and covering her face with her hands.

In the silence that followed the two short remarks, Springrove watched the cart round the corner, and heard the rattle of its wheels gradually dying away as it rolled in the direction of the county-town.

XXI. THE EVENTS OF EIGHTEEN HOURS

1. MARCH THE TWENTY-NINTH. NOON

Exactly seven days after Edward Springrove had seen the man with the bundle of straw walking down the streets of Casterbridge, old Farmer Springrove was standing on the edge of the same pavement, talking to his friend, Farmer Baker.

There was a pause in their discourse. Mr. Springrove was looking down the street at some object which had attracted his attention. 'Ah, 'tis what we shall all come to!' he murmured.

The other looked in the same direction. 'True, neighbour Springrove; true.'

Two men, advancing one behind the other in the middle of the road, were

what the farmers referred to. They were carpenters, and bore on their shoulders an empty coffin, covered by a thin black cloth.

'I always feel a satisfaction at being breasted by such a sight as that,' said Springrove, still regarding the men's sad burden. 'I call it a sort of medicine.'

'And it is medicine.... I have not heard of any body being ill up this way lately? D'seem as if the person died suddenly.'

'May be so. Ah, Baker, we say sudden death, don't we? But there's no difference in their nature between sudden death and death of any other sort. There's no such thing as a random snapping off of what was laid down to last longer. We only suddenly light upon an end--thoughtfully formed as any other--which has been existing at that very same point from the beginning, though unseen by us to be so soon.'

'It is just a discovery to your own mind, and not an alteration in the Lord's.'

'That's it. Unexpected is not as to the thing, but as to our sight.'

'Now you'll hardly believe me, neighbour, but this little scene in front of us makes me feel less anxious about pushing on wi' that threshing and winnowing next week, that I was speaking about. Why should we not stand still, says I to myself, and fling a quiet eye upon the Whys and

the Wherefores, before the end o' it all, and we go down into the mouldering-place, and are forgotten?'

''Tis a feeling that will come. But 'twont bear looking into. There's a back'ard current in the world, and we must do our utmost to advance in order just to bide where we be. But, Baker, they are turning in here with the coffin, look.'

The two carpenters had borne their load into a narrow way close at hand. The farmers, in common with others, turned and watched them along the way.

''Tis a man's coffin, and a tall man's, too,' continued Farmer Springrove. 'His was a fine frame, whoever he was.'

'A very plain box for the poor soul--just the rough elm, you see.' The corner of the cloth had blown aside.

'Yes, for a very poor man. Well, death's all the less insult to him. I have often thought how much smaller the richer class are made to look than the poor at last pinches like this. Perhaps the greatest of all the reconcilers of a thoughtful man to poverty--and I speak from experience--is the grand quiet it fills him with when the uncertainty of his life shows itself more than usual.'

As Springrove finished speaking, the bearers of the coffin went across

a gravelled square facing the two men and approached a grim and heavy archway. They paused beneath it, rang a bell, and waited.

Over the archway was written in Egyptian capitals,

'COUNTY GAOL.'

The small rectangular wicket, which was constructed in one of the two iron-studded doors, was opened from the inside. The men severally stepped over the threshold, the coffin dragged its melancholy length through the aperture, and both entered the court, and were covered from sight.

'Somebody in the gaol, then?'

'Yes, one of the prisoners,' said a boy, scudding by at the moment, who passed on whistling.

'Do you know the name of the man who is dead?' inquired Baker of a third bystander.

'Yes, 'tis all over town--surely you know, Mr. Springrove? Why, Manston, Miss Aldclyffe's steward. He was found dead the first thing this morning. He had hung himself behind the door of his cell, in some way, by a handkerchief and some strips of his clothes. The turnkey says his features were scarcely changed, as he looked at 'em with the early sun

a-shining in at the grating upon him. He has left a full account of the murder, and all that led to it. So there's an end of him.'

It was perfectly true: Manston was dead.

The previous day he had been allowed the use of writing-materials, and had occupied himself for nearly seven hours in preparing the following confession:--

'LAST WORDS.

'Having found man's life to be a wretchedly conceived scheme, I renounce it, and, to cause no further trouble, I write down the facts connected with my past proceedings.

'After thanking God, on first entering my house, on the night of the fire at Carriford, for my release from bondage to a woman I detested, I went, a second time, to the scene of the disaster, and, finding that nothing could be done by remaining there, shortly afterwards I returned home again in the company of Mr. Raunham.

'He parted from me at the steps of my porch, and went back towards the rectory. Whilst I still stood at the door, musing on my strange deliverance, I saw a figure advance from beneath the shadow of the park

trees. It was the figure of a woman.

'When she came near, the twilight was sufficient to show me her attire: it was a cloak reaching to the bottom of her dress, and a thick veil covering her face. These features, together with her size and gait, aided also by a flash of perception as to the chain of events which had saved her life, told me that she was my wife Eunice.

