BOOK THIRD

THE FASCINATION

I

"My Mind to Me a Kingdom Is"

In Clym Yeobright's face could be dimly seen the typical countenance of the future. Should there be a classic period to art hereafter, its Pheidias may produce such faces. The view of life as a thing to be put up with, replacing that zest for existence which was so intense in early civilizations, must ultimately enter so thoroughly into the constitution of the advanced races that its facial expression will become accepted as a new artistic departure. People already feel that a man who lives without disturbing a curve of feature, or setting a mark of mental concern anywhere upon himself, is too far removed from modern perceptiveness to be a modern type. Physically beautiful men--the glory of the race when it was young--are almost an anachronism now; and we may wonder whether, at some time or other, physically beautiful women may not be an anachronism likewise.

The truth seems to be that a long line of disillusive centuries has permanently displaced the Hellenic idea of life, or whatever it may be called. What the Greeks only suspected we know well; what their

Aeschylus imagined our nursery children feel. That old-fashioned revelling in the general situation grows less and less possible as we uncover the defects of natural laws, and see the quandary that man is in by their operation.

The lineaments which will get embodied in ideals based upon this new recognition will probably be akin to those of Yeobright. The observer's eye was arrested, not by his face as a picture, but by his face as a page; not by what it was, but by what it recorded. His features were attractive in the light of symbols, as sounds intrinsically common become attractive in language, and as shapes intrinsically simple become interesting in writing.

He had been a lad of whom something was expected. Beyond this all had been chaos. That he would be successful in an original way, or that he would go to the dogs in an original way, seemed equally probable. The only absolute certainty about him was that he would not stand still in the circumstances amid which he was born.

Hence, when his name was casually mentioned by neighbouring yeomen, the listener said, "Ah, Clym Yeobright: what is he doing now?" When the instinctive question about a person is, What is he doing? it is felt that he will be found to be, like most of us, doing nothing in particular. There is an indefinite sense that he must be invading some region of singularity, good or bad. The devout hope is that he is doing well. The secret faith is that he is making a mess of it.

Half a dozen comfortable marketmen, who were habitual callers at the Quiet Woman as they passed by in their carts, were partial to the topic. In fact, though they were not Egdon men, they could hardly avoid it while they sucked their long clay tubes and regarded the heath through the window. Clym had been so inwoven with the heath in his boyhood that hardly anybody could look upon it without thinking of him. So the subject recurred: if he were making a fortune and a name, so much the better for him; if he were making a tragical figure in the world, so much the better for a narrative.

The fact was that Yeobright's fame had spread to an awkward extent before he left home. "It is bad when your fame outruns your means," said the Spanish Jesuit Gracian. At the age of six he had asked a Scripture riddle: "Who was the first man known to wear breeches?" and applause had resounded from the very verge of the heath. At seven he painted the Battle of Waterloo with tiger-lily pollen and black-currant juice, in the absence of water-colours. By the time he reached twelve he had in this manner been heard of as artist and scholar for at least two miles round. An individual whose fame spreads three or four thousand yards in the time taken by the fame of others similarly situated to travel six or eight hundred, must of necessity have something in him. Possibly Clym's fame, like Homer's, owed something to the accidents of his situation; nevertheless famous he was.

He grew up and was helped out in life. That waggery of fate which

started Clive as a writing clerk, Gay as a linen-draper, Keats as a surgeon, and a thousand others in a thousand other odd ways, banished the wild and ascetic heath lad to a trade whose sole concern was with the especial symbols of self-indulgence and vainglory.

The details of this choice of a business for him it is not necessary to give. At the death of his father a neighbouring gentleman had kindly undertaken to give the boy a start, and this assumed the form of sending him to Budmouth. Yeobright did not wish to go there, but it was the only feasible opening. Thence he went to London; and thence, shortly after, to Paris, where he had remained till now.

Something being expected of him, he had not been at home many days before a great curiosity as to why he stayed on so long began to arise in the heath. The natural term of a holiday had passed, yet he still remained. On the Sunday morning following the week of Thomasin's marriage a discussion on this subject was in progress at a hair-cutting before Fairway's house. Here the local barbering was always done at this hour on this day, to be followed by the great Sunday wash of the inhabitants at noon, which in its turn was followed by the great Sunday dressing an hour later. On Egdon Heath Sunday proper did not begin till dinner-time, and even then it was a somewhat battered specimen of the day.

These Sunday-morning hair-cuttings were performed by Fairway; the victim sitting on a chopping-block in front of the house, without a

coat, and the neighbours gossiping around, idly observing the locks of hair as they rose upon the wind after the snip, and flew away out of sight to the four quarters of the heavens. Summer and winter the scene was the same, unless the wind were more than usually blusterous, when the stool was shifted a few feet round the corner. To complain of cold in sitting out of doors, hatless and coatless, while Fairway told true stories between the cuts of the scissors, would have been to pronounce yourself no man at once. To flinch, exclaim, or move a muscle of the face at the small stabs under the ear received from those instruments, or at scarifications of the neck by the comb, would have been thought a gross breach of good manners, considering that Fairway did it all for nothing. A bleeding about the poll on Sunday afternoons was amply accounted for by the explanation. "I have had my hair cut, you know."

The conversation on Yeobright had been started by a distant view of the young man rambling leisurely across the heath before them.

"A man who is doing well elsewhere wouldn't bide here two or three weeks for nothing," said Fairway. "He's got some project in's head--depend upon that."

"Well, 'a can't keep a diment shop here," said Sam.

"I don't see why he should have had them two heavy boxes home if he had not been going to bide; and what there is for him to do here the

Lord in heaven knows."

Before many more surmises could be indulged in Yeobright had come near; and seeing the hair-cutting group he turned aside to join them. Marching up, and looking critically at their faces for a moment, he said, without introduction, "Now, folks, let me guess what you have been talking about."

"Ay, sure, if you will," said Sam.

"About me."

"Now, it is a thing I shouldn't have dreamed of doing, otherwise," said Fairway in a tone of integrity; "but since you have named it, Master Yeobright, I'll own that we was talking about 'ee. We were wondering what could keep you home here mollyhorning about when you have made such a world-wide name for yourself in the nick-nack trade--now, that's the truth o't."

"I'll tell you," said Yeobright, with unexpected earnestness. "I am not sorry to have the opportunity. I've come home because, all things considered, I can be a trifle less useless here than anywhere else. But I have only lately found this out. When I first got away from home I thought this place was not worth troubling about. I thought our life here was contemptible. To oil your boots instead of blacking them, to dust your coat with a switch instead of a brush: was there

ever anything more ridiculous? I said."

"So 'tis; so 'tis!"

"No, no--you are wrong; it isn't."

"Beg your pardon, we thought that was your maning?"

"Well, as my views changed my course became very depressing. I found that I was trying to be like people who had hardly anything in common with myself. I was endeavouring to put off one sort of life for another sort of life, which was not better than the life I had known before. It was simply different."

"True; a sight different," said Fairway.

"Yes, Paris must be a taking place," said Humphrey. "Grand shop-winders, trumpets, and drums; and here be we out of doors in all winds and weathers--"

"But you mistake me," pleaded Clym. "All this was very depressing. But not so depressing as something I next perceived--that my business was the idlest, vainest, most effeminate business that ever a man could be put to. That decided me: I would give it up and try to follow some rational occupation among the people I knew best, and to whom I could be of most use. I have come home; and this is how I

mean to carry out my plan. I shall keep a school as near to Egdon as possible, so as to be able to walk over here and have a night-school in my mother's house. But I must study a little at first, to get properly qualified. Now, neighbours, I must go."

And Clym resumed his walk across the heath.

"He'll never carry it out in the world," said Fairway. "In a few weeks he'll learn to see things otherwise."

"'Tis good-hearted of the young man," said another. "But, for my part, I think he had better mind his business."

II

The New Course Causes Disappointment

Yeobright loved his kind. He had a conviction that the want of most men was knowledge of a sort which brings wisdom rather than affluence. He wished to raise the class at the expense of individuals rather than individuals at the expense of the class. What was more, he was ready at once to be the first unit sacrificed.

In passing from the bucolic to the intellectual life the intermediate stages are usually two at least, frequently many more; and one of those stages is almost sure to be worldly advance. We can hardly imagine bucolic placidity quickening to intellectual aims without imagining social aims as the transitional phase. Yeobright's local peculiarity was that in striving at high thinking he still cleaved to plain living--nay, wild and meagre living in many respects, and brotherliness with clowns.

He was a John the Baptist who took ennoblement rather than repentance for his text. Mentally he was in a provincial future, that is, he was in many points abreast with the central town thinkers of his date. Much of this development he may have owed to his studious life in Paris, where he had become acquainted with ethical systems popular at the time.

In consequence of this relatively advanced position, Yeobright might have been called unfortunate. The rural world was not ripe for him. A man should be only partially before his time: to be completely to the vanward in aspirations is fatal to fame. Had Philip's warlike son been intellectually so far ahead as to have attempted civilization without bloodshed, he would have been twice the godlike hero that he seemed, but nobody would have heard of an Alexander.

In the interests of renown the forwardness should lie chiefly in the

capacity to handle things. Successful propagandists have succeeded because the doctrine they bring into form is that which their listeners have for some time felt without being able to shape. A man who advocates aesthetic effort and deprecates social effort is only likely to be understood by a class to which social effort has become a stale matter. To argue upon the possibility of culture before luxury to the bucolic world may be to argue truly, but it is an attempt to disturb a sequence to which humanity has been long accustomed. Yeobright preaching to the Egdon eremites that they might rise to a serene comprehensiveness without going through the process of enriching themselves, was not unlike arguing to ancient Chaldeans that in ascending from earth to the pure empyrean it was not necessary to pass first into the intervening heaven of ether.

Was Yeobright's mind well-proportioned? No. A well-proportioned mind is one which shows no particular bias; one of which we may safely say that it will never cause its owner to be confined as a madman, tortured as a heretic, or crucified as a blasphemer. Also, on the other hand, that it will never cause him to be applauded as a prophet, revered as a priest, or exalted as a king. Its usual blessings are happiness and mediocrity. It produces the poetry of Rogers, the paintings of West, the statecraft of North, the spiritual guidance of Tomline; enabling its possessors to find their way to wealth, to wind up well, to step with dignity off the stage, to die comfortably in their beds, and to get the decent monument which, in many cases, they deserve. It never would have allowed Yeobright to do

such a ridiculous thing as throw up his business to benefit his fellow-creatures.

He walked along towards home without attending to paths. If anyone knew the heath well it was Clym. He was permeated with its scenes, with its substance, and with its odours. He might be said to be its product. His eyes had first opened thereon; with its appearance all the first images of his memory were mingled; his estimate of life had been coloured by it: his toys had been the flint knives and arrow-heads which he found there, wondering why stones should "grow" to such odd shapes; his flowers, the purple bells and yellow furze; his animal kingdom, the snakes and croppers; his society, its human haunters. Take all the varying hates felt by Eustacia Vye towards the heath, and translate them into loves, and you have the heart of Clym. He gazed upon the wide prospect as he walked, and was glad.

To many persons this Egdon was a place which had slipped out of its century generations ago, to intrude as an uncouth object into this. It was an obsolete thing, and few cared to study it. How could this be otherwise in the days of square fields, plashed hedges, and meadows watered on a plan so rectangular that on a fine day they looked like silver gridirons? The farmer, in his ride, who could smile at artificial grasses, look with solicitude at the coming corn, and sigh with sadness at the fly-eaten turnips, bestowed upon the distant upland of heath nothing better than a frown. But as for Yeobright, when he looked from the heights on his way he could not help indulging

in a barbarous satisfaction at observing that, in some of the attempts at reclamation from the waste, tillage, after holding on for a year or two, had receded again in despair, the ferns and furze-tufts stubbornly reasserting themselves.

He descended into the valley, and soon reached his home at Blooms-End. His mother was snipping dead leaves from the window-plants. She looked up at him as if she did not understand the meaning of his long stay with her; her face had worn that look for several days. He could perceive that the curiosity which had been shown by the hair-cutting group amounted in his mother to concern. But she had asked no question with her lips, even when the arrival of his trunk suggested that he was not going to leave her soon. Her silence besought an explanation of him more loudly than words.

"I am not going back to Paris again, mother," he said. "At least, in my old capacity. I have given up the business."

Mrs. Yeobright turned in pained surprise. "I thought something was amiss, because of the boxes. I wonder you did not tell me sooner."

"I ought to have done it. But I have been in doubt whether you would be pleased with my plan. I was not quite clear on a few points myself. I am going to take an entirely new course."

"I am astonished, Clym. How can you want to do better than you've

been doing?"

"Very easily. But I shall not do better in the way you mean; I suppose it will be called doing worse. But I hate that business of mine, and I want to do some worthy thing before I die. As a schoolmaster I think to do it--a school-master to the poor and ignorant, to teach them what nobody else will."

"After all the trouble that has been taken to give you a start, and when there is nothing to do but to keep straight on towards affluence, you say you will be a poor man's schoolmaster. Your fancies will be your ruin, Clym."

Mrs. Yeobright spoke calmly, but the force of feeling behind the words was but too apparent to one who knew her as well as her son did. He did not answer. There was in his face that hopelessness of being understood which comes when the objector is constitutionally beyond the reach of a logic that, even under favouring conditions, is almost too coarse a vehicle for the subtlety of the argument.

No more was said on the subject till the end of dinner. His mother then began, as if there had been no interval since the morning. "It disturbs me, Clym, to find that you have come home with such thoughts as those. I hadn't the least idea that you meant to go backward in the world by your own free choice. Of course, I have always supposed you were going to push straight on, as other men do--all who deserve

the name--when they have been put in a good way of doing well."

