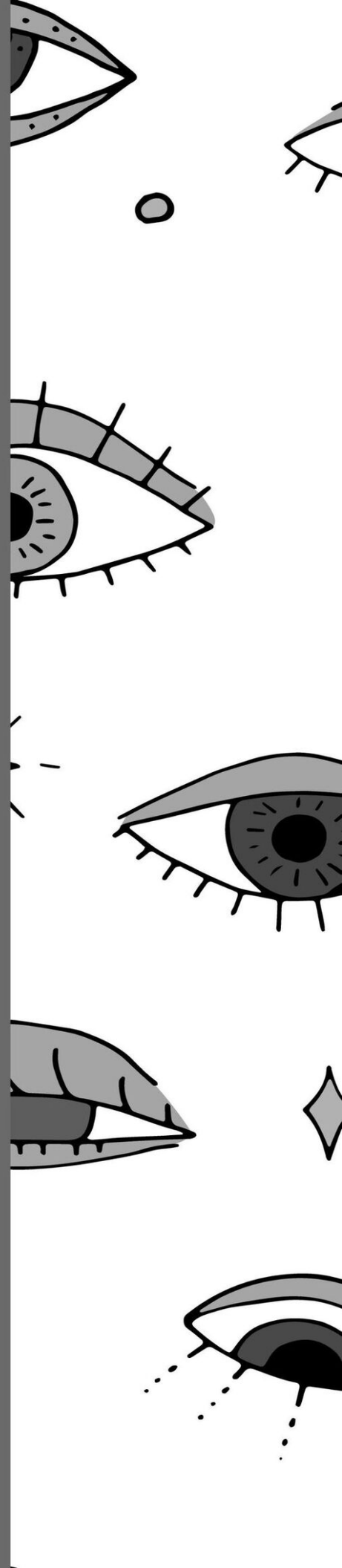


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A
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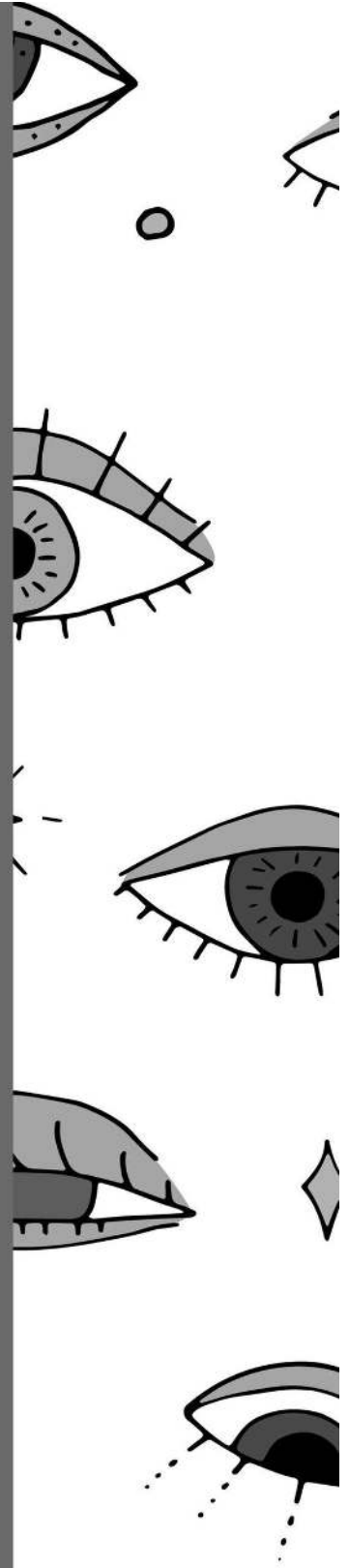
Thomas Hardy



Sheba Blake Publishing Corp.