'I gnashed my teeth in a frenzy of despair; I had lost Cytherea; I had gained one whose beauty had departed, whose utterance was complaint, whose mind was shallow, and who drank brandy every day. The revulsion of feeling was terrible. Providence, whom I had just thanked, seemed a mocking tormentor laughing at me. I felt like a madman.

'She came close--started at seeing me outside--then spoke to me. Her first words were reproof for what I had unintentionally done, and sounded as an earnest of what I was to be cursed with as long as we both lived. I answered angrily; this tone of mine changed her complaints to irritation. She taunted me with a secret she had discovered, which concerned Miss Aldclyffe and myself. I was surprised to learn it--more surprised that she knew it, but concealed my feeling.

'"How could you serve me so?" she said, her breath smelling of spirits even then. "You love another woman--yes, you do. See how you drive me about! I have been to the station, intending to leave you for ever, and yet I come to try you once more."

'An indescribable exasperation had sprung up in me as she talked--rage and regret were all in all. Scarcely knowing what I did, I furiously raised my hand and swung it round with my whole force to strike her. She turned quickly--and it was the poor creature's end. By her movement my hand came edgewise exactly in the nape of the neck--as men strike a hare to kill it. The effect staggered me with amazement. The blow must have disturbed the vertebrae; she fell at my feet, made a few movements, and uttered one low sound.

'I ran indoors for water and some wine, I came out and lanced her arm with my penknife. But she lay still, and I found that she was dead.

'It was a long time before I could realize my horrible position. For several minutes I had no idea of attempting to escape the consequences of my deed. Then a light broke upon me. Had anybody seen her since she left the Three Tranters? Had they not, she was already believed by the parishioners to be dust and ashes. I should never be found out.

'Upon this I acted.

'The first question was how to dispose of the body. The impulse of the moment was to bury her at once in the pit between the engine-house and waterfall; but it struck me that I should not have time. It was now four o'clock, and the working-men would soon be stirring about the place. I would put off burying her till the next night. I carried her indoors.

'In turning the outhouse into a workshop, earlier in the season, I found, when driving a nail into the wall for fixing a cupboard, that the wall sounded hollow. I examined it, and discovered behind the plaster an old oven which had long been disused, and was bricked up when the house was prepared for me.

'To unfix this cupboard and pull out the bricks was the work of a few minutes. Then, bearing in mind that I should have to remove the body again the next night, I placed it in a sack, pushed it into the oven, packed in the bricks, and replaced the cupboard.

'I then went to bed. In bed, I thought whether there were any very remote possibilities that might lead to the supposition that my wife was not consumed by the flames of the burning house. The thing which struck me most forcibly was this, that the searchers might think it odd that no remains whatever should be found.

'The clinching and triumphant deed would be to take the body and place it among the ruins of the destroyed house. But I could not do this, on account of the men who were watching against an outbreak of the fire. One remedy remained.

'I arose again, dressed myself, and went down to the outhouse. I must take down the cupboard again. I did take it down. I pulled out the bricks, pulled out the sack, pulled out the corpse, and took her keys

from her pocket and the watch from her side.

'I then replaced everything as before.

'With these articles in my pocket I went out of the yard, and took my way through the withy copse to the churchyard, entering it from the back. Here I felt my way carefully along till I came to the nook where pieces of bones from newly-dug graves are sometimes piled behind the laurel-bushes. I had been earnestly hoping to find a skull among these old bones; but though I had frequently seen one or two in the rubbish here, there was not one now. I then groped in the other corner with the same result--nowhere could I find a skull. Three or four fragments of leg and back-bones were all I could collect, and with these I was forced to be content.

'Taking them in my hand, I crossed the road, and got round behind the inn, where the couch heap was still smouldering. Keeping behind the hedge, I could see the heads of the three or four men who watched the spot.

'Standing in this place I took the bones, and threw them one by one over the hedge and over the men's heads into the smoking embers. When the bones had all been thrown, I threw the keys; last of all I threw the watch.

'I then returned home as I had gone, and went to bed once more, just as

the dawn began to break. I exulted--"Cytherea is mine again!"

'At breakfast-time I thought, "Suppose the cupboard should by some unlikely chance get moved to-day!"

'I went to the mason's yard hard by, while the men were at breakfast, and brought away a shovelful of mortar. I took it into the outhouse, again shifted the cupboard, and plastered over the mouth of the oven behind. Simply pushing the cupboard back into its place, I waited for the next night that I might bury the body, though upon the whole it was in a tolerably safe hiding-place.

'When the night came, my nerves were in some way weaker than they had been on the previous night. I felt reluctant to touch the body. I went to the outhouse, but instead of opening the oven, I firmly drove in the shoulder-nails that held the cupboard to the wall. "I will bury her to-morrow night, however," I thought.

