THOMAS HARDY

A LAODICEAN

EXTENDED ANNOTATED EDITION

A Laodicean: A Story Of Today

Thomas Hardy

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Thomas Hardy – A Biographical Primer

English novelist, was born in Dorsetshire on the 2nd of June 1840. His family was one of the branches of the Dorset Hardys, formerly of influence in and near the valley of the Frome, claiming descent of John Le Hardy of Jersey (son of Clement Le Hardy, lieutenant-governor of that island in 1488), who settled in the west of England. His maternal ancestors were the Swetman, Childs or Child, and kindred families, who before and after 1635 were small landed proprietors in Melbury Osmond, Dorset, and adjoining parishes. He was educated at local schools, 1848–1854, and afterwards privately, and in 1856 was articled to Mr. John Hicks, an ecclesiastical architect of Dorchester. In 1859 he began writing verse and essays, but in 1861 was compelled to apply himself more strictly to architecture, sketching and measuring many old Dorset churches with a view to their restoration. In 1862 he went to London (which he had first visited at the age of nine) and became assistant to the late Sir Arthur Blomfield, R.A. In 1863 he won the medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects for an essay on Coloured Brick and Terra-cotta Architecture, and in the same year won the prize of the Architectural Association for design. In March 1965 his first short story was published in Chamber’s Journal, and during the next two or three years he wrote a great deal of verse, being somewhat uncertain whether to take to architecture or to

literature as a profession. In 1867 he left London for Weymouth, and during that and the following year wrote a “purpose” story, which in 1869 was accepted by Messrs Chapman and Hall. The manuscript had been read by Mr. George Meredith, who asked the writer to call on him, and advised him not to print it, but to try another, with more plot. The manuscript was withdrawn and re-written, but never published. In 1870 Mr. Hardy took Mr. Meredith’s advice too literally, and constructed a novel that was all plot, which was published under the title Desperate Remedies. In 1872 appeared Under the Greenwood Tree, “a rural painting of the Dutch school,” in which Mr. Hardy had already “found himself,” and which he has never surpassed in happy and delicate perfection of art. A Pair of Blue Eyes, in which tragedy and irony come into his work together, was published in 1873. In 1874 Mr. Hardy married Emma Lavinia, daughter of the late T. Attersoll Gifford of Plymouth. His first popular success was made by Far from the Madding Crowd (1874), which, on its appearance anonymously in the Cornhill Magazine, was attributed by many to George Eliot. Then came The Hand of Ethelberta (1876), described, not inaptly, as “a comedy in chapters”; The Return of the Native (1878), the most sombre and, in some ways, the most powerful and characteristic of Mr. Hardy’s novels; The Trumpet-Major (1880); A Laodicean (1881); Two on a Tower (1882), a long excursion in constructive irony; The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886); The Woodlanders (1887); Wessex Tales (1888); A Group of Noble Dames (1891); Tess of the D’ Urbervilles (1891), Mr. Hardy’s most famous novel; Life’s Little Ironies (1894); Jude the Obscure (1895), his most thoughtful and least popular book; The Well-Beloved, a reprint, with some revision, of a story originally published in the Illustrated London News in 1892 (1897); Wessex Poems, written during the previous thirty years, with illustrations by the author; and The Dynasts (2 parts, 1904–1906). In 1909

appeared Time’s Laughing-stocks and other Verses. In all his works Mr. Hardy is concerned with one thing, seen under two aspects; not civilizations, nor manners, but the principle of life itself, invisibly realized in humanity as sex, seen visibly in the world as what we call nature. He is a fatalist, perhaps rather a determinist, and he studies the workings of fate or law (ruling through inexorable moods or humours), in the chief vivifying and disturbing influence in life, women. His view of women is more French than English; it is subtle, a little cruel, not as tolerant as it seems, thoroughly a man’s point of view, and not, as with Mr. Meredith, man’s and woman’s at once. He sees all that is irresponsible for good and evil in a woman’s character, all that is untrustworthy in her brain and will, all that is alluring in her variability. He is her apologist, but always with a reserve of private judgment. No one has created more attractive women of a certain class, women whom a man would have been more likely to love or regret loving. In his earlier books he is somewhat careful over the reputation of his heroines; gradually, he allows them more liberty, with a franker treatment of instinct and its consequence. Jude the Obscure is perhaps the most unbiased consideration in English fiction of the more complicated question of sex. There is almost no passion in his work, neither the author nor his characters ever seeming to pass beyond the state of curiosity, the most intellectually interesting of limitations, under the influence of any emotion. In his feeling for nature, curiosity sometimes seems to broaden into a more intimate communion. The heath, the village with its peasants, the change of every hour among the fields and on the roads of that English countryside which he made his own—the Dorsetshire and Wiltshire “Wessex”—mean more to him, in a sense, than even the spectacle of man and woman in their blind and painful and absorbing struggle for existence. His knowledge of woman confirms him in a suspension of

