VIII. THE EVENTS OF EIGHTEEN DAYS

1. FROM THE THIRD TO THE NINETEENTH OF SEPTEMBER

Miss Aldclyffe's tenderness towards Cytherea, between the hours of her irascibility, increased till it became no less than doting fondness. Like Nature in the tropics, with her hurricanes and the subsequent luxuriant vegetation effacing their ravages, Miss Aldclyffe compensated for her outbursts by excess of generosity afterwards. She seemed to be completely won out of herself by close contact with a young woman whose modesty was absolutely unimpaired, and whose artlessness was as perfect as was compatible with the complexity necessary to produce the due charm of womanhood. Cytherea, on her part, perceived with honest satisfaction that her influence for good over Miss Aldclyffe was considerable. Ideas and habits peculiar to the younger, which the elder lady had originally imitated as a mere whim, she grew in course of time to take a positive delight in. Among others were evening and morning prayers, dreaming over out-door scenes, learning a verse from some poem whilst dressing.

Yet try to force her sympathies as much as she would, Cytherea could feel no more than thankful for this, even if she always felt as much as thankful. The mysterious cloud hanging over the past life of her companion, of which the uncertain light already thrown upon it only seemed to render still darker the unpenetrated remainder, nourished in her a feeling which was scarcely too slight to be called dread. She would have infinitely preferred to be treated distantly, as the mere

dependent, by such a changeable nature--like a fountain, always herself, yet always another. That a crime of any deep dye had ever been perpetrated or participated in by her namesake, she would not believe; but the reckless adventuring of the lady's youth seemed connected with deeds of darkness rather than of light.

Sometimes Miss Aldclyffe appeared to be on the point of making some absorbing confidence, but reflection invariably restrained her. Cytherea hoped that such a confidence would come with time, and that she might thus be a means of soothing a mind which had obviously known extreme suffering.

But Miss Aldclyffe's reticence concerning her past was not imitated by Cytherea. Though she never disclosed the one fact of her knowledge that the love-suit between Miss Aldclyffe and her father terminated abnormally, the maiden's natural ingenuousness on subjects not set down for special guard had enabled Miss Aldclyffe to worm from her, fragment by fragment, every detail of her father's history. Cytherea saw how deeply Miss Aldclyffe sympathized--and it compensated her, to some extent, for the hasty resentments of other times.

Thus uncertainly she lived on. It was perceived by the servants of the House that some secret bond of connection existed between Miss Aldclyffe and her companion. But they were woman and woman, not woman and man, the facts were ethereal and refined, and so they could not be worked up

into a taking story. Whether, as old critics disputed, a supernatural machinery be necessary to an epic or no, an ungodly machinery is decidedly necessary to a scandal.

Another letter had come to her from Edward--very short, but full of entreaty, asking why she would not write just one line--just one line of cold friendship at least? She then allowed herself to think, little by little, whether she had not perhaps been too harsh with him; and at last wondered if he were really much to blame for being engaged to another woman. 'Ah, Brain, there is one in me stronger than you!' she said. The young maid now continually pulled out his letter, read it and re-read it, almost crying with pity the while, to think what wretched suspense he must be enduring at her silence, till her heart chid her for her cruelty. She felt that she must send him a line--one little line--just a wee line to keep him alive, poor thing; sighing like Donna Clara--

'Ah, were he now before me,
In spite of injured pride,
I fear my eyes would pardon
Before my tongue could chide.'

2. SEPTEMBER THE TWENTIETH. THREE TO FOUR P.M.

It was the third week in September, about five weeks after Cytherea's

arrival, when Miss Aldclyffe requested her one day to go through the village of Carriford and assist herself in collecting the subscriptions made by some of the inhabitants of the parish to a religious society she patronized. Miss Aldclyffe formed one of what was called a Ladies' Association, each member of which collected tributary streams of shillings from her inferiors, to add to her own pound at the end.

Miss Aldclyffe took particular interest in Cytherea's appearance that afternoon, and the object of her attention was, indeed, gratifying to look at. The sight of the lithe girl, set off by an airy dress, coquettish jacket, flexible hat, a ray of starlight in each eye and a war of lilies and roses in each cheek, was a palpable pleasure to the mistress of the mansion, yet a pleasure which appeared to partake less of the nature of affectionate satisfaction than of mental gratification.

Eight names were printed in the report as belonging to Miss Aldclyffe's list, with the amount of subscription-money attached to each.

'I will collect the first four, whilst you do the same with the last four,' said Miss Aldclyffe.

The names of two tradespeople stood first in Cytherea's share: then came a Miss Hinton: last of all in the printed list was Mr. Springrove the elder. Underneath his name was pencilled, in Miss Aldclyffe's handwriting, 'Mr. Manston.'

Manston had arrived on the estate, in the capacity of steward, three or four days previously, and occupied the old manor-house, which had been altered and repaired for his reception.

'Call on Mr. Manston,' said the lady impressively, looking at the name written under Cytherea's portion of the list.

'But he does not subscribe yet?'

'I know it; but call and leave him a report. Don't forget it.'

'Say you would be pleased if he would subscribe?'

'Yes--say I should be pleased if he would,' repeated Miss Aldclyffe, smiling. 'Good-bye. Don't hurry in your walk. If you can't get easily through your task to-day put off some of it till to-morrow.'

Each then started on her rounds: Cytherea going in the first place to the old manor-house. Mr. Manston was not indoors, which was a relief to her. She called then on the two gentleman-farmers' wives, who soon transacted their business with her, frigidly indifferent to her personality. A person who socially is nothing is thought less of by people who are not much than by those who are a great deal.

She then turned towards Peakhill Cottage, the residence of Miss Hinton, who lived there happily enough, with an elderly servant and a house-dog

as companions. Her father, and last remaining parent, had retired thither four years before this time, after having filled the post of editor to the Casterbridge Chronicle for eighteen or twenty years. There he died soon after, and though comparatively a poor man, he left his daughter sufficiently well provided for as a modest fundholder and claimant of sundry small sums in dividends to maintain herself as mistress at Peakhill.