'But the next night I was still more reluctant to touch her. And my reluctance increased, and there the body remained. The oven was, after all, never likely to be opened in my time.

'I married Cytherea Graye, and never did a bridegroom leave the church with a heart more full of love and happiness, and a brain more fixed on good intentions, than I did on that morning.

'When Cytherea's brother made his appearance at the hotel in Southampton, bearing his strange evidence of the porter's disclosure, I was staggered beyond expression. I thought they had found the body. "Am I to be apprehended and to lose her even now?" I mourned. I saw my error, and instantly saw, too, that I must act externally like an honourable man. So at his request I yielded her up to him, and meditated on several schemes for enabling me to claim the woman I had a legal right to claim as my wife, without disclosing the reason why I knew myself to have it.

'I went home to Knapwater the next day, and for nearly a week lived in a state of indecision. I could not hit upon a scheme for proving my wife dead without compromising myself.

'Mr. Raunham hinted that I should take steps to discover her whereabouts by advertising. I had no energy for the farce. But one evening I chanced to enter the Rising Sun Inn. Two notorious poachers were sitting in the settle, which screened my entrance. They were half drunk--their conversation was carried on in the solemn and emphatic tone common to that stage of intoxication, and I myself was the subject of it.

'The following was the substance of their disjointed remarks: On the night of the great fire at Carriford, one of them was sent to meet me, and break the news of the death of my wife to me. This he did; but because I would not pay him for his news, he left me in a mood of vindictiveness. When the fire was over, he joined his comrade. The

favourable hour of the night suggested to them the possibility of some unlawful gain before daylight came. My fowlhouse stood in a tempting position, and still resenting his repulse during the evening, one of them proposed to operate upon my birds. I was believed to have gone to the rectory with Mr. Raunham. The other was disinclined to go, and the first went off alone.

'It was now about three o'clock. He had advanced as far as the shrubbery, which grows near the north wall of the house, when he fancied he heard, above the rush of the waterfall, noises on the other side of the building. He described them in these words, "Ghostly mouths talking--then a fall--then a groan--then the rush of the water and creak of the engine as before." Only one explanation occurred to him; the house was haunted. And, whether those of the living or the dead, voices of any kind were inimical to one who had come on such an errand. He stealthily crept home.

'His unlawful purpose in being behind the house led him to conceal his adventure. No suspicion of the truth entered his mind till the railway-porter had startled everybody by his strange announcement. Then he asked himself, had the horrifying sounds of that night been really an enactment in the flesh between me and my wife?

'The words of the other man were:

'"Why don't he try to find her if she's alive?"

'"True," said the first. "Well, I don't forget what I heard, and if she don't turn up alive my mind will be as sure as a Bible upon her murder, and the parson shall know it, though I do get six months on the treadmill for being where I was."

'"And if she should turn up alive?"

'"Then I shall know that I am wrong, and believing myself a fool as well as a rogue, hold my tongue."

'I glided out of the house in a cold sweat. The only pressure in heaven or earth which could have forced me to renounce Cytherea was now put upon me--the dread of a death upon the gallows.

'I sat all that night weaving strategy of various kinds. The only effectual remedy for my hazardous standing that I could see was a simple one. It was to substitute another woman for my wife before the suspicions of that one easily-hoodwinked man extended further.

'The only difficulty was to find a practicable substitute.

'The one woman at all available for the purpose was a friendless, innocent creature, named Anne Seaway, whom I had known in my youth, and who had for some time been the housekeeper of a lady in London. On account of this lady's sudden death, Anne stood in rather a precarious

position, as regarded her future subsistence. She was not the best kind of woman for the scheme; but there was no alternative. One quality of hers was valuable; she was not a talker. I went to London the very next day, called at the Hoxton lodging of my wife (the only place at which she had been known as Mrs. Manston), and found that no great difficulties stood in the way of a personation. And thus favouring circumstances determined my course. I visited Anne Seaway, made love to her, and propounded my plan.

*   *   *   *   *

'We lived quietly enough until the Sunday before my apprehension. Anne came home from church that morning, and told me of the suspicious way in which a young man had looked at her there. Nothing could be done beyond waiting the issue of events. Then the letter came from Raunham. For the first time in my life I was half indifferent as to what fate awaited me. During the succeeding day I thought once or twice of running away, but could not quite make up my mind. At any rate it would be best to bury the body of my wife, I thought, for the oven might be opened at any time. I went to Casterbridge and made some arrangements. In the evening Miss Aldclyffe (who is united to me by a common secret which I have no right or wish to disclose) came to my house, and alarmed me still more. She said that she could tell by Mr. Raunham's manner that evening, that he kept back from her a suspicion of more importance even than the one he spoke of, and that strangers were in his house even then.

