VINTAGE **HARDY**

The Mayor *of* Casterbridge

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About the Book

The Mayor of Casterbridge is a man haunted by his past. In his youth he betrayed his wife and baby daughter in a shocking incident that led him to swear never to touch alcohol again. He has since risen from his humble origins to become a respected pillar of the community in Casterbridge, but his secrets cannot stay hidden forever and he has many hard lessons left to learn.

About the Author

Thomas Hardy was born on 2 June 1840 at Higher Bockhampton in Dorset. His father was a stonemason. Hardy attended school in Dorchester and then trained as an architect. In 1868 his work took him to St Juliot's church in Cornwall where he met his wife-to-be, Emma. His first novel, *The Poor Man and the Lady*, was rejected by publishers but *Desperate Remedies* was published in 1871 and this was rapidly followed by *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872), *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873), *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874) and *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886). He also wrote many other novels, poems and short stories. *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* was published in 1891 and he published his final novel, *Jude the Obscure*, in 1895. Hardy was awarded the Order of Merit in 1910 and the gold medal of the Royal Society of Literature in 1912. Emma died in 1912 and Hardy married his second wife, Florence, in 1914. Thomas Hardy died on 11 January 1928.

OTHER NOVELS BY THOMAS HARDY

Desperate Remedies
Under the Greenwood Tree
A Pair of Blue Eyes
Far from the Madding Crowd
The Return of the Native
The Hand of Ethelberta
The Trumpet-Major
A Laodicean
Two on a Tower
The Woodlanders
The Well-Beloved
Tess of the D'Urbervilles
Jude the Obscure

THOMAS HARDY

The Mayor of Casterbridge

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY
Lucy Hughes-Hallett

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

INTRODUCTION

First, a *caveat*. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is – among other things – a tightly-constructed piece of story-telling. It was first published in serial form and Hardy, who inclined, in public anyway, to undervalue his own novels (his serious, important work, in his opinion, was his poetry) thought that in 'aiming to get an incident into almost every week's part' he had given it altogether too much in the way of plot. This may have been false modesty (he later conceded that the novel's narrative was 'quite coherent and organic'). But if Hardy was sincere in his self-deprecation, generations of readers have disagreed.

From its thunderclap of an opening scene to its heartbreaking end *The Mayor of Casterbridge* holds us gripped. There are twists. There are reverses. There are ironies. There are recognitions. Most of them – so firmly does this novel belong in a narrative tradition going all the way back to Homer – are foreseeable pages, even chapters, in advance. Of course that filthy hag up before the magistrates reminds Henchard of someone, and of course many readers will guess, a paragraph or two before he is so calamitously reminded of their first meeting, who she is. Of course that stranger with a seamanlike air, asking for a room at the inn, is the sailor whose always predictable reappearance will force the exposure of more awful truth. Those readers who know the novel well can enjoy the subtlety with which Hardy trifles with our expectations, by turns gratifying and tantalising them. But for one opening *The Mayor of Casterbridge* for the first time there are

surprises that I would be loath to spoil. New readers may prefer to finish it before reading on.

* * *

To begin not at the beginning but at the dramatic tableau with which Hardy opens the main part of his story, we are looking at a dinner-table. Silver-plate and crystal catches the light from a chandelier. Down each side of the table is seated a row of small-town dignitaries in their best clothes, most of them glistening too, evidently having eaten and drunk a thought too well. At the head of a table sits a man whose dominance is proclaimed by his size, his 'commanding' voice, his vivid looks ('a rich complexion . . . a flashing eye') and by the gold chain around his neck which identifies him as mayor. It could be one of Frans Hals' group portraits: the burghers of Haarlem transplanted to Wessex. Or more aptly, since we are observing this scene through a bay window which frames it like a proscenium arch, it could be a scene on stage. Michael Henchard, the mayor, is presented here at the zenith of his success. 'He worked his way up from nothing when 'a came here' explains one of the yokels gawping through the widow 'and now he's a pillar of the town'. It's evident that we are about to hear a variation on the lugubrious ancient theme of Fortune's wheel. Henchard has gone up: now he must come down. Among the watchers at the window are three people newly arrived in town – his long-lost wife, the girl who might be his daughter, the man who will supplant him – who will help to precipitate his fall.

