THOMAS HARDY

A GROUP OF NOBLE DAMES

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Содержание

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PREFACE

The pedigrees of our county families, arranged in diagrams on the pages of county histories, mostly appear at first sight to be as barren of any touch of nature as a table of logarithms. But given a clue – the faintest tradition of what went on behind the scenes, and this dryness as of dust may be transformed into a palpitating drama. More, the careful comparison of dates alone – that of birth with marriage, of marriage with death, of one marriage, birth, or death with a kindred marriage, birth, or death – will often effect the same transformation, and anybody practised in raising images from such genealogies finds himself unconsciously filling into the framework the motives, passions, and personal qualities which would appear to be the single explanation possible of some extraordinary conjunction in times, events, and personages that occasionally marks these reticent family records.

Out of such pedigrees and supplementary material most of the following stories have arisen and taken shape.

I would make this preface an opportunity of expressing my sense of the courtesy and kindness of several bright-eyed

Noble Dames yet in the flesh, who, since the first publication of these tales in periodicals, six or seven years ago, have given me interesting comments and conjectures on such of the narratives as they have recognized to be connected with their own families, residences, or traditions; in which they have shown a truly philosophic absence of prejudice in their regard of those incidents whose relation has tended more distinctly to dramatize than to eulogize their ancestors. The outlines they have also given of other singular events in their family histories for use in a second "Group of Noble Dames," will, I fear, never reach the printing-press through me; but I shall store them up in memory of my informants' good nature.

T. H.

June 1896.

DAME THE FIRST – THE FIRST COUNTESS OF WESSEX
By the Local Historian

King's-Hintock Court (said the narrator, turning over his memoranda for reference) – King's-Hintock Court is, as we know, one of the most imposing of the mansions that overlook our beautiful Blackmoor or Blakemore Vale. On the particular occasion of which I have to speak this building stood, as it had often stood before, in the perfect silence of a calm clear night, lighted only by the cold shine of the stars. The season was winter, in days long ago, the last century having run but little more than a third of its length. North, south, and west, not a casement was unfastened, not a curtain undrawn; eastward, one window on the upper floor was open, and a girl of twelve or thirteen was leaning over the sill. That she had not taken up the position for purposes of observation was apparent at a glance, for she kept her eyes covered with her hands.

The room occupied by the girl was an inner one of a suite, to be reached only by passing through a large bedchamber adjoining. From this apartment voices in altercation were audible, everything else in the building being so still. It was to avoid listening to these voices that the girl had left her little cot, thrown a cloak round her head and shoulders, and stretched into

the night air.

But she could not escape the conversation, try as she would. The words reached her in all their painfulness, one sentence in masculine tones, those of her father, being repeated many times.

'I tell 'ee there shall be no such betrothal! I tell 'ee there sha'n't! A child like her!'

She knew the subject of dispute to be herself. A cool feminine voice, her mother's, replied:

'Have done with you, and be wise. He is willing to wait a good five or six years before the marriage takes place, and there's not a man in the county to compare with him.'

'It shall not be! He is over thirty. It is wickedness.'

'He is just thirty, and the best and finest man alive – a perfect match for her.'

'He is poor!'

'But his father and elder brothers are made much of at Court – none so constantly at the palace as they; and with her fortune, who knows? He may be able to get a barony.'

'I believe you are in love with en yourself!'

'How can you insult me so, Thomas! And is it not monstrous for you to talk of my wickedness when you have a like scheme in your own head? You know you have. Some bumpkin of your own choosing – some petty gentleman who lives down at that outlandish place of yours, Falls-Park – one of your pot-companions' sons – '

There was an outburst of imprecation on the part of her

husband in lieu of further argument. As soon as he could utter a connected sentence he said: 'You crow and you domineer, mistress, because you are heiress-general here. You are in your own house; you are on your own land. But let me tell 'ee that if I did come here to you instead of taking you to me, it was done at the dictates of convenience merely. H-! I'm no beggar! Ha'n't I a place of my own? Ha'n't I an avenue as long as thine? Ha'n't I beeches that will more than match thy oaks? I should have lived in my own quiet house and land, contented, if you had not called me off with your airs and graces. Faith, I'll go back there; I'll not stay with thee longer! If it had not been for our Betty I should have gone long ago!'

After this there were no more words; but presently, hearing the sound of a door opening and shutting below, the girl again looked from the window. Footsteps crunched on the gravel-walk, and a shape in a drab greatcoat, easily distinguishable as her father, withdrew from the house. He moved to the left, and she watched him diminish down the long east front till he had turned the corner and vanished. He must have gone round to the stables.

She closed the window and shrank into bed, where she cried herself to sleep. This child, their only one, Betty, beloved ambitiously by her mother, and with uncalculating passionateness by her father, was frequently made wretched by such episodes as this; though she was too young to care very deeply, for her own sake, whether her mother betrothed her to the gentleman discussed or not.

The Squire had often gone out of the house in this manner, declaring that he would never return, but he had always reappeared in the morning. The present occasion, however, was different in the issue: next day she was told that her father had ridden to his estate at Falls-Park early in the morning on business with his agent, and might not come back for some days.

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Falls-Park was over twenty miles from King's-Hintock Court, and was altogether a more modest centre-piece to a more modest possession than the latter. But as Squire Dornell came in view of it that February morning, he thought that he had been a fool ever to leave it, though it was for the sake of the greatest heiress in Wessex. Its classic front, of the period of the second Charles, derived from its regular features a dignity which the great, battlemented, heterogeneous mansion of his wife could not eclipse. Altogether he was sick at heart, and the gloom which the densely-timbered park threw over the scene did not tend to remove the depression of this rubicund man of eight-and-forty, who sat so heavily upon his gelding. The child, his darling Betty: there lay the root of his trouble. He was unhappy when near his wife, he was unhappy when away from his little girl; and from this dilemma there was no practicable escape. As a consequence he indulged rather freely in the pleasures of the table, became what was called a three bottle man, and, in his wife's estimation,

less and less presentable to her polite friends from town.

He was received by the two or three old servants who were in charge of the lonely place, where a few rooms only were kept habitable for his use or that of his friends when hunting; and during the morning he was made more comfortable by the arrival of his faithful servant Tupcombe from King's-Hintock. But after a day or two spent here in solitude he began to feel that he had made a mistake in coming. By leaving King's-Hintock in his anger he had thrown away his best opportunity of counteracting his wife's preposterous notion of promising his poor little Betty's hand to a man she had hardly seen. To protect her from such a repugnant bargain he should have remained on the spot. He felt it almost as a misfortune that the child would inherit so much wealth. She would be a mark for all the adventurers in the kingdom. Had she been only the heiress to his own unassuming little place at Falls, how much better would have been her chances of happiness!

His wife had divined truly when she insinuated that he himself had a lover in view for this pet child. The son of a dear deceased friend of his, who lived not two miles from where the Squire now was, a lad a couple of years his daughter's senior, seemed in her father's opinion the one person in the world likely to make her happy. But as to breathing such a scheme to either of the young people with the indecent haste that his wife had shown, he would not dream of it; years hence would be soon enough for that. They had already seen each other, and the Squire fancied

that he noticed a tenderness on the youth's part which promised well. He was strongly tempted to profit by his wife's example, and forestall her match-making by throwing the two young people together there at Falls. The girl, though marriageable in the views of those days, was too young to be in love, but the lad was fifteen, and already felt an interest in her.

Still better than keeping watch over her at King's Hintock, where she was necessarily much under her mother's influence, would it be to get the child to stay with him at Falls for a time, under his exclusive control. But how accomplish this without using main force? The only possible chance was that his wife might, for appearance' sake, as she had done before, consent to Betty paying him a day's visit, when he might find means of detaining her till Reynard, the suitor whom his wife favoured, had gone abroad, which he was expected to do the following week. Squire Dornell determined to return to King's-Hintock and attempt the enterprise. If he were refused, it was almost in him to pick up Betty bodily and carry her off.

The journey back, vague and Quixotic as were his intentions, was performed with a far lighter heart than his setting forth. He would see Betty, and talk to her, come what might of his plan.

So he rode along the dead level which stretches between the hills skirting Falls-Park and those bounding the town of Ivell, trotted through that borough, and out by the King's-Hintock highway, till, passing the villages he entered the mile-long drive through the park to the Court. The drive being open, without an

avenue, the Squire could discern the north front and door of the Court a long way off, and was himself visible from the windows on that side; for which reason he hoped that Betty might perceive him coming, as she sometimes did on his return from an outing, and run to the door or wave her handkerchief.

But there was no sign. He inquired for his wife as soon as he set foot to earth.

'Mistress is away. She was called to London, sir.'

'And Mistress Betty?' said the Squire blankly.

'Gone likewise, sir, for a little change. Mistress has left a letter for you.'

The note explained nothing, merely stating that she had posted to London on her own affairs, and had taken the child to give her a holiday. On the fly-leaf were some words from Betty herself to the same effect, evidently written in a state of high jubilation at the idea of her jaunt. Squire Dornell murmured a few expletives, and submitted to his disappointment. How long his wife meant to stay in town she did not say; but on investigation he found that the carriage had been packed with sufficient luggage for a sojourn of two or three weeks.

King's-Hintock Court was in consequence as gloomy as Falls-Park had been. He had lost all zest for hunting of late, and had hardly attended a meet that season. Dornell read and re-read Betty's scrawl, and hunted up some other such notes of hers to look over, this seeming to be the only pleasure there was left for him. That they were really in London he learnt in a few days

by another letter from Mrs. Dornell, in which she explained that they hoped to be home in about a week, and that she had had no idea he was coming back to King's-Hintock so soon, or she would not have gone away without telling him.