'I guessed what this further suspicion was, and resolved to enlighten her to a certain extent, and so secure her assistance. I said that I killed my wife by an accident on the night of the fire, dwelling upon the advantage to her of the death of the only woman who knew her secret.

'Her terror, and fears for my fate, led her to watch the rectory that evening. She saw the detective leave it, and followed him to my residence. This she told me hurriedly when I perceived her after digging my wife's grave in the plantation. She did not suspect what the sack contained.

'I am now about to enter on my normal condition. For people are almost always in their graves. When we survey the long race of men, it is strange and still more strange to find that they are mainly dead men, who have scarcely ever been otherwise.

'AENEAS MANSTON.'

The steward's confession, aided by circumstantial evidence of various kinds, was the means of freeing both Anne Seaway and Miss Aldclyffe from all suspicion of complicity with the murderer.

2. SIX O'CLOCK P.M.

It was evening--just at sunset--on the day of Manston's death.

In the cottage at Tolchurch was gathered a group consisting of Cytherea, her brother, Edward Springrove, and his father. They sat by the window conversing of the strange events which had just taken place. In Cytherea's eye there beamed a hopeful ray, though her face was as white as a lily.

Whilst they talked, looking out at the yellow evening light that coated the hedges, trees, and church tower, a brougham rolled round the corner of the lane, and came in full view. It reflected the rays of the sun in a flash from its polished panels as it turned the angle, the spokes of the wheels bristling in the same light like bayonets. The vehicle came nearer, and arrived opposite Owen's door, when the driver pulled the rein and gave a shout, and the panting and sweating horses stopped.

'Miss Aldclyffe's carriage!' they all exclaimed.

Owen went out. 'Is Miss Graye at home?' said the man. 'A note for her, and I am to wait for an answer.'

Cytherea read in the handwriting of the Rector of Carriford:--

'DEAR MISS GRAYE,--Miss Aldclyffe is ill, though not dangerously. She continually repeats your name, and now wishes very much to see you. If you possibly can, come in the carriage.--Very sincerely yours, JOHN

RAUNHAM.'

'How comes she ill?' Owen inquired of the coachman.

'She caught a violent cold by standing out of doors in the damp, on the night the steward ran away. Ever since, till this morning, she complained of fulness and heat in the chest. This morning the maid ran in and told her suddenly that Manston had killed himself in gaol--she shrieked--broke a blood-vessel--and fell upon the floor. Severe internal haemorrhage continued for some time and then stopped. They say she is sure to get over it; but she herself says no. She has suffered from it before.'

Cytherea was ready in a few moments, and entered the carriage.

3. SEVEN O'CLOCK P.M.

Soft as was Cytherea's motion along the corridors of Knapwater House, the preternaturally keen intelligence of the suffering woman caught the maiden's well-known footfall. She entered the sick-chamber with suspended breath.

In the room everything was so still, and sensation was as it were so rarefied by solicitude, that thinking seemed acting, and the lady's weak act of trying to live a silent wrestling with all the powers of the

universe. Nobody was present but Mr. Raunham, the nurse having left the room on Cytherea's entry, and the physician and surgeon being engaged in a whispered conversation in a side-chamber. Their patient had been pronounced out of danger.

Cytherea went to the bedside, and was instantly recognized. O, what a change--Miss Aldclyffe dependent upon pillows! And yet not a forbidding change. With weakness had come softness of aspect: the haughtiness was extracted from the frail thin countenance, and a sweeter mild placidity had taken its place.

Miss Aldclyffe signified to Mr. Raunham that she would like to be alone with Cytherea.

'Cytherea?' she faintly whispered the instant the door was closed.

Cytherea clasped the lady's weak hand, and sank beside her.

Miss Aldclyffe whispered again. 'They say I am certain to live; but I know that I am certainly going to die.'

'They know, I think, and hope.'

'I know best, but we'll leave that. Cytherea--O Cytherea, can you forgive me!'

Her companion pressed her hand.

'But you don't know yet--you don't know yet,' the invalid murmured. 'It is forgiveness for that misrepresentation to Edward Springrove that I implore, and for putting such force upon him--that which caused all the train of your innumerable ills!'

'I know all--all. And I do forgive you. Not in a hasty impulse that is revoked when coolness comes, but deliberately and sincerely: as I myself hope to be forgiven, I accord you my forgiveness now.'

Tears streamed from Miss Aldclyffe's eyes, and mingled with those of her young companion, who could not restrain hers for sympathy. Expressions of strong attachment, interrupted by emotion, burst again and again from the broken-spirited woman.

'But you don't know my motive. O, if you only knew it, how you would pity me then!'

Cytherea did not break the pause which ensued, and the elder woman appeared now to nerve herself by a superhuman effort. She spoke on in a voice weak as a summer breeze, and full of intermission, and yet there pervaded it a steadiness of intention that seemed to demand firm tones to bear it out worthily.

