between Kennetbridge and Alfredston. Arabella was in a thoughtful mood; but her thoughts were not of the new chapel, as Anny at first surmised.

"No--it is something else," at last said Arabella sullenly. "I came here to-day never thinking of anybody but poor Cartlett, or of anything but spreading the Gospel by means of this new tabernacle they've begun this afternoon. But something has happened to turn my mind another way quite. Anny, I've heard of un again, and I've seen HER!"

"Who?"

"I've heard of Jude, and I've seen his wife. And ever since, do what

I will, and though I sung the hymns wi' all my strength, I have not been able to help thinking about 'n; which I've no right to do as a chapel member."

"Can't ye fix your mind upon what was said by the London preacher to-day, and try to get rid of your wandering fancies that way?"

"I do. But my wicked heart will ramble off in spite of myself!"

"Well--I know what it is to have a wanton mind o' my own, too! If you on'y knew what I do dream sometimes o' nights quite against my wishes, you'd say I had my struggles!" (Anny, too, had grown rather serious of late, her lover having jilted her.)

"What shall I do about it?" urged Arabella morbidly.

"You could take a lock of your late-lost husband's hair, and have it made into a mourning brooch, and look at it every hour of the day."

"I haven't a morsel!--and if I had 'twould be no good... After all that's said about the comforts of this religion, I wish I had Jude back again!"

"You must fight valiant against the feeling, since he's another's. And I've heard that another good thing for it, when it afflicts volupshious widows, is to go to your husband's grave in the dusk of

evening, and stand a long while a-bowed down."

"Pooh! I know as well as you what I should do; only I don't do it!"

They drove in silence along the straight road till they were within the horizon of Marygreen, which lay not far to the left of their route. They came to the junction of the highway and the cross-lane leading to that village, whose church-tower could be seen athwart the hollow. When they got yet farther on, and were passing the lonely house in which Arabella and Jude had lived during the first months of their marriage, and where the pig-killing had taken place, she could control herself no longer.

"He's more mine than hers!" she burst out. "What right has she to him, I should like to know! I'd take him from her if I could!"

"Fie, Abby! And your husband only six weeks gone! Pray against it!"

"Be damned if I do! Feelings are feelings! I won't be a creeping hypocrite any longer--so there!"

Arabella had hastily drawn from her pocket a bundle of tracts which she had brought with her to distribute at the fair, and of which she had given away several. As she spoke she flung the whole remainder of the packet into the hedge. "I've tried that sort o' physic and have failed wi' it. I must be as I was born!"

"Hush! You be excited, dear! Now you come along home quiet, and have a cup of tea, and don't let us talk about un no more. We won't come out this road again, as it leads to where he is, because it inflames 'ee so. You'll be all right again soon."

Arabella did calm herself down by degrees; and they crossed the ridge-way. When they began to descend the long, straight hill, they saw plodding along in front of them an elderly man of spare stature and thoughtful gait. In his hand he carried a basket; and there was a touch of slovenliness in his attire, together with that indefinable something in his whole appearance which suggested one who was his own housekeeper, purveyor, confidant, and friend, through possessing nobody else at all in the world to act in those capacities for him. The remainder of the journey was down-hill, and guessing him to be going to Alfredston they offered him a lift, which he accepted.

Arabella looked at him, and looked again, till at length she spoke. "If I don't mistake I am talking to Mr. Phillotson?"

The wayfarer faced round and regarded her in turn. "Yes; my name is Phillotson," he said. "But I don't recognize you, ma'am."

"I remember you well enough when you used to be schoolmaster out at Marygreen, and I one of your scholars. I used to walk up there from Cresscombe every day, because we had only a mistress down at our

place, and you taught better. But you wouldn't remember me as I should you?--Arabella Donn."

He shook his head. "No," he said politely, "I don't recall the name. And I should hardly recognize in your present portly self the slim school child no doubt you were then."

"Well, I always had plenty of flesh on my bones. However, I am staying down here with some friends at present. You know, I suppose, who I married?"

"No."

"Jude Fawley--also a scholar of yours--at least a night scholar--for some little time I think? And known to you afterwards, if I am not mistaken."

"Dear me, dear me," said Phillotson, starting out of his stiffness. "YOU Fawley's wife? To be sure--he had a wife! And he--I understood--"

"Divorced her--as you did yours--perhaps for better reasons."

"Indeed?"

"Well--he med have been right in doing it--right for both; for I soon

married again, and all went pretty straight till my husband died lately. But you--you were decidedly wrong!"

"No," said Phillotson, with sudden testiness. "I would rather not talk of this, but--I am convinced I did only what was right, and just, and moral. I have suffered for my act and opinions, but I hold to them; though her loss was a loss to me in more ways than one!"

"You lost your school and good income through her, did you not?"

"I don't care to talk of it. I have recently come back here--to Marygreen. I mean."

"You are keeping the school there again, just as formerly?"

The pressure of a sadness that would out unsealed him. "I am there," he replied. "Just as formerly, no. Merely on sufferance. It was a last resource--a small thing to return to after my move upwards, and my long indulged hopes--a returning to zero, with all its humiliations. But it is a refuge. I like the seclusion of the place, and the vicar having known me before my so-called eccentric conduct towards my wife had ruined my reputation as a schoolmaster, he accepted my services when all other schools were closed against me. However, although I take fifty pounds a year here after taking above two hundred elsewhere, I prefer it to running the risk of having my old domestic experiences raked up against me, as I should

do if I tried to make a move."