At Cytherea's knock an inner door was heard to open and close, and footsteps crossed the passage hesitatingly. The next minute Cytherea stood face to face with the lady herself.

Adelaide Hinton was about nine-and-twenty years of age. Her hair was plentiful, like Cytherea's own; her teeth equalled Cytherea's in regularity and whiteness. But she was much paler, and had features too transparent to be in place among household surroundings. Her mouth expressed love less forcibly than Cytherea's, and, as a natural result of her greater maturity, her tread was less elastic, and she was more self-possessed.

She had been a girl of that kind which mothers praise as not forward, by way of contrast, when disparaging those warmer ones with whom loving is an end and not a means. Men of forty, too, said of her, 'a good sensible wife for any man, if she cares to marry,' the caring to marry being thrown in as the vaguest hypothesis, because she was so practical. Yet it would be singular if, in such cases, the important subject of

marriage should be excluded from manipulation by hands that are ready for practical performance in every domestic concern besides.

Cytherea was an acquisition, and the greeting was hearty.

'Good afternoon! O yes--Miss Graye, from Miss Aldclyffe's. I have seen you at church, and I am so glad you have called! Come in. I wonder if I have change enough to pay my subscription.' She spoke girlishly.

Adelaide, when in the company of a younger woman, always levelled herself down to that younger woman's age from a sense of justice to herself--as if, though not her own age at common law, it was in equity.

'It doesn't matter. I'll come again.'

'Yes, do at any time; not only on this errand. But you must step in for a minute. Do.'

'I have been wanting to come for several weeks.'

'That's right. Now you must see my house--lonely, isn't it, for a single person? People said it was odd for a young woman like me to keep on a house; but what did I care? If you knew the pleasure of locking up your own door, with the sensation that you reigned supreme inside it, you would say it was worth the risk of being called odd. Mr. Springrove attends to my gardening, the dog attends to robbers, and whenever there

is a snake or toad to kill, Jane does it.'

'How nice! It is better than living in a town.'

'Far better. A town makes a cynic of me.'

The remark recalled, somewhat startlingly, to Cytherea's mind, that Edward had used those very words to herself one evening at Budmouth.

Miss Hinton opened an interior door and led her visitor into a small drawing-room commanding a view of the country for miles.

The missionary business was soon settled; but the chat continued.

'How lonely it must be here at night!' said Cytherea. 'Aren't you afraid?'

'At first I was, slightly. But I got used to the solitude. And you know a sort of commonsense will creep even into timidity. I say to myself sometimes at night, "If I were anybody but a harmless woman, not worth the trouble of a worm's ghost to appear to me, I should think that every sound I hear was a spirit." But you must see all over my house.'

Cytherea was highly interested in seeing.

'I say you must do this, and you must do that, as if you were a

child,' remarked Adelaide. 'A privileged friend of mine tells me this use of the imperative comes of being so constantly in nobody's society but my own.'

'Ah, yes. I suppose she is right.'

Cytherea called the friend 'she' by a rule of ladylike practice; for a woman's 'friend' is delicately assumed by another friend to be of their own sex in the absence of knowledge to the contrary; just as cats are called she's until they prove themselves he's.

Miss Hinton laughed mysteriously.

'I get a humorous reproof for it now and then, I assure you,' she continued.

'"Humorous reproof:" that's not from a woman: who can reprove humorously but a man?' was the groove of Cytherea's thought at the remark. 'Your brother reproves you, I expect,' said that innocent young lady.

'No,' said Miss Hinton, with a candid air. ''Tis only a professional man I am acquainted with.' She looked out of the window.

Women are persistently imitative. No sooner did a thought flash through Cytherea's mind that the man was a lover than she became a Miss Aldclyffe in a mild form.

'I imagine he's a lover,' she said.

Miss Hinton smiled a smile of experience in that line.

Few women, if taxed with having an admirer, are so free from vanity as to deny the impeachment, even if it is utterly untrue. When it does happen to be true, they look pityingly away from the person who is so benighted as to have got no further than suspecting it.

'There now--Miss Hinton; you are engaged to be married!' said Cytherea accusingly.

Adelaide nodded her head practically. 'Well, yes, I am,' she said.

The word 'engaged' had no sooner passed Cytherea's lips than the sound of it--the mere sound of her own lips--carried her mind to the time and circumstances under which Miss Aldclyffe had used it towards herself. A sickening thought followed--based but on a mere surmise; yet its presence took every other idea away from Cytherea's mind. Miss Hinton had used Edward's words about towns; she mentioned Mr. Springrove as attending to her garden. It could not be that Edward was the man! that Miss Aldclyffe had planned to reveal her rival thus!

'Are you going to be married soon?' she inquired, with a steadiness the result of a sort of fascination, but apparently of indifference.

'Not very soon--still, soon.'

'Ah-ha! In less than three months?' said Cytherea.

'Two.'

Now that the subject was well in hand, Adelaide wanted no more prompting. 'You won't tell anybody if I show you something?' she said, with eager mystery.

'O no, nobody. But does he live in this parish?'

'No.'

Nothing proved yet.

'What's his name?' said Cytherea flatly. Her breath and heart had begun their old tricks, and came and went hotly. Miss Hinton could not see her face.

'What do you think?' said Miss Hinton.

'George?' said Cytherea, with deceitful agony.

'No,' said Adelaide. 'But now, you shall see him first; come here;'

and she led the way upstairs into her bedroom. There, standing on the dressing table in a little frame, was the unconscious portrait of Edward Springrove.

'There he is,' Miss Hinton said, and a silence ensued.

'Are you very fond of him?' continued the miserable Cytherea at length.

'Yes, of course I am,' her companion replied, but in the tone of one who 'lived in Abraham's bosom all the year,' and was therefore untouched by solemn thought at the fact. 'He's my cousin--a native of this village. We were engaged before my father's death left me so lonely. I was only twenty, and a much greater belle than I am now. We know each other thoroughly, as you may imagine. I give him a little sermonizing now and then.'