'Cytherea,' she said, 'listen to me before I die.

'A long time ago--more than thirty years ago--a young girl of seventeen was cruelly betrayed by her cousin, a wild officer of six-and-twenty. He went to India, and died.

'One night when that miserable girl had just arrived home with her parents from Germany, where her baby had been born, she took all the money she possessed, pinned it on her infant's bosom, together with a letter, stating, among other things, what she wished the child's Christian name to be; wrapped up the little thing, and walked with it to Clapham. Here, in a retired street, she selected a house. She placed the child on the doorstep and knocked at the door, then ran away and watched. They took it up and carried it indoors.

'Now that her poor baby was gone, the girl blamed herself bitterly for cruelty towards it, and wished she had adopted her parents' counsel to secretly hire a nurse. She longed to see it. She didn't know what to do. She wrote in an assumed name to the woman who had taken it in, and asked
her to meet the writer with the infant at certain places she named. These were hotels or coffee-houses in Chelsea, Pimlico, or Hammersmith. The woman, being well paid, always came, and asked no questions. At one meeting--at an inn in Hammersmith--she made her appearance without the child, and told the girl it was so ill that it would not live through the night. The news, and fatigue, brought on a fainting-fit....'

Miss Aldclyffe's sobs choked her utterance, and she became painfully agitated. Cytherea, pale and amazed at what she heard, wept for her, bent over her, and begged her not to go on speaking.

'Yes--I must,' she cried, between her sobs. 'I will--I must go on! And I must tell yet more plainly!... you must hear it before I am gone, Cytherea.' The sympathizing and astonished girl sat down again.

'The name of the woman who had taken the child was Manston. She was the widow of a schoolmaster. She said she had adopted the child of a relation.

'Only one man ever found out who the mother was. He was the keeper of the inn in which she fainted, and his silence she has purchased ever since.

'A twelvemonth passed--fifteen months--and the saddened girl met a man at her father's house named Graye--your father, Cytherea, then unmarried. Ah, such a man! Inexperience now perceived what it was to be loved in spirit and in truth! But it was too late. Had he known her secret he would have cast her out. She withdrew from him by an effort, and pined.

'Years and years afterwards, when she became mistress of a fortune and estates by her father's death, she formed the weak scheme of having near her the son whom, in her father's life-time, she had been forbidden to

recognize. Cytherea, you know who that weak woman is.

*   *   *   *   *

'By such toilsome labour as this I got him here as my steward. And I wanted to see him your husband, Cytherea!--the husband of my true lover's child. It was a sweet dream to me.... Pity me--O, pity me! To die unloved is more than I can bear! I loved your father, and I love him now.'

That was the burden of Cytherea Aldclyffe.

'I suppose you must leave me again--you always leave me,' she said, after holding the young woman's hand a long while in silence.

'No--indeed I'll stay always. Do you like me to stay?'

Miss Aldclyffe in the jaws of death was Miss Aldclyffe still, though the old fire had degenerated to mere phosphorescence now. 'But you are your brother's housekeeper?'

'Yes.'

'Well, of course you cannot stay with me on a sudden like this.... Go home, or he will be at a loss for things. And to-morrow morning come

again, won't you, dearest, come again--we'll fetch you. But you mustn't stay now, and put Owen out. O no--it would be absurd.' The absorbing concern about trifles of daily routine, which is so often seen in very sick people, was present here.

Cytherea promised to go home, and come the next morning to stay continuously.

'Stay till I die then, will you not? Yes, till I die--I shan't die till to-morrow.'

'We hope for your recovery--all of us.'

'I know best. Come at six o'clock, darling.'

'As soon as ever I can,' returned Cytherea tenderly.

'But six is too early--you will have to think of your brother's breakfast. Leave Tolchurch at eight, will you?'

Cytherea consented to this. Miss Aldclyffe would never have known had her companion stayed in the house all night; but the honesty of Cytherea's nature rebelled against even the friendly deceit which such a proceeding would have involved.

An arrangement was come to whereby she was to be taken home in the

pony-carriage instead of the brougham that fetched her; the carriage to put up at Tolchurch farm for the night, and on that account to be in readiness to bring her back earlier.

4. MARCH THE THIRTIETH. DAYBREAK

The third and last instance of Cytherea's subjection to those periodic terrors of the night which had emphasized her connection with the Aldclyffe name and blood occurred at the present date.

It was about four o'clock in the morning when Cytherea, though most probably dreaming, seemed to awake--and instantly was transfixed by a sort of spell, that had in it more of awe than of affright. At the foot of her bed, looking her in the face with an expression of entreaty beyond the power of words to portray, was the form of Miss Aldclyffe--wan and distinct. No motion was perceptible in her; but longing--earnest longing--was written in every feature.