Henchard's decline has two motors. In part his tragedy is an individual one, the consequence of his own transgressive act in selling his wife and daughter. In part it represents a cultural shift. In 1883 Thomas Hardy, after nearly twenty years away, returned to live in Dorchester, where he had gone to school and served his apprenticeship as an architect

while he built his nearby home, Max Gate. The next year he read systematically through several years-worth of back copies of the local paper dating from the 1820s. One of the items he noted was the edifying tale of the drunken labourer who foreswore alcohol for seven years and in the meantime rose in the world to become a respectable tradesman. There was the story of a soldier who shot himself after being marched through the streets half-dressed. There was the bankrupt whose honourable behaviour won general praise when he offered his gold watch to his creditors. And there was the case of a woman accused of bigamy who explained that her transfer from one husband to another was the consequence of a contract between the two men. All of these incidents found their way into *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, published two years later. More generally, as Hardy read through those half-century-old stories of a place he had once known well, and was coming to know again after a lapse of two decades, his mind was pervaded by reflections on transience and continuity, ideas which fed directly into his great dramatic novel on the workings of time.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is both an historical novel – its opening scenes are set in the 1820s, the main action in the early 1840s – and a novel about history. A remarkable number of the great nineteenth-century English novels are set in an earlier period. Some, by linking their action to public events, proclaim the fact – *A Tale of Two Cities, Vanity Fair*, and Hardy's own *The Trumpet Major*. Others, (*Jane Eyre, Middlemarch*) dealing with social organisation rather than battles and revolutions, wear their period costume less ostentatiously. In each of these works the past is a setting which, being at a remove from contemporary reality, allows the author imaginative freedom. For Hardy in this novel, though, it is more than that. The process of history, the way one era is inexorably overtaken by the next, is the very stuff of his story. As country fairs are superseded by urban

markets and the biblical ‘romance of the sower’ by a shiny machine, so each generation must give way to the next, and so Henchard is displaced by Farfrae.

That theme is framed as a tragedy. Hardy repeatedly alludes to the story of Saul, the king of the Israelites whose young favourite David (noted, like Farfrae for his singing) supplants him in the affections of his child and eventually takes his kingdom. Hardy admired Bible narratives: ‘their so-called simplicity is, in fact, the simplicity of the highest cunning.’ But his own narrative has a dramatic shape. Echoes of *King Lear* sound insistently through the novel, from the auction at the fair, where Henchard casts off not only a wife, but a daughter as well, to the hovel where he dies attended only by Abel Whittle, whom he once reduced to a ‘poor, bare forked creature’ as pitiful as Lear’s Poor Tom. Even the goldfinch he brings to Elizabeth Jane’s wedding is an allusion to Lear’s hope that he and his (kinder) daughter might sing together in prison like birds in a cage. And although Henchard is still in his forties at the end, his story, like Lear’s, is that of a man who has outlived his time.

The Mayor of Casterbridge is full of reminders of the remote past. Dead Roman soldiers lie beneath the town and their ghosts seem to crowd the stepped sides of the ruined amphitheatre. The furmity woman and the weather prophet are both atavistic figures, still at home in a world which is only just, at the time of the action, relinquishing agricultural methods unchanged since ‘the time of the heptarchy’ (the six kingdoms, of which Wessex was one, into which Anglo-Saxon Britain was divided). Henchard belongs with these past times. Weydon Priors, scene of his ‘crime’ and his vow of atonement, is part of an older, more primitive world than the bustling town of Casterbridge, which the railway has nearly reached. And it is to an even more archaic setting, a mud-hut on an untilled heath, that Henchard goes to die.

* * *

It’s the way of tragedy to convert a sad story of the decline of a way of life and the fall of an individual into a spectacle full of vigour and exuberance. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* depicts a busy, populous world. Labourers and carters, barmaids and gamekeepers crowd the scene. This is, unusually, a novel about work. The market price of corn is every bit as important in the plot as sexual and social morality. The most interesting relationship is a business one: the question of who will be employer and who employee being accorded as much attention as the more conventional novelistic question of who should be married to whom.