'Why?'

'O, it's only in fun. He's very naughty sometimes--not really, you know--but he will look at any pretty face when he sees it.'

Storing up this statement of his susceptibility as another item to be miserable upon when she had time, 'How do you know that?' Cytherea asked, with a swelling heart.

'Well, you know how things do come to women's ears. He used to live at

Budmouth as an assistant-architect, and I found out that a young giddy thing of a girl who lives there somewhere took his fancy for a day or two. But I don't feel jealous at all--our engagement is so matter-of-fact that neither of us can be jealous. And it was a mere flirtation--she was too silly for him. He's fond of rowing, and kindly gave her an airing for an evening or two. I'll warrant they talked the most unmitigated rubbish under the sun--all shallowness and pastime, just as everything is at watering places--neither of them caring a bit for the other--she giggling like a goose all the time--'

Concentrated essence of woman pervaded the room rather than air. 'She didn't! and it wasn't shallowness!' Cytherea burst out, with brimming eyes. ''Twas deep deceit on one side, and entire confidence on the other--yes, it was!' The pent-up emotion had swollen and swollen inside the young thing till the dam could no longer embay it. The instant the words were out she would have given worlds to have been able to recall them.

'Do you know her--or him?' said Miss Hinton, starting with suspicion at the warmth shown.

The two rivals had now lost their personality quite. There was the same keen brightness of eye, the same movement of the mouth, the same mind in both, as they looked doubtingly and excitedly at each other. As is invariably the case with women when a man they care for is the subject of an excitement among them, the situation abstracted the differences

which distinguished them as individuals, and left only the properties common to them as atoms of a sex.

Cytherea caught at the chance afforded her of not betraying herself. 'Yes, I know her,' she said.

'Well,' said Miss Hinton, 'I am really vexed if my speaking so lightly of any friend of yours has hurt your feelings, but--'

'O, never mind,' Cytherea returned; 'it doesn't matter, Miss Hinton. I think I must leave you now. I have to call at other places. Yes--I must go.'

Miss Hinton, in a perplexed state of mind, showed her visitor politely downstairs to the door. Here Cytherea bade her a hurried adieu, and flitted down the garden into the lane.

She persevered in her duties with a wayward pleasure in giving herself misery, as was her wont. Mr. Springrove's name was next on the list, and she turned towards his dwelling, the Three Tranters Inn.

3. FOUR TO FIVE P.M.

The cottages along Carriford village street were not so close but that on one side or other of the road was always a hedge of hawthorn or privet, over or through which could be seen gardens or orchards rich

with produce. It was about the middle of the early apple-harvest, and the laden trees were shaken at intervals by the gatherers; the soft pattering of the falling crop upon the grassy ground being diversified by the loud rattle of vagrant ones upon a rail, hencoop, basket, or lean-to roof, or upon the rounded and stooping backs of the collectors--mostly children, who would have cried bitterly at receiving such a smart blow from any other quarter, but smilingly assumed it to be but fun in apples.

The Three Tranters Inn, a many-gabled, mediaeval building, constructed almost entirely of timber, plaster, and thatch, stood close to the line of the roadside, almost opposite the churchyard, and was connected with a row of cottages on the left by thatched outbuildings. It was an uncommonly characteristic and handsome specimen of the genuine roadside inn of bygone times; and standing on one of the great highways in this part of England, had in its time been the scene of as much of what is now looked upon as the romantic and genial experience of stage-coach travelling as any halting-place in the country. The railway had absorbed the whole stream of traffic which formerly flowed through the village and along by the ancient door of the inn, reducing the empty-handed landlord, who used only to farm a few fields at the back of the house, to the necessity of eking out his attenuated income by increasing the extent of his agricultural business if he would still maintain his social standing. Next to the general stillness pervading the spot, the long line of outbuildings adjoining the house was the most striking and saddening witness to the passed-away fortunes of the Three Tranters Inn.

It was the bulk of the original stabling, and where once the hoofs of two-score horses had daily rattled over the stony yard, to and from the stalls within, thick grass now grew, whilst the line of roofs--once so straight--over the decayed stalls, had sunk into vast hollows till they seemed like the cheeks of toothless age.

On a green plot at the other end of the building grew two or three large, wide-spreading elm-trees, from which the sign was suspended--representing the three men called tranters (irregular carriers), standing side by side, and exactly alike to a hair's-breadth, the grain of the wood and joints of the boards being visible through the thin paint depicting their forms, which were still further disfigured by red stains running downwards from the rusty nails above.

Under the trees now stood a cider-mill and press, and upon the spot sheltered by the boughs were gathered Mr. Springrove himself, his men, the parish clerk, two or three other men, grinders and supernumeraries, a woman with an infant in her arms, a flock of pigeons, and some little boys with straws in their mouths, endeavouring, whenever the men's backs were turned, to get a sip of the sweet juice issuing from the vat.

Edward Springrove the elder, the landlord, now more particularly a farmer, and for two months in the year a cider-maker, was an employer of labour of the old school, who worked himself among his men. He was now engaged in packing the pomace into horsehair bags with a rammer, and Gad Weedy, his man, was occupied in shovelling up more from a tub at

his side. The shovel shone like silver from the action of the juice, and ever and anon, in its motion to and fro, caught the rays of the declining sun and reflected them in bristling stars of light.

Mr. Springrove had been too young a man when the pristine days of the Three Tranters had departed for ever to have much of the host left in him now. He was a poet with a rough skin: one whose sturdiness was more the result of external circumstances than of intrinsic nature. Too kindly constituted to be very provident, he was yet not imprudent. He had a quiet humorousness of disposition, not out of keeping with a frequent melancholy, the general expression of his countenance being one of abstraction. Like Walt Whitman he felt as his years increased--

'I foresee too much; it means more than I thought.'