"I cannot help it," said Clym, in a troubled tone. "Mother, I hate the flashy business. Talk about men who deserve the name, can any man deserving the name waste his time in that effeminate way, when he sees half the world going to ruin for want of somebody to buckle to and teach them how to breast the misery they are born to? I get up every morning and see the whole creation groaning and travailing in pain, as St. Paul says, and yet there am I, trafficking in glittering splendours with wealthy women and titled libertines, and pandering to the meanest vanities--I, who have health and strength enough for anything. I have been troubled in my mind about it all the year, and the end is that I cannot do it any more."

"Why can't you do it as well as others?"

"I don't know, except that there are many things other people care for which I don't; and that's partly why I think I ought to do this. For one thing, my body does not require much of me. I cannot enjoy delicacies; good things are wasted upon me. Well, I ought to turn that defect to advantage, and by being able to do without what other people require I can spend what such things cost upon anybody else."

Now, Yeobright, having inherited some of these very instincts from the woman before him, could not fail to awaken a reciprocity in her through her feelings, if not by arguments, disguise it as she might

for his good. She spoke with less assurance. "And yet you might have been a wealthy man if you had only persevered. Manager to that large diamond establishment--what better can a man wish for? What a post of trust and respect! I suppose you will be like your father; like him, you are getting weary of doing well."

"No," said her son, "I am not weary of that, though I am weary of what you mean by it. Mother, what is doing well?"

Mrs. Yeobright was far too thoughtful a woman to be content with ready definitions, and, like the "What is wisdom?" of Plato's Socrates, and the "What is truth?" of Pontius Pilate, Yeobright's burning question received no answer.

The silence was broken by the clash of the garden gate, a tap at the door, and its opening. Christian Cantle appeared in the room in his Sunday clothes.

It was the custom on Egdon to begin the preface to a story before absolutely entering the house, so as to be well in for the body of the narrative by the time visitor and visited stood face to face. Christian had been saying to them while the door was leaving its latch, "To think that I, who go from home but once in a while, and hardly then, should have been there this morning!"

"'Tis news you have brought us, then, Christian?" said Mrs. Yeobright.

"Ay, sure, about a witch, and ye must overlook my time o' day; for, says I, 'I must go and tell 'em, though they won't have half done dinner.' I assure ye it made me shake like a driven leaf. Do ye think any harm will come o't?"

"Well--what?"

"This morning at church we was all standing up, and the pa'son said, 'Let us pray.' 'Well,' thinks I, 'one may as well kneel as stand'; so down I went; and, more than that, all the rest were as willing to oblige the man as I. We hadn't been hard at it for more than a minute when a most terrible screech sounded through church, as if somebody had just gied up their heart's blood. All the folk jumped up and then we found that Susan Nunsuch had pricked Miss Vye with a long stocking-needle, as she had threatened to do as soon as ever she could get the young lady to church, where she don't come very often. She've waited for this chance for weeks, so as to draw her blood and put an end to the bewitching of Susan's children that has been carried on so long. Sue followed her into church, sat next to her, and as soon as she could find a chance in went the stocking-needle into my lady's arm."

"Good heaven, how horrid!" said Mrs. Yeobright.

"Sue pricked her that deep that the maid fainted away; and as I was

afeard there might be some tumult among us, I got behind the bass-viol and didn't see no more. But they carried her out into the air, 'tis said; but when they looked round for Sue she was gone. What a scream that girl gied, poor thing! There were the pa'son in his surplice holding up his hand and saying, 'Sit down, my good people, sit down!' But the deuce a bit would they sit down. O, and what d'ye think I found out, Mrs. Yeobright? The pa'son wears a suit of clothes under his surplice!--I could see his black sleeves when he held up his arm."

"'Tis a cruel thing," said Yeobright.

"Yes," said his mother.

"The nation ought to look into it," said Christian. "Here's Humphrey coming, I think."

In came Humphrey. "Well, have ye heard the news? But I see you have. 'Tis a very strange thing that whenever one of Egdon folk goes to church some rum job or other is sure to be doing. The last time one of us was there was when neighbour Fairway went in the fall; and that was the day you forbad the banns, Mrs. Yeobright."

"Has this cruelly treated girl been able to walk home?" said Clym.

"They say she got better, and went home very well. And now I've told it I must be moving homeward myself."

"And I," said Humphrey. "Truly now we shall see if there's anything in what folks say about her."

When they were gone into the heath again Yeobright said quietly to his mother, "Do you think I have turned teacher too soon?"

"It is right that there should be schoolmasters, and missionaries, and all such men," she replied. "But it is right, too, that I should try to lift you out of this life into something richer, and that you should not come back again, and be as if I had not tried at all."

Later in the day Sam, the turf-cutter, entered. "I've come a-borrowing, Mrs. Yeobright. I suppose you have heard what's been happening to the beauty on the hill?"

"Yes, Sam: half a dozen have been telling us."

"Beauty?" said Clym.

"Yes, tolerably well-favoured," Sam replied. "Lord! all the country owns that 'tis one of the strangest things in the world that such a woman should have come to live up there."

"Dark or fair?"

"Now, though I've seen her twenty times, that's a thing I cannot call to mind."

"Darker than Tamsin," murmured Mrs. Yeobright.

"A woman who seems to care for nothing at all, as you may say."

"She is melancholy, then?" inquired Clym.

"She mopes about by herself, and don't mix in with the people."

"Is she a young lady inclined for adventures?"

"Not to my knowledge."

"Doesn't join in with the lads in their games, to get some sort of excitement in this lonely place?"

"No."

"Mumming, for instance?"

"No. Her notions be different. I should rather say her thoughts were far away from here, with lords and ladies she'll never know, and

mansions she'll never see again."

Observing that Clym appeared singularly interested Mrs. Yeobright said rather uneasily to Sam, "You see more in her than most of us do. Miss Vye is to my mind too idle to be charming. I have never heard that she is of any use to herself or to other people. Good girls don't get treated as witches even on Egdon."

"Nonsense--that proves nothing either way," said Yeobright.

"Well, of course I don't understand such niceties," said Sam, withdrawing from a possibly unpleasant argument; "and what she is we must wait for time to tell us. The business that I have really called about is this, to borrow the longest and strongest rope you have. The captain's bucket has dropped into the well, and they are in want of water; and as all the chaps are at home today we think we can get it out for him. We have three cart-ropes already, but they won't reach to the bottom."

Mrs. Yeobright told him that he might have whatever ropes he could find in the outhouse, and Sam went out to search. When he passed by the door Clym joined him, and accompanied him to the gate.

"Is this young witch-lady going to stay long at Mistover?" he asked.

"I should say so."

"What a cruel shame to ill-use her, She must have suffered greatly--more in mind than in body."

"'Twas a graceless trick--such a handsome girl, too. You ought to see her, Mr. Yeobright, being a young man come from far, and with a little more to show for your years than most of us."

"Do you think she would like to teach children?" said Clym.

Sam shook his head. "Quite a different sort of body from that, I reckon."

"O, it was merely something which occurred to me. It would of course be necessary to see her and talk it over--not an easy thing, by the way, for my family and hers are not very friendly."

"I'll tell you how you mid see her, Mr. Yeobright," said Sam. "We are going to grapple for the bucket at six o'clock tonight at her house, and you could lend a hand. There's five or six coming, but the well is deep, and another might be useful, if you don't mind appearing in that shape. She's sure to be walking round."

"I'll think of it," said Yeobright; and they parted.

He thought of it a good deal; but nothing more was said about Eustacia

inside the house at that time. Whether this romantic martyr to superstition and the melancholy mummer he had conversed with under the full moon were one and the same person remained as yet a problem.

III

The First Act in a Timeworn Drama

The afternoon was fine, and Yeobright walked on the heath for an hour with his mother. When they reached the lofty ridge which divided the valley of Blooms-End from the adjoining valley they stood still and looked round. The Quiet Woman Inn was visible on the low margin of the heath in one direction, and afar on the other hand rose Mistover Knap.

"You mean to call on Thomasin?" he inquired.

"Yes. But you need not come this time," said his mother.

"In that case I'll branch off here, mother. I am going to Mistover."

Mrs. Yeobright turned to him inquiringly.

"I am going to help them get the bucket out of the captain's well," he continued. "As it is so very deep I may be useful. And I should like to see this Miss Vye--not so much for her good looks as for another reason."

"Must you go?" his mother asked.

"I thought to."

And they parted. "There is no help for it," murmured Clym's mother gloomily as he withdrew. "They are sure to see each other. I wish Sam would carry his news to other houses than mine."

Clym's retreating figure got smaller and smaller as it rose and fell over the hillocks on his way. "He is tender-hearted," said Mrs. Yeobright to herself while she watched him; "otherwise it would matter little. How he's going on!"

He was, indeed, walking with a will over the furze, as straight as a line, as if his life depended upon it. His mother drew a long breath, and, abandoning the visit to Thomasin, turned back. The evening films began to make nebulous pictures of the valleys, but the high lands still were raked by the declining rays of the winter sun, which glanced on Clym as he walked forward, eyed by every rabbit and fieldfare around, a long shadow advancing in front of him.

On drawing near to the furze-covered bank and ditch which fortified the captain's dwelling he could hear voices within, signifying that operations had been already begun. At the side-entrance gate he stopped and looked over.

Half a dozen able-bodied men were standing in a line from the well-mouth, holding a rope which passed over the well-roller into the depths below. Fairway, with a piece of smaller rope round his body, made fast to one of the standards, to guard against accidents, was leaning over the opening, his right hand clasping the vertical rope that descended into the well.

"Now, silence, folks," said Fairway.

The talking ceased, and Fairway gave a circular motion to the rope, as if he were stirring batter. At the end of a minute a dull splashing reverberated from the bottom of the well; the helical twist he had imparted to the rope had reached the grapnel below.

"Haul!" said Fairway; and the men who held the rope began to gather it over the wheel.

"I think we've got sommat," said one of the haulers-in.

"Then pull steady," said Fairway.

They gathered up more and more, till a regular dripping into the well could be heard below. It grew smarter with the increasing height of the bucket, and presently a hundred and fifty feet of rope had been pulled in.

Fairway then lit a lantern, tied it to another cord, and began lowering it into the well beside the first. Clym came forward and looked down. Strange humid leaves, which knew nothing of the seasons of the year, and quaint-natured mosses were revealed on the wellside as the lantern descended; till its rays fell upon a confused mass of rope and bucket dangling in the dank, dark air.

"We've only got en by the edge of the hoop--steady, for God's sake!" said Fairway.

They pulled with the greatest gentleness, till the wet bucket appeared about two yards below them, like a dead friend come to earth again. Three or four hands were stretched out, then jerk went the rope, whizz went the wheel, the two foremost haulers fell backward, the beating of a falling body was heard, receding down the sides of the well, and a thunderous uproar arose at the bottom. The bucket was gone again.

"Damn the bucket!" said Fairway.

"Lower again," said Sam.

"I'm as stiff as a ram's horn stooping so long," said Fairway, standing up and stretching himself till his joints creaked.

"Rest a few minutes, Timothy," said Yeobright. "I'll take your place."

The grapnel was again lowered. Its smart impact upon the distant water reached their ears like a kiss, whereupon Yeobright knelt down, and leaning over the well began dragging the grapnel round and round as Fairway had done.

"Tie a rope round him--it is dangerous!" cried a soft and anxious voice somewhere above them.

Everybody turned. The speaker was a woman, gazing down upon the group from an upper window, whose panes blazed in the ruddy glare from the west. Her lips were parted and she appeared for the moment to forget where she was.

The rope was accordingly tied round his waist, and the work proceeded. At the next haul the weight was not heavy, and it was discovered that they had only secured a coil of the rope detached from the bucket. The tangled mass was thrown into the background. Humphrey took Yeobright's place, and the grapnel was lowered again.

Yeobright retired to the heap of recovered rope in a meditative mood.

Of the identity between the lady's voice and that of the melancholy mummer he had not a moment's doubt. "How thoughtful of her!" he said to himself.

Eustacia, who had reddened when she perceived the effect of her exclamation upon the group below, was no longer to be seen at the window, though Yeobright scanned it wistfully. While he stood there the men at the well succeeded in getting up the bucket without a mishap. One of them went to inquire for the captain, to learn what orders he wished to give for mending the well-tackle. The captain proved to be away from home, and Eustacia appeared at the door and came out. She had lapsed into an easy and dignified calm, far removed from the intensity of life in her words of solicitude for Clym's safety.

"Will it be possible to draw water here tonight?" she inquired.

"No, miss; the bottom of the bucket is clean knocked out. And as we can do no more now we'll leave off, and come again tomorrow morning."

"No water," she murmured, turning away.

"I can send you up some from Blooms-End," said Clym, coming forward and raising his hat as the men retired.

Yeobright and Eustacia looked at each other for one instant, as if

each had in mind those few moments during which a certain moonlight scene was common to both. With the glance the calm fixity of her features sublimed itself to an expression of refinement and warmth: it was like garish noon rising to the dignity of sunset in a couple of seconds.

"Thank you; it will hardly be necessary," she replied.

"But if you have no water?"

"Well, it is what I call no water," she said, blushing, and lifting her long-lashed eyelids as if to lift them were a work requiring consideration. "But my grandfather calls it water enough. I'll show you what I mean."

She moved away a few yards, and Clym followed. When she reached the corner of the enclosure, where the steps were formed for mounting the boundary bank, she sprang up with a lightness which seemed strange after her listless movement towards the well. It incidentally showed that her apparent languor did not arise from lack of force.

Clym ascended behind her, and noticed a circular burnt patch at the top of the bank. "Ashes?" he said.

"Yes," said Eustacia. "We had a little bonfire here last Fifth of November, and those are the marks of it."

On that spot had stood the fire she had kindled to attract Wildeve.