judgment; his knowledge of nature brings him nearer to the unchanging and consoling element in the world. All the entertainment which he gets out of life comes to him from his contemplation of the peasant, as himself a rooted part of the earth, translating the dumbness of the fields into humour. His peasants have been compared with Shakespeare’s; he has the Shakesperean sense of their placid vegetation by the side of hurrying animal life, to which they act the part of chorus, with an unconscious wisdom in their close, narrow and undistracted view of things. The order of merit was conferred upon Mr. Hardy in July 1910.

A Laodicean: A Story Of Today

PREFACE.

The changing of the old order in country manors and mansions may be slow or sudden, may have many issues romantic or otherwise, its romantic issues being not necessarily restricted to a change back to the original order; though this admissible instance appears to have been the only romance formerly recognized by novelists as possible in the case. Whether the following production be a picture of other possibilities or not, its incidents may be taken to be fairly well supported by evidence every day forthcoming in most counties.

The writing of the tale was rendered memorable to two persons, at least, by a tedious illness of five months that laid hold of the author soon after the story was begun in a

well-known magazine; during which period the narrative had to be strenuously continued by dictation to a predetermined cheerful ending.

As some of these novels of Wessex life address themselves more especially to readers into whose souls the iron has entered, and whose years have less pleasure in them now than heretofore, so "A Laodicean" may perhaps help to while away an idle afternoon of the comfortable ones whose lines have fallen to them in pleasant places; above all, of that large and happy section of the reading public which has not yet reached ripeness of years; those to whom marriage is the pilgrim's Eternal City, and not a milestone on the way. T.H.

January 1896.

BOOK THE FIRST. GEORGE SOMERSET.

I.

The sun blazed down and down, till it was within half-an-hour of its setting; but the sketcher still lingered at his occupation of measuring and copying the chevroned doorway—a bold and quaint example of a transitional style of architecture, which formed the tower entrance to an English village church. The graveyard being quite open on its western side, the tweed-clad figure of the young draughtsman, and the tall mass of antique masonry which rose above him to a battlemented parapet, were fired to a great brightness by the solar rays, that crossed the neighbouring mead like a warp of gold threads, in whose mazes groups of equally lustrous gnats danced and wailed incessantly.

He was so absorbed in his pursuit that he did not mark the brilliant chromatic effect of which he composed the central feature, till it was brought home to his intelligence by the warmth of the moulded stonework under his touch when measuring; which led him at length to turn his head and gaze on its cause.

There are few in whom the sight of a sunset does not beget as much meditative melancholy as contemplative pleasure, the human decline and death that it illustrates being too obvious to escape the notice of the simplest observer. The sketcher, as if he had been brought to this reflection many hundreds of times before by the same spectacle, showed that he did not wish to pursue it just now, by turning away his face after a few moments, to resume his architectural studies.

He took his measurements carefully, and as if he reverenced the old workers whose trick he was endeavouring to acquire six hundred years after the original performance had ceased and the performers passed into the unseen. By means of a strip of lead called a leaden tape, which he pressed around and into the fillets and hollows with his finger and thumb, he transferred the exact contour of each moulding to his drawing, that lay on a sketching-stool a few feet distant; where were also a sketching-block, a small T-square, a bow-pencil, and other mathematical instruments. When he had marked down the line thus fixed, he returned to the doorway to copy another as before.

It being the month of August, when the pale face of the townsman and the stranger is to be seen among the brown skins of remotest uplanders, not only in England, but throughout the temperate zone, few of the homeward-bound labourers paused to notice him further than by a momentary turn of the head. They had beheld such gentlemen before, not exactly measuring the church so accurately as this one seemed to be doing, but painting it from a distance, or at least walking round the mouldy pile. At the same time the present visitor, even exteriorly, was not altogether commonplace. His features were good, his eyes of the dark deep sort called eloquent by the sex that ought to know, and with that ray of light in them which announces a heart susceptible to beauty of all kinds,—in woman, in art, and in inanimate nature. Though he would have been broadly characterized as a young man, his face bore contradictory testimonies to his precise age. This was conceivably owing to a too dominant speculative activity in him, which, while it had preserved the emotional side of his constitution, and with it the significant flexuousness of mouth and chin, had played upon his forehead and temples till, at weary moments, they exhibited some traces of being

over-exercised. A youthfulness about the mobile features, a mature forehead—though not exactly what the world has been familiar with in past ages—is now growing common; and with the advance of juvenile introspection it probably must grow commoner still. Briefly, he had more of the beauty—if beauty it ought to be called—of the future human type than of the past; but not so much as to make him other than a nice young man.