At the centre of this dynamic fictional world Hardy places a character of explosive vitality. Henchard is decisive, forceful, overbearing. His emotions are quick to kindle and, mastered by them, he insists on mastering others. Barely-educated and low-born he may be, an itinerant labourer at the beginning, a derelict at the end, he is yet a heroic character. He can wrestle an enraged bull into submission. Before provoking a duel to the death with a physically inferior opponent he binds one arm behind him. Bankrupt, he disdains to hold anything back. His nobility of character links him with the heroes of epic, (Virginia Woolf likened him to Ajax, lord of Salamis). Even in his decline he is magnificent. Hardy compares him repeatedly to a lion, or to a great tree. With his ‘tigerish affection’, his tendency to demand far too much of those he desires and to turn fiercely against them when disappointed, he alienates everyone in his fictional world, ending his life almost alone, but to readers he is irresistible.

This is perhaps the least romantic of Hardy’s novels, or rather the least sentimental about romantic love. Henchard’s relationships with Susan and Lucetta are driven successively by desire, irritation, and duty. Only once Lucetta has become yet another of the things that Farfrae

has taken from him does she become truly interesting to Henchard. His strongest emotions are those directed towards the young man, yet even in this case there is no suggestion of erotic tenderness, only, while Henchard is still the boss, a delight in domination, and afterwards jealousy not of Farfrae's affection but of his power. Other characters are equally cool. When Farfrae temporarily jilts Elizabeth Jane she is disappointed but not heart-broken. When Lucetta dies Farfrae mourns only briefly, reckoning (so guesses the narrator) that the 'simple sorrow' of her death had spared him a 'looming misery'. As for Henchard's treatment of Elizabeth Jane, it is so capricious, so selfish (he wants her for his own happiness, not for hers) that there is a dreadful justice in the indifference with which she turns him away at last. But though this is a novel very short on love, its emotional impact is immense, because of the way Henchard – so grand and so vulnerable at once – appeals to the reader. When he reads his dead wife's letter informing him that Elizabeth Jane is not his daughter he sits motionless for a couple of hours, staring at the paper 'as if it were a window pane through which he saw for miles'. His distress is all the more terrible for being so repressed.

Private emotion, though, is only one aspect of this novel's life. The title is carefully chosen. Casterbridge, with its market, its gossip, its inns and its millennia of history, is as important as its mayor. We first see the town literally from a birds-eye view, and to a 'bird of the more soaring kind' it appears like a square mosaic of roofs framed by its green avenues, 'as compact as a box of dominoes'. A town without suburbs, its relation to the countryside around it is singular, and the occasion for some of Hardy's finest bravura writing. 'The farmer's boy could sit under his barley-mow and pitch a stone into the office-window of the town-clerk; reapers at work among the sheaves nodded to acquaintances standing on the pavement-corner; the red-robed judge, when he condemned a sheep stealer, pronounced sentence to the

tune of Baa, that floated in at the window from the remainder of the flock browsing hard by'. This is a picture of Dorchester as Hardy knew it and as he found its earlier state recorded in the archives he was reading, but it is also a symbolic image, a landscape of the mind. Tight-packed and four-square, Casterbridge seems at first the quintessential product of human ingenuity, human co-operation. Later in the novel, though, it begins to metamorphose. The passage quoted above ends with a reference to the gallows and the meadow beneath it. Later Henchard, in one of his depressions, will wander through the quarter of town where the gallows stands and where, we now learn, a ruined priory looms above a sinister river and the allegedly 'compact' toy-box of a town sprawls beyond its quadrangular limits in a jumbled landscape of cliff and black water. Viewed one way Casterbridge is as neat and functional as Farfrae's accountancy or his newfangled agricultural machinery: viewed another it reveals gothic ruins and deep romantic chasms where a torrent roars 'like the voice of desolation'.