"That's the only kind of water we have," she continued, tossing a stone into the pool, which lay on the outside of the bank like the white of an eye without its pupil. The stone fell with a flounce, but no Wildeve appeared on the other side, as on a previous occasion there. "My grandfather says he lived for more than twenty years at sea on water twice as bad as that," she went on, "and considers it quite good enough for us here on an emergency."

"Well, as a matter of fact there are no impurities in the water of these pools at this time of the year. It has only just rained into them."

She shook her head. "I am managing to exist in a wilderness, but I cannot drink from a pond," she said.

Clym looked towards the well, which was now deserted, the men having gone home. "It is a long way to send for spring-water," he said, after a silence. "But since you don't like this in the pond, I'll try to get you some myself." He went back to the well. "Yes, I think I could do it by tying on this pail."

"But, since I would not trouble the men to get it, I cannot in conscience let you."

"I don't mind the trouble at all."

He made fast the pail to the long coil of rope, put it over the wheel, and allowed it to descend by letting the rope slip through his hands. Before it had gone far, however, he checked it.

"I must make fast the end first, or we may lose the whole," he said to Eustacia, who had drawn near. "Could you hold this a moment, while I do it--or shall I call your servant?"

"I can hold it," said Eustacia; and he placed the rope in her hands, going then to search for the end.

"I suppose I may let it slip down?" she inquired.

"I would advise you not to let it go far," said Clym. "It will get much heavier, you will find."

However, Eustacia had begun to pay out. While he was tying she cried, "I cannot stop it!"

Clym ran to her side, and found he could only check the rope by twisting the loose part round the upright post, when it stopped with a jerk. "Has it hurt you?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Very much?"

"No; I think not." She opened her hands. One of them was bleeding; the rope had dragged off the skin. Eustacia wrapped it in her handkerchief.

"You should have let go," said Yeobright. "Why didn't you?"

"You said I was to hold on... This is the second time I have been wounded today."

"Ah, yes; I have heard of it. I blush for my native Egdon. Was it a serious injury you received in church, Miss Vye?"

There was such an abundance of sympathy in Clym's tone that Eustacia slowly drew up her sleeve and disclosed her round white arm. A bright red spot appeared on its smooth surface, like a ruby on Parian marble.

"There it is," she said, putting her finger against the spot.

"It was dastardly of the woman," said Clym. "Will not Captain Vye get her punished?"

"He is gone from home on that very business. I did not know that I had such a magic reputation."

"And you fainted?" said Clym, looking at the scarlet little puncture as if he would like to kiss it and make it well.

"Yes, it frightened me. I had not been to church for a long time. And now I shall not go again for ever so long--perhaps never. I cannot face their eyes after this. Don't you think it dreadfully humiliating? I wished I was dead for hours after, but I don't mind now."

"I have come to clean away these cobwebs," said Yeobright. "Would you like to help me--by high-class teaching? We might benefit them much."

"I don't quite feel anxious to. I have not much love for my fellow-creatures. Sometimes I quite hate them."

"Still I think that if you were to hear my scheme you might take an interest in it. There is no use in hating people--if you hate anything, you should hate what produced them."

"Do you mean Nature? I hate her already. But I shall be glad to hear your scheme at any time."

The situation had now worked itself out, and the next natural thing

was for them to part. Clym knew this well enough, and Eustacia made a move of conclusion; yet he looked at her as if he had one word more to say. Perhaps if he had not lived in Paris it would never have been uttered.

"We have met before," he said, regarding her with rather more interest than was necessary.

"I do not own it," said Eustacia, with a repressed, still look.

"But I may think what I like."

"Yes."

"You are lonely here."

"I cannot endure the heath, except in its purple season. The heath is a cruel taskmaster to me."

"Can you say so?" he asked. "To my mind it is most exhilarating, and strengthening, and soothing. I would rather live on these hills than anywhere else in the world."

"It is well enough for artists; but I never would learn to draw."

"And there is a very curious Druidical stone just out there." He threw

a pebble in the direction signified. "Do you often go to see it?"

"I was not even aware there existed any such curious Druidical stone. I am aware that there are boulevards in Paris."

Yeobright looked thoughtfully on the ground. "That means much," he said.

"It does indeed," said Eustacia.

"I remember when I had the same longing for town bustle. Five years of a great city would be a perfect cure for that."

"Heaven send me such a cure! Now, Mr. Yeobright, I will go indoors and plaster my wounded hand."

They separated, and Eustacia vanished in the increasing shade. She seemed full of many things. Her past was a blank, her life had begun. The effect upon Clym of this meeting he did not fully discover till some time after. During his walk home his most intelligible sensation was that his scheme had somehow become glorified. A beautiful woman had been intertwined with it.

On reaching the house he went up to the room which was to be made his study, and occupied himself during the evening in unpacking his books from the boxes and arranging them on shelves. From another box he

drew a lamp and a can of oil. He trimmed the lamp, arranged his table, and said, "Now, I am ready to begin."

He rose early the next morning, read two hours before breakfast by the light of his lamp--read all the morning, all the afternoon. Just when the sun was going down his eyes felt weary, and he leant back in his chair.

His room overlooked the front of the premises and the valley of the heath beyond. The lowest beams of the winter sun threw the shadow of the house over the palings, across the grass margin of the heath, and far up the vale, where the chimney outlines and those of the surrounding treetops stretched forth in long dark prongs. Having been seated at work all day, he decided to take a turn upon the hills before it got dark; and, going out forthwith, he struck across the heath towards Mistover.

It was an hour and a half later when he again appeared at the garden gate. The shutters of the house were closed, and Christian Cantle, who had been wheeling manure about the garden all day, had gone home. On entering he found that his mother, after waiting a long time for him, had finished her meal.

"Where have you been, Clym?" she immediately said. "Why didn't you tell me that you were going away at this time?"

"I have been on the heath."

"You'll meet Eustacia Vye if you go up there."

Clym paused a minute. "Yes, I met her this evening," he said, as though it were spoken under the sheer necessity of preserving honesty.

"I wondered if you had."

"It was no appointment."

"No; such meetings never are."

"But you are not angry, mother?"

"I can hardly say that I am not. Angry? No. But when I consider the usual nature of the drag which causes men of promise to disappoint the world I feel uneasy."

"You deserve credit for the feeling, mother. But I can assure you that you need not be disturbed by it on my account."

"When I think of you and your new crotchets," said Mrs. Yeobright, with some emphasis, "I naturally don't feel so comfortable as I did a twelvemonth ago. It is incredible to me that a man accustomed to the attractive women of Paris and elsewhere should be so easily worked

upon by a girl in a heath. You could just as well have walked another way."

"I had been studying all day."

"Well, yes," she added more hopefully, "I have been thinking that you might get on as a schoolmaster, and rise that way, since you really are determined to hate the course you were pursuing."

Yeobright was unwilling to disturb this idea, though his scheme was far enough removed from one wherein the education of youth should be made a mere channel of social ascent. He had no desires of that sort. He had reached the stage in a young man's life when the grimness of the general human situation first becomes clear; and the realization of this causes ambition to halt awhile. In France it is not uncustomary to commit suicide at this stage; in England we do much better, or much worse, as the case may be.

The love between the young man and his mother was strangely invisible now. Of love it may be said, the less earthly the less demonstrative. In its absolutely indestructible form it reaches a profundity in which all exhibition of itself is painful. It was so with these. Had conversations between them been overheard, people would have said, "How cold they are to each other!"

His theory and his wishes about devoting his future to teaching

had made an impression on Mrs. Yeobright. Indeed, how could it be otherwise when he was a part of her--when their discourses were as if carried on between the right and the left hands of the same body? He had despaired of reaching her by argument; and it was almost as a discovery to him that he could reach her by a magnetism which was as superior to words as words are to yells.

Strangely enough he began to feel now that it would not be so hard to persuade her who was his best friend that comparative poverty was essentially the higher course for him, as to reconcile to his feelings the act of persuading her. From every provident point of view his mother was so undoubtedly right, that he was not without a sickness of heart in finding he could shake her.

She had a singular insight into life, considering that she had never mixed with it. There are instances of persons who, without clear ideas of the things they criticize, have yet had clear ideas of the relations of those things. Blacklock, a poet blind from his birth, could describe visual objects with accuracy; Professor Sanderson, who was also blind, gave excellent lectures on colour, and taught others the theory of ideas which they had and he had not. In the social sphere these gifted ones are mostly women; they can watch a world which they never saw, and estimate forces of which they have only heard. We call it intuition.

What was the great world to Mrs. Yeobright? A multitude whose

tendencies could be perceived, though not its essences. Communities were seen by her as from a distance; she saw them as we see the throngs which cover the canvases of Sallaert, Van Alsloot, and others of that school--vast masses of beings, jostling, zigzagging, and processioning in definite directions, but whose features are indistinguishable by the very comprehensiveness of the view.

One could see that, as far as it had gone, her life was very complete on its reflective side. The philosophy of her nature, and its limitation by circumstances, was almost written in her movements. They had a majestic foundation, though they were far from being majestic; and they had a groundwork of assurance, but they were not assured. As her once elastic walk had become deadened by time, so had her natural pride of life been hindered in its blooming by her necessities.

The next slight touch in the shaping of Clym's destiny occurred a few days after. A barrow was opened on the heath, and Yeobright attended the operation, remaining away from his study during several hours. In the afternoon Christian returned from a journey in the same direction, and Mrs. Yeobright questioned him.

"They have dug a hole, and they have found things like flowerpots upside down, Mis'ess Yeobright; and inside these be real charnel

bones. They have carried 'em off to men's houses; but I shouldn't like to sleep where they will bide. Dead folks have been known to come and claim their own. Mr. Yeobright had got one pot of the bones, and was going to bring 'em home--real skellington bones--but 'twas ordered otherwise. You'll be relieved to hear that he gave away his pot and all, on second thoughts; and a blessed thing for ye, Mis'ess Yeobright, considering the wind o' nights."

"Gave it away?"

"Yes. To Miss Vye. She has a cannibal taste for such churchyard furniture seemingly."

"Miss Vye was there too?"

"Ay, 'a b'lieve she was."

When Clym came home, which was shortly after, his mother said, in a curious tone, "The urn you had meant for me you gave away."

Yeobright made no reply; the current of her feeling was too pronounced to admit it.

The early weeks of the year passed on. Yeobright certainly studied at home, but he also walked much abroad, and the direction of his walk was always towards some point of a line between Mistover and

Rainbarrow.

The month of March arrived, and the heath showed its first signs of awakening from winter trance. The awakening was almost feline in its stealthiness. The pool outside the bank by Eustacia's dwelling, which seemed as dead and desolate as ever to an observer who moved and made noises in his observation, would gradually disclose a state of great animation when silently watched awhile. A timid animal world had come to life for the season. Little tadpoles and efts began to bubble up through the water, and to race along beneath it; toads made noises like very young ducks, and advanced to the margin in twos and threes; overhead, bumble-bees flew hither and thither in the thickening light, their drone coming and going like the sound of a gong.

On an evening such as this Yeobright descended into the Blooms-End valley from beside that very pool, where he had been standing with another person quite silently and quite long enough to hear all this puny stir of resurrection in nature; yet he had not heard it. His walk was rapid as he came down, and he went with a springy tread. Before entering upon his mother's premises he stopped and breathed. The light which shone forth on him from the window revealed that his face was flushed and his eye bright. What it did not show was something which lingered upon his lips like a seal set there. The abiding presence of this impress was so real that he hardly dared to enter the house, for it seemed as if his mother might say, "What red spot is that glowing upon your mouth so vividly?"

But he entered soon after. The tea was ready, and he sat down opposite his mother. She did not speak many words; and as for him, something had been just done and some words had been just said on the hill which prevented him from beginning a desultory chat. His mother's taciturnity was not without ominousness, but he appeared not to care. He knew why she said so little, but he could not remove the cause of her bearing towards him. These half-silent sittings were far from uncommon with them now. At last Yeobright made a beginning of what was intended to strike at the whole root of the matter.

"Five days have we sat like this at meals with scarcely a word. What's the use of it, mother?"

"None," said she, in a heart-swollen tone. "But there is only too good a reason."

"Not when you know all. I have been wanting to speak about this, and I am glad the subject is begun. The reason, of course, is Eustacia Vye. Well, I confess I have seen her lately, and have seen her a good many times."

"Yes, yes; and I know what that amounts to. It troubles me, Clym. You are wasting your life here; and it is solely on account of her. If it had not been for that woman you would never have entertained this teaching scheme at all."

Clym looked hard at his mother. "You know that is not it," he said.

"Well, I know you had decided to attempt it before you saw her; but that would have ended in intentions. It was very well to talk of, but ridiculous to put in practice. I fully expected that in the course of a month or two you would have seen the folly of such self-sacrifice, and would have been by this time back again to Paris in some business or other. I can understand objections to the diamond trade--I really was thinking that it might be inadequate to the life of a man like you even though it might have made you a millionaire. But now I see how mistaken you are about this girl I doubt if you could be correct about other things."

"How am I mistaken in her?"

"She is lazy and dissatisfied. But that is not all of it. Supposing her to be as good a woman as any you can find, which she certainly is not, why do you wish to connect yourself with anybody at present?"

"Well, there are practical reasons," Clym began, and then almost broke off under an overpowering sense of the weight of argument which could be brought against his statement. "If I take a school an educated woman would be invaluable as a help to me."

"What! you really mean to marry her?"

"It would be premature to state that plainly. But consider what obvious advantages there would be in doing it. She--"

"Don't suppose she has any money. She hasn't a farthing."

"She is excellently educated, and would make a good matron in a boarding-school. I candidly own that I have modified my views a little, in deference to you; and it should satisfy you. I no longer adhere to my intention of giving with my own mouth rudimentary education to the lowest class. I can do better. I can establish a good private school for farmers' sons, and without stopping the school I can manage to pass examinations. By this means, and by the assistance of a wife like her--"

"Oh, Clym!"

"I shall ultimately, I hope, be at the head of one of the best schools in the county."