Cytherea believed she exercised her waking judgment as usual in thinking, without a shadow of doubt, that Miss Aldclyffe stood before her in flesh and blood. Reason was not sufficiently alert to lead Cytherea to ask herself how such a thing could have occurred.

'I would have remained with you--why would you not allow me to stay!' Cytherea exclaimed. The spell was broken: she became broadly awake; and the figure vanished.

It was in the grey time of dawn. She trembled in a sweat of disquiet, and not being able to endure the thought of her brother being asleep, she went and tapped at his door.

'Owen!'

He was not a heavy sleeper, and it was verging upon his time to rise.

'What do you want, Cytherea?'

'I ought not to have left Knapwater last night. I wish I had not. I really think I will start at once. She wants me, I know.'

'What time is it?'

'A few minutes past four.'

'You had better not. Keep to the time agreed upon. Consider, we should have such a trouble in rousing the driver, and other things.'

Upon the whole it seemed wiser not to act on a mere fancy. She went to bed again.

An hour later, when Owen was thinking of getting up, a knocking came to the front door. The next minute something touched the glass of Owen's

window. He waited--the noise was repeated. A little gravel had been thrown against it to arouse him.

He crossed the room, pulled up the blind, and looked out. A solemn white face was gazing upwards from the road, expectantly straining to catch the first glimpse of a person within the panes. It was the face of a Knapwater man sitting on horseback.

Owen saw his errand. There is an unmistakable look in the face of every man who brings tidings of death. Graye opened the window.

'Miss Aldclyffe....' said the messenger, and paused.

'Ah--dead?'

'Yes--she is dead.'

'When did she die?'

'At ten minutes past four, after another effusion. She knew best, you see, sir. I started directly, by the rector's orders.'

SEQUEL

Fifteen months have passed, and we are brought on to Midsummer Night, 1867.

The picture presented is the interior of the old belfry of Carriford Church, at ten o'clock in the evening.

Six Carriford men and one stranger are gathered there, beneath the light of a flaring candle stuck on a piece of wood against the wall. The six Carriford men are the well-known ringers of the fine-toned old bells in the key of F, which have been music to the ears of Carriford parish and the outlying districts for the last four hundred years. The stranger is an assistant, who has appeared from nobody knows where.

The six natives--in their shirt-sleeves, and without hats--pull and catch frantically at the dancing bellropes, the locks of their hair waving in the breeze created by their quick motions; the stranger, who has the treble bell, does likewise, but in his right mind and coat. Their ever-changing shadows mingle on the wall in an endless variety of kaleidoscopic forms, and the eyes of all the seven are religiously fixed on a diagram like a large addition sum, which is chalked on the floor.

Vividly contrasting with the yellow light of the candle upon the four unplastered walls of the tower, and upon the faces and clothes of the men, is the scene discernible through the screen beneath the tower archway. At the extremity of the long mysterious avenue of the nave and

chancel can be seen shafts of moonlight streaming in at the east window of the church--blue, phosphoric, and ghostly.

A thorough renovation of the bell-ringing machinery and accessories had taken place in anticipation of an interesting event. New ropes had been provided; every bell had been carefully shifted from its carriage, and the pivots lubricated. Bright red 'sallies' of woollen texture--soft to the hands and easily caught--glowed on the ropes in place of the old ragged knots, all of which newness in small details only rendered more evident the irrepressible aspect of age in the mass surrounding them.

The triple-bob-major was ended, and the ringers wiped their faces and rolled down their shirt-sleeves, previously to tucking away the ropes and leaving the place for the night.

'Piph--h--h--h! A good forty minutes,' said a man with a streaming face, and blowing out his breath--one of the pair who had taken the tenor bell.

'Our friend here pulled proper well--that 'a did--seeing he's but a stranger,' said Clerk Crickett, who had just resigned the second rope, and addressing the man in the black coat.

''A did,' said the rest.

'I enjoyed it much,' said the man modestly.

'What we should ha' done without you words can't tell. The man that d'belong by rights to that there bell is ill o' two gallons o' wold cider.'

'And now so's,' remarked the fifth ringer, as pertaining to the last allusion, 'we'll finish this drop o' metheglin and cider, and every man home--along straight as a line.'

'Wi' all my heart,' Clerk Crickett replied. 'And the Lord send if I ha'n't done my duty by Master Teddy Springrove--that I have so.'

'And the rest o' us,' they said, as the cup was handed round.

'Ay, ay--in ringen--but I was spaken in a spiritual sense o' this mornen's business o' mine up by the chancel rails there. 'Twas very convenient to lug her here and marry her instead o' doen it at that twopenny-halfpenny town o' Budm'th. Very convenient.'

'Very. There was a little fee for Master Crickett.'

'Ah--well. Money's money--very much so--very--I always have said it. But 'twas a pretty sight for the nation. He coloured up like any maid, that 'a did.'