Hardy's use of landscape to mirror and enlarge his character's psychic states is his most distinctive technique, and his most brilliant gift. The labyrinthine Chase of Tess Durbeyfield's downfall, the lush dairy farm of her happy love, the bleak turnip-fields of her tribulation, magnify her story from banal misfortune to mythic ordeal. The protean landscape of Egdon Heath aggrandises the love-tangle of *The Return of the Native's* characters, like a screen onto which vast shadows are cast by manikins. Receiving the outline of trivial human difficulties, the screen reflects back titanic drama. Casterbridge performs a similar function for its mayor. As the successful urban persona he has made for himself begins to crack up, revealing earlier strata of his personality, so we are gradually shown the ancient and disreputable side of the prosperous modern town. Lucetta's house, for all the 'dignity' of its front, backs onto an alley with an old arch decorated by a 'ghastly' leering mask,

which is connected with other hidden ancient places of ‘intrigue’ and cruelty – the bull-stake, the cock-pit, ‘the pool wherein nameless infants had been used to disappear’. And then, of course, there is Mixen Lane. As Henchard’s fortunes unravel, so to the supposedly neat-knit square of Casterbridge unravels as well, and the reader belatedly learns of this ‘spit’ stretching out into the ‘moist and misty lowland’. Here, under cover of darkness, over plank bridges which dematerialise once finished with, strangers can slip in and out of town. (From any other quarter they must approach, clearly visible for miles, along dead-straight avenues). The Lane’s characters are lewd and humorous, with a jeering view of their so-called betters: writing of them Hardy adopts a droll, satiric style sharply contrasted with the sober tone he uses when observing, for instance, from Elizabeth Jane’s point of view. It is in Mixen Lane that Newson, a man so easy-going that he simply cannot see what is so transgressive or tragic about Henchard’s story, makes his first appearance. It is from Mixen Lane that the phantasmagoric Skimmington Ride erupts into town.

Mixen Lane is the ribald satyr-play to central Casterbridge’s tragedy. The theatrical metaphor is apt: *The Mayor of Casterbridge* is as close to being drama as a prose narrative can be. It has its chorus, the gossips of the Three Mariners. It has its arresting visual effects: the effigy swirling in the pool; the exactly repeated scene of Henchard’s meeting with a woman in the Ring. It has its wonderfully varied language. The rhythms of Hardy’s prose, now sonorously grand, now sharply sardonic, are as varied as his characters. His dialogue is wittily differentiated. Lucetta’s silliness and Susan’s nervous abjection are as evident in their syntax as in their actual sentiments. Farfrae’s one extended speech, a naively enthusiastic account of his recent trading successes, tells us all we need to know about his energy and his limitations. And the narrative voice is as varied and expressive as the

characters' speech. There are passages of great beauty in a slightly archaic high style, and others where Hardy wisely subordinates beauty to dramatic effect. The final paragraph, with its knotted prose, so miserably expressive of choked feeling, is as desolating as the flat Shakespearean valedictions spoken by Fortinbras or Edgar

The novel employs drama's methods. More, its events are staged for us. Hardy comments on the characters' thoughts and emotions, but he seldom takes us right inside their heads or hearts. We watch them, sometimes from the viewpoint of the narrator who is as far from being omniscient as the audience at a play, sometimes from that of characters looking on. Over and over again in this novel a significant event or a crucial meeting is described as mediated, seen through a window, or a telescope, or the crack in the door. Through the sides of a tent Henchard sees Farfrae dancing with Elizabeth Jane, the nails in his boot-soles twinkling as he capers. Elizabeth Jane overlooks Henchard's yard, and later joins Lucetta in looking down from their first floor window onto the marketplace as onto an arena. Unnamed servant-girls, peering from their attic-windows, are our eyes on the Skimmington ride.

That opening dinner at the Kings Arms, with Henchard in all his provincial pomp, is balanced at the end by the complementary tableau of Elizabeth Jane's wedding. Now Henchard, once the observed of all observers, is the excluded one, looking in, grim as 'a dark ruin', though a half-closed door on a scene of jollity. There is dancing. In his tightly-framed view he sees only 'fractions' of the gyrating revellers. And with wonderful exactitude Hardy describes the frolicking of Newson, the happy man who has taken the daughter Henchard wanted, appearing in that narrow aperture first head down and legs crossed, next leaning back and kicking out: 'his white waistcoat preceding his face, and his toes preceding his white waistcoat'. It is a

moment of desolating poignancy, and it is Henchard's last glimpse of the society in which he has failed.

When Hardy wondered whether he was really much of a novelist, he was not disparaging his own talents so much as hinting at his low opinion of 'novels proper', which he defined with evident disdain as being 'stories of modern artificial life and manners showing a certain smartness of treatment'. His own programme was very different – 'to show the sorrow underlying the grandest things, and the grandeur underlying the sorriest things'. *The Mayor of Casterbridge* tells the far-from-smart story of a corn-merchant who once treated a woman badly and subsequently makes a wrong guess as to the harvest-weather, and makes of it a drama as grand and sorry as a tragedy should be.