On the present occasion he wore gaiters and a leathern apron, and worked with his shirt-sleeves rolled up beyond his elbows, disclosing solid and fleshy rather than muscular arms. They were stained by the cider, and two or three brown apple-pips from the pomace he was handling were to be seen sticking on them here and there.

The other prominent figure was that of Richard Crickett, the parish clerk, a kind of Bowdlerized rake, who ate only as much as a woman, and had the rheumatism in his left hand. The remainder of the group, brown-faced peasants, wore smock-frocks embroidered on the shoulders with hearts and diamonds, and were girt round their middle with a strap,

another being worn round the right wrist.

'And have you seen the steward, Mr. Springrove?' said the clerk.

'Just a glimpse of him; but 'twas just enough to show me that he's not here for long.'

'Why mid that be?'

'He'll never stand the vagaries of the female figure holden the reins--not he.'

'She d' pay en well,' said a grinder; 'and money's money.'

'Ah--'tis: very much so,' the clerk replied.

'Yes, yes, naibour Crickett,' said Springrove, 'but she'll vlee in a passion--all the fat will be in the fire--and there's an end o't....
Yes, she is a one,' continued the farmer, resting, raising his eyes, and reading the features of a distant apple.

'She is,' said Gad, resting too (it is wonderful how prompt a journeyman is in following his master's initiative to rest) and reflectively regarding the ground in front of him.

'True: a one is she,' the clerk chimed in, shaking his head ominously.

'She has such a temper,' said the farmer, 'and is so wilful too. You may as well try to stop a footpath as stop her when she has taken anything into her head. I'd as soon grind little green crabs all day as live wi' her.'

''Tis a temper she hev, 'tis,' the clerk replied, 'though I be a servant of the Church that say it. But she isn't goen to flee in a passion this time.'

The audience waited for the continuation of the speech, as if they knew from experience the exact distance off it lay in the future.

The clerk swallowed nothing as if it were a great deal, and then went on, 'There's some'at between 'em: mark my words, naibours--there's some'at between 'em.'

'D'ye mean it?'

'I d' know it. He came last Saturday, didn't he?'

''A did, truly,' said Gad Weedy, at the same time taking an apple from the hopper of the mill, eating a piece, and flinging back the remainder to be ground up for cider.

'He went to church a-Sunday,' said the clerk again.

''A did.'

'And she kept her eye upon en all the service, her face flickeren between red and white, but never stoppen at either.'

Mr. Springrove nodded, and went to the press.

'Well,' said the clerk, 'you don't call her the kind o' woman to make mistakes in just trotten through the weekly service o' God? Why, as a rule she's as right as I be myself.'

Mr. Springrove nodded again, and gave a twist to the screw of the press, followed in the movement by Gad at the other side; the two grinders expressing by looks of the greatest concern that, if Miss Aldclyffe were as right at church as the clerk, she must be right indeed.

'Yes, as right in the service o' God as I be myself,' repeated the clerk. 'But last Sunday, when we were in the tenth commandment, says she, "Incline our hearts to keep this law," says she, when 'twas "Laws in our hearts, we beseech Thee," all the church through. Her eye was upon him--she was quite lost--"Hearts to keep this law," says she; she was no more than a mere shadder at that tenth time--a mere shadder. You mi't ha' mouthed across to her "Laws in our hearts we beseech Thee," fifty times over--she'd never ha' noticed ye. She's in love wi' the man, that's what she is.'

'Then she's a bigger stunpoll than I took her for,' said Mr. Springrove. 'Why, she's old enough to be his mother.'

'The row'll be between her and that young Curlywig, you'll see. She won't run the risk of that pretty face be-en near.'

'Clerk Crickett, I d' fancy you d' know everything about everybody,' said Gad.

'Well so's,' said the clerk modestly. 'I do know a little. It comes to me.'

'And I d' know where from.'

'Ah.'

'That wife o' thine. She's an entertainen woman, not to speak disrespectful.'

'She is: and a winnen one. Look at the husbands she've had--God bless her!'

'I wonder you could stand third in that list, Clerk Crickett,' said Mr. Springrove.

'Well, 't has been a power o' marvel to myself oftentimes. Yes, matrimony do begin wi' "Dearly beloved," and ends wi' "Amazement," as the prayer-book says. But what could I do, naibour Springrove? 'Twas ordained to be. Well do I call to mind what your poor lady said to me when I had just married. "Ah, Mr. Crickett," says she, "your wife will soon settle you as she did her other two: here's a glass o' rum, for I shan't see your poor face this time next year." I swallered the rum, called again next year, and said, "Mrs. Springrove, you gave me a glass o' rum last year because I was going to die--here I be alive still, you see." "Well said, clerk! Here's two glasses for you now, then," says she. "Thank you, mem," I said, and swallered the rum. Well, dang my old sides, next year I thought I'd call again and get three. And call I did. But she wouldn't give me a drop o' the commonest. "No, clerk," says she, "you be too tough for a woman's pity."... Ah, poor soul, 'twas true enough! Here be I, that was expected to die, alive and hard as a nail, you see, and there's she moulderen in her grave.'

'I used to think 'twas your wife's fate not to have a liven husband when I zid 'em die off so,' said Gad.

'Fate? Bless thy simplicity, so 'twas her fate; but she struggled to have one, and would, and did. Fate's nothen beside a woman's schemen!'

'I suppose, then, that Fate is a He, like us, and the Lord, and the rest o' 'em up above there,' said Gad, lifting his eyes to the sky.

'Hullo! Here's the young woman comen that we were a-talken about by-now,' said a grinder, suddenly interrupting. 'She's comen up here, as I be alive!'

The two grinders stood and regarded Cytherea as if she had been a ship tacking into a harbour, nearly stopping the mill in their new interest.

'Stylish accoutrements about the head and shoulders, to my thinken,' said the clerk. 'Sheenen curls, and plenty o' em.'