'Well enough 'a mid colour up. 'Tis no small matter for a man to play

wi' fire.'

'Whatever it may be to a woman,' said the clerk absently.

'Thou'rt thinken o' thy wife, clerk,' said Gad Weedy. 'She'll play wi'it again when thou'st got mildewed.'

'Well--let her, God bless her; for I'm but a poor third man, I. The Lord have mercy upon the fourth!... Ay, Teddy's got his own at last. What little white ears that maid hev, to be sure! choose your wife as you choose your pig--a small ear and a small tale--that was always my joke when I was a merry feller, ah--years agone now! But Teddy's got her. Poor chap, he was getten as thin as a hermit wi' grief--so was she.'

'Maybe she'll pick up now.'

'True--'tis nater's law, which no man shall gainsay. Ah, well do I bear in mind what I said to Pa'son Raunham, about thy mother's family o' seven, Gad, the very first week of his comen here, when I was just in my prime. "And how many daughters has that poor Weedy got, clerk?" he says. "Six, sir," says I, "and every one of 'em has a brother!" "Poor woman," says he, "a dozen children!--give her this half-sovereign from me, clerk." 'A laughed a good five minutes afterwards, when he found out my merry nater--'a did. But there, 'tis over wi' me now. Enteren the Church is the ruin of a man's wit for wit's nothen without a faint shadder o' sin.'

'If so be Teddy and the lady had been kept apart for life, they'd both ha' died,' said Gad emphatically.

'But now instead o' death there'll be increase o' life,' answered the clerk.

'It all went proper well,' said the fifth bell-ringer. 'They didn't flee off to Babylonish places--not they.' He struck up an attitude--'Here's Master Springrove standen so: here's the married woman standen likewise; here they d'walk across to Knapwater House; and there they d'bide in the chimley corner, hard and fast.'

'Yes, 'twas a pretty wedden, and well attended,' added the clerk. 'Here was my lady herself--red as scarlet: here was Master Springrove, looken as if he half wished he'd never a-come--ah, poor souls!--the men always do! The women do stand it best--the maid was in her glory. Though she was so shy the glory shone plain through that shy skin. Ah, it did so's.'

'Ay,' said Gad, 'and there was Tim Tankins and his five journeymen carpenters, standen on tiptoe and peepen in at the chancel winders. There was Dairyman Dodman waiten in his new spring-cart to see 'em come out--whip in hand--that 'a was. Then up comes two master tailors. Then there was Christopher Runt wi' his pickaxe and shovel. There was wimmen-folk and there was men-folk traypsen up and down church'ard till

they wore a path wi' traypsen so--letten the squallen children slip down through their arms and nearly skinnen o' em. And these were all over and above the gentry and Sunday-clothes folk inside. Well, I seed Mr. Graye at last dressed up quite the dand. "Well, Mr. Graye," says I from the top o' church'ard wall, "how's yerself?" Mr. Graye never spoke--he'd prided away his hearen. Seize the man, I didn' want en to spak. Teddy hears it, and turns round: "All right, Gad!" says he, and laughed like a boy. There's more in Teddy.'

'Well,' said Clerk Crickett, turning to the man in black, 'now you've been among us so long, and d'know us so well, won't ye tell us what ye've come here for, and what your trade is?'

'I am no trade,' said the thin man, smiling, 'and I came to see the wickedness of the land.'

'I said thou wast one o' the devil's brood wi' thy black clothes,' replied a sturdy ringer, who had not spoken before.

'No, the truth is,' said the thin man, retracting at this horrible translation, 'I came for a walk because it is a fine evening.'

'Now let's be off, neighbours,' the clerk interrupted.

The candle was inverted in the socket, and the whole party stepped out into the churchyard. The moon was shining within a day or two of full,

and just overlooked the three or four vast yews that stood on the south-east side of the church, and rose in unvaried and flat darkness against the illuminated atmosphere behind them.

'Good-night,' the clerk said to his comrades, when the door was locked. 'My nearest way is through the park.'

'I suppose mine is too?' said the stranger. 'I am going to the railway-station.'

'Of course--come on.'

The two men went over a stile to the west, the remainder of the party going into the road on the opposite side.

'And so the romance has ended well,' the clerk's companion remarked, as they brushed along through the grass. 'But what is the truth of the story about the property?'

'Now look here, neighbour,' said Clerk Crickett, 'if so be you'll tell me what your line o' life is, and your purpose in comen here to-day, I'll tell you the truth about the wedden particulars.'

'Very well--I will when you have done,' said the other man.