Lucy Hughes-Hallet, 2010

PREFACE

Readers of the following story who have not yet arrived at middle age are asked to bear in mind that, in the days recalled by the tale, the home Corn Trade, on which so much of the action turns, had an importance that can hardly be realized by those accustomed to the sixpenny loaf of the present date, and to the present indifference of the public to harvest weather.

The incidents narrated arise mainly out of three events, which chanced to range themselves in the order and at or about the intervals of time here given, in the real history of the town called Casterbridge and the neighbouring country. They were the sale of a wife by her husband, the uncertain harvests which immediately preceded the repeal of the Corn Laws, and the visit of a Royal personage to the aforesaid part of England.

The present edition of the volume, like the previous one, contains nearly a chapter which did not at first appear in any English copy, though it was printed in the serial issue of the tale, and in the American edition. The restoration was made at the instance of some good judges across the Atlantic, who strongly represented that the home edition suffered from the omission. Some shorter passages and names, omitted or altered for reasons which no longer exist, in the original printing of both English and American editions, have also been replaced or inserted.

The story is more particularly a study of one man’s deeds and character than, perhaps, any other of those included in my Exhibition of Wessex life. Objections have been raised to the Scotch language of Mr Farfrae, the second character;

and one of his fellow-countrymen went so far as to declare that men beyond the Tweed did not and never could say ‘warrld’, ‘cannet’, ‘advairrtisment’, and so on. As this gentleman’s pronunciation in correcting me seemed to my Southron ear an exact repetition of what my spelling implied, I was not struck with the truth of his remark, and somehow we did not get any forwarder in the matter. It must be remembered that the Scotchman of the tale is represented not as he would appear to other Scotchmen, but as he would appear to people of outer regions. Moreover, no attempt is made herein to reproduce his entire pronunciation phonetically, any more than that of the Wessex speakers. I should add, however, that this new edition of the book has had the accidental advantage of a critical overlooking by a professor of the tongue in question – one of undoubted authority: – in fact he is a gentleman who adopted it for urgent personal reasons in the first year of his existence.

Furthermore, a charming non-Scottish lady, of strict veracity and admitted penetration, the wife of a well-known Caledonian, came to the writer shortly after the story was first published, and inquired if Farfrae were not drawn from her husband, for he seemed to her to be the living portrait of that (doubtless) happy man. It happened that I had never thought of her husband in constructing Farfrae. I trust therefore that Farfrae may be allowed to pass, if not as a Scotchman to Scotchmen, as a Scotchman to Southerners.

The novel was first published complete, in two volumes, in May 1886. T.H.

February 1895–May 1912
T.H.

THOMAS HARDY

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF THE

MAYOR OF CASTERBRIDGE

A STORY OF A MAN OF CHARACTER

CHAPTER I

ONE EVENING OF late summer, before the nineteenth century had reached one-third of its span, a young man and woman, the latter carrying a child, were approaching the large village of Weydon-Priors, in Upper Wessex, on foot. They were plainly but not ill clad, though the thick hoar of dust which had accumulated on their shoes and garments from an obviously long journey lent a disadvantageous shabbiness to their appearance just now.

The man was of fine figure, swarthy, and stern in aspect; and he showed in profile a facial angle so slightly inclined as to be almost perpendicular. He wore a short jacket of brown corduroy, newer than the remainder of his suit, which was a fustian waistcoat with white horn buttons, breeches of the same, tanned leggings, and a straw hat overlaid with black glazed canvas. At his back he carried by a looped strap a rush basket, from which protruded at one end the crutch of a hay-knife, a wimble for hay-bonds being also visible in the aperture. His measured, springless walk was the walk of the skilled countryman as distinct, from the desultory shamble of the general labourer; while in the turn and plant of each foot there was, further, a dogged and cynical indifference personal to himself, showing its presence even in the regularly interchanging fustian folds, now in the left leg, now in the right, as he paced along.