'If there's one kind of pride more excusable than another in a young woman, 'tis being proud of her hair,' said Mr. Springrove.

'Dear man!--the pride there is only a small piece o' the whole. I warrant now, though she can show such a figure, she ha'n't a stick o' furniture to call her own.'

'Come, Clerk Crickett, let the maid be a maid while she is a maid,' said Farmer Springrove chivalrously.

'O,' replied the servant of the Church; 'I've nothen to say against it--O no:

'"The chimney-sweeper's daughter Sue
As I have heard declare, O,
Although she's neither sock nor shoe

Will curl and deck her hair, O.'"

Cytherea was rather disconcerted at finding that the gradual cessation of the chopping of the mill was on her account, and still more when she saw all the cider-makers' eyes fixed upon her except Mr. Springrove's, whose natural delicacy restrained him. She neared the plot of grass, but instead of advancing further, hesitated on its border.

Mr. Springrove perceived her embarrassment, which was relieved when she saw his old-established figure coming across to her, wiping his hands in his apron.

'I know your errand, missie,' he said, 'and am glad to see you, and attend to it. I'll step indoors.'

'If you are busy I am in no hurry for a minute or two,' said Cytherea.

'Then if so be you really wouldn't mind, we'll wring down this last filling to let it drain all night?'

'Not at all. I like to see you.'

'We are only just grinding down the early pickthongs and griffins,' continued the farmer, in a half-apologetic tone for detaining by his cider-making any well-dressed woman. 'They rot as black as a chimney-crook if we keep 'em till the regulars turn in.' As he spoke he

went back to the press, Cytherea keeping at his elbow. 'I'm later than I should have been by rights,' he continued, taking up a lever for propelling the screw, and beckoning to the men to come forward. 'The truth is, my son Edward had promised to come to-day, and I made preparations; but instead of him comes a letter: "London, September the eighteenth, Dear Father," says he, and went on to tell me he couldn't. It threw me out a bit.'

'Of course,' said Cytherea.

'He's got a place 'a b'lieve?' said the clerk, drawing near.

'No, poor mortal fellow, no. He tried for this one here, you know, but couldn't manage to get it. I don't know the rights o' the matter, but willy-nilly they wouldn't have him for steward. Now mates, form in line.'

Springrove, the clerk, the grinders, and Gad, all ranged themselves behind the lever of the screw, and walked round like soldiers wheeling.

'The man that the old quean hev got is a man you can hardly get upon your tongue to gainsay, by the look o' en,' rejoined Clerk Crickett.

'One o' them people that can contrive to be thought no worse o' for stealen a horse than another man for looken over hedge at en,' said a grinder.

'Well, he's all there as steward, and is quite the gentleman--no doubt about that.'

'So would my Ted ha' been, for the matter o' that,' the farmer said.

'That's true: 'a would, sir.'

'I said, I'll give Ted a good education if it do cost me my eyes, and I would have done it.'

'Ay, that you would so,' said the chorus of assistants solemnly.

'But he took to books and drawing naturally, and cost very little; and as a wind-up the womenfolk hatched up a match between him and his cousin.'

'When's the wedden to be, Mr. Springrove?'

'Uncertain--but soon, I suppose. Edward, you see, can do anything pretty nearly, and yet can't get a straightforward living. I wish sometimes I had kept him here, and let professions go. But he was such a one for the pencil.'

He dropped the lever in the hedge, and turned to his visitor.

'Now then, missie, if you'll come indoors, please.'

Gad Weedy looked with a placid criticism at Cytherea as she withdrew with the farmer.

'I could tell by the tongue o' her that she didn't take her degrees in our county,' he said in an undertone.

'The railways have left you lonely here,' she observed, when they were indoors.

Save the withered old flies, which were quite tame from the solitude, not a being was in the house. Nobody seemed to have entered it since the last passenger had been called out to mount the last stage-coach that had run by.

'Yes, the Inn and I seem almost a pair of fossils,' the farmer replied, looking at the room and then at himself.

'O, Mr. Springrove,' said Cytherea, suddenly recollecting herself; 'I am much obliged to you for recommending me to Miss Aldclyffe.' She began to warm towards the old man; there was in him a gentleness of disposition which reminded her of her own father.

'Recommending? Not at all, miss. Ted--that's my son--Ted said a

fellow-draughtsman of his had a sister who wanted to be doing something in the world, and I mentioned it to the housekeeper, that's all. Ay, I miss my son very much.'

She kept her back to the window that he might not see her rising colour.

'Yes,' he continued, 'sometimes I can't help feeling uneasy about him. You know, he seems not made for a town life exactly: he gets very queer over it sometimes, I think. Perhaps he'll be better when he's married to Adelaide.'

A half-impatient feeling arose in her, like that which possesses a sick person when he hears a recently-struck hour struck again by a slow clock. She had lived further on.

'Everything depends upon whether he loves her,' she said tremulously.

'He used to--he doesn't show it so much now; but that's because he's older. You see, it was several years ago they first walked together as young man and young woman. She's altered too from what she was when he first courted her.'

'How, sir?'

'O, she's more sensible by half. When he used to write to her she'd creep up the lane and look back over her shoulder, and slide out the

letter, and read a word and stand in thought looking at the hills and seeing none. Then the cuckoo would cry--away the letter would slip, and she'd start wi' fright at the mere bird, and have a red skin before the quickest man among ye could say, "Blood rush up."'

He came forward with the money and dropped it into her hand. His thoughts were still with Edward, and he absently took her little fingers in his as he said, earnestly and ingenuously--

''Tis so seldom I get a gentlewoman to speak to that I can't help speaking to you, Miss Graye, on my fears for Edward; I sometimes am afraid that he'll never get on--that he'll die poor and despised under the worst mental conditions, a keen sense of having been passed in the race by men whose brains are nothing to his own, all through his seeing too far into things--being discontented with make-shifts--thinking o' perfection in things, and then sickened that there's no such thing as perfection. I shan't be sorry to see him marry, since it may settle him down and do him good.... Ay, we'll hope for the best.'