His build was somewhat slender and tall; his complexion, though a little browned by recent exposure, was that of a man who spent much of his time indoors. Of beard he had but small show, though he was as innocent as a Nazarite of the use of the razor; but he possessed a moustache all-sufficient to hide the subtleties of his mouth, which could thus be tremulous at tender moments without provoking inconvenient criticism.

Owing to his situation on high ground, open to the west, he remained enveloped in the lingering aureate haze till a time when the eastern part of the churchyard was in obscurity, and damp with rising dew. When it was too dark to sketch further he packed up his drawing, and, beckoning to a lad who had been idling by the gate, directed him to carry the stool and implements to a roadside inn which he named, lying a mile or two ahead. The draughtsman leisurely followed the lad out of the churchyard, and along a lane in the direction signified.

The spectacle of a summer traveller from London sketching mediaeval details in these neo-Pagan days, when a lull has come over the study of English Gothic architecture, through a re-awakening to the art-forms of times that more nearly neighbour our own, is accounted for by the fact that George Somerset, son of the Academician of that name, was a man of independent tastes and excursive instincts,

who unconsciously, and perhaps unhappily, took greater pleasure in floating in lonely currents of thought than with the general tide of opinion. When quite a lad, in the days of the French Gothic mania which immediately succeeded to the great English-pointed revival under Britton, Pugin, Rickman, Scott, and other mediaevalists, he had crept away from the fashion to admire what was good in Palladian and Renaissance. As soon as Jacobean, Queen Anne, and kindred accretions of decayed styles began to be popular, he purchased such old-school works as Revett and Stuart, Chambers, and the rest, and worked diligently at the Five Orders; till quite bewildered on the question of style, he concluded that all styles were extinct, and with them all architecture as a living art. Somerset was not old enough at that time to know that, in practice, art had at all times been as full of shifts and compromises as every other mundane thing; that ideal perfection was never achieved by Greek, Goth, or Hebrew Jew, and never would be; and thus he was thrown into a mood of disgust with his profession, from which mood he was only delivered by recklessly abandoning these studies and indulging in an old enthusiasm for poetical literature. For two whole years he did nothing but write verse in every conceivable metre, and on every conceivable subject, from Wordsworthian sonnets on the singing of his tea-kettle to epic fragments on the Fall of Empires. His discovery at the age of five-and-twenty that these inspired works were not jumped at by the publishers with all the eagerness they deserved, coincided in point of time with a severe hint from his father that unless he went on with his legitimate profession he might have to look elsewhere than at home for an allowance. Mr. Somerset junior then awoke to realities, became intently practical, rushed back to his dusty drawing-boards, and worked up the styles anew, with a view of regularly starting in practice on the first day of the following January.

It is an old story, and perhaps only deserves the light tone in which the soaring of a young man into the empyrean, and his descent again, is always narrated. But as has often been said, the light and the truth may be on the side of the dreamer: a far wider view than the wise ones have may be his at that recalcitrant time, and his reduction to common measure be nothing less than a tragic event. The operation called lunging, in which a haltered colt is made to trot round and round a horsebreaker who holds the rope, till the beholder grows dizzy in looking at them, is a very unhappy one for the animal concerned. During its progress the colt springs upward, across the circle, stops, flies over the turf with the velocity of a bird, and indulges in all sorts of graceful antics; but he always ends in one way—thanks to the knotted whipcord—in a level trot round the lunger with the regularity of a horizontal wheel, and in the loss for ever to his character of the bold contours which the fine hand of Nature gave it. Yet the process is considered to be the making of him.

Whether Somerset became permanently made under the action of the inevitable lunge, or whether he lapsed into mere dabbling with the artistic side of his profession only, it would be premature to say; but at any rate it was his contrite return to architecture as a calling that sent him on the sketching excursion under notice. Feeling that something still was wanting to round off his knowledge before he could take his professional line with confidence, he was led to remember that his own native Gothic was the one form of design that he had totally neglected from the beginning, through its having greeted him with wearisome iteration at the opening of his career. Now it had again returned to silence; indeed—such is the surprising instability of art 'principles' as they are facetiously called—it was just as likely as not to sink into the neglect and oblivion which had been its lot in Georgian times. This

accident of being out of vogue lent English Gothic an additional charm to one of his proclivities; and away he went to make it the business of a summer circuit in the west.