What was really peculiar, however, in this couple's progress, and would have attracted the attention of any casual observer otherwise disposed to overlook them, was the perfect silence they preserved. They walked side by side in such a way as to suggest afar off the low, easy,

confidential chat of people full of reciprocity; but on closer view it could be discerned that the man was reading, or pretending to read, a ballad sheet which he kept before his eyes with some difficulty by the hand that was passed through the basket strap. Whether this apparent cause were the real cause, or whether it were an assumed one to escape an intercourse that would have been irksome to him, nobody but himself could have said precisely; but his taciturnity was unbroken, and the woman enjoyed no society whatever from his presence. Virtually she walked the highway alone, save for the child she bore. Sometimes the man's bent elbow almost touched her shoulder, for she kept as close to his side as was possible without actual contact; but she seemed to have no idea of taking his arm, nor he of offering it; and far from exhibiting surprise at his ignoring silence she appeared to receive it as a natural thing. If any word at all were uttered by the little group, it was an occasional whisper of the woman to the child – a tiny girl in short clothes and blue boots of knitted yarn – and the murmured babble of the child in reply.

The chief – almost the only – attraction of the young woman's face was its mobility. When she looked down sideways to the girl she became pretty, and even handsome, particularly that in the action her features caught slantwise the rays of the strongly coloured sun, which made transparencies of her eyelids and nostrils and set fire on her lips. When she plodded on in the shade of the hedge, silently thinking, she had the hard, half-apathetic expression of one who deems anything possible at the hands of Time and Chance except, perhaps, fair play. The first phase was the work of Nature, the second probably of civilization.

That the man and woman were husband and wife, and the parents of the girl in arms, there could be little doubt. No other than such relationship would have accounted for the

atmosphere of stale familiarity which the trio carried along with them like a nimbus as they moved down the road.

The wife mostly kept her eyes fixed ahead, though with little interest – the scene for that matter being one that might have been matched at almost any spot in any county in England at this time of the year; a road neither straight nor crooked, neither level nor hilly, bordered by hedges, trees, and other vegetation, which had entered the blackened-green stage of colour that the doomed leaves pass through on their way to dingy, and yellow, and red. The grassy margin of the bank, and the nearest hedgerow boughs, were powdered by the dust that had been stirred over them by hasty vehicles, the same dust as it lay on the road deadening their footfalls like a carpet; and this, with the aforesaid total absence of conversation, allowed every extraneous sound to be heard.

For a long time there was none, beyond the voice of a weak bird singing a trite old evening song that might doubtless have been heard on the hill at the same hour, and with the self-same trills, quavers, and breves, at any sunset of that season for centuries untold. But as they approached the village sundry distant shouts and rattles reached their ears from some elevated spot in that direction, as yet screened from view by foliage. When the outlying houses of Weydon-Priors could just be descried, the family group was met by a turnip-hoer with his hoe on his shoulder, and his dinner-bag suspended from it. The reader promptly glanced up.

‘Any trade doing here?’ he asked phlegmatically, designating the village in his van by a wave of the broadsheet. And thinking the labourer did not understand him, he added, ‘Anything in the hay-trussing line?’

The turnip-hoer had already begun shaking his head. ‘Why, save the man, what wisdom’s in him that ’a should come to Weydon for a job of that sort this time o’ year?’

‘Then is there any house to let – a little small new cottage just abuilded, or such like?’ asked the other.

The pessimist still maintained a negative. ‘Pulling down is more the nater of Weydon. There were five houses cleared away last year, and three this; and the volk nowhere to go – no, not so much as a thatched hurdle; that’s the way o’ Weydon-Priors.’

The hay-trusser, which he obviously was, nodded with some superciliousness. Looking towards the village, he continued, ‘There is something going on here, however, is there not?’

‘Ay. ’Tis Fair Day. Though what you hear now is little more than the clatter and scurry of getting away the money o’ children and fools, for the real business is done earlier than this. I’ve been working within sound o’t all day, but I didn’t go up – not I. ’Twas no business of mine.’