''Tis a bargain; and this is the right o' the story. When Miss

Aldclyffe's will was opened, it was found to have been drawn up on the very day that Manston (her love-child) married Miss Cytherea Graye. And this is what that deep woman did. Deep? she was as deep as the North Star. She bequeathed all her property, real and personal, to "THE WIFE OF AENEAS MANSTON" (with one exception): failen her life to her husband: failen his life to the heirs of his head--body I would say: failen them to her absolutely and her heirs for ever: failen these to Pa'son Raunham, and so on to the end o' the human race. Now do you see the depth of her scheme? Why, although upon the surface it appeared her whole property was for Miss Cytherea, by the word "wife" being used, and not Cytherea's name, whoever was the wife o' Manston would come in for't. Wasn't that rale depth? It was done, of course, that her son AEneas, under any circumstances, should be master o' the property, without folk knowen it was her son or suspecting anything, as they would if it had been left to en straightway.'

'A clever arrangement! And what was the exception?'

'The payment of a legacy to her relative, Pa'son Raunham.'

'And Miss Cytherea was now Manston's widow and only relative, and inherited all absolutely.'

'True, she did. "Well," says she, "I shan't have it" (she didn't like the notion o' getten anything through Manston, naturally enough, pretty dear). She waived her right in favour o' Mr. Raunham. Now, if there's

a man in the world that d'care nothen about land--I don't say there is, but if there is--'tis our pa'son. He's like a snail. He's a-growed so to the shape o' that there rectory that 'a wouldn' think o' leaven it even in name. "'Tis yours, Miss Graye," says he. "No, 'tis yours," says she. "'Tis'n' mine," says he. The Crown had cast his eyes upon the case, thinken o' forfeiture by felony--but 'twas no such thing, and 'a gied it up, too. Did you ever hear such a tale?--three people, a man and a woman, and a Crown--neither o' em in a madhouse--flingen an estate backwards and forwards like an apple or nut? Well, it ended in this way. Mr. Raunham took it: young Springrove was had as agent and steward, and put to live in Knapwater House, close here at hand--just as if 'twas his own. He does just what he'd like--Mr. Raunham never interferen--and hither to-day he's brought his new wife, Cytherea. And a settlement ha' been drawn up this very day, whereby their children, heirs, and cetrer, be to inherit after Mr. Raunham's death. Good fortune came at last. Her brother, too, is doen well. He came in first man in some architectural competition, and is about to move to London. Here's the house, look. Stap out from these bushes, and you'll get a clear sight o't.'

They emerged from the shrubbery, breaking off towards the lake, and down the south slope. When they arrived exactly opposite the centre of the mansion, they halted.

It was a magnificent picture of the English country-house. The whole of the severe regular front, with its columns and cornices, was built of a white smoothly-faced freestone, which appeared in the rays of the moon

as pure as Pentelic marble. The sole objects in the scene rivalling the fairness of the facade were a dozen swans floating upon the lake.

At this moment the central door at the top of the steps was opened, and two figures advanced into the light. Two contrasting figures were they. A young lithe woman in an airy fairy dress--Cytherea Springrove: a young man in black stereotype raiment--Edward, her husband.

They stood at the top of the steps together, looking at the moon, the water, and the general loveliness of the prospect.

'That's the married man and wife--there, I've illustrated my story by rale liven specimens,' the clerk whispered.

'To be sure, how close together they do stand! You couldn' slip a penny-piece between 'em--that you couldn'! Beautiful to see it, isn't it--beautiful!... But this is a private path, and we won't let 'em see us, as all the ringers be goen there to a supper and dance to-morrow night.'

The speaker and his companion softly moved on, passed through the wicket, and into the coach-road. Arrived at the clerk's house at the further boundary of the park, they paused to part.

'Now for your half o' the bargain,' said Clerk Crickett. 'What's your line o' life, and what d'ye come here for?'

'I'm the reporter to the Casterbridge Chronicle, and I come to pick up the news. Good-night.'

Meanwhile Edward and Cytherea, after lingering on the steps for several minutes, slowly descended the slope to the lake. The skiff was lying alongside.

'O, Edward,' said Cytherea, 'you must do something that has just come into my head!'

'Well, dearest--I know.'

'Yes--give me one half-minute's row on the lake here now, just as you did on Budmouth Bay three years ago.'

He handed her into the boat, and almost noiselessly pulled off from shore. When they were half-way between the two margins of the lake, he paused and looked at her.

'Ah, darling, I remember exactly how I kissed you that first time,' said Springrove. 'You were there as you are now. I unshipped the sculls in this way. Then I turned round and sat beside you--in this way. Then I put my hand on the other side of your little neck--'

'I think it was just on my cheek, in this way.'

'Ah, so it was. Then you moved that soft red mouth round to mine--'

'But, dearest--you pressed it round if you remember; and of course I couldn't then help letting it come to your mouth without being unkind to you, and I wouldn't be that.'

'And then I put my cheek against that cheek, and turned my two lips round upon those two lips, and kissed them--so.'