P A I R
OF BLUE EYES

Thomas Hardy



THOMAS HARDY

A Pair of Blue Eyes

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Thomas Hardy asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

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*A violet in the youth of primy nature,
Forward, not permanent, sweet not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute;
No more.*

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About the Author

Preface

The following chapters were written at a time when the craze for indiscriminate church-restoration had just reached the remotest nooks of western England, where the wild and tragic features of the coast had long combined in perfect harmony with the crude Gothic Art of the ecclesiastical buildings scattered along it, throwing into extraordinary discord all architectural attempts at newness there. To restore the grey carcasses of a mediaevalism whose spirit had fled, seemed a not less incongruous act than to set about renovating the adjoining crags themselves.

Hence it happened that an imaginary history of three human hearts, whose emotions were not without correspondence with these material circumstances, found in the ordinary incidents of such church- renovations a fitting frame for its presentation.

The shore and country about 'Castle Boterel' is now getting well known, and will be readily recognized. The spot is, I may add, the furthest westward of all those convenient corners wherein I have ventured to erect my theatre for these imperfect little dramas of country life and passions; and it lies near to, or no great way beyond, the vague border of the Wessex kingdom on that side, which, like the westering verge of modern American settlements, was progressive and uncertain.

This, however, is of little importance. The place is pre- eminently (for one person at least) the region of dream and mystery. The ghostly birds, the pall-like sea, the frothy wind, the eternal soliloquy of the waters, the bloom of dark

purple cast, that seems to exhale from the shoreward precipices, in themselves lend to the scene an atmosphere like the twilight of a night vision.

One enormous sea-board cliff in particular figures in the narrative; and for some forgotten reason or other this cliff was described in the story as being without a name. Accuracy would require the statement to be that a remarkable cliff which resembles in many points the cliff of the description bears a name that no event has made famous.

T. H. March 1899

The Persons

ELFRIDE SWANCOURT a young Lady

CHRISTOPHER SWANCOURT a Clergyman

STEPHEN SMITH an Architect

HENRY KNIGHT a Reviewer and Essayist

CHARLOTTE TROYTON a rich Widow

GERTRUDE JETHWAY a poor Widow

SPENSER HUGO LUXELLIAN a Peer

LADY LUXELLIAN his Wife

MARY AND KATE two little Girls

WILLIAM WORM a dazed Factotum

JOHN SMITH a Master-mason

JANE SMITH his Wife

MARTIN CANNISTER a Sexton

UNITY a Maid-servant

Other servants, masons, labourers, grooms, nondescripts, etc., etc.

One

A Fair Vestal, Throned in the West



Elfride Swancourt was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface. Their nature more precisely, and as modified by the creeping hours of time, was known only to those who watched the circumstances of her history.

Personally, she was the combination of very interesting particulars, whose rarity, however, lay in the combination itself rather than in the individual elements combined. As a matter of fact, you did not see the form and substance of her features when conversing with her; and this charming power of preventing a material study of her lineaments by an interlocutor, originated not in the cloaking effect of a well-formed manner (for her manner was childish and scarcely formed), but in the attractive crudeness of the remarks themselves. She had lived all her life in retirement—the monstrari gigitto of idle men had not flattered her, and at the age of nineteen or twenty she was no further on in social consciousness than an urban young lady of fifteen.

One point in her, however, you did notice: that was her eyes. In them was seen a sublimation of all of her; it was not necessary to look further: there she lived.

These eyes were blue; blue as autumn distance—blue as the blue we see between the retreating mouldings of hills and woody slopes on a sunny September morning. A misty and shady blue, that had no beginning or surface, and was looked INTO rather than AT.

As to her presence, it was not powerful; it was weak. Some women can make their personality pervade the atmosphere of a whole banqueting hall; Elfride's was no more pervasive than that of a kitten.

Elfride had as her own the thoughtfulness which appears in the face of the Madonna della Sedia, without its rapture: the warmth and spirit of the type of woman's feature most common to the beauties—mortal and immortal—of Rubens, without their insistent fleshiness. The characteristic expression of the female faces of Correggio—that of the yearning human thoughts that lie too deep for tears—was hers sometimes, but seldom under ordinary conditions.