Squire Dornell wondered if, in going or returning, it had been her plan to call at the Reynards' place near Melchester, through which city their journey lay. It was possible that she might do this in furtherance of her project, and the sense that his own might become the losing game was harassing.

He did not know how to dispose of himself, till it occurred to him that, to get rid of his intolerable heaviness, he would invite some friends to dinner and drown his cares in grog and wine. No sooner was the carouse decided upon than he put it in hand; those invited being mostly neighbouring landholders, all smaller men than himself, members of the hunt; also the doctor from Evershead, and the like – some of them rollicking blades whose presence his wife would not have countenanced had she been at home. 'When the cat's away – !' said the Squire.

They arrived, and there were indications in their manner that they meant to make a night of it. Baxby of Sherton Castle was late, and they waited a quarter of an hour for him, he being one of the liveliest of Dornell's friends; without whose presence no such dinner as this would be considered complete, and, it may be added, with whose presence no dinner which included both sexes could be conducted with strict propriety. He had just returned from London, and the Squire was anxious to talk to him – for

no definite reason; but he had lately breathed the atmosphere in which Betty was.

At length they heard Baxby driving up to the door, whereupon the host and the rest of his guests crossed over to the dining-room. In a moment Baxby came hastily in at their heels, apologizing for his lateness.

'I only came back last night, you know,' he said; 'and the truth o't is, I had as much as I could carry.' He turned to the Squire. 'Well, Dornell – so cunning Reynard has stolen your little ewe lamb? Ha, ha!'

'What?' said Squire Dornell vacantly, across the dining-table, round which they were all standing, the cold March sunlight streaming in upon his full-clean shaven face.

'Surely th'st know what all the town knows? – you've had a letter by this time? – that Stephen Reynard has married your Betty? Yes, as I'm a living man. It was a carefully-arranged thing: they parted at once, and are not to meet for five or six years. But, Lord, you must know!'

A thud on the floor was the only reply of the Squire. They quickly turned. He had fallen down like a log behind the table, and lay motionless on the oak boards.

Those at hand hastily bent over him, and the whole group were in confusion. They found him to be quite unconscious, though puffing and panting like a blacksmith's bellows. His face was livid, his veins swollen, and beads of perspiration stood upon his brow.

'What's happened to him?' said several.

'An apoplectic fit,' said the doctor from Evershead, gravely.

He was only called in at the Court for small ailments, as a rule, and felt the importance of the situation. He lifted the Squire's head, loosened his cravat and clothing, and rang for the servants, who took the Squire upstairs.

There he lay as if in a drugged sleep. The surgeon drew a basin-full of blood from him, but it was nearly six o'clock before he came to himself. The dinner was completely disorganized, and some had gone home long ago; but two or three remained.

'Bless my soul,' Baxby kept repeating, 'I didn't know things had come to this pass between Dornell and his lady! I thought the feast he was spreading to-day was in honour of the event, though privately kept for the present! His little maid married without his knowledge!'

As soon as the Squire recovered consciousness he gasped: "'Tis abduction! 'Tis a capital felony! He can be hung! Where is Baxby? I am very well now. What items have ye heard, Baxby?'

The bearer of the untoward news was extremely unwilling to agitate Dornell further, and would say little more at first. But an hour after, when the Squire had partially recovered and was sitting up, Baxby told as much as he knew, the most important particular being that Betty's mother was present at the marriage, and showed every mark of approval. 'Everything appeared to have been done so regularly that I, of course, thought you knew all about it,' he said.

'I knew no more than the underground dead that such a step was in the wind! A child not yet thirteen! How Sue hath outwitted me! Did Reynard go up to Lon'on with 'em, d'ye know?'

'I can't say. All I know is that your lady and daughter were walking along the street, with the footman behind 'em; that they entered a jeweller's shop, where Reynard was standing; and that there, in the presence o' the shopkeeper and your man, who was called in on purpose, your Betty said to Reynard – so the story goes: 'pon my soul I don't vouch for the truth of it – she said, "Will you marry me?" or, "I want to marry you: will you have me – now or never?" she said.'

'What she said means nothing,' murmured the Squire, with wet eyes. 'Her mother put the words into her mouth to avoid the serious consequences that would attach to any suspicion of force. The words be not the child's: she didn't dream of marriage – how should she, poor little maid! Go on.'

'Well, be that as it will, they were all agreed apparently. They bought the ring on the spot, and the marriage took place at the nearest church within half-an-hour.'

* * * * *

A day or two later there came a letter from Mrs. Dornell to her husband, written before she knew of his stroke. She related the circumstances of the marriage in the gentlest manner, and gave cogent reasons and excuses for consenting to the

premature union, which was now an accomplished fact indeed. She had no idea, till sudden pressure was put upon her, that the contract was expected to be carried out so soon, but being taken half unawares, she had consented, having learned that Stephen Reynard, now their son-in-law, was becoming a great favourite at Court, and that he would in all likelihood have a title granted him before long. No harm could come to their dear daughter by this early marriage-contract, seeing that her life would be continued under their own eyes, exactly as before, for some years. In fine, she had felt that no other such fair opportunity for a good marriage with a shrewd courtier and wise man of the world, who was at the same time noted for his excellent personal qualities, was within the range of probability, owing to the rusticated lives they led at King's-Hintock. Hence she had yielded to Stephen's solicitation, and hoped her husband would forgive her. She wrote, in short, like a woman who, having had her way as to the deed, is prepared to make any concession as to words and subsequent behaviour.

All this Dornell took at its true value, or rather, perhaps, at less than its true value. As his life depended upon his not getting into a passion, he controlled his perturbed emotions as well as he was able, going about the house sadly and utterly unlike his former self. He took every precaution to prevent his wife knowing of the incidents of his sudden illness, from a sense of shame at having a heart so tender; a ridiculous quality, no doubt, in her eyes, now that she had become so imbued with town ideas. But rumours of

his seizure somehow reached her, and she let him know that she was about to return to nurse him. He thereupon packed up and went off to his own place at Falls-Park.

Here he lived the life of a recluse for some time. He was still too unwell to entertain company, or to ride to hounds or elsewhither; but more than this, his aversion to the faces of strangers and acquaintances, who knew by that time of the trick his wife had played him, operated to hold him aloof.

Nothing could influence him to censure Betty for her share in the exploit. He never once believed that she had acted voluntarily. Anxious to know how she was getting on, he despatched the trusty servant Tupcombe to Evershead village, close to King's-Hintock, timing his journey so that he should reach the place under cover of dark. The emissary arrived without notice, being out of livery, and took a seat in the chimney-corner of the Sow-and-Acorn.

The conversation of the droppers-in was always of the nine days' wonder – the recent marriage. The smoking listener learnt that Mrs. Dornell and the girl had returned to King's-Hintock for a day or two, that Reynard had set out for the Continent, and that Betty had since been packed off to school. She did not realize her position as Reynard's child-wife – so the story went – and though somewhat awe-stricken at first by the ceremony, she had soon recovered her spirits on finding that her freedom was in no way to be interfered with.

After that, formal messages began to pass between Dornell

and his wife, the latter being now as persistently conciliating as she was formerly masterful. But her rustic, simple, blustering husband still held personally aloof. Her wish to be reconciled – to win his forgiveness for her stratagem – moreover, a genuine tenderness and desire to soothe his sorrow, which welled up in her at times, brought her at last to his door at Falls-Park one day.

They had not met since that night of altercation, before her departure for London and his subsequent illness. She was shocked at the change in him. His face had become expressionless, as blank as that of a puppet, and what troubled her still more was that she found him living in one room, and indulging freely in stimulants, in absolute disobedience to the physician's order. The fact was obvious that he could no longer be allowed to live thus uncouthly.

So she sympathized, and begged his pardon, and coaxed. But though after this date there was no longer such a complete estrangement as before, they only occasionally saw each other, Dornell for the most part making Falls his headquarters still.

Three or four years passed thus. Then she came one day, with more animation in her manner, and at once moved him by the simple statement that Betty's schooling had ended; she had returned, and was grieved because he was away. She had sent a message to him in these words: 'Ask father to come home to his dear Betty.'

'Ah! Then she is very unhappy!' said Squire Dornell.

His wife was silent.

'Tis that accursed marriage!' continued the Squire.

Still his wife would not dispute with him. 'She is outside in the carriage,' said Mrs. Dornell gently.

'What – Betty?'

'Yes.'

'Why didn't you tell me?' Dornell rushed out, and there was the girl awaiting his forgiveness, for she supposed herself, no less than her mother, to be under his displeasure.

Yes, Betty had left school, and had returned to King's-Hintock. She was nearly seventeen, and had developed to quite a young woman. She looked not less a member of the household for her early marriage-contract, which she seemed, indeed, to have almost forgotten. It was like a dream to her; that clear cold March day, the London church, with its gorgeous pews, and green-baize linings, and the great organ in the west gallery – so different from their own little church in the shrubbery of King's-Hintock Court – the man of thirty, to whose face she had looked up with so much awe, and with a sense that he was rather ugly and formidable; the man whom, though they corresponded politely, she had never seen since; one to whose existence she was now so indifferent that if informed of his death, and that she would never see him more, she would merely have replied, 'Indeed!' Betty's passions as yet still slept.

'Hast heard from thy husband lately?' said Squire Dornell, when they were indoors, with an ironical laugh of fondness which demanded no answer.