The quiet time of evening, the secluded neighbourhood, the unusually gorgeous liveries of the clouds packed in a pile over that quarter of the heavens in which the sun had disappeared, were such as to make a traveller loiter on his walk. Coming to a stile, Somerset mounted himself on the top bar, to imbibe the spirit of the scene and hour. The evening was so still that every trifling sound could be heard for miles. There was the rattle of a returning waggon, mixed with the smacks of the waggoner's whip: the team must have been at least three miles off. From far over the hill came the faint periodic yell of kennelled hounds; while from the nearest village resounded the voices of boys at play in the twilight. Then a powerful clock struck the hour; it was not from the direction of the church, but rather from the wood behind him; and he thought it must be the clock of some mansion that way.

But the mind of man cannot always be forced to take up subjects by the pressure of their material presence, and Somerset's thoughts were often, to his great loss, apt to be even more than common truants from the tones and images that met his outer senses on walks and rides. He would sometimes go quietly through the queerest, gayest, most extraordinary town in Europe, and let it alone, provided it did not meddle with him by its beggars, beauties, innkeepers, police, coachmen, mongrels, bad smells, and such like obstructions. This feat of questionable utility he began performing now. Sitting on the three-inch ash rail that had been peeled and polished like glass by the rubbings of all the small-clothes in the parish, he forgot the time, the place, forgot that it was August—in short,

everything of the present altogether. His mind flew back to his past life, and deplored the waste of time that had resulted from his not having been able to make up his mind which of the many fashions of art that were coming and going in kaleidoscopic change was the true point of departure from himself. He had suffered from the modern malady of unlimited appreciativeness as much as any living man of his own age. Dozens of his fellows in years and experience, who had never thought specially of the matter, but had blunderingly applied themselves to whatever form of art confronted them at the moment of their making a move, were by this time acquiring renown as new lights; while he was still unknown. He wished that some accident could have hemmed in his eyes between inexorable blinkers, and sped him on in a channel ever so worn.

Thus balanced between believing and not believing in his own future, he was recalled to the scene without by hearing the notes of a familiar hymn, rising in subdued harmonies from a valley below. He listened more heedfully. It was his old friend the 'New Sabbath,' which he had never once heard since the lisping days of childhood, and whose existence, much as it had then been to him, he had till this moment quite forgotten. Where the 'New Sabbath' had kept itself all these years—why that sound and hearty melody had disappeared from all the cathedrals, parish churches, minsters and chapels-of-ease that he had been acquainted with during his apprenticeship to life, and until his ways had become irregular and uncongregational—he could not, at first, say. But then he recollected that the tune appertained to the old west-gallery period of church-music, anterior to the great choral reformation and the rule of Monk—that old time when the repetition of a word, or half-line of a verse, was not considered a disgrace to an ecclesiastical choir.

Willing to be interested in anything which would keep him out-of-doors, Somerset dismounted from the stile and descended the hill before him, to learn whence the singing proceeded.

II.

He found that it had its origin in a building standing alone in a field; and though the evening was not yet dark without, lights shone from the windows. In a few moments Somerset stood before the edifice. Being just then en rapport with ecclesiasticism by reason of his recent occupation, he could not help murmuring, 'Shade of Pugin, what a monstrosity!'

Perhaps this exclamation (rather out of date since the discovery that Pugin himself often nodded amazingly) would not have been indulged in by Somerset but for his new architectural resolves, which caused professional opinions to advance themselves officiously to his lips whenever occasion offered. The building was, in short, a recently-erected chapel of red brick, with pseudo-classic ornamentation, and the white regular joints of mortar could be seen streaking its surface in geometrical oppressiveness from top to bottom. The roof was of blue slate, clean as a table, and unbroken from gable to gable; the windows were glazed with sheets of plate glass, a temporary iron stovepipe passing out near one of these, and running up to the height of the ridge, where it was finished by a covering like a parachute. Walking round to the end, he perceived an oblong white stone let into the wall just above the plinth, on which was inscribed in deep letters:—

Erected 187-,

AT THE SOLE EXPENSE OF

JOHN POWER, ESQ., M.P.

The 'New Sabbath' still proceeded line by line, with all the emotional swells and cadences that had of old characterized the tune: and the body of vocal harmony that it evoked implied a large congregation within, to whom it was plainly as familiar as it had been to church-goers of a past generation. With a whimsical sense of regret at the secession of his once favourite air Somerset moved away, and would have quite withdrawn from the field had he not at that moment observed two young men with pitchers of water coming up from a stream hard by, and hastening with their burdens into the chapel vestry by a side door. Almost as soon as they had entered they emerged again with empty pitchers, and proceeded to the stream to fill them as before, an operation which they repeated several times. Somerset went forward to the stream, and waited till the young men came out again.