He let go her hand and accompanied her to the door saying, 'If you should care to walk this way and talk to an old man once now and then, it will be a great delight to him, Miss Graye. Good-evening to ye.... Ah look! a thunderstorm is brewing--be quick home. Or shall I step up with you?'

'No, thank you, Mr. Springrove. Good evening,' she said in a low voice,

and hurried away. One thought still possessed her; Edward had trifled with her love.

4. FIVE TO SIX P.M.

She followed the road into a bower of trees, overhanging it so densely that the pass appeared like a rabbit's burrow, and presently reached a side entrance to the park. The clouds rose more rapidly than the farmer had anticipated: the sheep moved in a trail, and complained incoherently. Livid grey shades, like those of the modern French painters, made a mystery of the remote and dark parts of the vista, and seemed to insist upon a suspension of breath. Before she was half-way across the park the thunder rumbled distinctly.

The direction in which she had to go would take her close by the old manor-house. The air was perfectly still, and between each low rumble of the thunder behind she could hear the roar of the waterfall before her, and the creak of the engine among the bushes hard by it. Hurrying on, with a growing dread of the gloom and of the approaching storm, she drew near the Old House, now rising before her against the dark foliage and sky in tones of strange whiteness.

On the flight of steps, which descended from a terrace in front to the level of the park, stood a man. He appeared, partly from the relief the position gave to his figure, and partly from fact, to be of towering height. He was dark in outline, and was looking at the sky, with his

hands behind him.

It was necessary for Cytherea to pass directly across the line of his front. She felt so reluctant to do this, that she was about to turn under the trees out of the path and enter it again at a point beyond the Old House; but he had seen her, and she came on mechanically, unconsciously averting her face a little, and dropping her glance to the ground.

Her eyes unswervingly lingered along the path until they fell upon another path branching in a right line from the path she was pursuing. It came from the steps of the Old House. 'I am exactly opposite him now,' she thought, 'and his eyes are going through me.'

A clear masculine voice said, at the same instant--

'Are you afraid?'

She, interpreting his question by her feelings at the moment, assumed himself to be the object of fear, if any. 'I don't think I am,' she stammered.

He seemed to know that she thought in that sense.

'Of the thunder, I mean,' he said; 'not of myself.'

She must turn to him now. 'I think it is going to rain,' she remarked for the sake of saying something.

He could not conceal his surprise and admiration of her face and bearing. He said courteously, 'It may possibly not rain before you reach the House, if you are going there?'

'Yes, I am,'

'May I walk up with you? It is lonely under the trees.'

'No.' Fearing his courtesy arose from a belief that he was addressing a woman of higher station than was hers, she added, 'I am Miss Aldclyffe's companion. I don't mind the loneliness.'

'O, Miss Aldclyffe's companion. Then will you be kind enough to take a subscription to her? She sent to me this afternoon to ask me to become a subscriber to her Society, and I was out. Of course I'll subscribe if she wishes it. I take a great interest in the Society.'

'Miss Aldclyffe will be glad to hear that, I know.'

'Yes; let me see--what Society did she say it was? I am afraid I haven't enough money in my pocket, and yet it would be a satisfaction to her to have practical proof of my willingness. I'll get it, and be out in one minute.'

He entered the house and was at her side again within the time he had named. 'This is it,' he said pleasantly.

She held up her hand. The soft tips of his fingers brushed the palm of her glove as he placed the money within it. She wondered why his fingers should have touched her.

'I think after all,' he continued, 'that the rain is upon us, and will drench you before you reach the House. Yes: see there.'

He pointed to a round wet spot as large as a nasturtium leaf, which had suddenly appeared upon the white surface of the step.

'You had better come into the porch. It is not nearly night yet. The clouds make it seem later than it really is.'

Heavy drops of rain, followed immediately by a forked flash of lightning and sharp rattling thunder compelled her, willingly or no, to accept his invitation. She ascended the steps, stood beside him just within the porch, and for the first time obtained a series of short views of his person, as they waited there in silence.

He was an extremely handsome man, well-formed, and well-dressed, of an age which seemed to be two or three years less than thirty. The most striking point in his appearance was the wonderful, almost

preternatural, clearness of his complexion. There was not a blemish or speck of any kind to mar the smoothness of its surface or the beauty of its hue. Next, his forehead was square and broad, his brows straight and firm, his eyes penetrating and clear. By collecting the round of expressions they gave forth, a person who theorized on such matters would have imbibed the notion that their owner was of a nature to kick against the pricks; the last man in the world to put up with a position because it seemed to be his destiny to do so; one who took upon himself to resist fate with the vindictive determination of a Theomachist.
Eyes and forehead both would have expressed keenness of intellect too severely to be pleasing, had their force not been counteracted by the lines and tone of the lips. These were full and luscious to a surprising degree, possessing a woman-like softness of curve, and a ruby redness so intense, as to testify strongly to much susceptibility of heart where feminine beauty was concerned--a susceptibility that might require all the ballast of brain with which he had previously been credited to confine within reasonable channels.

His manner was rather elegant than good: his speech well-finished and unconstrained.

The pause in their discourse, which had been caused by the peal of thunder was unbroken by either for a minute or two, during which the ears of both seemed to be absently following the low roar of the waterfall as it became gradually rivalled by the increasing rush of rain upon the trees and herbage of the grove. After her short looks at him,

Cytherea had turned her head towards the avenue for a while, and now, glancing back again for an instant, she discovered that his eyes were engaged in a steady, though delicate, regard of her face and form.

At this moment, by reason of the narrowness of the porch, their dresses touched, and remained in contact.

His clothes are something exterior to every man; but to a woman her dress is part of her body. Its motions are all present to her intelligence if not to her eyes; no man knows how his coat-tails swing. By the slightest hyperbole it may be said that her dress has sensation. Crease but the very Ultima Thule of fringe or flounce, and it hurts her as much as pinching her. Delicate antennae, or feelers, bristle on every outlying frill. Go to the uppermost: she is there; tread on the lowest: the fair creature is there almost before you.