The girl winced, and he noticed that his wife looked appealingly at him. As the conversation went on, and there were signs that Dornell would express sentiments that might do harm to a position which they could not alter, Mrs. Dornell suggested that Betty should leave the room till her father and herself had finished their private conversation; and this Betty obediently did.

Dornell renewed his animadversions freely. 'Did you see how the sound of his name frightened her?' he presently added. 'If you didn't, I did. Zounds! what a future is in store for that poor little unfortunate wench o' mine! I tell 'ee, Sue, 'twas not a marriage at all, in morality, and if I were a woman in such a position, I shouldn't feel it as one. She might, without a sign of sin, love a man of her choice as well now as if she were chained up to no other at all. There, that's my mind, and I can't help it. Ah, Sue, my man was best! He'd ha' suited her.'

'I don't believe it,' she replied incredulously.

'You should see him; then you would. He's growing up a fine fellow, I can tell 'ee.'

'Hush! not so loud!' she answered, rising from her seat and going to the door of the next room, whither her daughter had betaken herself. To Mrs. Dornell's alarm, there sat Betty in a reverie, her round eyes fixed on vacancy, musing so deeply that she did not perceive her mother's entrance. She had heard every word, and was digesting the new knowledge.

Her mother felt that Falls-Park was dangerous ground for a young girl of the susceptible age, and in Betty's peculiar position,

while Dornell talked and reasoned thus. She called Betty to her, and they took leave. The Squire would not clearly promise to return and make King's-Hintock Court his permanent abode; but Betty's presence there, as at former times, was sufficient to make him agree to pay them a visit soon.

All the way home Betty remained preoccupied and silent. It was too plain to her anxious mother that Squire Dornell's free views had been a sort of awakening to the girl.

The interval before Dornell redeemed his pledge to come and see them was unexpectedly short. He arrived one morning about twelve o'clock, driving his own pair of black-bays in the curricle-phaeton with yellow panels and red wheels, just as he had used to do, and his faithful old Tupcombe on horseback behind. A young man sat beside the Squire in the carriage, and Mrs. Dornell's consternation could scarcely be concealed when, abruptly entering with his companion, the Squire announced him as his friend Phelipson of Elm-Cranlynch.

Dornell passed on to Betty in the background and tenderly kissed her. 'Sting your mother's conscience, my maid!' he whispered. 'Sting her conscience by pretending you are struck with Phelipson, and would ha' loved him, as your old father's choice, much more than him she has forced upon 'ee.'

The simple-souled speaker fondly imagined that it as entirely in obedience to this direction that Betty's eyes stole interested glances at the frank and impulsive Phelipson that day at dinner, and he laughed grimly within himself to see how this joke of his,

as he imagined it to be, was disturbing the peace of mind of the lady of the house. 'Now Sue sees what a mistake she has made!' said he.

Mrs. Dornell was verily greatly alarmed, and as soon as she could speak a word with him alone she upbraided him. 'You ought not to have brought him here. Oh Thomas, how could you be so thoughtless! Lord, don't you see, dear, that what is done cannot be undone, and how all this foolery jeopardizes her happiness with her husband? Until you interfered, and spoke in her hearing about this Phelipson, she was as patient and as willing as a lamb, and looked forward to Mr. Reynard's return with real pleasure. Since her visit to Falls-Park she has been monstrous close-mouthed and busy with her own thoughts. What mischief will you do? How will it end?'

'Own, then, that my man was best suited to her. I only brought him to convince you.'

'Yes, yes; I do admit it. But oh! do take him back again at once! Don't keep him here! I fear she is even attracted by him already.'

'Nonsense, Sue. 'Tis only a little trick to tease 'ee!'

Nevertheless her motherly eye was not so likely to be deceived as his, and if Betty were really only playing at being love-struck that day, she played at it with the perfection of a Rosalind, and would have deceived the best professors into a belief that it was no counterfeit. The Squire, having obtained his victory, was quite ready to take back the too attractive youth, and early in the

afternoon they set out on their return journey.

A silent figure who rode behind them was as interested as Dornell in that day's experiment. It was the staunch Tupcombe, who, with his eyes on the Squire's and young Phelipson's backs, thought how well the latter would have suited Betty, and how greatly the former had changed for the worse during these last two or three years. He cursed his mistress as the cause of the change.

After this memorable visit to prove his point, the lives of the Dornell couple flowed on quietly enough for the space of a twelvemonth, the Squire for the most part remaining at Falls, and Betty passing and repassing between them now and then, once or twice alarming her mother by not driving home from her father's house till midnight.

* * * * *

The repose of King's-Hintock was broken by the arrival of a special messenger. Squire Dornell had had an access of gout so violent as to be serious. He wished to see Betty again: why had she not come for so long?

Mrs. Dornell was extremely reluctant to take Betty in that direction too frequently; but the girl was so anxious to go, her interests latterly seeming to be so entirely bound up in Falls-Park and its neighbourhood, that there was nothing to be done but to let her set out and accompany her.

Squire Dornell had been impatiently awaiting her arrival. They found him very ill and irritable. It had been his habit to take powerful medicines to drive away his enemy, and they had failed in their effect on this occasion.

The presence of his daughter, as usual, calmed him much, even while, as usual too, it saddened him; for he could never forget that she had disposed of herself for life in opposition to his wishes, though she had secretly assured him that she would never have consented had she been as old as she was now.

As on a former occasion, his wife wished to speak to him alone about the girl's future, the time now drawing nigh at which Reynard was expected to come and claim her. He would have done so already, but he had been put off by the earnest request of the young woman herself, which accorded with that of her parents, on the score of her youth. Reynard had deferentially submitted to their wishes in this respect, the understanding between them having been that he would not visit her before she was eighteen, except by the mutual consent of all parties. But this could not go on much longer, and there was no doubt, from the tenor of his last letter, that he would soon take possession of her whether or no.

To be out of the sound of this delicate discussion Betty was accordingly sent downstairs, and they soon saw her walking away into the shrubberies, looking very pretty in her sweeping green gown, and flapping broad-brimmed hat overhung with a feather.

On returning to the subject, Mrs. Dornell found her husband's

reluctance to reply in the affirmative to Reynard's letter to be as great as ever.

'She is three months short of eighteen!' he exclaimed. "Tis too soon. I won't hear of it! If I have to keep him off sword in hand, he shall not have her yet.'

'But, my dear Thomas,' she expostulated, 'consider if anything should happen to you or to me, how much better it would be that she should be settled in her home with him!'

'I say it is too soon!' he argued, the veins of his forehead beginning to swell. 'If he gets her this side o' Candlemas I'll challenge en – I'll take my oath on't! I'll be back to King's-Hintock in two or three days, and I'll not lose sight of her day or night!'

She feared to agitate him further, and gave way, assuring him, in obedience to his demand, that if Reynard should write again before he got back, to fix a time for joining Betty, she would put the letter in her husband's hands, and he should do as he chose. This was all that required discussion privately, and Mrs. Dornell went to call in Betty, hoping that she had not heard her father's loud tones.

She had certainly not done so this time. Mrs. Dornell followed the path along which she had seen Betty wandering, but went a considerable distance without perceiving anything of her. The Squire's wife then turned round to proceed to the other side of the house by a short cut across the grass, when, to her surprise and consternation, she beheld the object of her search sitting

on the horizontal bough of a cedar, beside her being a young man, whose arm was round her waist. He moved a little, and she recognized him as young Phelipson.

Alas, then, she was right. The so-called counterfeit love was real. What Mrs. Dornell called her husband at that moment, for his folly in originally throwing the young people together, it is not necessary to mention. She decided in a moment not to let the lovers know that she had seen them. She accordingly retreated, reached the front of the house by another route, and called at the top of her voice from a window, 'Betty!'

For the first time since her strategic marriage of the child, Susan Dornell doubted the wisdom of that step.

Her husband had, as it were, been assisted by destiny to make his objection, originally trivial, a valid one. She saw the outlines of trouble in the future. Why had Dornell interfered? Why had he insisted upon producing his man? This, then, accounted for Betty's pleading for postponement whenever the subject of her husband's return was broached; this accounted for her attachment to Falls-Park. Possibly this very meeting that she had witnessed had been arranged by letter.

Perhaps the girl's thoughts would never have strayed for a moment if her father had not filled her head with ideas of repugnance to her early union, on the ground that she had been coerced into it before she knew her own mind; and she might have rushed to meet her husband with open arms on the appointed day.

Betty at length appeared in the distance in answer to the call, and came up pale, but looking innocent of having seen a living soul. Mrs. Dornell groaned in spirit at such duplicity in the child of her bosom. This was the simple creature for whose development into womanhood they had all been so tenderly waiting – a forward minx, old enough not only to have a lover, but to conceal his existence as adroitly as any woman of the world! Bitterly did the Squire's lady regret that Stephen Reynard had not been allowed to come to claim her at the time he first proposed.

The two sat beside each other almost in silence on their journey back to King's-Hintock. Such words as were spoken came mainly from Betty, and their formality indicated how much her mind and heart were occupied with other things.

Mrs. Dornell was far too astute a mother to openly attack Betty on the matter. That would be only fanning flame. The indispensable course seemed to her to be that of keeping the treacherous girl under lock and key till her husband came to take her off her mother's hands. That he would disregard Dornell's opposition, and come soon, was her devout wish.

It seemed, therefore, a fortunate coincidence that on her arrival at King's-Hintock a letter from Reynard was put into Mrs. Dornell's hands. It was addressed to both her and her husband, and courteously informed them that the writer had landed at Bristol, and proposed to come on to King's-Hintock in a few days, at last to meet and carry off his darling Betty, if she and her parents saw no objection.