The point in Elfride Swancourt's life at which a deeper current may be said to have permanently set in, was one winter afternoon when she found herself standing, in the character of hostess, face to face with a man she had never seen before—moreover, looking at him with a Miranda-like curiosity and interest that she had never yet bestowed on a mortal.

On this particular day her father, the vicar of a parish on the sea-swept outskirts of Lower Wessex, and a widower, was suffering from an attack of gout. After finishing her household supervisions Elfride became restless, and several times left the room, ascended the staircase, and knocked at her father's chamber- door.

'Come in!' was always answered in a hearty out-of-door voice from the inside.

'Papa,' she said on one occasion to the fine, red-faced, handsome man of forty, who, puffing and fizzing like a bursting bottle, lay on the bed wrapped in

a dressing-gown, and every now and then enunciating, in spite of himself, about one letter of some word or words that were almost oaths; 'papa, will you not come downstairs this evening?' She spoke distinctly: he was rather deaf.

'Afraid not—eh-hh !—very much afraid I shall not, Elfride. Piph-ph-ph! I can't bear even a handkerchief upon this deuced toe of mine, much less a stocking or slipper—piph-ph-ph! There 'tis again! No, I shan't get up till to-morrow.'

'Then I hope this London man won't come; for I don't know what I should do, papa.'

'Well, it would be awkward, certainly.'

'I should hardly think he would come to-day.'

'Why?'

'Because the wind blows so.'

'Wind! What ideas you have, Elfride! Who ever heard of wind stopping a man from doing his business? The idea of this toe of mine coming on so suddenly!...If he should come, you must send him up to me, I suppose, and then give him some food and put him to bed in some way. Dear me, what a nuisance all this is!'

'Must he have dinner?'

'Too heavy for a tired man at the end of a tedious journey.'

'Tea, then?'

'Not substantial enough.'

'High tea, then? There is cold fowl, rabbit-pie, some pasties, and things of that kind.'

'Yes, high tea.'

'Must I pour out his tea, papa?'

'Of course; you are the mistress of the house.'

‘What! sit there all the time with a stranger, just as if I knew him, and not anybody to introduce us?’

‘Nonsense, child, about introducing; you know better than that. A practical professional man, tired and hungry, who has been travelling ever since daylight this morning, will hardly be inclined to talk and air courtesies to-night. He wants food and shelter, and you must see that he has it, simply because I am suddenly laid up and cannot. There is nothing so dreadful in that, I hope? You get all kinds of stuff into your head from reading so many of those novels.’

‘Oh no; there is nothing dreadful in it when it becomes plainly a case of necessity like this. But, you see, you are always there when people come to dinner, even if we know them; and this is some strange London man of the world, who will think it odd, perhaps.’

‘Very well; let him.’

‘Is he Mr. Hewby’s partner?’

‘I should scarcely think so: he may be.’

‘How old is he, I wonder?’

‘That I cannot tell. You will find the copy of my letter to Mr. Hewby, and his answer, upon the table in the study. You may read them, and then you’ll know as much as I do about our visitor.’

‘I have read them.’

‘Well, what’s the use of asking questions, then? They contain all I know. Ugh-h-h!...Od plague you, you young scamp! don’t put anything there! I can’t bear the weight of a fly.’

‘Oh, I am sorry, papa. I forgot; I thought you might be cold,’ she said, hastily removing the rug she had thrown upon the feet of the sufferer; and

waiting till she saw that consciousness of her offence had passed from his face, she withdrew from the room, and retired again downstairs.