Thus the touch of clothes, which was nothing to Manston, sent a thrill through Cytherea, seeing, moreover, that he was of the nature of a mysterious stranger. She looked out again at the storm, but still felt him. At last to escape the sensation she moved away, though by so doing it was necessary to advance a little into the rain.

'Look, the rain is coming into the porch upon you,' he said. 'Step inside the door.'

Cytherea hesitated.

'Perfectly safe, I assure you,' he added, laughing, and holding the door open. 'You shall see what a state of disorganization I am in--boxes on boxes, furniture, straw, crockery, in every form of transposition. An old woman is in the back quarters somewhere, beginning to put things to rights.... You know the inside of the house, I dare say?'

'I have never been in.'

'O well, come along. Here, you see, they have made a door through, here, they have put a partition dividing the old hall into two, one part is now my parlour; there they have put a plaster ceiling, hiding the old chestnut-carved roof because it was too high and would have been chilly for me; you see, being the original hall, it was open right up to the top, and here the lord of the manor and his retainers used to meet and be merry by the light from the monstrous fire which shone out from that monstrous fire-place, now narrowed to a mere nothing for my grate, though you can see the old outline still. I almost wish I could have had it in its original state.'

'With more romance and less comfort.'

'Yes, exactly. Well, perhaps the wish is not deep-seated. You will see how the things are tumbled in anyhow, packing-cases and all. The only piece of ornamental furniture yet unpacked is this one.'

'An organ?'

'Yes, an organ. I made it myself, except the pipes. I opened the case this afternoon to commence soothing myself at once. It is not a very large one, but quite big enough for a private house. You play, I dare say?'

'The piano. I am not at all used to an organ.'

'You would soon acquire the touch for an organ, though it would spoil your touch for the piano. Not that that matters a great deal. A piano isn't much as an instrument.'

'It is the fashion to say so now. I think it is quite good enough.'

'That isn't altogether a right sentiment about things being good enough.'

'No--no. What I mean is, that the men who despise pianos do it as a rule from their teeth, merely for fashion's sake, because cleverer men have said it before them--not from the experience of their ears.'

Now Cytherea all at once broke into a blush at the consciousness of a great snub she had been guilty of in her eagerness to explain herself. He charitably expressed by a look that he did not in the least mind her blunder, if it were one; and this attitude forced him into a position of

mental superiority which vexed her.

'I play for my private amusement only,' he said. 'I have never learned scientifically. All I know is what I taught myself.'

The thunder, lightning, and rain had now increased to a terrific force. The clouds, from which darts, forks, zigzags, and balls of fire continually sprang, did not appear to be more than a hundred yards above their heads, and every now and then a flash and a peal made gaps in the steward's descriptions. He went towards the organ, in the midst of a volley which seemed to shake the aged house from foundations to chimney.

'You are not going to play now, are you?' said Cytherea uneasily.

'O yes. Why not now?' he said. 'You can't go home, and therefore we may as well be amused, if you don't mind sitting on this box. The few chairs I have unpacked are in the other room.'

Without waiting to see whether she sat down or not, he turned to the organ and began extemporizing a harmony which meandered through every variety of expression of which the instrument was capable. Presently he ceased and began searching for some music-book.

'What a splendid flash!' he said, as the lightning again shone in through the mullioned window, which, of a proportion to suit the whole extent of the original hall, was much too large for the present room.

The thunder pealed again. Cytherea, in spite of herself, was frightened, not only at the weather, but at the general unearthly weirdness which seemed to surround her there.

'I wish I--the lightning wasn't so bright. Do you think it will last long?' she said timidly.

'It can't last much longer,' he murmured, without turning, running his fingers again over the keys. 'But this is nothing,' he continued, suddenly stopping and regarding her. 'It seems brighter because of the deep shadow under those trees yonder. Don't mind it; now look at me--look in my face--now.'

He had faced the window, looking fixedly at the sky with his dark strong eyes. She seemed compelled to do as she was bidden, and looked in the too-delicately beautiful face.

The flash came; but he did not turn or blink, keeping his eyes fixed as firmly as before. 'There,' he said, turning to her, 'that's the way to look at lightning.'

'O, it might have blinded you!' she exclaimed.

'Nonsense--not lightning of this sort--I shouldn't have stared at it if there had been danger. It is only sheet-lightning now. Now, will you have another piece? Something from an oratorio this time?'

'No, thank you--I don't want to hear it whilst it thunders so.' But he had begun without heeding her answer, and she stood motionless again, marvelling at the wonderful indifference to all external circumstance which was now evinced by his complete absorption in the music before him.

'Why do you play such saddening chords?' she said, when he next paused.

'H'm--because I like them, I suppose,' said he lightly. 'Don't you like sad impressions sometimes?'

'Yes, sometimes, perhaps.'

'When you are full of trouble.'

'Yes.'

'Well, why shouldn't I when I am full of trouble?'

'Are you troubled?'

'I am troubled.' He said this thoughtfully and abruptly--so abruptly that she did not push the dialogue further.

He now played more powerfully. Cytherea had never heard music in the

completeness of full orchestral power, and the tones of the organ, which reverberated with considerable effect in the comparatively small space of the room, heightened by the elemental strife of light and sound outside, moved her to a degree out of proportion to the actual power of the mere notes, practised as was the hand that produced them. The varying strains--now loud, now soft; simple, complicated, weird, touching, grand, boisterous, subdued; each phase distinct, yet modulating into the next with a graceful and easy flow--shook and bent her to themselves, as a gushing brook shakes and bends a shadow cast across its surface. The power of the music did not show itself so much by attracting her attention to the subject of the piece, as by taking up and developing as its libretto the poem of her own life and soul, shifting her deeds and intentions from the hands of her judgment and holding them in its own.