Betty had also received a letter of the same tenor. Her mother had only to look at her face to see how the girl received the information. She was as pale as a sheet.

'You must do your best to welcome him this time, my dear Betty,' her mother said gently.

'But – but – I – '

'You are a woman now,' added her mother severely, 'and these postponements must come to an end.'

'But my father – oh, I am sure he will not allow this! I am not ready. If he could only wait a year longer – if he could only wait a few months longer! Oh, I wish – I wish my dear father were here! I will send to him instantly.' She broke off abruptly, and falling upon her mother's neck, burst into tears, saying, 'O my mother, have mercy upon me – I do not love this man, my husband!'

The agonized appeal went too straight to Mrs. Dornell's heart for her to hear it unmoved. Yet, things having come to this pass, what could she do? She was distracted, and for a moment was on Betty's side. Her original thought had been to write an affirmative reply to Reynard, allow him to come on to King's-Hintock, and keep her husband in ignorance of the whole proceeding till he should arrive from Falls on some fine day after his recovery, and find everything settled, and Reynard and Betty living together in harmony. But the events of the day, and her daughter's sudden outburst of feeling, had overthrown this intention. Betty was sure to do as she had threatened, and communicate instantly with her father, possibly attempt to fly to him. Moreover, Reynard's letter

was addressed to Mr. Dornell and herself conjointly, and she could not in conscience keep it from her husband.

'I will send the letter on to your father instantly,' she replied soothingly. 'He shall act entirely as he chooses, and you know that will not be in opposition to your wishes. He would ruin you rather than thwart you. I only hope he may be well enough to bear the agitation of this news. Do you agree to this?'

Poor Betty agreed, on condition that she should actually witness the despatch of the letter. Her mother had no objection to offer to this; but as soon as the horseman had cantered down the drive toward the highway, Mrs. Dornell's sympathy with Betty's recalcitration began to die out. The girl's secret affection for young Phelipson could not possibly be condoned. Betty might communicate with him, might even try to reach him. Ruin lay that way. Stephen Reynard must be speedily installed in his proper place by Betty's side.

She sat down and penned a private letter to Reynard, which threw light upon her plan.

* * * * *

'It is Necessary that I should now tell you,' she said, 'what I have never Mentioned before – indeed I may have signified the Contrary – that her Father's Objection to your joining her has not as yet been overcome. As I personally Wish to delay you no longer – am indeed as anxious for your Arrival as you

can be yourself, having the good of my Daughter at Heart – no course is left open to me but to assist your Cause without my Husband's Knowledge. He, I am sorry to say, is at present ill at Falls-Park, but I felt it my Duty to forward him your Letter. He will therefore be like to reply with a peremptory Command to you to go back again, for some Months, whence you came, till the Time he originally stipulated has expir'd. My Advice is, if you get such a Letter, to take no Notice of it, but to come on hither as you had proposed, letting me know the Day and Hour (after dark, if possible) at which we may expect you. Dear Betty is with me, and I warrant ye that she shall be in the House when you arrive.'

* * * * *

Mrs. Dornell, having sent away this epistle unsuspected of anybody, next took steps to prevent her daughter leaving the Court, avoiding if possible to excite the girl's suspicions that she was under restraint. But, as if by divination, Betty had seemed to read the husband's approach in the aspect of her mother's face.

'He is coming!' exclaimed the maiden.

'Not for a week,' her mother assured her.

'He is then – for certain?'

'Well, yes.'

Betty hastily retired to her room, and would not be seen.

To lock her up, and hand over the key to Reynard when he

should appear in the hall, was a plan charming in its simplicity, till her mother found, on trying the door of the girl's chamber softly, that Betty had already locked and bolted it on the inside, and had given directions to have her meals served where she was, by leaving them on a dumb-waiter outside the door.

Thereupon Mrs. Dornell noiselessly sat down in her boudoir, which, as well as her bed-chamber, was a passage-room to the girl's apartment, and she resolved not to vacate her post night or day till her daughter's husband should appear, to which end she too arranged to breakfast, dine, and sup on the spot. It was impossible now that Betty should escape without her knowledge, even if she had wished, there being no other door to the chamber, except one admitting to a small inner dressing-room inaccessible by any second way.

But it was plain that the young girl had no thought of escape. Her ideas ran rather in the direction of intrenchment: she was prepared to stand a siege, but scorned flight. This, at any rate, rendered her secure. As to how Reynard would contrive a meeting with her coy daughter while in such a defensive humour, that, thought her mother, must be left to his own ingenuity to discover.

Betty had looked so wild and pale at the announcement of her husband's approaching visit, that Mrs. Dornell, somewhat uneasy, could not leave her to herself. She peeped through the keyhole an hour later. Betty lay on the sofa, staring listlessly at the ceiling.

'You are looking ill, child,' cried her mother. 'You've not taken the air lately. Come with me for a drive.'

Betty made no objection. Soon they drove through the park towards the village, the daughter still in the strained, strung-up silence that had fallen upon her. They left the park to return by another route, and on the open road passed a cottage.

Betty's eye fell upon the cottage-window. Within it she saw a young girl about her own age, whom she knew by sight, sitting in a chair and propped by a pillow. The girl's face was covered with scales, which glistened in the sun. She was a convalescent from smallpox – a disease whose prevalence at that period was a terror of which we at present can hardly form a conception.

An idea suddenly energized Betty's apathetic features. She glanced at her mother; Mrs. Dornell had been looking in the opposite direction. Betty said that she wished to go back to the cottage for a moment to speak to a girl in whom she took an interest. Mrs. Dornell appeared suspicious, but observing that the cottage had no back-door, and that Betty could not escape without being seen, she allowed the carriage to be stopped. Betty ran back and entered the cottage, emerging again in about a minute, and resuming her seat in the carriage. As they drove on she fixed her eyes upon her mother and said, 'There, I have done it now!' Her pale face was stormy, and her eyes full of waiting tears.

'What have you done?' said Mrs. Dornell.

'Nanny Priddle is sick of the smallpox, and I saw her at the

window, and I went in and kissed her, so that I might take it; and now I shall have it, and he won't be able to come near me!'

'Wicked girl!' cries her mother. 'Oh, what am I to do! What – bring a distemper on yourself, and usurp the sacred prerogative of God, because you can't palate the man you've wedded!'

The alarmed woman gave orders to drive home as rapidly as possible, and on arriving, Betty, who was by this time also somewhat frightened at her own enormity, was put into a bath, and fumigated, and treated in every way that could be thought of to ward off the dreadful malady that in a rash moment she had tried to acquire.

There was now a double reason for isolating the rebellious daughter and wife in her own chamber, and there she accordingly remained for the rest of the day and the days that followed; till no ill results seemed likely to arise from her wilfulness.

* * * * *

Meanwhile the first letter from Reynard, announcing to Mrs. Dornell and her husband jointly that he was coming in a few days, had sped on its way to Falls-Park. It was directed under cover to Tupcombe, the confidential servant, with instructions not to put it into his master's hands till he had been refreshed by a good long sleep. Tupcombe much regretted his commission, letters sent in this way always disturbing the Squire; but guessing that it would be infinitely worse in the end to withhold the news

than to reveal it, he chose his time, which was early the next morning, and delivered the missive.

The utmost effect that Mrs. Dornell had anticipated from the message was a peremptory order from her husband to Reynard to hold aloof a few months longer. What the Squire really did was to declare that he would go himself and confront Reynard at Bristol, and have it out with him there by word of mouth.

'But, master,' said Tupcombe, 'you can't. You cannot get out of bed.'

'You leave the room, Tupcombe, and don't say "can't" before me! Have Jerry saddled in an hour.'

The long-tried Tupcombe thought his employer demented, so utterly helpless was his appearance just then, and he went out reluctantly. No sooner was he gone than the Squire, with great difficulty, stretched himself over to a cabinet by the bedside, unlocked it, and took out a small bottle. It contained a gout specific, against whose use he had been repeatedly warned by his regular physician, but whose warning he now cast to the winds.

He took a double dose, and waited half an hour. It seemed to produce no effect. He then poured out a treble dose, swallowed it, leant back upon his pillow, and waited. The miracle he anticipated had been worked at last. It seemed as though the second draught had not only operated with its own strength, but had kindled into power the latent forces of the first. He put away the bottle, and rang up Tupcombe.

Less than an hour later one of the housemaids, who of

course was quite aware that the Squire's illness was serious, was surprised to hear a bold and decided step descending the stairs from the direction of Mr. Dornell's room, accompanied by the humming of a tune. She knew that the doctor had not paid a visit that morning, and that it was too heavy to be the valet or any other man-servant. Looking up, she saw Squire Dornell fully dressed, descending toward her in his drab caped riding-coat and boots, with the swinging easy movement of his prime. Her face expressed her amazement.

'What the devil beest looking at?' said the Squire. 'Did you never see a man walk out of his house before, wench?'

Resuming his humming – which was of a defiant sort – he proceeded to the library, rang the bell, asked if the horses were ready, and directed them to be brought round. Ten minutes later he rode away in the direction of Bristol, Tupcombe behind him, trembling at what these movements might portend.

They rode on through the pleasant woodlands and the monotonous straight lanes at an equal pace. The distance traversed might have been about fifteen miles when Tupcombe could perceive that the Squire was getting tired – as weary as he would have been after riding three times the distance ten years before. However, they reached Bristol without any mishap, and put up at the Squire's accustomed inn. Dornell almost immediately proceeded on foot to the inn which Reynard had given as his address, it being now about four o'clock.