'You are carrying in a great deal of water,' he said, as each dipped his pitcher.

One of the young men modestly replied, 'Yes: we filled the cistern this morning; but it leaks, and requires a few pitcherfuls more.'

'Why do you do it?'

'There is to be a baptism, sir.'

Somerset was not sufficiently interested to develop a further conversation, and observing them in silence till they had again vanished into the building, he went on his way. Reaching the brow of the hill he stopped and looked back. The chapel was still in view, and the shades of night having deepened, the lights shone from the windows yet more brightly than before. A few steps further would hide them

and the edifice, and all that belonged to it from his sight, possibly for ever. There was something in the thought which led him to linger. The chapel had neither beauty, quaintness, nor congeniality to recommend it: the dissimilitude between the new utilitarianism of the place and the scenes of venerable Gothic art which had occupied his daylight hours could not well be exceeded. But Somerset, as has been said, was an instrument of no narrow gamut: he had a key for other touches than the purely aesthetic, even on such an excursion as this. His mind was arrested by the intense and busy energy which must needs belong to an assembly that required such a glare of light to do its religion by; in the heaving of that tune there was an earnestness which made him thoughtful, and the shine of those windows he had characterized as ugly reminded him of the shining of the good deed in a naughty world. The chapel and its shabby plot of ground, from which the herbage was all trodden away by busy feet, had a living human interest that the numerous minsters and churches knee-deep in fresh green grass, visited by him during the foregoing week, had often lacked. Moreover, there was going to be a baptism: that meant the immersion of a grown-up person; and he had been told that Baptists were serious people and that the scene was most impressive. What manner of man would it be who on an ordinary plodding and bustling evening of the nineteenth century could single himself out as one different from the rest of the inhabitants, banish all shyness, and come forward to undergo such a trying ceremony? Who was he that had pondered, gone into solitudes, wrestled with himself, worked up his courage and said, I will do this, though few else will, for I believe it to be my duty?

Whether on account of these thoughts, or from the circumstance that he had been alone amongst the tombs all day without communion with his kind, he could not tell in

after years (when he had good reason to think of the subject); but so it was that Somerset went back, and again stood under the chapel-wall.

Instead of entering he passed round to where the stove-chimney came through the bricks, and holding on to the iron stay he put his toes on the plinth and looked in at the window. The building was quite full of people belonging to that vast majority of society who are denied the art of articulating their higher emotions, and crave dumbly for a fugleman—respectably dressed working people, whose faces and forms were worn and contorted by years of dreary toil. On a platform at the end of the chapel a haggard man of more than middle age, with grey whiskers ascetically cut back from the fore part of his face so far as to be almost banished from the countenance, stood reading a chapter. Between the minister and the congregation was an open space, and in the floor of this was sunk a tank full of water, which just made its surface visible above the blackness of its depths by reflecting the lights overhead.

Somerset endeavoured to discover which one among the assemblage was to be the subject of the ceremony. But nobody appeared there who was at all out of the region of commonplace. The people were all quiet and settled; yet he could discern on their faces something more than attention, though it was less than excitement: perhaps it was expectation. And as if to bear out his surmise he heard at that moment the noise of wheels behind him.

His gaze into the lighted chapel made what had been an evening scene when he looked away from the landscape night itself on looking back; but he could see enough to discover that a brougham had driven up to the side-door used by the young water-bearers, and that a lady in white-and-black half-mourning was in the act of alighting,

followed by what appeared to be a waiting-woman carrying wraps. They entered the vestry-room of the chapel, and the door was shut. The service went on as before till at a certain moment the door between vestry and chapel was opened, when a woman came out clothed in an ample robe of flowing white, which descended to her feet. Somerset was unfortunate in his position; he could not see her face, but her gait suggested at once that she was the lady who had arrived just before. She was rather tall than otherwise, and the contour of her head and shoulders denoted a girl in the heyday of youth and activity. His imagination, stimulated by this beginning, set about filling in the meagre outline with most attractive details.

She stood upon the brink of the pool, and the minister descended the steps at its edge till the soles of his shoes were moistened with the water. He turned to the young candidate, but she did not follow him: instead of doing so she remained rigid as a stone. He stretched out his hand, but she still showed reluctance, till, with some embarrassment, he went back, and spoke softly in her ear.