Yeobright had enunciated the word "her" with a fervour which, in conversation with a mother, was absurdly indiscreet. Hardly a maternal heart within the four seas could, in such circumstances, have helped being irritated at that ill-timed betrayal of feeling for a new woman.

"You are blinded, Clym," she said warmly. "It was a bad day for you when you first set eyes on her. And your scheme is merely a castle in the air built on purpose to justify this folly which has seized you, and to salve your conscience on the irrational situation you are in."

"Mother, that's not true," he firmly answered.

"Can you maintain that I sit and tell untruths, when all I wish to do is to save you from sorrow? For shame, Clym! But it is all through that woman--a hussy!"

Clym reddened like fire and rose. He placed his hand upon his mother's shoulder and said, in a tone which hung strangely between entreaty and command, "I won't hear it. I may be led to answer you in a way which we shall both regret."

His mother parted her lips to begin some other vehement truth, but on looking at him she saw that in his face which led her to leave the words unsaid. Yeobright walked once or twice across the room, and then suddenly went out of the house. It was eleven o'clock when he came in, though he had not been further than the precincts of the garden. His mother was gone to bed. A light was left burning on the table, and supper was spread. Without stopping for any food he secured the doors and went upstairs.

IV

An Hour of Bliss and Many Hours of Sadness

The next day was gloomy enough at Blooms-End. Yeobright remained in his study, sitting over the open books; but the work of those hours was miserably scant. Determined that there should be nothing in his conduct towards his mother resembling sullenness, he had occasionally spoken to her on passing matters, and would take no notice of the brevity of her replies. With the same resolve to keep up a show of conversation he said, about seven o'clock in the evening, "There's an eclipse of the moon tonight. I am going out to see it." And, putting on his overcoat, he left her.

The low moon was not as yet visible from the front of the house, and Yeobright climbed out of the valley until he stood in the full flood of her light. But even now he walked on, and his steps were in the direction of Rainbarrow.

In half an hour he stood at the top. The sky was clear from verge to verge, and the moon flung her rays over the whole heath, but without sensibly lighting it, except where paths and water-courses had laid bare the white flints and glistening quartz sand, which made streaks

upon the general shade. After standing awhile he stooped and felt the heather. It was dry, and he flung himself down upon the barrow, his face towards the moon, which depicted a small image of herself in each of his eyes.

He had often come up here without stating his purpose to his mother; but this was the first time that he had been ostensibly frank as to his purpose while really concealing it. It was a moral situation which, three months earlier, he could hardly have credited of himself. In returning to labour in this sequestered spot he had anticipated an escape from the chafing of social necessities; yet behold they were here also. More than ever he longed to be in some world where personal ambition was not the only recognized form of progress--such, perhaps, as might have been the case at some time or other in the silvery globe then shining upon him. His eye travelled over the length and breadth of that distant country--over the Bay of Rainbows, the sombre Sea of Crises, the Ocean of Storms, the Lake of Dreams, the vast Walled Plains, and the wondrous Ring Mountains--till he almost felt himself to be voyaging bodily through its wild scenes, standing on its hollow hills, traversing its deserts, descending its vales and old sea bottoms, or mounting to the edges of its craters.

While he watched the far-removed landscape a tawny stain grew into being on the lower verge: the eclipse had begun. This marked a preconcerted moment: for the remote celestial phenomenon had been pressed into sublunary service as a lover's signal. Yeobright's mind

flew back to earth at the sight; he arose, shook himself and listened. Minute after minute passed by, perhaps ten minutes passed, and the shadow on the moon perceptibly widened. He heard a rustling on his left hand, a cloaked figure with an upturned face appeared at the base of the Barrow, and Clym descended. In a moment the figure was in his arms, and his lips upon hers.

"My Eustacia!"

"Clym, dearest!"

Such a situation had less than three months brought forth.

They remained long without a single utterance, for no language could reach the level of their condition: words were as the rusty implements of a by-gone barbarous epoch, and only to be occasionally tolerated.

"I began to wonder why you did not come," said Yeobright, when she had withdrawn a little from his embrace.

"You said ten minutes after the first mark of shade on the edge of the moon, and that's what it is now."

"Well, let us only think that here we are."

Then, holding each other's hand, they were again silent, and the

shadow on the moon's disc grew a little larger.

"Has it seemed long since you last saw me?" she asked.

"It has seemed sad."

"And not long? That's because you occupy yourself, and so blind yourself to my absence. To me, who can do nothing, it has been like living under stagnant water."

"I would rather bear tediousness, dear, than have time made short by such means as have shortened mine."

"In what way is that? You have been thinking you wished you did not love me."

"How can a man wish that, and yet love on? No, Eustacia."

"Men can, women cannot."

"Well, whatever I may have thought, one thing is certain--I do love you--past all compass and description. I love you to oppressiveness--I, who have never before felt more than a pleasant passing fancy for any woman I have ever seen. Let me look right into your moonlit face and dwell on every line and curve in it! Only a few hair-breadths make the difference between this face and faces I

have seen many times before I knew you; yet what a difference--the difference between everything and nothing at all. One touch on that mouth again! there, and there, and there. Your eyes seem heavy, Eustacia."

"No, it is my general way of looking. I think it arises from my feeling sometimes an agonizing pity for myself that I ever was born."

"You don't feel it now?"

"No. Yet I know that we shall not love like this always. Nothing can ensure the continuance of love. It will evaporate like a spirit, and so I feel full of fears."

"You need not."

"Ah, you don't know. You have seen more than I, and have been into cities and among people that I have only heard of, and have lived more years than I; but yet I am older at this than you. I loved another man once, and now I love you."

"In God's mercy don't talk so, Eustacia!"

"But I do not think I shall be the one who wearies first. It will, I fear, end in this way: your mother will find out that you meet me, and she will influence you against me!"

"That can never be. She knows of these meetings already."

"And she speaks against me?"

"I will not say."

"There, go away! Obey her. I shall ruin you. It is foolish of you to meet me like this. Kiss me, and go away for ever. For ever--do you hear?--for ever!"

"Not I."

"It is your only chance. Many a man's love has been a curse to him."

"You are desperate, full of fancies, and wilful; and you misunderstand. I have an additional reason for seeing you tonight besides love of you. For though, unlike you, I feel our affection may be eternal, I feel with you in this, that our present mode of existence cannot last."

"Oh! 'tis your mother. Yes, that's it! I knew it."

"Never mind what it is. Believe this, I cannot let myself lose you. I must have you always with me. This very evening I do not like to let you go. There is only one cure for this anxiety, dearest--you

must be my wife."

She started: then endeavoured to say calmly, "Cynics say that cures the anxiety by curing the love."

"But you must answer me. Shall I claim you some day--I don't mean at once?"

"I must think," Eustacia murmured. "At present speak of Paris to me. Is there any place like it on earth?"

"It is very beautiful. But will you be mine?"

"I will be nobody else's in the world--does that satisfy you?"

"Yes, for the present."

"Now tell me of the Tuileries, and the Louvre," she continued evasively.

"I hate talking of Paris! Well, I remember one sunny room in the Louvre which would make a fitting place for you to live in--the Galerie d'Apollon. Its windows are mainly east; and in the early morning, when the sun is bright, the whole apartment is in a perfect blaze of splendour. The rays bristle and dart from the encrustations of gilding to the magnificent inlaid coffers, from the coffers to

the gold and silver plate, from the plate to the jewels and precious stones, from these to the enamels, till there is a perfect network of light which quite dazzles the eye. But now, about our marriage--"

"And Versailles--the King's Gallery is some such gorgeous room, is it not?"

"Yes. But what's the use of talking of gorgeous rooms? By the way, the Little Trianon would suit us beautifully to live in, and you might walk in the gardens in the moonlight and think you were in some English shrubbery; it is laid out in English fashion."

"I should hate to think that!"

"Then you could keep to the lawn in front of the Grand Palace. All about there you would doubtless feel in a world of historical romance."

He went on, since it was all new to her, and described Fontainebleau, St. Cloud, the Bois, and many other familiar haunts of the Parisians; till she said--

"When used you to go to these places?"

"On Sundays."

"Ah, yes. I dislike English Sundays. How I should chime in with their manners over there! Dear Clym, you'll go back again?"

Clym shook his head, and looked at the eclipse.

"If you'll go back again I'll--be something," she said tenderly, putting her head near his breast. "If you'll agree I'll give my promise, without making you wait a minute longer."

"How extraordinary that you and my mother should be of one mind about this!" said Yeobright. "I have vowed not to go back, Eustacia. It is not the place I dislike; it is the occupation."

"But you can go in some other capacity."

"No. Besides, it would interfere with my scheme. Don't press that, Eustacia. Will you marry me?"

"I cannot tell."

"Now--never mind Paris; it is no better than other spots. Promise, sweet!"

"You will never adhere to your education plan, I am quite sure; and then it will be all right for me; and so I promise to be yours for ever and ever."

Clym brought her face towards his by a gentle pressure of the hand, and kissed her.

"Ah! but you don't know what you have got in me," she said. "Sometimes I think there is not that in Eustacia Vye which will make a good homespun wife. Well, let it go--see how our time is slipping, slipping, slipping!" She pointed towards the half eclipsed moon.

"You are too mournful."

"No. Only I dread to think of anything beyond the present. What is, we know. We are together now, and it is unknown how long we shall be so; the unknown always fills my mind with terrible possibilities, even when I may reasonably expect it to be cheerful... Clym, the eclipsed moonlight shines upon your face with a strange foreign colour, and shows its shape as if it were cut out in gold. That means that you should be doing better things than this."

"You are ambitious, Eustacia--no, not exactly ambitious, luxurious. I ought to be of the same vein, to make you happy, I suppose. And yet, far from that, I could live and die in a hermitage here, with proper work to do."

There was that in his tone which implied distrust of his position as a solicitous lover, a doubt if he were acting fairly towards one whose

tastes touched his own only at rare and infrequent points. She saw his meaning, and whispered, in a low, full accent of eager assurance "Don't mistake me, Clym: though I should like Paris, I love you for yourself alone. To be your wife and live in Paris would be heaven to me; but I would rather live with you in a hermitage here than not be yours at all. It is gain to me either way, and very great gain. There's my too candid confession."

"Spoken like a woman. And now I must soon leave you. I'll walk with you towards your house."

"But must you go home yet?" she asked. "Yes, the sand has nearly slipped away, I see, and the eclipse is creeping on more and more. Don't go yet! Stop till the hour has run itself out; then I will not press you any more. You will go home and sleep well; I keep sighing in my sleep! Do you ever dream of me?"

"I cannot recollect a clear dream of you."

"I see your face in every scene of my dreams, and hear your voice in every sound. I wish I did not. It is too much what I feel. They say such love never lasts. But it must! And yet once, I remember, I saw an officer of the Hussars ride down the street at Budmouth, and though he was a total stranger and never spoke to me, I loved him till I thought I should really die of love--but I didn't die, and at last I left off caring for him. How terrible it would be if a time should

come when I could not love you, my Clym!"

"Please don't say such reckless things. When we see such a time at hand we will say, 'I have outlived my faith and purpose,' and die. There, the hour has expired: now let us walk on."

Hand in hand they went along the path towards Mistover. When they were near the house he said, "It is too late for me to see your grandfather tonight. Do you think he will object to it?"

"I will speak to him. I am so accustomed to be my own mistress that it did not occur to me that we should have to ask him."

Then they lingeringly separated, and Clym descended towards Blooms-End.

And as he walked further and further from the charmed atmosphere of his Olympian girl his face grew sad with a new sort of sadness. A perception of the dilemma in which his love had placed him came back in full force. In spite of Eustacia's apparent willingness to wait through the period of an unpromising engagement, till he should be established in his new pursuit, he could not but perceive at moments that she loved him rather as a visitant from a gay world to which she rightly belonged than as a man with a purpose opposed to that recent past of his which so interested her. Often at their meetings a word or a sigh escaped her. It meant that, though she made no conditions as to

his return to the French capital, this was what she secretly longed for in the event of marriage; and it robbed him of many an otherwise pleasant hour. Along with that came the widening breach between himself and his mother. Whenever any little occurrence had brought into more prominence than usual the disappointment that he was causing her it had sent him on lone and moody walks; or he was kept awake a great part of the night by the turmoil of spirit which such a recognition created. If Mrs. Yeobright could only have been led to see what a sound and worthy purpose this purpose of his was and how little it was being affected by his devotions to Eustacia, how differently would she regard him!

Thus as his sight grew accustomed to the first blinding halo kindled about him by love and beauty, Yeobright began to perceive what a strait he was in. Sometimes he wished that he had never known Eustacia, immediately to retract the wish as brutal. Three antagonistic growths had to be kept alive: his mother's trust in him, his plan for becoming a teacher, and Eustacia's happiness. His fervid nature could not afford to relinquish one of these, though two of the three were as many as he could hope to preserve. Though his love was as chaste as that of Petrarch for his Laura, it had made fetters of what previously was only a difficulty. A position which was not too simple when he stood wholehearted had become indescribably complicated by the addition of Eustacia. Just when his mother was beginning to tolerate one scheme he had introduced another still bitterer than the first, and the combination was more than she could

bear.

V

Sharp Words Are Spoken, and a Crisis Ensues

When Yeobright was not with Eustacia he was sitting slavishly over his books; when he was not reading he was meeting her. These meetings were carried on with the greatest secrecy.

One afternoon his mother came home from a morning visit to Thomasin. He could see from a disturbance in the lines of her face that something had happened.

"I have been told an incomprehensible thing," she said mournfully. "The captain has let out at the Woman that you and Eustacia Vye are engaged to be married."

"We are," said Yeobright. "But it may not be yet for a very long time."

"I should hardly think it WOULD be yet for a very long time! You will

take her to Paris, I suppose?" She spoke with weary hopelessness.