Reynard had already dined – for people dined early then – and

he was staying indoors. He had already received Mrs. Dornell's reply to his letter; but before acting upon her advice and starting for King's-Hintock he made up his mind to wait another day, that Betty's father might at least have time to write to him if so minded. The returned traveller much desired to obtain the Squire's assent, as well as his wife's, to the proposed visit to his bride, that nothing might seem harsh or forced in his method of taking his position as one of the family. But though he anticipated some sort of objection from his father-in-law, in consequence of Mrs. Dornell's warning, he was surprised at the announcement of the Squire in person.

Stephen Reynard formed the completest of possible contrasts to Dornell as they stood confronting each other in the best parlour of the Bristol tavern. The Squire, hot-tempered, gouty, impulsive, generous, reckless; the younger man, pale, tall, sedate, self-possessed – a man of the world, fully bearing out at least one couplet in his epitaph, still extant in King's-Hintock church, which places in the inventory of his good qualities

> 'Engaging Manners, cultivated Mind,
> Adorn'd by Letters, and in Courts refin'd.'

He was at this time about five-and-thirty, though careful living and an even, unemotional temperament caused him to look much younger than his years.

Squire Dornell plunged into his errand without much

ceremony or preface.

'I am your humble servant, sir,' he said. 'I have read your letter writ to my wife and myself, and considered that the best way to answer it would be to do so in person.'

'I am vastly honoured by your visit, sir,' said Mr. Stephen Reynard, bowing.

'Well, what's done can't be undone,' said Dornell, 'though it was mighty early, and was no doing of mine. She's your wife; and there's an end on't. But in brief, sir, she's too young for you to claim yet; we mustn't reckon by years; we must reckon by nature. She's still a girl; 'tis onpolite of 'ee to come yet; next year will be full soon enough for you to take her to you.'

Now, courteous as Reynard could be, he was a little obstinate when his resolution had once been formed. She had been promised him by her eighteenth birthday at latest – sooner if she were in robust health. Her mother had fixed the time on her own judgment, without a word of interference on his part. He had been hanging about foreign courts till he was weary. Betty was now as woman, if she would ever be one, and there was not, in his mind, the shadow of an excuse for putting him off longer. Therefore, fortified as he was by the support of her mother, he blandly but firmly told the Squire that he had been willing to waive his rights, out of deference to her parents, to any reasonable extent, but must now, in justice to himself and her insist on maintaining them. He therefore, since she had not come to meet him, should proceed to King's-Hintock in a few

days to fetch her.

This announcement, in spite of the urbanity with which it was delivered, set Dornell in a passion.

'Oh dammy, sir; you talk about rights, you do, after stealing her away, a mere child, against my will and knowledge! If we'd begged and prayed 'ee to take her, you could say no more.'

'Upon my honour, your charge is quite baseless, sir,' said his son-in-law. 'You must know by this time – or if you do not, it has been a monstrous cruel injustice to me that I should have been allowed to remain in your mind with such a stain upon my character – you must know that I used no seductiveness or temptation of any kind. Her mother assented; she assented. I took them at their word. That you was really opposed to the marriage was not known to me till afterwards.'

Dornell professed to believe not a word of it. 'You sha'n't have her till she's dree sixes full – no maid ought to be married till she's dree sixes! – and my daughter sha'n't be treated out of nater!' So he stormed on till Tupcombe, who had been alarmedly listening in the next room, entered suddenly, declaring to Reynard that his master's life was in danger if the interview were prolonged, he being subject to apoplectic strokes at these crises. Reynard immediately said that he would be the last to wish to injure Squire Dornell, and left the room, and as soon as the Squire had recovered breath and equanimity, he went out of the inn, leaning on the arm of Tupcombe.

Tupcombe was for sleeping in Bristol that night, but Dornell,

whose energy seemed as invincible as it was sudden, insisted upon mounting and getting back as far as Falls-Park, to continue the journey to King's-Hintock on the following day. At five they started, and took the southern road toward the Mendip Hills. The evening was dry and windy, and, excepting that the sun did not shine, strongly reminded Tupcombe of the evening of that March month, nearly five years earlier, when news had been brought to King's-Hintock Court of the child Betty's marriage in London – news which had produced upon Dornell such a marked effect for the worse ever since, and indirectly upon the household of which he was the head. Before that time the winters were lively at Falls-Park, as well as at King's-Hintock, although the Squire had ceased to make it his regular residence. Hunting-guests and shooting-guests came and went, and open house was kept. Tupcombe disliked the clever courtier who had put a stop to this by taking away from the Squire the only treasure he valued.

It grew darker with their progress along the lanes, and Tupcombe discovered from Mr. Dornell's manner of riding that his strength was giving way; and spurring his own horse close alongside, he asked him how he felt.

'Oh, bad; damn bad, Tupcombe! I can hardly keep my seat. I shall never be any better, I fear! Have we passed Three-Man-Gibbet yet?'

'Not yet by a long ways, sir.'

'I wish we had. I can hardly hold on.' The Squire could not repress a groan now and then, and Tupcombe knew he was in

great pain. 'I wish I was underground – that's the place for such fools as I! I'd gladly be there if it were not for Mistress Betty. He's coming on to King's-Hintock to-morrow – he won't put it off any longer; he'll set out and reach there to-morrow night, without stopping at Falls; and he'll take her unawares, and I want to be there before him.'

'I hope you may be well enough to do it, sir. But really – '

'I *must*, Tupcombe! You don't know what my trouble is; it is not so much that she is married to this man without my agreeing – for, after all, there's nothing to say against him, so far as I know; but that she don't take to him at all, seems to fear him – in fact, cares nothing about him; and if he comes forcing himself into the house upon her, why, 'twill be rank cruelty. Would to the Lord something would happen to prevent him!'

How they reached home that night Tupcombe hardly knew. The Squire was in such pain that he was obliged to recline upon his horse, and Tupcombe was afraid every moment lest he would fall into the road. But they did reach home at last, and Mr. Dornell was instantly assisted to bed.

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Next morning it was obvious that he could not possibly go to King's-Hintock for several days at least, and there on the bed he lay, cursing his inability to proceed on an errand so personal and so delicate that no emissary could perform it. What he wished

to do was to ascertain from Betty's own lips if her aversion to Reynard was so strong that his presence would be positively distasteful to her. Were that the case, he would have borne her away bodily on the saddle behind him.

But all that was hindered now, and he repeated a hundred times in Tupcombe's hearing, and in that of the nurse and other servants, 'I wish to God something would happen to him!'

This sentiment, reiterated by the Squire as he tossed in the agony induced by the powerful drugs of the day before, entered sharply into the soul of Tupcombe and of all who were attached to the house of Dornell, as distinct from the house of his wife at King's-Hintock. Tupcombe, who was an excitable man, was hardly less disquieted by the thought of Reynard's return than the Squire himself was. As the week drew on, and the afternoon advanced at which Reynard would in all probability be passing near Falls on his way to the Court, the Squire's feelings became acuter, and the responsive Tupcombe could hardly bear to come near him. Having left him in the hands of the doctor, the former went out upon the lawn, for he could hardly breathe in the contagion of excitement caught from the employer who had virtually made him his confidant. He had lived with the Dornells from his boyhood, had been born under the shadow of their walls; his whole life was annexed and welded to the life of the family in a degree which has no counterpart in these latter days.

He was summoned indoors, and learnt that it had been decided to send for Mrs. Dornell: her husband was in great danger.

There were two or three who could have acted as messenger, but Dornell wished Tupcombe to go, the reason showing itself when, Tupcombe being ready to start, Squire Dornell summoned him to his chamber and leaned down so that he could whisper in his ear:

'Put Peggy along smart, Tupcombe, and get there before him, you know – before him. This is the day he fixed. He has not passed Falls cross-roads yet. If you can do that you will be able to get Betty to come – d'ye see? – after her mother has started; she'll have a reason for not waiting for him. Bring her by the lower road – he'll go by the upper. Your business is to make 'em miss each other – d'ye see? – but that's a thing I couldn't write down.'

Five minutes after, Tupcombe was astride the horse and on his way – the way he had followed so many times since his master, a florid young countryman, had first gone wooing to King's-Hintock Court. As soon as he had crossed the hills in the immediate neighbourhood of the manor, the road lay over a plain, where it ran in long straight stretches for several miles. In the best of times, when all had been gay in the united houses, that part of the road had seemed tedious. It was gloomy in the extreme now that he pursued it, at night and alone, on such an errand.

He rode and brooded. If the Squire were to die, he, Tupcombe, would be alone in the world and friendless, for he was no favourite with Mrs. Dornell; and to find himself baffled, after all, in what he had set his mind on, would probably kill the Squire. Thinking thus, Tupcombe stopped his horse every now

and then, and listened for the coming husband. The time was drawing on to the moment when Reynard might be expected to pass along this very route. He had watched the road well during the afternoon, and had inquired of the tavern-keepers as he came up to each, and he was convinced that the premature descent of the stranger-husband upon his young mistress had not been made by this highway as yet.

Besides the girl's mother, Tupcombe was the only member of the household who suspected Betty's tender feelings towards young Phelipson, so unhappily generated on her return from school; and he could therefore imagine, even better than her fond father, what would be her emotions on the sudden announcement of Reynard's advent that evening at King's-Hintock Court.