She approached the edge, looked into the water, and turned away shaking her head. Somerset could for the first time see her face. Though humanly imperfect, as is every face we see, it was one which made him think that the best in woman-kind no less than the best in psalm-tunes had gone over to the Dissenters. He had certainly seen nobody so interesting in his tour hitherto; she was about twenty or twenty-one—perhaps twenty-three, for years have a way of stealing marches even upon beauty's anointed. The total dissimilarity between the expression of her lineaments and that of the countenances around her was not a little surprising, and was productive of hypotheses without measure as to how she came there. She was, in fact, emphatically a modern type of maidenhood, and she looked

ultra-modern by reason of her environment: a presumably sophisticated being among the simple ones—not wickedly so, but one who knew life fairly well for her age. Her hair, of good English brown, neither light nor dark, was abundant—too abundant for convenience in tying, as it seemed; and it threw off the lamp-light in a hazy lustre. And though it could not be said of her features that this or that was flawless, the nameless charm of them altogether was only another instance of how beautiful a woman can be as a whole without attaining in any one detail to the lines marked out as absolutely correct. The spirit and the life were there: and material shapes could be disregarded.

Whatever moral characteristics this might be the surface of, enough was shown to assure Somerset that she had some experience of things far removed from her present circumscribed horizon, and could live, and was even at that moment living, a clandestine, stealthy inner life which had very little to do with her outward one. The repression of nearly every external sign of that distress under which Somerset knew, by a sudden intuitive sympathy, that she was labouring, added strength to these convictions.

'And you refuse?' said the astonished minister, as she still stood immovable on the brink of the pool. He persuasively took her sleeve between his finger and thumb as if to draw her; but she resented this by a quick movement of displeasure, and he released her, seeing that he had gone too far.

'But, my dear lady,' he said, 'you promised! Consider your profession, and that you stand in the eyes of the whole church as an exemplar of your faith.'

'I cannot do it!'

'But your father's memory, miss; his last dying request!'

'I cannot help it,' she said, turning to get away.

'You came here with the intention to fulfil the Word?'

'But I was mistaken.'

'Then why did you come?'

She tacitly implied that to be a question she did not care to answer. 'Please say no more to me,' she murmured, and hastened to withdraw.

During this unexpected dialogue (which had reached Somerset's ears through the open windows) that young man's feelings had flown hither and thither between minister and lady in a most capricious manner: it had seemed at one moment a rather uncivil thing of her, charming as she was, to give the minister and the water-bearers so much trouble for nothing; the next, it seemed like reviving the ancient cruelties of the ducking-stool to try to force a girl into that dark water if she had not a mind to it. But the minister was not without insight, and he had seen that it would be useless to say more. The crestfallen old man had to turn round upon the congregation and declare officially that the baptism was postponed.

She passed through the door into the vestry. During the exciting moments of her recusancy there had been a perceptible flutter among the sensitive members of the congregation; nervous Dissenters seeming to be at one with nervous Episcopalians in this at least, that they heartily disliked a scene during service. Calm was restored to their minds by the minister starting a rather long hymn in minims and semibreves, amid the singing of which he

ascended the pulpit. His face had a severe and even denunciatory look as he gave out his text, and Somerset began to understand that this meant mischief to the young person who had caused the hitch.

'In the third chapter of Revelation and the fifteenth and following verses, you will find these words:—

'"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.... Thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked."'

The sermon straightway began, and it was soon apparent that the commentary was to be no less forcible than the text. It was also apparent that the words were, virtually, not directed forward in the line in which they were uttered, but through the chink of the vestry-door, that had stood slightly ajar since the exit of the young lady. The listeners appeared to feel this no less than Somerset did, for their eyes, one and all, became fixed upon that vestry door as if they would almost push it open by the force of their gazing. The preacher's heart was full and bitter; no book or note was wanted by him; never was spontaneity more absolute than here. It was no timid reproof of the ornamental kind, but a direct denunciation, all the more vigorous perhaps from the limitation of mind and language under which the speaker laboured. Yet, fool that he had been made by the candidate, there was nothing acrid in his attack. Genuine flashes of rhetorical fire were occasionally struck by that plain and simple man, who knew what straightforward conduct was, and who did not know the illimitable caprice of a woman's mind.

At this moment there was not in the whole chapel a person whose imagination was not centred on what was invisibly taking place within the vestry. The thunder of the minister's eloquence echoed, of course, through the weak sister's cavern of retreat no less than round the public assembly. What she was doing inside there—whether listening contritely, or haughtily hastening to put on her things and get away from the chapel and all it contained—was obviously the thought of each member. What changes were tracing themselves upon that lovely face: did it rise to phases of Raffaelesque resignation or sink so low as to flush and frown? was Somerset's inquiry; and a half-explanation occurred when, during the discourse, the door which had been ajar was gently pushed to.