She was swayed into emotional opinions concerning the strange man before her; new impulses of thought came with new harmonies, and entered into her with a gnawing thrill. A dreadful flash of lightning then, and the thunder close upon it. She found herself involuntarily shrinking up beside him, and looking with parted lips at his face.

He turned his eyes and saw her emotion, which greatly increased the ideal element in her expressive face. She was in the state in which woman's instinct to conceal has lost its power over her impulse to tell; and he saw it. Bending his handsome face over her till his lips almost touched her ear, he murmured, without breaking the harmonies--

'Do you very much like this piece?'

'Very much indeed,' she said.

'I could see you were affected by it. I will copy it for you.'

'Thank you much.'

'I will bring it to the House to you to-morrow. Who shall I ask for?'

'O, not for me. Don't bring it,' she said hastily. 'I shouldn't like you to.'

'Let me see--to-morrow evening at seven or a few minutes past I shall be passing the waterfall on my way home. I could conveniently give it you there, and I should like you to have it.'

He modulated into the Pastoral Symphony, still looking in her eyes.

'Very well,' she said, to get rid of the look.

The storm had by this time considerably decreased in violence, and in seven or ten minutes the sky partially cleared, the clouds around the western horizon becoming lighted up with the rays of the sinking sun.

Cytherea drew a long breath of relief, and prepared to go away. She was full of a distressing sense that her detention in the old manor-house, and the acquaintanceship it had set on foot, was not a thing she wished. It was such a foolish thing to have been excited and dragged into frankness by the wiles of a stranger.

'Allow me to come with you,' he said, accompanying her to the door, and again showing by his behaviour how much he was impressed with her. His influence over her had vanished with the musical chords, and she turned her back upon him. 'May I come?' he repeated.

'No, no. The distance is not a quarter of a mile--it is really not necessary, thank you,' she said quietly. And wishing him good-evening, without meeting his eyes, she went down the steps, leaving him standing at the door.

'O, how is it that man has so fascinated me?' was all she could think. Her own self, as she had sat spell-bound before him, was all she could see. Her gait was constrained, from the knowledge that his eyes were upon her until she had passed the hollow by the waterfall, and by ascending the rise had become hidden from his view by the boughs of the overhanging trees.

5. SIX TO SEVEN P.M.

The wet shining road threw the western glare into her eyes with an

invidious lustre which rendered the restlessness of her mood more wearying. Her thoughts flew from idea to idea without asking for the slightest link of connection between one and another. One moment she was full of the wild music and stirring scene with Manston---the next, Edward's image rose before her like a shadowy ghost. Then Manston's black eyes seemed piercing her again, and the reckless voluptuous mouth appeared bending to the curves of his special words. What could be those troubles to which he had alluded? Perhaps Miss Aldclyffe was at the bottom of them. Sad at heart she paced on: her life was bewildering her.

On coming into Miss Aldclyffe's presence Cytherea told her of the incident, not without a fear that she would burst into one of her ungovernable fits of temper at learning Cytherea's slight departure from the programme. But, strangely to Cytherea, Miss Aldclyffe looked delighted. The usual cross-examination followed.

'And so you were with him all that time?' said the lady, with assumed severity.

'Yes, I was.'

'I did not tell you to call at the Old House twice.'

'I didn't call, as I have said. He made me come into the porch.'

'What remarks did he make, do you say?'

'That the lightning was not so bad as I thought.'

'A very important remark, that. Did he--' she turned her glance full upon the girl, and eyeing her searchingly, said--

'Did he say anything about me?'

'Nothing,' said Cytherea, returning her gaze calmly, 'except that I was to give you the subscription.'

'You are quite sure?'

'Quite.'

'I believe you. Did he say anything striking or strange about himself?'

'Only one thing--that he was troubled,'

'Troubled!'

After saying the word, Miss Aldclyffe relapsed into silence. Such behaviour as this had ended, on most previous occasions, by her making a confession, and Cytherea expected one now. But for once she was mistaken, nothing more was said.

When she had returned to her room she sat down and penned a farewell letter to Edward Springrove, as little able as any other excitable and brimming young woman of nineteen to feel that the wisest and only dignified course at that juncture was to do nothing at all. She told him that, to her painful surprise, she had learnt that his engagement to another woman was a matter of notoriety. She insisted that all honour bade him marry his early love--a woman far better than her unworthy self, who only deserved to be forgotten, and begged him to remember that he was not to see her face again. She upbraided him for levity and cruelty in meeting her so frequently at Budmouth, and above all in stealing the kiss from her lips on the last evening of the water excursions. 'I never, never can forget it!' she said, and then felt a sensation of having done her duty, ostensibly persuading herself that her reproaches and commands were of such a force that no man to whom they were uttered could ever approach her more.

Yet it was all unconsciously said in words which betrayed a lingering tenderness of love at every unguarded turn. Like Beatrice accusing Dante from the chariot, try as she might to play the superior being who contemned such mere eye-sensuousness, she betrayed at every point a pretty woman's jealousy of a rival, and covertly gave her old lover hints for excusing himself at each fresh indictment.

This done, Cytherea, still in a practical mood, upbraided herself with weakness in allowing a stranger like Mr. Manston to influence her as he had done that evening. What right on earth had he to suggest so suddenly

that she might meet him at the waterfall to receive his music? She would have given much to be able to annihilate the ascendency he had obtained over her during that extraordinary interval of melodious sound. Not being able to endure the notion of his living a minute longer in the belief he was then holding, she took her pen and wrote to him also:--

'KNAPWATER HOUSE

September 20th.

'I find I cannot meet you at seven o'clock by the waterfall as I promised. The emotion I felt made me forgetful of realities.

'C. GRAYE.'

A great statesman thinks several times, and acts; a young lady acts, and thinks several times. When, a few minutes later, she saw the postman carry off the bag containing one of the letters, and a messenger with the other, she, for the first time, asked herself the question whether she had acted very wisely in writing to either of the two men who had so influenced her.