So he rode and rode, desponding and hopeful by turns. He felt assured that, unless in the unfortunate event of the almost immediate arrival of her son-in law at his own heels, Mrs. Dornell would not be able to hinder Betty's departure for her father's bedside.

It was about nine o'clock that, having put twenty miles of country behind him, he turned in at the lodge-gate nearest to Ivell and King's-Hintock village, and pursued the long north drive – itself much like a turnpike road – which led thence through the park to the Court. Though there were so many trees in King's-Hintock park, few bordered the carriage roadway; he could see it stretching ahead in the pale night light like an unrolled deal shaving. Presently the irregular frontage of the house came in

view, of great extent, but low, except where it rose into the outlines of a broad square tower.

As Tupcombe approached he rode aside upon the grass, to make sure, if possible, that he was the first comer, before letting his presence be known. The Court was dark and sleepy, in no respect as if a bridegroom were about to arrive.

While pausing he distinctly heard the tread of a horse upon the track behind him, and for a moment despaired of arriving in time: here, surely, was Reynard! Pulling up closer to the densest tree at hand he waited, and found he had retreated nothing too soon, for the second rider avoided the gravel also, and passed quite close to him. In the profile he recognized young Phelipson.

Before Tupcombe could think what to do, Phelipson had gone on; but not to the door of the house. Swerving to the left, he passed round to the east angle, where, as Tupcombe knew, were situated Betty's apartments. Dismounting, he left the horse tethered to a hanging bough, and walked on to the house.

Suddenly his eye caught sight of an object which explained the position immediately. It was a ladder stretching from beneath the trees, which there came pretty close to the house, up to a first-floor window – one which lighted Miss Betty's rooms. Yes, it was Betty's chamber; he knew every room in the house well.

The young horseman who had passed him, having evidently left his steed somewhere under the trees also, was perceptible at the top of the ladder, immediately outside Betty's window. While Tupcombe watched, a cloaked female figure stepped timidly

over the sill, and the two cautiously descended, one before the other, the young man's arms enclosing the young woman between his grasp of the ladder, so that she could not fall. As soon as they reached the bottom, young Phelipson quickly removed the ladder and hid it under the bushes. The pair disappeared; till, in a few minutes, Tupcombe could discern a horse emerging from a remoter part of the umbrage. The horse carried double, the girl being on a pillion behind her lover.

Tupcombe hardly knew what to do or think; yet, though this was not exactly the kind of flight that had been intended, she had certainly escaped. He went back to his own animal, and rode round to the servants' door, where he delivered the letter for Mrs. Dornell. To leave a verbal message for Betty was now impossible.

The Court servants desired him to stay over the night, but he would not do so, desiring to get back to the Squire as soon as possible and tell what he had seen. Whether he ought not to have intercepted the young people, and carried off Betty himself to her father, he did not know. However, it was too late to think of that now, and without wetting his lips or swallowing a crumb, Tupcombe turned his back upon King's-Hintock Court.

It was not till he had advanced a considerable distance on his way homeward that, halting under the lantern of a roadside-inn while the horse was watered, there came a traveller from the opposite direction in a hired coach; the lantern lit the stranger's face as he passed along and dropped into the shade. Tupcombe exulted for the moment, though he could hardly have justified

his exultation. The belated traveller was Reynard; and another had stepped in before him.

You may now be willing to know of the fortunes of Miss Betty. Left much to herself through the intervening days, she had ample time to brood over her desperate attempt at the stratagem of infection – thwarted, apparently, by her mother's promptitude. In what other way to gain time she could not think. Thus drew on the day and the hour of the evening on which her husband was expected to announce himself.

At some period after dark, when she could not tell, a tap at the window, twice and thrice repeated, became audible. It caused her to start up, for the only visitant in her mind was the one whose advances she had so feared as to risk health and life to repel them. She crept to the window, and heard a whisper without.

'It is I – Charley,' said the voice.

Betty's face fired with excitement. She had latterly begun to doubt her admirer's staunchness, fancying his love to be going off in mere attentions which neither committed him nor herself very deeply. She opened the window, saying in a joyous whisper, 'Oh Charley; I thought you had deserted me quite!'

He assured her he had not done that, and that he had a horse in waiting, if she would ride off with him. 'You must come quickly,' he said; 'for Reynard's on the way!'

To throw a cloak round herself was the work of a moment, and assuring herself that her door was locked against a surprise, she climbed over the window-sill and descended with him as we

have seen.

Her mother meanwhile, having received Tupcombe's note, found the news of her husband's illness so serious, as to displace her thoughts of the coming son-in-law, and she hastened to tell her daughter of the Squire's dangerous condition, thinking it might be desirable to take her to her father's bedside. On trying the door of the girl's room, she found it still locked. Mrs. Dornell called, but there was no answer. Full of misgivings, she privately fetched the old house-steward and bade him burst open the door – an order by no means easy to execute, the joinery of the Court being massively constructed. However, the lock sprang open at last, and she entered Betty's chamber only to find the window unfastened and the bird flown.

For a moment Mrs. Dornell was staggered. Then it occurred to her that Betty might have privately obtained from Tupcombe the news of her father's serious illness, and, fearing she might be kept back to meet her husband, have gone off with that obstinate and biassed servitor to Falls-Park. The more she thought it over the more probable did the supposition appear; and binding her own head-man to secrecy as to Betty's movements, whether as she conjectured, or otherwise, Mrs. Dornell herself prepared to set out.

She had no suspicion how seriously her husband's malady had been aggravated by his ride to Bristol, and thought more of Betty's affairs than of her own. That Betty's husband should arrive by some other road to-night, and find neither wife nor

mother-in-law to receive him, and no explanation of their absence, was possible; but never forgetting chances, Mrs. Dornell as she journeyed kept her eyes fixed upon the highway on the off-side, where, before she had reached the town of Ivell, the hired coach containing Stephen Reynard flashed into the lamplight of her own carriage.

Mrs. Dornell's coachman pulled up, in obedience to a direction she had given him at starting; the other coach was hailed, a few words passed, and Reynard alighted and came to Mrs. Dornell's carriage-window.

'Come inside,' says she. 'I want to speak privately to you. Why are you so late?'

'One hindrance and another,' says he. 'I meant to be at the Court by eight at latest. My gratitude for your letter. I hope – '

'You must not try to see Betty yet,' said she. 'There be far other and newer reasons against your seeing her now than there were when I wrote.'

The circumstances were such that Mrs. Dornell could not possibly conceal them entirely; nothing short of knowing some of the facts would prevent his blindly acting in a manner which might be fatal to the future. Moreover, there are times when deeper intriguers than Mrs. Dornell feel that they must let out a few truths, if only in self-indulgence. So she told so much of recent surprises as that Betty's heart had been attracted by another image than his, and that his insisting on visiting her now might drive the girl to desperation. 'Betty has, in fact, rushed off

to her father to avoid you,' she said. 'But if you wait she will soon forget this young man, and you will have nothing to fear.'

As a woman and a mother she could go no further, and Betty's desperate attempt to infect herself the week before as a means of repelling him, together with the alarming possibility that, after all, she had not gone to her father but to her lover, was not revealed.

'Well,' sighed the diplomatist, in a tone unexpectedly quiet, 'such things have been known before. After all, she may prefer me to him some day, when she reflects how very differently I might have acted than I am going to act towards her. But I'll say no more about that now. I can have a bed at your house for to-night?'

'To-night, certainly. And you leave to-morrow morning early?' She spoke anxiously, for on no account did she wish him to make further discoveries. 'My husband is so seriously ill,' she continued, 'that my absence and Betty's on your arrival is naturally accounted for.'

He promised to leave early, and to write to her soon. 'And when I think the time is ripe,' he said, 'I'll write to her. I may have something to tell her that will bring her to graciousness.'

It was about one o'clock in the morning when Mrs. Dornell reached Falls-Park. A double blow awaited her there. Betty had not arrived; her flight had been elsewhither; and her stricken mother divined with whom. She ascended to the bedside of her husband, where to her concern she found that the physician

had given up all hope. The Squire was sinking, and his extreme weakness had almost changed his character, except in the particular that his old obstinacy sustained him in a refusal to see a clergyman. He shed tears at the least word, and sobbed at the sight of his wife. He asked for Betty, and it was with a heavy heart that Mrs. Dornell told him that the girl had not accompanied her.

'He is not keeping her away?'

'No, no. He is going back – he is not coming to her for some time.'

'Then what is detaining her – cruel, neglectful maid!'

'No, no, Thomas; she is – She could not come.'

'How's that?'

Somehow the solemnity of these last moments of his gave him inquisitorial power, and the too cold wife could not conceal from him the flight which had taken place from King's-Hintock that night.

To her amazement, the effect upon him was electrical.

'What – Betty – a trump after all? Hurrah! She's her father's own maid! She's game! She knew he was her father's own choice! She vowed that my man should win! Well done, Bet! – haw! haw! Hurrah!'

He had raised himself in bed by starts as he spoke, and now fell back exhausted. He never uttered another word, and died before the dawn. People said there had not been such an ungenteel death in a good county family for years.

* * * * *

Now I will go back to the time of Betty's riding off on the pillion behind her lover. They left the park by an obscure gate to the east, and presently found themselves in the lonely and solitary length of the old Roman road now called Long-Ash Lane.

By this time they were rather alarmed at their own performance, for they were both young and inexperienced. Hence they proceeded almost in silence till they came to a mean roadside inn which was not yet closed; when Betty, who had held on to him with much misgiving all this while, felt dreadfully unwell, and said she thought she would like to get down.