"I am not going back to Paris."

"What will you do with a wife, then?"

"Keep a school in Budmouth, as I have told you."

"That's incredible! The place is overrun with schoolmasters. You have no special qualifications. What possible chance is there for such as you?"

"There is no chance of getting rich. But with my system of education, which is as new as it is true, I shall do a great deal of good to my fellow-creatures."

"Dreams, dreams! If there had been any system left to be invented they would have found it out at the universities long before this time."

"Never, mother. They cannot find it out, because their teachers don't come in contact with the class which demands such a system--that is, those who have had no preliminary training. My plan is one for instilling high knowledge into empty minds without first cramming them with what has to be uncrammed again before true study begins."

"I might have believed you if you had kept yourself free from

entanglements; but this woman--if she had been a good girl it would have been bad enough; but being--"

"She is a good girl."

"So you think. A Corfu bandmaster's daughter! What has her life been? Her surname even is not her true one."

"She is Captain Vye's granddaughter, and her father merely took her mother's name. And she is a lady by instinct."

"They call him 'captain,' but anybody is captain."

"He was in the Royal Navy!"

"No doubt he has been to sea in some tub or other. Why doesn't he look after her? No lady would rove about the heath at all hours of the day and night as she does. But that's not all of it. There was something queer between her and Thomasin's husband at one time--I am as sure of it as that I stand here."

"Eustacia has told me. He did pay her a little attention a year ago; but there's no harm in that. I like her all the better."

"Clym," said his mother with firmness, "I have no proofs against her, unfortunately. But if she makes you a good wife, there has never been

a bad one."

"Believe me, you are almost exasperating," said Yeobright vehemently. "And this very day I had intended to arrange a meeting between you. But you give me no peace; you try to thwart my wishes in everything."

"I hate the thought of any son of mine marrying badly! I wish I had never lived to see this; it is too much for me--it is more than I dreamt!" She turned to the window. Her breath was coming quickly, and her lips were pale, parted, and trembling.

"Mother," said Clym, "whatever you do, you will always be dear to me--that you know. But one thing I have a right to say, which is, that at my age I am old enough to know what is best for me."

Mrs. Yeobright remained for some time silent and shaken, as if she could say no more. Then she replied, "Best? Is it best for you to injure your prospects for such a voluptuous, idle woman as that? Don't you see that by the very fact of your choosing her you prove that you do not know what is best for you? You give up your whole thought--you set your whole soul--to please a woman."

"I do. And that woman is you."

"How can you treat me so flippantly!" said his mother, turning again to him with a tearful look. "You are unnatural, Clym, and I did not

expect it."

"Very likely," said he cheerlessly. "You did not know the measure you were going to mete me, and therefore did not know the measure that would be returned to you again."

"You answer me; you think only of her. You stick to her in all things."

"That proves her to be worthy. I have never yet supported what is bad. And I do not care only for her. I care for you and for myself, and for anything that is good. When a woman once dislikes another she is merciless!"

"O Clym! please don't go setting down as my fault what is your obstinate wrong-headedness. If you wished to connect yourself with an unworthy person why did you come home here to do it? Why didn't you do it in Paris?--it is more the fashion there. You have come only to distress me, a lonely woman, and shorten my days! I wish that you would bestow your presence where you bestow your love!"

Clym said huskily, "You are my mother. I will say no more--beyond this, that I beg your pardon for having thought this my home. I will no longer inflict myself upon you; I'll go." And he went out with tears in his eyes.

It was a sunny afternoon at the beginning of summer, and the moist hollows of the heath had passed from their brown to their green stage. Yeobright walked to the edge of the basin which extended down from Mistover and Rainbarrow. By this time he was calm, and he looked over the landscape. In the minor valleys, between the hillocks which diversified the contour of the vale, the fresh young ferns were luxuriantly growing up, ultimately to reach a height of five or six feet. He descended a little way, flung himself down in a spot where a path emerged from one of the small hollows, and waited. Hither it was that he had promised Eustacia to bring his mother this afternoon, that they might meet and be friends. His attempt had utterly failed.

He was in a nest of vivid green. The ferny vegetation round him, though so abundant, was quite uniform: it was a grove of machine-made foliage, a world of green triangles with saw-edges, and not a single flower. The air was warm with a vaporous warmth, and the stillness was unbroken. Lizards, grasshoppers, and ants were the only living things to be beheld. The scene seemed to belong to the ancient world of the carboniferous period, when the forms of plants were few, and of the fern kind; when there was neither bud nor blossom, nothing but a monotonous extent of leafage, amid which no bird sang.

When he had reclined for some considerable time, gloomily pondering, he discerned above the ferns a drawn bonnet of white silk approaching from the left, and Yeobright knew directly that it covered the head of her he loved. His heart awoke from its apathy to a warm excitement,

and, jumping to his feet, he said aloud, "I knew she was sure to come."

She vanished in a hollow for a few moments, and then her whole form unfolded itself from the brake.

"Only you here?" she exclaimed, with a disappointed air, whose hollowness was proved by her rising redness and her half-guilty low laugh. "Where is Mrs. Yeobright?"

"She has not come," he replied in a subdued tone.

"I wish I had known that you would be here alone," she said seriously, "and that we were going to have such an idle, pleasant time as this. Pleasure not known beforehand is half wasted; to anticipate it is to double it. I have not thought once today of having you all to myself this afternoon, and the actual moment of a thing is so soon gone."

"It is indeed."

"Poor Clym!" she continued, looking tenderly into his face. "You are sad. Something has happened at your home. Never mind what is--let us only look at what seems."

"But, darling, what shall we do?" said he.

"Still go on as we do now--just live on from meeting to meeting, never minding about another day. You, I know, are always thinking of that--I can see you are. But you must not--will you, dear Clym?"

"You are just like all women. They are ever content to build their lives on any incidental position that offers itself; whilst men would fain make a globe to suit them. Listen to this, Eustacia. There is a subject I have determined to put off no longer. Your sentiment on the wisdom of _Carpe diem_ does not impress me today. Our present mode of life must shortly be brought to an end."

"It is your mother!"

"It is. I love you none the less in telling you; it is only right you should know."

"I have feared my bliss," she said, with the merest motion of her lips. "It has been too intense and consuming."

"There is hope yet. There are forty years of work in me yet, and why should you despair? I am only at an awkward turning. I wish people wouldn't be so ready to think that there is no progress without uniformity."

"Ah--your mind runs off to the philosophical side of it. Well, these sad and hopeless obstacles are welcome in one sense, for they enable

us to look with indifference upon the cruel satires that Fate loves to indulge in. I have heard of people, who, upon coming suddenly into happiness, have died from anxiety lest they should not live to enjoy it. I felt myself in that whimsical state of uneasiness lately; but I shall be spared it now. Let us walk on."

Clym took the hand which was already bared for him--it was a favourite way with them to walk bare hand in bare hand--and led her through the ferns. They formed a very comely picture of love at full flush, as they walked along the valley that late afternoon, the sun sloping down on their right, and throwing their thin spectral shadows, tall as poplar trees, far out across the furze and fern. Eustacia went with her head thrown back fancifully, a certain glad and voluptuous air of triumph pervading her eyes at having won by her own unaided self a man who was her perfect complement in attainment, appearance, and age. On the young man's part, the paleness of face which he had brought with him from Paris, and the incipient marks of time and thought, were less perceptible than when he returned, the healthful and energetic sturdiness which was his by nature having partially recovered its original proportions. They wandered onward till they reached the nether margin of the heath, where it became marshy and merged in moorland.

"I must part from you here, Clym," said Eustacia.

They stood still and prepared to bid each other farewell. Everything

before them was on a perfect level. The sun, resting on the horizon line, streamed across the ground from between copper-coloured and lilac clouds, stretched out in flats beneath a sky of pale soft green. All dark objects on the earth that lay towards the sun were overspread by a purple haze, against which groups of wailing gnats shone out, rising upwards and dancing about like sparks of fire.

"O! this leaving you is too hard to bear!" exclaimed Eustacia in a sudden whisper of anguish. "Your mother will influence you too much; I shall not be judged fairly, it will get afloat that I am not a good girl, and the witch story will be added to make me blacker!"

"They cannot. Nobody dares to speak disrespectfully of you or of me."

"Oh how I wish I was sure of never losing you--that you could not be able to desert me anyhow!"

Clym stood silent a moment. His feelings were high, the moment was passionate, and he cut the knot.

"You shall be sure of me, darling," he said, folding her in his arms. "We will be married at once."

"O Clym!"

"Do you agree to it?"

"If--if we can."

"We certainly can, both being of full age. And I have not followed my occupation all these years without having accumulated money; and if you will agree to live in a tiny cottage somewhere on the heath, until I take a house in Budmouth for the school, we can do it at a very little expense."

"How long shall we have to live in the tiny cottage, Clym?"

"About six months. At the end of that time I shall have finished my reading--yes, we will do it, and this heartaching will be over. We shall, of course, live in absolute seclusion, and our married life will only begin to outward view when we take the house in Budmouth, where I have already addressed a letter on the matter. Would your grandfather allow you?"

"I think he would--on the understanding that it should not last longer than six months."

"I will guarantee that, if no misfortune happens."

"If no misfortune happens," she repeated slowly.

"Which is not likely. Dearest, fix the exact day."

And then they consulted on the question, and the day was chosen. It was to be a fortnight from that time.

This was the end of their talk, and Eustacia left him. Clym watched her as she retired towards the sun. The luminous rays wrapped her up with her increasing distance, and the rustle of her dress over the sprouting sedge and grass died away. As he watched, the dead flat of the scenery overpowered him, though he was fully alive to the beauty of that untarnished early summer green which was worn for the nonce by the poorest blade. There was something in its oppressive horizontality which too much reminded him of the arena of life; it gave him a sense of bare equality with, and no superiority to, a single living thing under the sun.

Eustacia was now no longer the goddess but the woman to him, a being to fight for, support, help, be maligned for. Now that he had reached a cooler moment he would have preferred a less hasty marriage; but the card was laid, and he determined to abide by the game. Whether Eustacia was to add one other to the list of those who love too hotly to love long and well, the forthcoming event was certainly a ready way of proving.

VI

Yeobright Goes, and the Breach Is Complete

All that evening smart sounds denoting an active packing up came from Yeobright's room to the ears of his mother downstairs.

Next morning he departed from the house and again proceeded across the heath. A long day's march was before him, his object being to secure a dwelling to which he might take Eustacia when she became his wife. Such a house, small, secluded, and with its windows boarded up, he had casually observed a month earlier, about two miles beyond the village of East Egdon, and six miles distant altogether; and thither he directed his steps today.

The weather was far different from that of the evening before. The yellow and vapoury sunset which had wrapped up Eustacia from his parting gaze had presaged change. It was one of those not infrequent days of an English June which are as wet and boisterous as November. The cold clouds hastened on in a body, as if painted on a moving slide. Vapours from other continents arrived upon the wind, which curled and parted round him as he walked on.

At length Clym reached the margin of a fir and beech plantation that had been enclosed from heath land in the year of his birth. Here

the trees, laden heavily with their new and humid leaves, were now suffering more damage than during the highest winds of winter, when the boughs are especially disencumbered to do battle with the storm. The wet young beeches were undergoing amputations, bruises, cripplings, and harsh lacerations, from which the wasting sap would bleed for many a day to come, and which would leave scars visible till the day of their burning. Each stem was wrenched at the root, where it moved like a bone in its socket, and at every onset of the gale convulsive sounds came from the branches, as if pain were felt. In a neighbouring brake a finch was trying to sing; but the wind blew under his feathers till they stood on end, twisted round his little tail, and made him give up his song.

Yet a few yards to Yeobright's left, on the open heath, how ineffectively gnashed the storm! Those gusts which tore the trees merely waved the furze and heather in a light caress. Egdon was made for such times as these.

Yeobright reached the empty house about mid-day. It was almost as lonely as that of Eustacia's grandfather, but the fact that it stood near a heath was disguised by a belt of firs which almost enclosed the premises. He journeyed on about a mile further to the village in which the owner lived, and, returning with him to the house, arrangements were completed, and the man undertook that one room at least should be ready for occupation the next day. Clym's intention was to live there alone until Eustacia should join him on their

wedding day.

Then he turned to pursue his way homeward through the drizzle that had so greatly transformed the scene. The ferns, among which he had lain in comfort yesterday, were dripping moisture from every frond, wetting his legs through as he brushed past; and the fur of the rabbits leaping before him was clotted into dark locks by the same watery surrounding.

He reached home damp and weary enough after his ten-mile walk. It had hardly been a propitious beginning, but he had chosen his course, and would show no swerving. The evening and the following morning were spent in concluding arrangements for his departure. To stay at home a minute longer than necessary after having once come to his determination would be, he felt, only to give new pain to his mother by some word, look, or deed.

He had hired a conveyance and sent off his goods by two o'clock that day. The next step was to get some furniture, which, after serving for temporary use in the cottage, would be available for the house at Budmouth when increased by goods of a better description. A mart extensive enough for the purpose existed at Anglebury, some miles beyond the spot chosen for his residence, and there he resolved to pass the coming night.

It now only remained to wish his mother good-bye. She was sitting by

the window as usual when he came downstairs.

"Mother, I am going to leave you," he said, holding out his hand.

"I thought you were, by your packing," replied Mrs. Yeobright in a voice from which every particle of emotion was painfully excluded.

"And you will part friends with me?"

"Certainly, Clym."

"I am going to be married on the twenty-fifth."

"I thought you were going to be married."

"And then--and then you must come and see us. You will understand me better after that, and our situation will not be so wretched as it is now."

"I do not think it likely I shall come to see you."

"Then it will not be my fault or Eustacia's, mother. Good-bye!"

He kissed her cheek, and departed in great misery, which was several hours in lessening itself to a controllable level. The position had been such that nothing more could be said without, in the first place,

breaking down a barrier; and that was not to be done.