"Right you are. A contented mind is a continual feast. She has done no better."

"She is not doing well, you mean?"

"I met her by accident at Kennetbridge this very day, and she is anything but thriving. Her husband is ill, and she anxious. You made a fool of a mistake about her, I tell 'ee again, and the harm you did yourself by dirting your own nest serves you right, excusing the liberty."

"How?"

"She was innocent."

"But nonsense! They did not even defend the case!"

"That was because they didn't care to. She was quite innocent of what obtained you your freedom, at the time you obtained it. I saw her just afterwards, and proved it to myself completely by talking to her."

Phillotson grasped the edge of the spring-cart, and appeared to be much stressed and worried by the information. "Still--she wanted to

go," he said.

"Yes. But you shouldn't have let her. That's the only way with these fanciful women that chaw high--innocent or guilty. She'd have come round in time. We all do! Custom does it! It's all the same in the end! However, I think she's fond of her man still--whatever he med be of her. You were too quick about her. I shouldn't have let her go! I should have kept her chained on--her spirit for kicking would have been broke soon enough! There's nothing like bondage and a stone-deaf taskmaster for taming us women. Besides, you've got the laws on your side. Moses knew. Don't you call to mind what he says?"

"Not for the moment, ma'am, I regret to say."

"Call yourself a schoolmaster! I used to think o't when they read it in church, and I was carrying on a bit. 'Then shall the man be guiltless; but the woman shall bear her iniquity.' Damn rough on us women; but we must grin and put up wi' it! Haw haw! Well; she's got her deserts now."

"Yes," said Phillotson, with biting sadness. "Cruelty is the law pervading all nature and society; and we can't get out of it if we would!"

"Well--don't you forget to try it next time, old man."

"I cannot answer you, madam. I have never known much of womankind."

They had now reached the low levels bordering Alfredston, and passing through the outskirts approached a mill, to which Phillotson said his errand led him; whereupon they drew up, and he alighted, bidding them good-night in a preoccupied mood.

In the meantime Sue, though remarkably successful in her cake-selling experiment at Kennetbridge fair, had lost the temporary brightness which had begun to sit upon her sadness on account of that success. When all her "Christminster" cakes had been disposed of she took upon her arm the empty basket, and the cloth which had covered the standing she had hired, and giving the other things to the boy left the street with him. They followed a lane to a distance of half a mile, till they met an old woman carrying a child in short clothes, and leading a toddler in the other hand.

Sue kissed the children, and said, "How is he now?"

"Still better!" returned Mrs. Edlin cheerfully. "Before you are upstairs again your husband will be well enough--don't 'ee trouble."

They turned, and came to some old, dun-tiled cottages with gardens and fruit-trees. Into one of these they entered by lifting the latch without knocking, and were at once in the general living-room. Here

they greeted Jude, who was sitting in an arm-chair, the increased delicacy of his normally delicate features, and the childishly expectant look in his eyes, being alone sufficient to show that he had been passing through a severe illness.

"What--you have sold them all?" he said, a gleam of interest lighting up his face.

"Yes. Arcades, gables, east windows and all." She told him the pecuniary results, and then hesitated. At last, when they were left alone, she informed him of the unexpected meeting with Arabella, and the latter's widowhood.

Jude was discomposed. "What--is she living here?" he said.

"No; at Alfredston," said Sue.

Jude's countenance remained clouded. "I thought I had better tell you?" she continued, kissing him anxiously.

"Yes... Dear me! Arabella not in the depths of London, but down here! It is only a little over a dozen miles across the country to Alfredston. What is she doing there?"

She told him all she knew. "She has taken to chapel-going," Sue added; "and talks accordingly."

"Well," said Jude, "perhaps it is for the best that we have almost decided to move on. I feel much better to-day, and shall be well enough to leave in a week or two. Then Mrs. Edlin can go home again--dear faithful old soul--the only friend we have in the world!"

"Where do you think to go to?" Sue asked, a troublousness in her tones.

Then Jude confessed what was in his mind. He said it would surprise her, perhaps, after his having resolutely avoided all the old places for so long. But one thing and another had made him think a great deal of Christminster lately, and, if she didn't mind, he would like to go back there. Why should they care if they were known? It was oversensitive of them to mind so much. They could go on selling cakes there, for that matter, if he couldn't work. He had no sense of shame at mere poverty; and perhaps he would be as strong as ever soon, and able to set up stone-cutting for himself there.

"Why should you care so much for Christminster?" she said pensively. "Christminster cares nothing for you, poor dear!"

"Well, I do, I can't help it. I love the place--although I know how it hates all men like me--the so-called self-taught--how it scorns our laboured acquisitions, when it should be the first to respect them; how it sneers at our false quantities and

mispronunciations, when it should say, I see you want help, my poor friend! ... Nevertheless, it is the centre of the universe to me, because of my early dream: and nothing can alter it. Perhaps it will soon wake up, and be generous. I pray so! ... I should like to go back to live there--perhaps to die there! In two or three weeks I might, I think. It will then be June, and I should like to be there by a particular day."

His hope that he was recovering proved so far well grounded that in three weeks they had arrived in the city of many memories; were actually treading its pavements, receiving the reflection of the sunshine from its wasting walls.