They accordingly dismounted from the jaded animal that had brought them, and were shown into a small dark parlour, where they stood side by side awkwardly, like the fugitives they were. A light was brought, and when they were left alone Betty threw off the cloak which had enveloped her. No sooner did young Phelipson see her face than he uttered an alarmed exclamation.

'Why, Lord, Lord, you are sickening for the small-pox!' he cried.

'Oh – I forgot!' faltered Betty. And then she informed him that, on hearing of her husband's approach the week before, in a desperate attempt to keep him from her side, she had tried to imbibe the infection – an act which till this moment she had supposed to have been ineffectual, imagining her feverishness to

be the result of her excitement.

The effect of this discovery upon young Phelipson was overwhelming. Better-seasoned men than he would not have been proof against it, and he was only a little over her own age. 'And you've been holding on to me!' he said. 'And suppose you get worse, and we both have it, what shall we do? Won't you be a fright in a month or two, poor, poor Betty!'

In his horror he attempted to laugh, but the laugh ended in a weakly giggle. She was more woman than girl by this time, and realized his feeling.

'What – in trying to keep off him, I keep off you?' she said miserably. 'Do you hate me because I am going to be ugly and ill?'

'Oh – no, no!' he said soothingly. 'But I – I am thinking if it is quite right for us to do this. You see, dear Betty, if you was not married it would be different. You are not in honour married to him we've often said; still you are his by law, and you can't be mine whilst he's alive. And with this terrible sickness coming on, perhaps you had better let me take you back, and – climb in at the window again.'

'Is *this* your love?' said Betty reproachfully. 'Oh, if you was sickening for the plague itself, and going to be as ugly as the Ooser in the church-vestry, I wouldn't – '

'No, no, you mistake, upon my soul!'

But Betty with a swollen heart had rewrapped herself and gone out of the door. The horse was still standing there. She mounted

by the help of the upping-stock, and when he had followed her she said, 'Do not come near me, Charley; but please lead the horse, so that if you've not caught anything already you'll not catch it going back. After all, what keeps off you may keep off him. Now onward.'

He did not resist her command, and back they went by the way they had come, Betty shedding bitter tears at the retribution she had already brought upon herself; for though she had reproached Phelipson, she was staunch enough not to blame him in her secret heart for showing that his love was only skin-deep. The horse was stopped in the plantation, and they walked silently to the lawn, reaching the bushes wherein the ladder still lay.

'Will you put it up for me?' she asked mournfully.

He re-erected the ladder without a word; but when she approached to ascend he said, 'Good-bye, Betty!'

'Good-bye!' said she; and involuntarily turned her face towards his. He hung back from imprinting the expected kiss: at which Betty started as if she had received a poignant wound. She moved away so suddenly that he hardly had time to follow her up the ladder to prevent her falling.

'Tell your mother to get the doctor at once!' he said anxiously.

She stepped in without looking behind; he descended, withdrew the ladder, and went away.

Alone in her chamber, Betty flung herself upon her face on the bed, and burst into shaking sobs. Yet she would not admit to herself that her lover's conduct was unreasonable; only that her

rash act of the previous week had been wrong. No one had heard her enter, and she was too worn out, in body and mind, to think or care about medical aid. In an hour or so she felt yet more unwell, positively ill; and nobody coming to her at the usual bedtime, she looked towards the door. Marks of the lock having been forced were visible, and this made her chary of summoning a servant. She opened the door cautiously and sallied forth downstairs.

In the dining-parlour, as it was called, the now sick and sorry Betty was startled to see at that late hour not her mother, but a man sitting, calmly finishing his supper. There was no servant in the room. He turned, and she recognized her husband.

'Where's my mamma?' she demanded without preface.

'Gone to your father's. Is that – ' He stopped, aghast.

'Yes, sir. This spotted object is your wife! I've done it because I don't want you to come near me!'

He was sixteen years her senior; old enough to be compassionate. 'My poor child, you must get to bed directly! Don't be afraid of me – I'll carry you upstairs, and send for a doctor instantly.'

'Ah, you don't know what I am!' she cried. 'I had a lover once; but now he's gone! 'Twasn't I who deserted him. He has deserted me; because I am ill he wouldn't kiss me, though I wanted him to!'

'Wouldn't he? Then he was a very poor slack-twisted sort of fellow. Betty, *I've* never kissed you since you stood beside me as my little wife, twelve years and a half old! May I kiss you now?'

Though Betty by no means desired his kisses, she had enough of the spirit of Cunigonde in Schiller's ballad to test his daring. 'If you have courage to venture, yes sir!' said she. 'But you may die for it, mind!'

He came up to her and imprinted a deliberate kiss full upon her mouth, saying, 'May many others follow!'

She shook her head, and hastily withdrew, though secretly pleased at his hardihood. The excitement had supported her for the few minutes she had passed in his presence, and she could hardly drag herself back to her room. Her husband summoned the servants, and, sending them to her assistance, went off himself for a doctor.

The next morning Reynard waited at the Court till he had learnt from the medical man that Betty's attack promised to be a very light one – or, as it was expressed, 'very fine'; and in taking his leave sent up a note to her:

'Now I must be Gone. I promised your Mother I would not see You yet, and she may be anger'd if she finds me here. Promise to see me as Soon as you are well?'

He was of all men then living one of the best able to cope with such an untimely situation as this. A contriving, sagacious, gentle-mannered man, a philosopher who saw that the only constant attribute of life is change, he held that, as long as she lives, there is nothing finite in the most impassioned attitude a woman may take up. In twelve months his girl-wife's recent infatuation might be as distasteful to her mind as it was now to

his own. In a few years her very flesh would change – so said the scientific; – her spirit, so much more ephemeral, was capable of changing in one. Betty was his, and it became a mere question of means how to effect that change.

During the day Mrs. Dornell, having closed her husband's eyes, returned to the Court. She was truly relieved to find Betty there, even though on a bed of sickness. The disease ran its course, and in due time Betty became convalescent, without having suffered deeply for her rashness, one little speck beneath her ear, and one beneath her chin, being all the marks she retained.

The Squire's body was not brought back to King's-Hintock. Where he was born, and where he had lived before wedding his Sue, there he had wished to be buried. No sooner had she lost him than Mrs. Dornell, like certain other wives, though she had never shown any great affection for him while he lived, awoke suddenly to his many virtues, and zealously embraced his opinion about delaying Betty's union with her husband, which she had formerly combated strenuously. 'Poor man! how right he was, and how wrong was I!' Eighteen was certainly the lowest age at which Mr. Reynard should claim her child – nay, it was too low! Far too low!

So desirous was she of honouring her lamented husband's sentiments in this respect, that she wrote to her son-in-law suggesting that, partly on account of Betty's sorrow for her father's loss, and out of consideration for his known wishes for

delay, Betty should not be taken from her till her nineteenth birthday.

However much or little Stephen Reynard might have been to blame in his marriage, the patient man now almost deserved to be pitied. First Betty's skittishness; now her mother's remorseful *volte-face*: it was enough to exasperate anybody; and he wrote to the widow in a tone which led to a little coolness between those hitherto firm friends. However, knowing that he had a wife not to claim but to win, and that young Phelipson had been packed off to sea by his parents, Stephen was complaisant to a degree, returning to London, and holding quite aloof from Betty and her mother, who remained for the present in the country. In town he had a mild visitation of the distemper he had taken from Betty, and in writing to her he took care not to dwell upon its mildness. It was now that Betty began to pity him for what she had inflicted upon him by the kiss, and her correspondence acquired a distinct flavour of kindness thenceforward.

Owing to his rebuffs, Reynard had grown to be truly in love with Betty in his mild, placid, durable way – in that way which perhaps, upon the whole, tends most generally to the woman's comfort under the institution of marriage, if not particularly to her ecstasy. Mrs. Dornell's exaggeration of her husband's wish for delay in their living together was inconvenient, but he would not openly infringe it. He wrote tenderly to Betty, and soon announced that he had a little surprise in store for her. The secret was that the King had been graciously pleased to inform him

privately, through a relation, that His Majesty was about to offer him a Barony. Would she like the title to be Ivell? Moreover, he had reason for knowing that in a few years the dignity would be raised to that of an Earl, for which creation he thought the title of Wessex would be eminently suitable, considering the position of much of their property. As Lady Ivell, therefore, and future Countess of Wessex, he should beg leave to offer her his heart a third time.

He did not add, as he might have added, how greatly the consideration of the enormous estates at King's-Hintock and elsewhere which Betty would inherit, and her children after her, had conduced to this desirable honour.

Whether the impending titles had really any effect upon Betty's regard for him I cannot state, for she was one of those close characters who never let their minds be known upon anything. That such honour was absolutely unexpected by her from such a quarter is, however, certain; and she could not deny that Stephen had shown her kindness, forbearance, even magnanimity; had forgiven her for an errant passion which he might with some reason have denounced, notwithstanding her cruel position as a child entrapped into marriage ere able to understand its bearings.

Her mother, in her grief and remorse for the loveless life she had led with her rough, though open-hearted, husband, made now a creed of his merest whim; and continued to insist that, out of respect to his known desire, her son-in-law should not reside with

Betty till the girl's father had been dead a year at least, at which time the girl would still be under nineteen. Letters must suffice for Stephen till then.

'It is rather long for him to wait,' Betty hesitatingly said one day.