No sooner had Yeobright gone from his mother's house than her face changed its rigid aspect for one of blank despair. After a while she wept, and her tears brought some relief. During the rest of the day she did nothing but walk up and down the garden path in a state bordering on stupefaction. Night came, and with it but little rest. The next day, with an instinct to do something which should reduce prostration to mournfulness, she went to her son's room, and with her own hands arranged it in order, for an imaginary time when he should return again. She gave some attention to her flowers, but it was perfunctorily bestowed, for they no longer charmed her.

It was a great relief when, early in the afternoon, Thomasin paid her an unexpected visit. This was not the first meeting between the relatives since Thomasin's marriage; and past blunders having been in a rough way rectified, they could always greet each other with pleasure and ease.

The oblique band of sunlight which followed her through the door became the young wife well. It illuminated her as her presence illuminated the heath. In her movements, in her gaze, she reminded the beholder of the feathered creatures who lived around her home. All similes and allegories concerning her began and ended with birds. There was as much variety in her motions as in their flight. When she was musing she was a kestrel, which hangs in the air by an invisible

motion of its wings. When she was in a high wind her light body was blown against trees and banks like a heron's. When she was frightened she darted noiselessly like a kingfisher. When she was serene she skimmed like a swallow, and that is how she was moving now.

"You are looking very blithe, upon my word, Tamsie," said Mrs. Yeobright, with a sad smile. "How is Damon?"

"He is very well."

"Is he kind to you, Thomasin?" And Mrs. Yeobright observed her narrowly.

"Pretty fairly."

"Is that honestly said?"

"Yes, aunt. I would tell you if he were unkind." She added, blushing, and with hesitation, "He--I don't know if I ought to complain to you about this, but I am not quite sure what to do. I want some money, you know, aunt--some to buy little things for myself--and he doesn't give me any. I don't like to ask him; and yet, perhaps, he doesn't give it me because he doesn't know. Ought I to mention it to him, aunt?"

"Of course you ought. Have you never said a word on the matter?"

"You see, I had some of my own," said Thomasin evasively, "and I have not wanted any of his until lately. I did just say something about it last week; but he seems--not to remember."

"He must be made to remember. You are aware that I have a little box full of spade-guineas, which your uncle put into my hands to divide between yourself and Clym whenever I chose. Perhaps the time has come when it should be done. They can be turned into sovereigns at any moment."

"I think I should like to have my share--that is, if you don't mind."

"You shall, if necessary. But it is only proper that you should first tell your husband distinctly that you are without any, and see what he will do."

"Very well, I will... Aunt, I have heard about Clym. I know you are in trouble about him, and that's why I have come."

Mrs. Yeobright turned away, and her features worked in her attempt to conceal her feelings. Then she ceased to make any attempt, and said, weeping, "O Thomasin, do you think he hates me? How can he bear to grieve me so, when I have lived only for him through all these years?"

"Hate you--no," said Thomasin soothingly. "It is only that he loves

her too well. Look at it quietly--do. It is not so very bad of him. Do you know, I thought it not the worst match he could have made. Miss Vye's family is a good one on her mother's side; and her father was a romantic wanderer--a sort of Greek Ulysses."

"It is no use, Thomasin; it is no use. Your intention is good; but I will not trouble you to argue. I have gone through the whole that can be said on either side times, and many times. Clym and I have not parted in anger; we have parted in a worse way. It is not a passionate quarrel that would have broken my heart; it is the steady opposition and persistence in going wrong that he has shown. O Thomasin, he was so good as a little boy--so tender and kind!"

"He was, I know."

"I did not think one whom I called mine would grow up to treat me like this. He spoke to me as if I opposed him to injure him. As though I could wish him ill!"

"There are worse women in the world than Eustacia Vye."

"There are too many better; that's the agony of it. It was she, Thomasin, and she only, who led your husband to act as he did: I would swear it!"

"No," said Thomasin eagerly. "It was before he knew me that he

thought of her, and it was nothing but a mere flirtation."

"Very well; we will let it be so. There is little use in unravelling that now. Sons must be blind if they will. Why is it that a woman can see from a distance what a man cannot see close? Clym must do as he will--he is nothing more to me. And this is maternity--to give one's best years and best love to ensure the fate of being despised!"

"You are too unyielding. Think how many mothers there are whose sons have brought them to public shame by real crimes before you feel so deeply a case like this."

"Thomasin, don't lecture me--I can't have it. It is the excess above what we expect that makes the force of the blow, and that may not be greater in their case than in mine: they may have foreseen the worst... I am wrongly made, Thomasin," she added, with a mournful smile. "Some widows can guard against the wounds their children give them by turning their hearts to another husband and beginning life again. But I always was a poor, weak, one-idea'd creature--I had not the compass of heart nor the enterprise for that. Just as forlorn and stupefied as I was when my husband's spirit flew away I have sat ever since--never attempting to mend matters at all. I was comparatively a young woman then, and I might have had another family by this time, and have been comforted by them for the failure of this one son."

"It is more noble in you that you did not."

"The more noble, the less wise."

"Forget it, and be soothed, dear aunt. And I shall not leave you alone for long. I shall come and see you every day."

And for one week Thomasin literally fulfilled her word. She endeavoured to make light of the wedding; and brought news of the preparations, and that she was invited to be present. The next week she was rather unwell, and did not appear. Nothing had as yet been done about the guineas, for Thomasin feared to address her husband again on the subject, and Mrs. Yeobright had insisted upon this.

One day just before this time Wildeve was standing at the door of the Quiet Woman. In addition to the upward path through the heath to Rainbarrow and Mistover, there was a road which branched from the highway a short distance below the inn, and ascended to Mistover by a circuitous and easy incline. This was the only route on that side for vehicles to the captain's retreat. A light cart from the nearest town descended the road, and the lad who was driving pulled up in front of the inn for something to drink.

"You come from Mistover?" said Wildeve.

"Yes. They are taking in good things up there. Going to be a wedding." And the driver buried his face in his mug.

Wildeve had not received an inkling of the fact before, and a sudden expression of pain overspread his face. He turned for a moment into the passage to hide it. Then he came back again.

"Do you mean Miss Vye?" he said. "How is it--that she can be married so soon?"

"By the will of God and a ready young man, I suppose."

"You don't mean Mr. Yeobright?"

"Yes. He has been creeping about with her all the spring."

"I suppose--she was immensely taken with him?"

"She is crazy about him, so their general servant of all work tells me. And that lad Charley that looks after the horse is all in a daze about it. The stun-poll has got fondlike of her."

"Is she lively--is she glad? Going to be married so soon--well!"

"It isn't so very soon."

"No; not so very soon."

Wildeve went indoors to the empty room, a curious heartache within him. He rested his elbow upon the mantelpiece and his face upon his hand. When Thomasin entered the room he did not tell her of what he had heard. The old longing for Eustacia had reappeared in his soul; and it was mainly because he had discovered that it was another man's intention to possess her.

To be yearning for the difficult, to be weary of that offered; to care for the remote, to dislike the near; it was Wildeve's nature always. This is the true mark of the man of sentiment. Though Wildeve's fevered feeling had not been elaborated to real poetical compass, it was of the standard sort. He might have been called the Rousseau of Egdon.

VII

The Morning and the Evening of a Day

The wedding morning came. Nobody would have imagined from appearances that Blooms-End had any interest in Mistover that day. A solemn

stillness prevailed around the house of Clym's mother, and there was no more animation indoors. Mrs. Yeobright, who had declined to attend the ceremony, sat by the breakfast table in the old room which communicated immediately with the porch, her eyes listlessly directed towards the open door. It was the room in which, six months earlier, the merry Christmas party had met, to which Eustacia came secretly and as a stranger. The only living thing that entered now was a sparrow; and seeing no movements to cause alarm, he hopped boldly round the room, endeavoured to go out by the window, and fluttered among the pot-flowers. This roused the lonely sitter, who got up, released the bird, and went to the door. She was expecting Thomasin, who had written the night before to state that the time had come when she would wish to have the money, and that she would if possible call this day.

Yet Thomasin occupied Mrs. Yeobright's thoughts but slightly as she looked up the valley of the heath, alive with butterflies, and with grasshoppers whose husky noises on every side formed a whispered chorus. A domestic drama, for which the preparations were now being made a mile or two off, was but little less vividly present to her eyes than if enacted before her. She tried to dismiss the vision, and walked about the garden plot; but her eyes ever and anon sought out the direction of the parish church to which Mistover belonged, and her excited fancy clove the hills which divided the building from her eyes. The morning wore away. Eleven o'clock struck: could it be that the wedding was then in progress? It must be so. She went

on imagining the scene at the church, which he had by this time approached with his bride. She pictured the little group of children by the gate as the pony-carriage drove up in which, as Thomasin had learnt, they were going to perform the short journey. Then she saw them enter and proceed to the chancel and kneel; and the service seemed to go on.

She covered her face with her hands. "O, it is a mistake!" she groaned. "And he will rue it some day, and think of me!"

While she remained thus, overcome by her forebodings, the old clock indoors whizzed forth twelve strokes. Soon after, faint sounds floated to her ear from afar over the hills. The breeze came from that quarter, and it had brought with it the notes of distant bells, gaily starting off in a peal: one, two, three, four, five. The ringers at East Egdon were announcing the nuptials of Eustacia and her son.

"Then it is over," she murmured. "Well, well! and life too will be over soon. And why should I go on scalding my face like this? Cry about one thing in life, cry about all; one thread runs through the whole piece. And yet we say, 'a time to laugh!'"

Towards evening Wildeve came. Since Thomasin's marriage Mrs. Yeobright had shown towards him that grim friendliness which at last arises in all such cases of undesired affinity. The vision of what ought to have been is thrown aside in sheer weariness, and browbeaten human

endeavour listlessly makes the best of the fact that is. Wildeve, to do him justice, had behaved very courteously to his wife's aunt; and it was with no surprise that she saw him enter now.

"Thomasin has not been able to come, as she promised to do," he replied to her inquiry, which had been anxious, for she knew that her niece was badly in want of money. "The captain came down last night and personally pressed her to join them today. So, not to be unpleasant, she determined to go. They fetched her in the pony-chaise, and are going to bring her back."

"Then it is done," said Mrs. Yeobright. "Have they gone to their new home?"

"I don't know. I have had no news from Mistover since Thomasin left to go."

"You did not go with her?" said she, as if there might be good reasons why.

"I could not," said Wildeve, reddening slightly. "We could not both leave the house; it was rather a busy morning, on account of Anglebury Great Market. I believe you have something to give to Thomasin? If you like, I will take it."

Mrs. Yeobright hesitated, and wondered if Wildeve knew what the

something was. "Did she tell you of this?" she inquired.

"Not particularly. She casually dropped a remark about having arranged to fetch some article or other."

"It is hardly necessary to send it. She can have it whenever she chooses to come."

"That won't be yet. In the present state of her health she must not go on walking so much as she has done." He added, with a faint twang of sarcasm, "What wonderful thing is it that I cannot be trusted to take?"

"Nothing worth troubling you with."

"One would think you doubted my honesty," he said, with a laugh, though his colour rose in a quick resentfulness frequent with him.

"You need think no such thing," said she drily. "It is simply that I, in common with the rest of the world, feel that there are certain things which had better be done by certain people than by others."

"As you like, as you like," said Wildeve laconically. "It is not worth arguing about. Well, I think I must turn homeward again, as the inn must not be left long in charge of the lad and the maid only."

He went his way, his farewell being scarcely so courteous as his greeting. But Mrs. Yeobright knew him thoroughly by this time, and took little notice of his manner, good or bad.

When Wildeve was gone Mrs. Yeobright stood and considered what would be the best course to adopt with regard to the guineas, which she had not liked to entrust to Wildeve. It was hardly credible that Thomasin had told him to ask for them, when the necessity for them had arisen from the difficulty of obtaining money at his hands. At the same time Thomasin really wanted them, and might be unable to come to Blooms-End for another week at least. To take or send the money to her at the inn would be impolite, since Wildeve would pretty surely be present, or would discover the transaction; and if, as her aunt suspected, he treated her less kindly than she deserved to be treated, he might then get the whole sum out of her gentle hands. But on this particular evening Thomasin was at Mistover, and anything might be conveyed to her there without the knowledge of her husband. Upon the whole the opportunity was worth taking advantage of.

Her son, too, was there, and was now married. There could be no more proper moment to render him his share of the money than the present. And the chance that would be afforded her, by sending him this gift, of showing how far she was from bearing him ill-will, cheered the sad mother's heart.

She went upstairs and took from a locked drawer a little box, out of

which she poured a hoard of broad unworn guineas that had lain there many a year. There were a hundred in all, and she divided them into two heaps, fifty in each. Tying up these in small canvas bags, she went down to the garden and called to Christian Cantle, who was loitering about in hope of a supper which was not really owed him. Mrs. Yeobright gave him the moneybags, charged him to go to Mistover, and on no account to deliver them into any one's hands save her son's and Thomasin's. On further thought she deemed it advisable to tell Christian precisely what the two bags contained, that he might be fully impressed with their importance. Christian pocketed the money-bags, promised the greatest carefulness, and set out on his way.

"You need not hurry," said Mrs. Yeobright. "It will be better not to get there till after dusk, and then nobody will notice you. Come back here to supper, if it is not too late."

It was nearly nine o'clock when he began to ascend the vale towards Mistover; but the long days of summer being at their climax, the first obscurity of evening had only just begun to tan the landscape. At this point of his journey Christian heard voices, and found that they proceeded from a company of men and women who were traversing a hollow ahead of him, the tops only of their heads being visible.