Two

Twas on the Evening of a Winter's Day



When two or three additional hours had merged the same afternoon in evening, some moving outlines might have been observed against the sky on the summit of a wild lone hill in that district. They circumscribed two men, having at present the aspect of silhouettes, sitting in a dog-cart and pushing along in the teeth of the wind. Scarcely a solitary house or man had been visible along the whole dreary distance of open country they were traversing; and now that night had begun to fall, the faint twilight, which still gave an idea of the landscape to their observation, was enlivened by the quiet appearance of the planet Jupiter, momentarily gleaming in intenser brilliancy in front of them, and by Sirius shedding his rays in rivalry from his position over their shoulders. The only lights apparent on earth were some spots of dull red, glowing here and there upon the distant hills, which, as the driver of the vehicle gratuitously remarked to the hirer, were smouldering fires for the consumption of peat and gorse-roots, where the common was being broken up for agricultural purposes. The wind prevailed with but little abatement from its daytime boisterousness, three or four small clouds, delicate and pale, creeping along under the sky southward to the Channel.

Fourteen of the sixteen miles intervening between the railway terminus and the end of their journey had been gone over, when they began to pass along the brink of a valley some miles in extent, wherein the wintry skeletons of a more luxuriant vegetation than had hitherto surrounded them proclaimed an increased richness of soil, which showed signs of far more careful enclosure and management than had any slopes they had yet passed. A little farther, and an opening in the elms stretching up from this fertile valley revealed a mansion.

‘That’s Endelstow House, Lord Luxellian’s,’ said the driver.

‘Endelstow House, Lord Luxellian’s,’ repeated the other mechanically. He then turned himself sideways, and keenly scrutinized the almost invisible house with an interest which the indistinct picture itself seemed far from adequate to create. ‘Yes, that’s Lord Luxellian’s,’ he said yet again after a while, as he still looked in the same direction.

‘What, be we going there?’

‘No; Endelstow Vicarage, as I have told you.’

‘I thought you m’t have altered your mind, sir, as ye have stared that way at nothing so long.’

‘Oh no; I am interested in the house, that’s all.’

‘Most people be, as the saying is.’

‘Not in the sense that I am.’

‘Oh!...Well, his family is no better than my own, ‘a b’lieve.’

‘How is that?’

‘Hedgers and ditchers by rights. But once in ancient times one of ‘em, when he was at work, changed clothes with King Charles the Second, and saved the king’s life. King Charles came up to him like a common man, and said off-hand, “Man in the smock-frock, my name is Charles the Second, and

that's the truth on't. Will you lend me your clothes?" "I don't mind if I do," said Hedger Luxellian; and they changed there and then. "Now mind ye," King Charles the Second said, like a common man, as he rode away, "if ever I come to the crown, you come to court, knock at the door, and say out bold, 'Is King Charles the Second at home?' Tell your name, and they shall let you in, and you shall be made a lord." Now, that was very nice of Master Charley?

'Very nice indeed.'

'Well, as the story is, the king came to the throne; and some years after that, away went Hedger Luxellian, knocked at the king's door, and asked if King Charles the Second was in. "No, he isn't," they said. "Then, is Charles the Third?" said Hedger Luxellian. "Yes," said a young feller standing by like a common man, only he had a crown on, "my name is Charles the Third." And ——'

'I really fancy that must be a mistake. I don't recollect anything in English history about Charles the Third,' said the other in a tone of mild remonstrance.

'Oh, that's right history enough, only 'twasn't prented; he was rather a queer-tempered man, if you remember.'

'Very well; go on.'

'And, by hook or by crook, Hedger Luxellian was made a lord, and everything went on well till some time after, when he got into a most terrible row with King Charles the Fourth

'I can't stand Charles the Fourth. Upon my word, that's too much.'

'Why? There was a George the Fourth, wasn't there?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, Charleses be as common as Georges. However I'll say no more about it....Ah, well! 'tis the funniest world ever I lived in—upon my life 'tis. Ah, that such should be!'

The dusk had thickened into darkness while they thus conversed, and the outline and surface of the mansion gradually disappeared. The windows, which had before been as black blots on a lighter expanse of wall, became illuminated, and were transfigured to squares of light on the general dark body of the night landscape as it absorbed the outlines of the edifice into its gloomy monochrome.