Looking on as a stranger it seemed to him more than probable that this young woman's power of persistence in her unexpected repugnance to the rite was strengthened by wealth and position of some sort, and was not the unassisted gift of nature. The manner of her arrival, and her dignified bearing before the assembly, strengthened the belief. A woman who did not feel something extraneous to her mental self to fall back upon would be so far overawed by the people and the crisis as not to retain sufficient resolution for a change of mind.

The sermon ended, the minister wiped his steaming face and turned down his cuffs, and nods and sagacious glances went round. Yet many, even of those who had presumably passed the same ordeal with credit, exhibited gentler judgment than the preacher's on a tergiversation of which they had probably recognized some germ in their own bosoms when in the lady's situation.

For Somerset there was but one scene: the imagined scene of the girl herself as she sat alone in the vestry. The fervent congregation rose to sing again, and then Somerset heard a slight noise on his left hand which caused him to turn his head. The brougham, which had retired into the field to wait, was back again at the door: the subject of his rumination came out from the chapel—not in her mystic robe of white, but dressed in ordinary fashionable costume —followed as before by the attendant with other articles of clothing on her arm, including the white gown. Somerset fancied that the younger woman was drying her eyes with her handkerchief, but there was not much time to see: they quickly entered the carriage, and it moved on. Then a cat suddenly mewed, and he saw a white Persian standing forlorn where the carriage had been. The door was opened, the cat taken in, and the carriage drove away.

The stranger's girlish form stamped itself deeply on Somerset's soul. He strolled on his way quite oblivious to the fact that the moon had just risen, and that the landscape was one for him to linger over, especially if there were any Gothic architecture in the line of the lunar rays. The inference was that though this girl must be of a serious turn of mind, wilfulness was not foreign to her composition: and it was probable that her daily doings evinced without much abatement by religion the unbroken spirit and pride of life natural to her age.

The little village inn at which Somerset intended to pass the night lay a mile further on, and retracing his way up to the stile he rambled along the lane, now beginning to be streaked like a zebra with the shadows of some young trees that edged the road. But his attention was attracted to the other side of the way by a hum as of a night-bee, which arose from the play of the breezes over a single wire of telegraph running parallel with his track on tall poles that

had appeared by the road, he hardly knew when, from a branch route, probably leading from some town in the neighbourhood to the village he was approaching. He did not know the population of Sleeping-Green, as the village of his search was called, but the presence of this mark of civilization seemed to signify that its inhabitants were not quite so far in the rear of their age as might be imagined; a glance at the still ungrassed heap of earth round the foot of each post was, however, sufficient to show that it was at no very remote period that they had made their advance.

Aided by this friendly wire Somerset had no difficulty in keeping his course, till he reached a point in the ascent of a hill at which the telegraph branched off from the road, passing through an opening in the hedge, to strike across an undulating down, while the road wound round to the left. For a few moments Somerset doubted and stood still. The wire sang on overhead with dying falls and melodious rises that invited him to follow; while above the wire rode the stars in their courses, the low nocturn of the former seeming to be the voices of those stars,

> 'Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubim.'

Recalling himself from these reflections Somerset decided to follow the lead of the wire. It was not the first time during his present tour that he had found his way at night by the help of these musical threads which the post-office authorities had erected all over the country for quite another purpose than to guide belated travellers. Plunging with it across the down he came to a hedgeless road that entered a park or chase, which flourished in all its original wildness. Tufts of rushes and brakes of fern rose from the hollows, and the road was in places half overgrown with green, as if it had not been tended for many years; so much so that, where shaded by trees, he found some difficulty in

keeping it. Though he had noticed the remains of a deer-fence further back no deer were visible, and it was scarcely possible that there should be any in the existing state of things: but rabbits were multitudinous, every hillock being dotted with their seated figures till Somerset approached and sent them limping into their burrows. The road next wound round a clump of underwood beside which lay heaps of faggots for burning, and then there appeared against the sky the walls and towers of a castle, half ruin, half residence, standing on an eminence hard by.

Somerset stopped to examine it. The castle was not exceptionally large, but it had all the characteristics of its most important fellows. Irregular, dilapidated, and muffled in creepers as a great portion of it was, some part—a comparatively modern wing—was inhabited, for a light or two steadily gleamed from some upper windows; in others a reflection of the moon denoted that unbroken glass yet filled their casements. Over all rose the keep, a square solid tower apparently not much injured by wars or weather, and darkened with ivy on one side, wherein wings could be heard flapping uncertainly, as if they belonged to a bird unable to find a proper perch. Hissing noises supervened, and then a hoot, proclaiming that a brood of young owls were residing there in the company of older ones. In spite of the habitable and more modern wing, neglect and decay had set their mark upon the outworks of the pile, unfitting them for a more positive light than that of the present hour.