He paused and thought of the money he carried. It was almost too early even for Christian seriously to fear robbery; nevertheless he took a precaution which ever since his boyhood he had adopted whenever

he carried more than two or three shillings upon his person--a precaution somewhat like that of the owner of the Pitt Diamond when filled with similar misgivings. He took off his boots, untied the guineas, and emptied the contents of one little bag into the right boot, and of the other into the left, spreading them as flatly as possible over the bottom of each, which was really a spacious coffer by no means limited to the size of the foot. Pulling them on again and lacing them to the very top, he proceeded on his way, more easy in his head than under his soles.

His path converged towards that of the noisy company, and on coming nearer he found to his relief that they were several Egdon people whom he knew very well, while with them walked Fairway, of Blooms-End.

"What! Christian going too?" said Fairway as soon as he recognized the newcomer. "You've got no young woman nor wife to your name to gie a gown-piece to, I'm sure."

"What d'ye mean?" said Christian.

"Why, the raffle. The one we go to every year. Going to the raffle as well as ourselves?"

"Never knew a word o't. Is it like cudgel-playing or other sportful forms of bloodshed? I don't want to go, thank you, Mister Fairway, and no offence."

"Christian don't know the fun o't, and 'twould be a fine sight for him," said a buxom woman. "There's no danger at all, Christian. Every man puts in a shilling apiece, and one wins a gown-piece for his wife or sweetheart if he's got one."

"Well, as that's not my fortune there's no meaning in it to me. But I should like to see the fun, if there's nothing of the black art in it, and if a man may look on without cost or getting into any dangerous wrangle?"

"There will be no uproar at all," said Timothy. "Sure, Christian, if you'd like to come we'll see there's no harm done."

"And no ba'dy gaieties, I suppose? You see, neighbours, if so, it would be setting father a bad example, as he is so light moral'd. But a gown-piece for a shilling, and no black art--'tis worth looking in to see, and it wouldn't hinder me half an hour. Yes, I'll come, if you'll step a little way towards Mistover with me afterwards, supposing night should have closed in, and nobody else is going that way?"

One or two promised; and Christian, diverging from his direct path, turned round to the right with his companions towards the Quiet Woman.

When they entered the large common room of the inn they found

assembled there about ten men from among the neighbouring population, and the group was increased by the new contingent to double that number. Most of them were sitting round the room in seats divided by wooden elbows like those of crude cathedral stalls, which were carved with the initials of many an illustrious drunkard of former times who had passed his days and his nights between them, and now lay as an alcoholic cinder in the nearest churchyard. Among the cups on the long table before the sitters lay an open parcel of light drapery--the gown-piece, as it was called--which was to be raffled for. Wildeve was standing with his back to the fireplace smoking a cigar; and the promoter of the raffle, a packman from a distant town, was expatiating upon the value of the fabric as material for a summer dress.

"Now, gentlemen," he continued, as the newcomers drew up to the table, "there's five have entered, and we want four more to make up the number. I think, by the faces of those gentlemen who have just come in, that they are shrewd enough to take advantage of this rare opportunity of beautifying their ladies at a very trifling expense."

Fairway, Sam, and another placed their shillings on the table, and the man turned to Christian.

"No, sir," said Christian, drawing back, with a quick gaze of misgiving. "I am only a poor chap come to look on, an it please ye, sir. I don't so much as know how you do it. If so be I was sure of getting it I would put down the shilling; but I couldn't otherwise."

"I think you might almost be sure," said the pedlar. "In fact, now I look into your face, even if I can't say you are sure to win, I can say that I never saw anything look more like winning in my life."

"You'll anyhow have the same chance as the rest of us," said Sam.

"And the extra luck of being the last comer," said another.

"And I was born wi' a caul, and perhaps can be no more ruined than drowned?" Christian added, beginning to give way.

Ultimately Christian laid down his shilling, the raffle began, and the dice went round. When it came to Christian's turn he took the box with a trembling hand, shook it fearfully, and threw a pair-royal. Three of the others had thrown common low pairs, and all the rest mere points.

"The gentleman looked like winning, as I said," observed the chapman blandly. "Take it, sir; the article is yours."

"Haw-haw-haw!" said Fairway. "I'm damned if this isn't the quarest start that ever I knowed!"

"Mine?" asked Christian, with a vacant stare from his target eyes. "I--I haven't got neither maid, wife, nor widder belonging to me at

all, and I'm afeard it will make me laughed at to ha'e it, Master Traveller. What with being curious to join in I never thought of that! What shall I do wi' a woman's clothes in my bedroom, and not lose my decency!"

"Keep 'em, to be sure," said Fairway, "if it is only for luck. Perhaps 'twill tempt some woman that thy poor carcase had no power over when standing empty-handed."

"Keep it, certainly," said Wildeve, who had idly watched the scene from a distance.

The table was then cleared of the articles, and the men began to drink.

"Well, to be sure!" said Christian, half to himself. "To think I should have been born so lucky as this, and not have found it out until now! What curious creatures these dice be--powerful rulers of us all, and yet at my command! I am sure I never need be afeared of anything after this." He handled the dice fondly one by one. "Why, sir," he said in a confidential whisper to Wildeve, who was near his left hand, "if I could only use this power that's in me of multiplying money I might do some good to a near relation of yours, seeing what I've got about me of hers--eh?" He tapped one of his money-laden boots upon the floor.

"What do you mean?" said Wildeve.

"That's a secret. Well, I must be going now." He looked anxiously towards Fairway.

"Where are you going?" Wildeve asked.

"To Mistover Knap. I have to see Mrs. Thomasin there--that's all."

"I am going there, too, to fetch Mrs. Wildeve. We can walk together."

Wildeve became lost in thought, and a look of inward illumination came into his eyes. It was money for his wife that Mrs. Yeobright could not trust him with. "Yet she could trust this fellow," he said to himself. "Why doesn't that which belongs to the wife belong to the husband too?"

He called to the pot-boy to bring him his hat, and said, "Now, Christian, I am ready."

"Mr. Wildeve," said Christian timidly, as he turned to leave the room, "would you mind lending me them wonderful little things that carry my luck inside 'em, that I might practise a bit by myself, you know?" He looked wistfully at the dice and box lying on the mantlepiece.

"Certainly," said Wildeve carelessly. "They were only cut out by some

lad with his knife, and are worth nothing." And Christian went back and privately pocketed them.

Wildeve opened the door and looked out. The night was warm and cloudy. "By Gad! 'tis dark," he continued. "But I suppose we shall find our way."

"If we should lose the path it might be awkward," said Christian. "A lantern is the only shield that will make it safe for us."

"Let's have a lantern by all means." The stable lantern was fetched and lighted. Christian took up his gownpiece, and the two set out to ascend the hill.

Within the room the men fell into chat till their attention was for a moment drawn to the chimney-corner. This was large, and, in addition to its proper recess, contained within its jambs, like many on Egdon, a receding seat, so that a person might sit there absolutely unobserved, provided there was no fire to light him up, as was the case now and throughout the summer. From the niche a single object protruded into the light from the candles on the table. It was a clay pipe, and its colour was reddish. The men had been attracted to this object by a voice behind the pipe asking for a light.

"Upon my life, it fairly startled me when the man spoke!" said Fairway, handing a candle. "Oh--'tis the reddleman! You've kept a

quiet tongue, young man."

"Yes, I had nothing to say," observed Venn. In a few minutes he arose and wished the company good night.

Meanwhile Wildeve and Christian had plunged into the heath.

It was a stagnant, warm, and misty night, full of all the heavy perfumes of new vegetation not yet dried by hot sun, and among these particularly the scent of the fern. The lantern, dangling from Christian's hand, brushed the feathery fronds in passing by, disturbing moths and other winged insects, which flew out and alighted upon its horny panes.

"So you have money to carry to Mrs. Wildeve?" said Christian's companion, after a silence. "Don't you think it very odd that it shouldn't be given to me?"

"As man and wife be one flesh, 'twould have been all the same, I should think," said Christian. "But my strict documents was, to give the money into Mrs. Wildeve's hand--and 'tis well to do things right."

"No doubt," said Wildeve. Any person who had known the circumstances might have perceived that Wildeve was mortified by the discovery that the matter in transit was money, and not, as he had supposed when at Blooms-End, some fancy nick-nack which only interested the two women

themselves. Mrs. Yeobright's refusal implied that his honour was not considered to be of sufficiently good quality to make him a safer bearer of his wife's property.

"How very warm it is tonight, Christian!" he said, panting, when they were nearly under Rainbarrow. "Let us sit down for a few minutes, for Heaven's sake."

Wildeve flung himself down on the soft ferns; and Christian, placing the lantern and parcel on the ground, perched himself in a cramped position hard by, his knees almost touching his chin. He presently thrust one hand into his coat-pocket and began shaking it about.

"What are you rattling in there?" said Wildeve.

"Only the dice, sir," said Christian, quickly withdrawing his hand. "What magical machines these little things be, Mr. Wildeve! 'Tis a game I should never get tired of. Would you mind my taking 'em out and looking at 'em for a minute, to see how they are made? I didn't like to look close before the other men, for fear they should think it bad manners in me." Christian took them out and examined them in the hollow of his hand by the lantern light. "That these little things should carry such luck, and such charm, and such a spell, and such power in 'em, passes all I ever heard or zeed," he went on, with a fascinated gaze at the dice, which, as is frequently the case in country places, were made of wood, the points being burnt upon each

face with the end of a wire.

"They are a great deal in a small compass, You think?"

"Yes. Do ye suppose they really be the devil's playthings, Mr. Wildeve? If so, 'tis no good sign that I be such a lucky man."

"You ought to win some money, now that you've got them. Any woman would marry you then. Now is your time, Christian, and I would recommend you not to let it slip. Some men are born to luck, some are not. I belong to the latter class."

"Did you ever know anybody who was born to it besides myself?"

"O yes. I once heard of an Italian, who sat down at a gaming table with only a louis (that's a foreign sovereign) in his pocket. He played on for twenty-four hours, and won ten thousand pounds, stripping the bank he had played against. Then there was another man who had lost a thousand pounds, and went to the broker's next day to sell stock, that he might pay the debt. The man to whom he owed the money went with him in a hackney-coach; and to pass the time they tossed who should pay the fare. The ruined man won, and the other was tempted to continue the game, and they played all the way. When the coachman stopped he was told to drive home again: the whole thousand pounds had been won back by the man who was going to sell."

"Ha--ha--splendid!" exclaimed Christian. "Go on--go on!"

"Then there was a man of London, who was only a waiter at White's clubhouse. He began playing first half-crown stakes, and then higher and higher, till he became very rich, got an appointment in India, and rose to be Governor of Madras. His daughter married a member of Parliament, and the Bishop of Carlisle stood godfather to one of the children."

"Wonderful! wonderful!"

"And once there was a young man in America who gambled till he had lost his last dollar. He staked his watch and chain, and lost as before; staked his umbrella, lost again; staked his hat, lost again; staked his coat and stood in his shirt-sleeve; lost again. Began taking off his breeches, and then a looker-on gave him a trifle for his pluck. With this he won. Won back his coat, won back his hat, won back his umbrella, his watch, his money, and went out of the door a rich man."

"Oh, 'tis too good--it takes away my breath! Mr. Wildeve, I think I will try another shilling with you, as I am one of that sort; no danger can come o't, and you can afford to lose."

"Very well," said Wildeve, rising. Searching about with the lantern, he found a large flat stone, which he placed between himself and

Christian, and sat down again. The lantern was opened to give more light, and it's rays directed upon the stone. Christian put down a shilling, Wildeve another, and each threw. Christian won. They played for two, Christian won again.

"Let us try four," said Wildeve. They played for four. This time the stakes were won by Wildeve.

"Ah, those little accidents will, of course, sometimes happen, to the luckiest man," he observed.

"And now I have no more money!" explained Christian excitedly. "And yet, if I could go on, I should get it back again, and more. I wish this was mine." He struck his boot upon the ground, so that the guineas chinked within.

"What! you have not put Mrs. Wildeve's money there?"

"Yes. 'Tis for safety. Is it any harm to raffle with a married lady's money when, if I win, I shall only keep my winnings, and give her her own all the same; and if t'other man wins, her money will go to the lawful owner?"

"None at all."

Wildeve had been brooding ever since they started on the mean

estimation in which he was held by his wife's friends; and it cut his heart severely. As the minutes passed he had gradually drifted into a revengeful intention without knowing the precise moment of forming it. This was to teach Mrs. Yeobright a lesson, as he considered it to be; in other words, to show her if he could, that her niece's husband was the proper guardian of her niece's money.

"Well, here goes!" said Christian, beginning to unlace one boot. "I shall dream of it nights and nights, I suppose; but I shall always swear my flesh don't crawl when I think o't!"

He thrust his hand into the boot and withdrew one of poor Thomasin's precious guineas, piping hot. Wildeve had already placed a sovereign on the stone. The game was then resumed. Wildeve won first, and Christian ventured another, winning himself this time. The game fluctuated, but the average was in Wildeve's favour. Both men became so absorbed in the game that they took no heed of anything but the pigmy objects immediately beneath their eyes, the flat stone, the open lantern, the dice, and the few illuminated fern-leaves which lay under the light, were the whole world to them.

At length Christian lost rapidly; and presently, to his horror, the whole fifty guineas belonging to Thomasin had been handed over to his adversary.

"I don't care--I don't care!" he moaned, and desperately set about

untying his left boot to get at the other fifty. "The devil will toss me into the flames on his three-pronged fork for this night's work, I know! But perhaps I shall win yet, and then I'll get a wife to sit up with me o' nights, and I won't be afeard, I won't! Here's another for'ee, my man!" He slapped another guinea down upon the stone, and the dice-box was rattled again.