Not another word was spoken for some time, and they climbed a hill, then another hill piled on the summit of the first. An additional mile of plateau followed, from which could be discerned two light-houses on the coast they were nearing, reposing on the horizon with a calm lustre of benignity. Another oasis was reached; a little dell lay like a nest at their feet, towards which the driver pulled the horse at a sharp angle, and descended a steep slope which dived under the trees like a rabbit's burrow. They sank lower and lower.

'Endelstow Vicarage is inside here,' continued the man with the reins. 'This part about here is West Endelstow; Lord Luxellian's is East Endelstow, and has a church to itself. Pa'son Swancourt is the pa'son of both, and bobs backward and forward. Ah, well! 'tis a funny world. 'A b'lieve there was once a quarry where this house stands. The man who built it in past time scraped all the glebe for earth to put round the vicarage, and laid out a little paradise of flowers and trees in the soil he had got together in this way, whilst the fields he scraped have been good for nothing ever since.'

'How long has the present incumbent been here?'

'Maybe about a year, or a year and half: 't isn't two years; for they don't scandalize him yet; and, as a rule, a parish begins to scandalize the pa'son at the end of two years among 'em familiar. But he's a very nice party. Ay, Pa'son Swancourt knows me pretty well from often driving over; and I know Pa'son Swancourt.'

They emerged from the bower, swept round in a curve, and the chimneys and gables of the vicarage became darkly visible. Not a light showed anywhere. They alighted; the man felt his way into the porch, and rang the bell.

At the end of three or four minutes, spent in patient waiting without hearing any sounds of a response, the stranger advanced and repeated the call in a more decided manner. He then fancied he heard footsteps in the hall, and sundry movements of the door-knob, but nobody appeared.

'Perhaps they beant at home,' sighed the driver. 'And I promised myself a bit of supper in Pa'son Swancourt's kitchen. Sich lovely mate-pize and figged keakes, and cider, and drops o' cordial that they do keep here!'

'All right, naibours! Be ye rich men or be ye poor men, that ye must needs come to the world's end at this time o' night?' exclaimed a voice at this instant; and, turning their heads, they saw a rickety individual shambling round from the back door with a horn lantern dangling from his hand.

'Time o' night, 'a b'lieve! and the clock only gone seven of 'em. Show a light, and let us in, William Worm.'

'Oh, that you, Robert Lickpan?'

'Nobody else, William Worm.'

'And is the visiting man a-come?'

'Yes,' said the stranger. 'Is Mr. Swancourt at home?'

'That 'a is, sir. And would ye mind coming round by the back way? The front door is got stuck wi' the wet, as he will do sometimes; and the Turk can't open en. I know I am only a poor wambling man that 'ill never pay the Lord for my making, sir; but I can show the way in, sir.'

The new arrival followed his guide through a little door in a wall, and then promenaded a scullery and a kitchen, along which he passed with eyes rigidly fixed in advance, an inbred horror of prying forbidding him to gaze around

apartments that formed the back side of the household tapestry. Entering the hall, he was about to be shown to his room, when from the inner lobby of the front entrance, whither she had gone to learn the cause of the delay, sailed forth the form of Elfride. Her start of amazement at the sight of the visitor coming forth from under the stairs proved that she had not been expecting this surprising flank movement, which had been originated entirely by the ingenuity of William Worm.

She appeared in the prettiest of all feminine guises, that is to say, in demi-toilette, with plenty of loose curly hair tumbling down about her shoulders. An expression of uneasiness pervaded her countenance; and altogether she scarcely appeared woman enough for the situation. The visitor removed his hat, and the first words were spoken; Elfride prelusively looking with a deal of interest, not unmixed with surprise, at the person towards whom she was to do the duties of hospitality.

‘I am Mr. Smith,’ said the stranger in a musical voice.

‘I am Miss Swancourt,’ said Elfride.