The trusser and his family proceeded on their way, and soon entered the Fair-field, which showed standing-places and pens where many hundreds of horses and sheep had been exhibited and sold in the forenoon, but were now in great part taken away. At present, as their informant had observed, but little real business remained on hand, the chief being the sale by auction of a few inferior animals, that could not otherwise be disposed of, and had been absolutely refused by the better class of traders, who came and went early. Yet the crowd was denser now than during the morning hours, the frivolous contingent of visitors, including journeymen out for a holiday, a stray soldier or two home on furlough, village shopkeepers, and the like, having latterly flocked in; persons whose activities found a congenial field among the peep-shows, toy-stands, waxworks, inspired monsters, disinterested medical men who travelled for the public good, thimble-riggers, knick-knack vendors, and readers of Fate.

Neither of our pedestrians had much heart for these things, and they looked around for a refreshment tent

among the many which dotted the down. Two, which stood nearest to them in the ochreous haze of expiring sunlight, seemed almost equally inviting. One was formed of new, milk-hued canvas, and bore red flags on its summit; it announced ‘Good Home-brewed Beer, Ale, and Cyder’. The other was less new; a little iron stove-pipe came out of it at the back, and in front appeared the placard, ‘Good Furmity Sold Hear’. The man mentally weighed the two inscriptions, and inclined to the former tent.

‘No – no – the other one,’ said the woman. ‘I always like furmity; and so does Elizabeth-Jane; and so will you. It is nourishing after a long hard day.’

‘I’ve never tasted it,’ said the man. However, he gave way to her representations, and they entered the furmity booth forthwith.

A rather numerous company appeared within, seated at the long narrow tables that ran down the tent on each side. At the upper end stood a stove, containing a charcoal fire, over which hung a large three-legged crock, sufficiently polished round the rim to show that it was made of bell-metal. A haggish creature of about fifty presided, in a white apron, which, as it threw an air of respectability over her as far as it extended, was made so wide as to reach nearly round her waist. She slowly stirred the contents of the pot. The dull scrape of her large spoon was audible throughout the tent as she thus kept from burning the mixture of corn in the grain, flour, milk, raisins, currants, and what not, that composed the antiquated slop in which she dealt. Vessels holding the separate ingredients stood on a white-clothed table of boards and trestles close by.

The young man and woman ordered a basin each of the mixture, steaming hot, and sat down to consume it at leisure. This was very well so far, for furmity, as the woman had said, was nourishing, and as proper a food as could be obtained within the four seas; though, to those not accustomed to it, the grains of wheat swollen as large as

lemon-pips, which floated on its surface, might have a deterrent effect at first.

But there was more in that tent than met the cursory glance; and the man, with the instinct of a perverse character, scented it quickly. After a mincing attack on his bowl, he watched the hag's proceedings from the corner of his eye, and saw the game she played. He winked to her, and passed up his basin in reply to her nod; when she took a bottle from under the table, slily measured out a quantity of its contents, and tipped the same into the man's furmity. The liquor poured in was rum. The man as slily sent back money in payment.

He found the concoction, thus strongly laced, much more to his satisfaction than it had been in its natural state. His wife had observed the proceeding with much uneasiness; but he persuaded her to have hers laced also, and she agreed to a milder allowance after some misgiving.

The man finished his basin, and called for another, the rum being signalled for in yet stronger proportion. The effect of it was soon apparent in his manner, and his wife but too sadly perceived that in strenuously steering off the rocks of the licensed liquor-tent she had only got into maelstrom depths here amongst the smugglers.

The child began to prattle impatiently, and the wife more than once said to her husband, 'Michael, how about our lodging? You know we may have trouble in getting it if we don't go soon.'

But he turned a deaf ear to those bird-like chirpings. He talked loud to the company. The child's black eye, after slow, round, ruminating gazes at the candles when they were lighted, fell together; then they opened, then shut again, and she slept.

At the end of the first basin the man had risen to serenity; at the second he was jovial; at the third, argumentative; at the fourth, the qualities signified by the shape of his face, the occasional clench of his mouth, and the fiery spark of

his dark eye, began to tell in his conduct; he was overbearing – even brilliantly quarrelsome.

The conversation took a high turn, as it often does on such occasions. The ruin of good men by bad wives, and, more particularly, the frustration of many a promising youth's high aims and hopes and the extinction of his energies by an early imprudent marriage, was the theme.

'I did for myself that way thoroughly,' said the trusser, with a contemplative bitterness that was well-nigh resentful. 'I married at eighteen, like the fool that I was; and this is the consequence o't.' He pointed at himself and family with a wave of the hand intended to bring out the penuriousness of the exhibition.