Time passed on. Wildeve began to be as excited as Christian himself. When commencing the game his intention had been nothing further than a bitter practical joke on Mrs. Yeobright. To win the money, fairly or otherwise, and to hand it contemptuously to Thomasin in her aunt's presence, had been the dim outline of his purpose. But men are drawn from their intentions even in the course of carrying them out, and it was extremely doubtful, by the time the twentieth guinea had been reached, whether Wildeve was conscious of any other intention than that of winning for his own personal benefit. Moreover, he was now no longer gambling for his wife's money, but for Yeobright's; though of this fact Christian, in his apprehensiveness, did not inform him till afterwards.

It was nearly eleven o'clock, when, with almost a shriek, Christian placed Yeobright's last gleaming guinea upon the stone. In thirty seconds it had gone the way of its companions.

Christian turned and flung himself on the ferns in a convulsion of remorse, "O, what shall I do with my wretched self?" he groaned.

"What shall I do? Will any good Heaven hae mercy upon my wicked soul?"

"Do? Live on just the same."

"I won't live on just the same! I'll die! I say you are a--a--"

"A man sharper than my neighbour."

"Yes, a man sharper than my neighbour; a regular sharper!"

"Poor chips-in-porridge, you are very unmannerly."

"I don't know about that! And I say you be unmannerly! You've got money that isn't your own. Half the guineas are poor Mr. Clym's."

"How's that?"

"Because I had to gie fifty of 'em to him. Mrs. Yeobright said so."

"Oh?... Well, 'twould have been more graceful of her to have given them to his wife Eustacia. But they are in my hands now."

Christian pulled on his boots, and with heavy breathings, which could be heard to some distance, dragged his limbs together, arose, and tottered away out of sight. Wildeve set about shutting the lantern to

return to the house, for he deemed it too late to go to Mistover to meet his wife, who was to be driven home in the captain's four-wheel. While he was closing the little horn door a figure rose from behind a neighbouring bush and came forward into the lantern light. It was the reddleman approaching.

VIII

A New Force Disturbs the Current

Wildeve stared. Venn looked coolly towards Wildeve, and, without a word being spoken, he deliberately sat himself down where Christian had been seated, thrust his hand into his pocket, drew out a sovereign, and laid it on the stone.

"You have been watching us from behind that bush?" said Wildeve.

The reddleman nodded. "Down with your stake," he said. "Or haven't you pluck enough to go on?"

Now, gambling is a species of amusement which is much more easily begun with full pockets than left off with the same; and though

Wildeve in a cooler temper might have prudently declined this invitation, the excitement of his recent success carried him completely away. He placed one of the guineas on a slab beside the reddleman's sovereign. "Mine is a guinea," he said.

"A guinea that's not your own," said Venn sarcastically.

"It is my own," answered Wildeve haughtily. "It is my wife's, and what is hers is mine."

"Very well; let's make a beginning." He shook the box, and threw eight, ten, and nine; the three casts amounted to twenty-seven.

This encouraged Wildeve. He took the box; and his three casts amounted to forty-five.

Down went another of the reddleman's sovereigns against his first one which Wildeve laid. This time Wildeve threw fifty-one points, but no pair. The reddleman looked grim, threw a raffle of aces, and pocketed the stakes.

"Here you are again," said Wildeve contemptuously. "Double the stakes." He laid two of Thomasin's guineas, and the reddleman his two pounds. Venn won again. New stakes were laid on the stone, and the gamblers proceeded as before.

Wildeve was a nervous and excitable man, and the game was beginning to tell upon his temper. He writhed, fumed, shifted his seat; and the beating of his heart was almost audible. Venn sat with lips impassively closed and eyes reduced to a pair of unimportant twinkles; he scarcely appeared to breathe. He might have been an Arab, or an automaton; he would have been like a red sandstone statue but for the motion of his arm with the dice-box.

The game fluctuated, now in favour of one, now in favour of the other, without any great advantage on the side of either. Nearly twenty minutes were passed thus. The light of the candle had by this time attracted heathflies, moths, and other winged creatures of night, which floated round the lantern, flew into the flame, or beat about the faces of the two players.

But neither of the men paid much attention to these things, their eyes being concentrated upon the little flat stone, which to them was an arena vast and important as a battlefield. By this time a change had come over the game; the reddleman won continually. At length sixty guineas--Thomasin's fifty, and ten of Clym's--had passed into his hands. Wildeve was reckless, frantic, exasperated.

"'Won back his coat,'" said Venn slily.

Another throw, and the money went the same way.

"'Won back his hat,'" continued Venn.

"Oh, oh!" said Wildeve.

"'Won back his watch, won back his money, and went out of the door a rich man,'" added Venn sentence by sentence, as stake after stake passed over to him.

"Five more!" shouted Wildeve, dashing down the money. "And three casts be hanged--one shall decide."

The red automaton opposite lapsed into silence, nodded, and followed his example. Wildeve rattled the box, and threw a pair of sixes and five points. He clapped his hands; "I have done it this time--hurrah!"

"There are two playing, and only one has thrown," said the reddleman, quietly bringing down the box. The eyes of each were then so intently converged upon the stone that one could fancy their beams were visible, like rays in a fog.

Venn lifted the box, and behold a triplet of sixes was disclosed.

Wildeve was full of fury. While the reddleman was grasping the stakes Wildeve seized the dice and hurled them, box and all, into the darkness, uttering a fearful imprecation. Then he arose and began

stamping up and down like a madman.

"It is all over, then?" said Venn.

"No, no!" cried Wildeve. "I mean to have another chance yet. I must!"

"But, my good man, what have you done with the dice?"

"I threw them away--it was a momentary irritation. What a fool I am! Here--come and help me to look for them--we must find them again."

Wildeve snatched up the lantern and began anxiously prowling among the furze and fern.

"You are not likely to find them there," said Venn, following. "What did you do such a crazy thing as that for? Here's the box. The dice can't be far off."

Wildeve turned the light eagerly upon the spot where Venn had found the box, and mauled the herbage right and left. In the course of a few minutes one of the dice was found. They searched on for some time, but no other was to be seen.

"Never mind," said Wildeve; "let's play with one."

"Agreed," said Venn.

Down they sat again, and recommenced with single guinea stakes; and the play went on smartly. But Fortune had unmistakably fallen in love with the reddleman tonight. He won steadily, till he was the owner of fourteen more of the gold pieces. Seventy-nine of the hundred guineas were his, Wildeve possessing only twenty-one. The aspect of the two opponents was now singular. Apart from motions, a complete diorama of the fluctuations of the game went on in their eyes. A diminutive candle-flame was mirrored in each pupil, and it would have been possible to distinguish therein between the moods of hope and the moods of abandonment, even as regards the reddleman, though his facial muscles betrayed nothing at all. Wildeve played on with the recklessness of despair.

"What's that?" he suddenly exclaimed, hearing a rustle; and they both looked up.

They were surrounded by dusky forms between four and five feet high, standing a few paces beyond the rays of the lantern. A moment's inspection revealed that the encircling figures were heath-croppers, their heads being all towards the players, at whom they gazed intently.

"Hoosh!" said Wildeve, and the whole forty or fifty animals at once turned and galloped away. Play was again resumed.

Ten minutes passed away. Then a large death's head moth advanced from the obscure outer air, wheeled twice round the lantern, flew straight at the candle, and extinguished it by the force of the blow. Wildeve had just thrown, but had not lifted the box to see what he had cast; and now it was impossible.

"What the infernal!" he shrieked. "Now, what shall we do? Perhaps I have thrown six--have you any matches?"

"None," said Venn.

"Christian had some--I wonder where he is. Christian!"

But there was no reply to Wildeve's shout, save a mournful whining from the herons which were nesting lower down the vale. Both men looked blankly round without rising. As their eyes grew accustomed to the darkness they perceived faint greenish points of light among the grass and fern. These lights dotted the hillside like stars of a low magnitude.

"Ah--glowworms," said Wildeve. "Wait a minute. We can continue the game."

Venn sat still, and his companion went hither and thither till he had gathered thirteen glowworms--as many as he could find in a space of

four or five minutes--upon a foxglove leaf which he pulled for the purpose. The reddleman vented a low humorous laugh when he saw his adversary return with these. "Determined to go on, then?" he said drily.

"I always am!" said Wildeve angrily. And shaking the glowworms from the leaf he ranged them with a trembling hand in a circle on the stone, leaving a space in the middle for the descent of the dice-box, over which the thirteen tiny lamps threw a pale phosphoric shine. The game was again renewed. It happened to be that season of the year at which glowworms put forth their greatest brilliancy, and the light they yielded was more than ample for the purpose, since it is possible on such nights to read the handwriting of a letter by the light of two or three.

The incongruity between the men's deeds and their environment was great. Amid the soft juicy vegetation of the hollow in which they sat, the motionless and the uninhabited solitude, intruded the chink of guineas, the rattle of dice, the exclamations of the reckless players.

Wildeve had lifted the box as soon as the lights were obtained, and the solitary die proclaimed that the game was still against him.

"I won't play any more--you've been tampering with the dice," he shouted.

"How--when they were your own?" said the reddleman.

"We'll change the game: the lowest point shall win the stake--it may cut off my ill luck. Do you refuse?"

"No--go on," said Venn.

"O, there they are again--damn them!" cried Wildeve, looking up. The heath-croppers had returned noiselessly, and were looking on with erect heads just as before, their timid eyes fixed upon the scene, as if they were wondering what mankind and candle-light could have to do in these haunts at this untoward hour.

"What a plague those creatures are--staring at me so!" he said, and flung a stone, which scattered them; when the game was continued as before.

Wildeve had now ten guineas left; and each laid five. Wildeve threw three points; Venn two, and raked in the coins. The other seized the die, and clenched his teeth upon it in sheer rage, as if he would bite it in pieces. "Never give in--here are my last five!" he cried, throwing them down. "Hang the glowworms--they are going out. Why don't you burn, you little fools? Stir them up with a thorn."

He probed the glowworms with a bit of stick, and rolled them over,

till the bright side of their tails was upwards.

"There's light enough. Throw on," said Venn.

Wildeve brought down the box within the shining circle and looked eagerly. He had thrown ace. "Well done!--I said it would turn, and it has turned." Venn said nothing; but his hand shook slightly.

He threw ace also.

"O!" said Wildeve. "Curse me!"

The die smacked the stone a second time. It was ace again. Venn looked gloomy, threw: the die was seen to be lying in two pieces, the cleft sides uppermost.

"I've thrown nothing at all," he said.

"Serves me right--I split the die with my teeth. Here--take your money. Blank is less than one."

"I don't wish it."

"Take it, I say--you've won it!" And Wildeve threw the stakes against the reddleman's chest. Venn gathered them up, arose, and withdrew from the hollow, Wildeve sitting stupefied.

When he had come to himself he also arose, and, with the extinguished lantern in his hand, went towards the high-road. On reaching it he stood still. The silence of night pervaded the whole heath except in one direction; and that was towards Mistover. There he could hear the noise of light wheels, and presently saw two carriage-lamps descending the hill. Wildeve screened himself under a bush and waited.

The vehicle came on and passed before him. It was a hired carriage, and behind the coachman were two persons whom he knew well. There sat Eustacia and Yeobright, the arm of the latter being round her waist. They turned the sharp corner at the bottom towards the temporary home which Clym had hired and furnished, about five miles to the eastward.

Wildeve forgot the loss of the money at the sight of his lost love, whose preciousness in his eyes was increasing in geometrical progression with each new incident that reminded him of their hopeless division. Brimming with the subtilized misery that he was capable of feeling, he followed the opposite way towards the inn.

About the same moment that Wildeve stepped into the highway Venn also had reached it at a point a hundred yards further on; and he, hearing the same wheels, likewise waited till the carriage should come up. When he saw who sat therein he seemed to be disappointed. Reflecting a minute or two, during which interval the carriage rolled on, he crossed the road, and took a short cut through the furze and heath to

a point where the turnpike-road bent round in ascending a hill. He was now again in front of the carriage, which presently came up at a walking pace. Venn stepped forward and showed himself.

Eustacia started when the lamp shone upon him, and Clym's arm was involuntarily withdrawn from her waist. He said, "What, Diggory? You are having a lonely walk."

"Yes--I beg your pardon for stopping you," said Venn. "But I am waiting about for Mrs. Wildeve: I have something to give her from Mrs. Yeobright. Can you tell me if she's gone home from the party yet?"

"No. But she will be leaving soon. You may possibly meet her at the corner."

Venn made a farewell obeisance, and walked back to his former position, where the by-road from Mistover joined the highway. Here he remained fixed for nearly half an hour, and then another pair of lights came down the hill. It was the old-fashioned wheeled nondescript belonging to the captain, and Thomasin sat in it alone, driven by Charley.

The reddleman came up as they slowly turned the corner. "I beg pardon for stopping you, Mrs. Wildeve," he said. "But I have something to give you privately from Mrs. Yeobright." He handed a small parcel; it consisted of the hundred guineas he had just won, roughly twisted up

in a piece of paper.

Thomasin recovered from her surprise, and took the packet. "That's all, ma'am--I wish you good night," he said, and vanished from her view.

Thus Venn, in his anxiety to rectify matters, had placed in Thomasin's hands not only the fifty guineas which rightly belonged to her, but also the fifty intended for her cousin Clym. His mistake had been based upon Wildeve's words at the opening of the game, when he indignantly denied that the guinea was not his own. It had not been comprehended by the reddleman that at half-way through the performance the game was continued with the money of another person; and it was an error which afterwards helped to cause more misfortune than treble the loss in money value could have done.

The night was now somewhat advanced; and Venn plunged deeper into the heath, till he came to a ravine where his van was standing--a spot not more than two hundred yards from the site of the gambling bout. He entered this movable home of his, lit his lantern, and, before closing his door for the night, stood reflecting on the circumstances of the preceding hours. While he stood the dawn grew visible in the north-east quarter of the heavens, which, the clouds having cleared off, was bright with a soft sheen at this midsummer time, though it was only between one and two o'clock. Venn, thoroughly weary, then shut his door and flung himself down to sleep.