Her constraint was over. The great contrast between the reality she beheld before her, and the dark, taciturn, sharp, elderly man of business who had lurked in her imagination—a man with clothes smelling of city smoke, skin sallow from want of sun, and talk flavoured with epigram—was such a relief to her that Elfride smiled, almost laughed, in the new-comer’s face.

Stephen Smith, who has hitherto been hidden from us by the darkness, was at this time of his life but a youth in appearance, and barely a man in years. Judging from his look, London was the last place in the world that one would have imagined to be the scene of his activities: such a face surely could not be nourished amid smoke and mud and fog and dust; such an open countenance

could never even have seen anything of 'the weariness, the fever, and the fret' of Babylon the Second.

His complexion was as fine as Elfride's own; the pink of his cheeks as delicate. His mouth as perfect as Cupid's bow in form, and as cherry-red in colour as hers. Bright curly hair; bright sparkling blue-gray eyes; a boy's blush and manner; neither whisker nor moustache, unless a little light-brown fur on his upper lip deserved the latter title: this composed the London professional man, the prospect of whose advent had so troubled Elfride.

Elfride hastened to say she was sorry to tell him that Mr. Swancourt was not able to receive him that evening, and gave the reason why. Mr. Smith replied, in a voice boyish by nature and manly by art, that he was very sorry to hear this news; but that as far as his reception was concerned, it did not matter in the least.

Stephen was shown up to his room. In his absence Elfride stealthily glided into her father's.

'He's come, papa. Such a young man for a business man!'

'Oh, indeed!'

'His face is—well—PRETTY; just like mine.'

'H'm! what next?'

'Nothing; that's all I know of him yet. It is rather nice, is it not?'

'Well, we shall see that when we know him better. Go down and give the poor fellow something to eat and drink, for Heaven's sake. And when he has done eating, say I should like to have a few words with him, if he doesn't mind coming up here.'

The young lady glided downstairs again, and whilst she awaits young Smith's entry, the letters referring to his visit had better be given.

MR. SWANCOURT TO MR. HEWBY.

ENDELSTOW VICARAGE, Feb. 18, 18—

SIR,

We are thinking of restoring the tower and aisle of the church in this parish; and Lord Luxellian, the patron of the living, has mentioned your name as that of a trustworthy architect whom it would be desirable to ask to superintend the work.

I am exceedingly ignorant of the necessary preliminary steps. Probably, however, the first is that (should you be, as Lord Luxellian says you are, disposed to assist us) yourself or some member of your staff come and see the building, and report thereupon for the satisfaction of parishioners and others.

The spot is a very remote one: we have no railway within fourteen miles; and the nearest place for putting up at—called a town, though merely a large village—is Castle Boterel, two miles further on; so that it would be most convenient for you to stay at the vicarage—which I am glad to place at your disposal—instead of pushing on to the hotel at Castle Boterel, and coming back again in the morning.

Any day of the next week that you like to name for the visit will find us quite ready to receive you.

Yours very truly,

CHRISTOPHER SWANCOURT

MR. HEWBY TO MR. SWANCOURT.

PERCY PLACE, CHARING CROSS, Feb. 20, 18—

DEAR SIR,

Agreeably to your request of the 18th instant, I have arranged to survey and make drawings of the aisle and tower of your parish church, and of the

dilapidations which have been suffered to accrue thereto, with a view to its restoration.

My assistant, Mr. Stephen Smith, will leave London by the early train to-morrow morning for the purpose. Many thanks for your proposal to accommodate him. He will take advantage of your offer, and will probably reach your house at some hour of the evening. You may put every confidence in him, and may rely upon his discernment in the matter of church architecture.

Trusting that the plans for the restoration, which I shall prepare from the details of his survey, will prove satisfactory to yourself and Lord Luxellian.