'What!' said her mother. 'From *you*? not to respect your dear father – '

'Of course it is quite proper,' said Betty hastily. 'I don't gainsay it. I was but thinking that – that – '

In the long slow months of the stipulated interval her mother tended and trained Betty carefully for her duties. Fully awake now to the many virtues of her dear departed one, she, among other acts of pious devotion to his memory, rebuilt the church of King's-Hintock village, and established valuable charities in all the villages of that name, as far as to Little-Hintock, several miles eastward.

In superintending these works, particularly that of the church-building, her daughter Betty was her constant companion, and the incidents of their execution were doubtless not without a soothing effect upon the young creature's heart. She had sprung from girl to woman by a sudden bound, and few would have recognized in the thoughtful face of Betty now the same person who, the year before, had seemed to have absolutely no idea whatever of responsibility, moral or other. Time passed thus till the Squire had been nearly a year in his vault; and Mrs. Dornell was duly asked by letter by the patient Reynard if she were willing for him

to come soon. He did not wish to take Betty away if her mother's sense of loneliness would be too great, but would willingly live at King's-Hintock awhile with them.

Before the widow had replied to this communication, she one day happened to observe Betty walking on the south terrace in the full sunlight, without hat or mantle, and was struck by her child's figure. Mrs. Dornell called her in, and said suddenly: 'Have you seen your husband since the time of your poor father's death?'

'Well – yes, mamma,' says Betty, colouring.

'What – against my wishes and those of your dear father! I am shocked at your disobedience!'

'But my father said eighteen, ma'am, and you made it much longer – '

'Why, of course – out of consideration for you! When have ye seen him?'

'Well,' stammered Betty, 'in the course of his letters to me he said that I belonged to him, and if nobody knew that we met it would make no difference. And that I need not hurt your feelings by telling you.'

'Well?'

'So I went to Casterbridge that time you went to London about five months ago – '

'And met him there? When did you come back?'

'Dear mamma, it grew very late, and he said it was safer not to go back till next day, as the roads were bad; and as you were

away from home – '

'I don't want to hear any more! This is your respect for your father's memory,' groaned the widow. 'When did you meet him again?'

'Oh – not for more than a fortnight.'

'A fortnight! How many times have ye seen him altogether?'

'I'm sure, mamma, I've not seen him altogether a dozen times.'

'A dozen! And eighteen and a half years old barely!'

'Twice we met by accident,' pleaded Betty. 'Once at Abbot's-Cernel, and another time at the Red Lion, Melchester.'

'O thou deceitful girl!' cried Mrs. Dornell. 'An accident took you to the Red Lion whilst I was staying at the White Hart! I remember – you came in at twelve o'clock at night and said you'd been to see the cathedral by the light o' the moon!'

'My ever-honoured mamma, so I had! I only went to the Red Lion with him afterwards.'

'Oh Betty, Betty! That my child should have deceived me even in my widowed days!'

'But, my dearest mamma, you made me marry him!' says Betty with spirit, 'and of course I've to obey him more than you now!'

Mrs. Dornell sighed. 'All I have to say is, that you'd better get your husband to join you as soon as possible,' she remarked. 'To go on playing the maiden like this – I'm ashamed to see you!'

She wrote instantly to Stephen Reynard: 'I wash my hands of the whole matter as between you two; though I should advise you

to *openly* join each other as soon as you can – if you wish to avoid scandal.'

He came, though not till the promised title had been granted, and he could call Betty archly 'My Lady.'

People said in after years that she and her husband were very happy. However that may be, they had a numerous family; and she became in due course first Countess of Wessex, as he had foretold.

The little white frock in which she had been married to him at the tender age of twelve was carefully preserved among the relics at King's-Hintock Court, where it may still be seen by the curious – a yellowing, pathetic testimony to the small count taken of the happiness of an innocent child in the social strategy of those days, which might have led, but providentially did not lead, to great unhappiness.

When the Earl died Betty wrote him an epitaph, in which she described him as the best of husbands, fathers, and friends, and called herself his disconsolate widow.

Such is woman; or rather (not to give offence by so sweeping an assertion), such was Betty Dornell.

* * * * *

It was at a meeting of one of the Wessex Field and Antiquarian Clubs that the foregoing story, partly told, partly read from a manuscript, was made to do duty for the regulation papers on

deformed butterflies, fossil ox-horns, prehistoric dung-mixens, and such like, that usually occupied the more serious attention of the members.

This Club was of an inclusive and intersocial character; to a degree, indeed, remarkable for the part of England in which it had its being – dear, delightful Wessex, whose statuesque dynasties are even now only just beginning to feel the shaking of the new and strange spirit without, like that which entered the lonely valley of Ezekiel's vision and made the dry bones move: where the honest squires, tradesmen, parsons, clerks, and people still praise the Lord with one voice for His best of all possible worlds.

The present meeting, which was to extend over two days, had opened its proceedings at the museum of the town whose buildings and environs were to be visited by the members. Lunch had ended, and the afternoon excursion had been about to be undertaken, when the rain came down in an obstinate spatter, which revealed no sign of cessation. As the members waited they grew chilly, although it was only autumn, and a fire was lighted, which threw a cheerful shine upon the varnished skulls, urns, penates, tesseræ, costumes, coats of mail, weapons, and missals, animated the fossilized ichthyosaurus and iguanodon; while the dead eyes of the stuffed birds – those never-absent familiars in such collections, though murdered to extinction out of doors – flashed as they had flashed to the rising sun above the neighbouring moors on the fatal morning when the trigger was

pulled which ended their little flight. It was then that the historian produced his manuscript, which he had prepared, he said, with a view to publication. His delivery of the story having concluded as aforesaid, the speaker expressed his hope that the constraint of the weather, and the paucity of more scientific papers, would excuse any inappropriateness in his subject.

Several members observed that a storm-bound club could not presume to be selective, and they were all very much obliged to him for such a curious chapter from the domestic histories of the county.

The President looked gloomily from the window at the descending rain, and broke a short silence by saying that though the Club had met, there seemed little probability of its being able to visit the objects of interest set down among the *agenda*.

The Treasurer observed that they had at least a roof over their heads; and they had also a second day before them.

A sentimental member, leaning back in his chair, declared that he was in no hurry to go out, and that nothing would please him so much as another county story, with or without manuscript.

The Colonel added that the subject should be a lady, like the former, to which a gentleman known as the Spark said 'Hear, hear!'

Though these had spoken in jest, a rural dean who was present observed blandly that there was no lack of materials. Many, indeed, were the legends and traditions of gentle and noble dames, renowned in times past in that part of England, whose

actions and passions were now, but for men's memories, buried under the brief inscription on a tomb or an entry of dates in a dry pedigree.

Another member, an old surgeon, a somewhat grim though sociable personage, was quite of the speaker's opinion, and felt quite sure that the memory of the reverend gentleman must abound with such curious tales of fair dames, of their loves and hates, their joys and their misfortunes, their beauty and their fate.

The parson, a trifle confused, retorted that their friend the surgeon, the son of a surgeon, seemed to him, as a man who had seen much and heard more during the long course of his own and his father's practice, the member of all others most likely to be acquainted with such lore.

The bookworm, the Colonel, the historian, the Vice-president, the churchwarden, the two curates, the gentleman-tradesman, the sentimental member, the crimson maltster, the quiet gentleman, the man of family, the Spark, and several others, quite agreed, and begged that he would recall something of the kind. The old surgeon said that, though a meeting of the Mid-Wessex Field and Antiquarian Club was the last place at which he should have expected to be called upon in this way, he had no objection; and the parson said he would come next. The surgeon then reflected, and decided to relate the history of a lady named Barbara, who lived towards the end of the last century, apologizing for his tale as being perhaps a little too professional. The crimson maltster winked to the Spark at hearing the nature of the apology, and

the surgeon began.

DAME THE SECOND – BARBARA OF THE HOUSE OF GREBE
By the Old Surgeon

It was apparently an idea, rather than a passion, that inspired Lord Uplandtowers' resolve to win her. Nobody ever knew when he formed it, or whence he got his assurance of success in the face of her manifest dislike of him. Possibly not until after that first important act of her life which I shall presently mention. His matured and cynical doggedness at the age of nineteen, when impulse mostly rules calculation, was remarkable, and might have owed its existence as much to his succession to the earldom and its accompanying local honours in childhood, as to the family character; an elevation which jerked him into maturity, so to speak, without his having known adolescence. He had only reached his twelfth year when his father, the fourth Earl, died, after a course of the Bath waters.

Nevertheless, the family character had a great deal to do with it. Determination was hereditary in the bearers of that escutcheon; sometimes for good, sometimes for evil.

The seats of the two families were about ten miles apart, the way between them lying along the now old, then new, turnpike-road connecting Havenpool and Warborne with the city of Melchester: a road which, though only a branch from what

was known as the Great Western Highway, is probably, even at present, as it has been for the last hundred years, one of the finest examples of a macadamized turnpike-track that can be found in England.

The mansion of the Earl, as well as that of his neighbour, Barbara's father, stood back about a mile from the highway, with which each was connected by an ordinary drive and lodge. It was along this particular highway that the young Earl drove on a certain evening at Christmastide some twenty years before the end of the last century, to attend a ball at Chene Manor, the home of Barbara, and her parents Sir John and Lady Grebe. Sir John's was a baronetcy created a few years before the breaking out of the Civil War, and his lands were even more extensive than those of Lord Uplandtowers himself; comprising this Manor of Chene, another on the coast near, half the Hundred of Cockdene, and well-enclosed lands in several other parishes, notably Warborne and those contiguous. At this time Barbara was barely seventeen, and the ball is the first occasion on which we have any tradition of Lord Uplandtowers attempting tender relations with her; it was early enough, God knows.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.