The young woman his wife, who seemed accustomed to such remarks, acted as if she did not hear them, and continued her intermittent private words on tender trifles to the sleeping and waking child, who was just big enough to be placed for a moment on the bench beside her when she wished to ease her arms. The man continued –

'I haven't more than fifteen shillings in the world, and yet I am a good experienced hand in my line. I'd challenge England to beat me in the fodder business; and if I were a free man again I'd be worth a thousand pound before I'd done o't. But a fellow never knows these little things till all chance of acting upon 'em is past.'

The auctioneer selling the old horses in the field outside could be heard saying, 'Now this is the last lot – now who'll take the last lot for a song? Shall I say forty shillings? 'Tis a very promising brood-mare, a trifle over five years old, and nothing the matter with the hoss at all, except that she's a little holler in the back and had her left eye knocked out by the kick of another, her own sister, coming along the road.'

'For my part, I don't see why men who have got wives and don't want 'em, shouldn't get rid of 'em as these gipsy fellows do their old horses,' said the man in the tent. 'Why shouldn't they put 'em up and sell 'em by auction to men

who are in need of such articles? Hey? Why, begad, I'd sell mine this minute if anybody would buy her!'

'There's them that would do that,' some of the guests replied, looking at the woman, who was by no means ill-favoured.

'True,' said a smoking gentleman, whose coat had the fine polish about the collar, elbows, seams, and shoulder-blades that long-continued friction with grimy surfaces will produce, and which is usually more desired on furniture than on clothes. From his appearance he had possibly been in former time groom or coachman to some neighbouring county family. 'I've had my breedings in as good circles, I may say, as any man,' he added, 'and I know true cultivation, or nobody do; and I can declare she's got it – in the bone, mind ye, I say – as much as any female in the fair – though it may want a little bringing out.' Then, crossing his legs, he resumed his pipe with a nicely-adjusted gaze at a point in the air.

The fuddled young husband stared for a few seconds at this unexpected praise of his wife, half in doubt of the wisdom of his own attitude towards the possessor of such qualities. But he speedily lapsed into his former conviction, and said harshly –

'Well, then, now is your chance; I am open to an offer for this gem o' creation.'

She turned to her husband and murmured, 'Michael, you have talked this nonsense in public places before. A joke is a joke, but you may make it once too often, mind!'

'I know I've said it before; I meant it. All I want is a buyer.'

At the moment a swallow, one among the last of the season, which had by chance found its way through an opening into the upper part of the tent, flew to and fro in quick curves above their heads, causing all eyes to follow it absently. In watching the bird till it made its escape the assembled company neglected to respond to the workman's offer, and the subject dropped.

But a quarter of an hour later the man, who had gone on lacing his furmity more and more heavily, though he was either so strong-minded or such an intrepid toper that he still appeared fairly sober, recurred to the old strain, as in a musical fantasy the instrument fetches up the original theme. 'Here – I am waiting to know about this offer of mine. The woman is no good to me. Who'll have her?'

The company had by this time decidedly degenerated, and the renewed inquiry was received with a laugh of appreciation. The woman whispered; she was imploring and anxious: 'Come, come, it is getting dark, and this nonsense won't do. If you don't come along, I shall go without you. Come!'

She waited and waited; yet he did not move. In ten minutes the man broke in upon the desultory conversation of the furmity drinkers with, 'I asked this question, and nobody answered to't. Will any Jack Rag or Tom Straw among ye buy my goods?'

The woman's manner changed, and her face assumed the grim shape and colour of which mention has been made.

'Mike, Mike,' said she; 'this is getting serious. O! – too serious!'

'Will anybody buy her?' said the man.

'I wish somebody would,' said she firmly. 'Her present owner is not at all to her liking!'

'Nor you to mine,' said he. 'So we are agreed about that. Gentlemen, you hear? It's an agreement to part. She shall take the girl if she wants to, and go her ways. I'll take my tools, and go my ways. 'Tis simple as Scripture history. Now then, stand up, Susan, and show yourself.'

'Don't, my chiel,' whispered a buxom staylace dealer in voluminous petticoats, who sat near the woman; 'yer good man don't know what he's saying.'

The woman, however, did stand up. 'Now, who's auctioneer?' cried the hay-trusser.