I am, dear sir, yours faithfully,

WALTER HEWBY

Three

Melodious Birds Sing Madrigals



That first repast in Endelstow Vicarage was a very agreeable one to young Stephen Smith. The table was spread, as Elfride had suggested to her father, with the materials for the heterogeneous meal called high tea—a class of refection welcome to all when away from men and towns, and particularly attractive to youthful palates. The table was prettily decked with winter flowers and leaves, amid which the eye was greeted by chops, chicken, pie, &c., and two huge pasties overhanging the sides of the dish with a cheerful aspect of abundance.

At the end, towards the fireplace, appeared the tea-service, of old-fashioned Worcester porcelain, and behind this arose the slight form of Elfride, attempting to add matronly dignity to the movement of pouring out tea, and to have a weighty and concerned look in matters of marmalade, honey, and clotted cream. Having made her own meal before he arrived, she found to her embarrassment that there was nothing left for her to do but talk when not assisting him. She asked him if he would excuse her finishing a letter she had been writing at a side-table, and, after sitting down to it, tingled with a sense of being grossly rude. However, seeing that he noticed nothing

personally wrong in her, and that he too was embarrassed when she attentively watched his cup to refill it, Elfride became better at ease; and when furthermore he accidentally kicked the leg of the table, and then nearly upset his tea-cup, just as schoolboys did, she felt herself mistress of the situation, and could talk very well. In a few minutes ingenuousness and a common term of years obliterated all recollection that they were strangers just met. Stephen began to wax eloquent on extremely slight experiences connected with his professional pursuits; and she, having no experiences to fall back upon, recounted with much animation stories that had been related to her by her father, which would have astonished him had he heard with what fidelity of action and tone they were rendered. Upon the whole, a very interesting picture of Sweet-and-Twenty was on view that evening in Mr. Swancourt's house.

Ultimately Stephen had to go upstairs and talk loud to the vicar, receiving from him between his puffs a great many apologies for calling him so unceremoniously to a stranger's bedroom. 'But,' continued Mr. Swancourt, 'I felt that I wanted to say a few words to you before the morning, on the business of your visit. One's patience gets exhausted by staying a prisoner in bed all day through a sudden freak of one's enemy—new to me, though—for I have known very little of gout as yet. However, he's gone to my other toe in a very mild manner, and I expect he'll slink off altogether by the morning. I hope you have been well attended to downstairs?'

'Perfectly. And though it is unfortunate, and I am sorry to see you laid up, I beg you will not take the slightest notice of my being in the house the while.'

'I will not. But I shall be down to-morrow. My daughter is an excellent doctor. A dose or two of her mild mixtures will fetch me round quicker than all the drug stuff in the world. Well, now about the church business. Take a

seat, do. We can't afford to stand upon ceremony in these parts as you see, and for this reason, that a civilized human being seldom stays long with us; and so we cannot waste time in approaching him, or he will be gone before we have had the pleasure of close acquaintance. This tower of ours is, as you will notice, entirely gone beyond the possibility of restoration; but the church itself is well enough. You should see some of the churches in this county. Floors rotten: ivy lining the walls.'

'Dear me!'

'Oh, that's nothing. The congregation of a neighbour of mine, whenever a storm of rain comes on during service, open their umbrellas and hold them up till the dripping ceases from the roof. Now, if you will kindly bring me those papers and letters you see lying on the table, I will show you how far we have got.'

Stephen crossed the room to fetch them, and the vicar seemed to notice more particularly the slim figure of his visitor.

'I suppose you are quite competent?' he said.

'Quite,' said the young man, colouring slightly.

'You are very young, I fancy—I should say you are not more than nineteen?'

I am nearly twenty-one.'

'Exactly half my age; I am forty-two.'

'By the way,' said Mr. Swancourt, after some conversation, 'you said your whole name was Stephen Fitzmaurice, and that your grandfather came originally from Caxbury. Since I have been speaking, it has occurred to me that I know something of you. You belong to a well-known ancient county family—not ordinary Smiths in the least.'

'I don't think we have any of their blood in our veins.'