He walked up to a modern arch spanning the ditch—now dry and green—over which the drawbridge once had swung. The large door under the porter's archway was closed and locked. While standing here the singing of the wire, which for the last few minutes he had quite forgotten, again struck upon his ear, and retreating to a convenient

place he observed its final course: from the poles amid the trees it leaped across the moat, over the girdling wall, and thence by a tremendous stretch towards the keep where, to judge by sound, it vanished through an arrow-slit into the interior. This fossil of feudalism, then, was the journey's-end of the wire, and not the village of Sleeping-Green.

There was a certain unexpectedness in the fact that the hoary memorial of a stolid antagonism to the interchange of ideas, the monument of hard distinctions in blood and race, of deadly mistrust of one's neighbour in spite of the Church's teaching, and of a sublime unconsciousness of any other force than a brute one, should be the goal of a machine which beyond everything may be said to symbolize cosmopolitan views and the intellectual and moral kinship of all mankind. In that light the little buzzing wire had a far finer significance to the student Somerset than the vast walls which neighboured it. But the modern fever and fret which consumes people before they can grow old was also signified by the wire; and this aspect of to-day did not contrast well with the fairer side of feudalism—leisure, light-hearted generosity, intense friendships, hawks, hounds, revels, healthy complexions, freedom from care, and such a living power in architectural art as the world may never again see.

Somerset withdrew till neither the singing of the wire nor the hisses of the irritable owls could be heard any more. A clock in the castle struck ten, and he recognized the strokes as those he had heard when sitting on the stile. It was indispensable that he should retrace his steps and push on to Sleeping-Green if he wished that night to reach his lodgings, which had been secured by letter at a little inn in the straggling line of roadside houses called by the above name, where his luggage had by this time probably arrived. In a quarter of an hour he was again at the point

where the wire left the road, and following the highway over a hill he saw the hamlet at his feet.

III.

By half-past ten the next morning Somerset was once more approaching the precincts of the building which had interested him the night before. Referring to his map he had learnt that it bore the name of Stancy Castle or Castle de Stancy; and he had been at once struck with its familiarity, though he had never understood its position in the county, believing it further to the west. If report spoke truly there was some excellent vaulting in the interior, and a change of study from ecclesiastical to secular Gothic was not unwelcome for a while.

The entrance-gate was open now, and under the archway the outer ward was visible, a great part of it being laid out as a flower-garden. This was in process of clearing from weeds and rubbish by a set of gardeners, and the soil was so encumbered that in rooting out the weeds such few hardy flowers as still remained in the beds were mostly brought up with them. The groove wherein the portcullis had run was as fresh as if only cut yesterday, the very tooling of the stone being visible. Close to this hung a bell-pull formed of a large wooden acorn attached to a vertical rod. Somerset's application brought a woman from the porter's door, who informed him that the day before having been the weekly show-day for visitors, it was doubtful if he could be admitted now.

'Who is at home?' said Somerset.

'Only Miss de Stancy,' the porteress replied.

His dread of being considered an intruder was such that he thought at first there was no help for it but to wait till the next week. But he had already through his want of effrontery lost a sight of many interiors, whose exhibition would have been rather a satisfaction to the inmates than a trouble. It was inconvenient to wait; he knew nobody in the neighbourhood from whom he could get an introductory letter: he turned and passed the woman, crossed the ward where the gardeners were at work, over a second and smaller bridge, and up a flight of stone stairs, open to the sky, along whose steps sunburnt Tudor soldiers and other renowned dead men had doubtless many times walked. It led to the principal door on this side. Thence he could observe the walls of the lower court in detail, and the old mosses with which they were padded—mosses that from time immemorial had been burnt brown every summer, and every winter had grown green again. The arrow-slit and the electric wire that entered it, like a worm uneasy at being unearthed, were distinctly visible now. So also was the clock, not, as he had supposed, a chronometer coeval with the fortress itself, but new and shining, and bearing the name of a recent maker.

The door was opened by a bland, intensely shaven man out of livery, who took Somerset's name and politely worded request to be allowed to inspect the architecture of the more public portions of the castle. He pronounced the word 'architecture' in the tone of a man who knew and practised that art; 'for,' he said to himself, 'if she thinks I am a mere idle tourist, it will not be so well.'

No such uncomfortable consequences ensued. Miss De Stancy had great pleasure in giving Mr. Somerset full permission to walk through whatever parts of the building he chose.