

From the madding crowd by Thomas Hardy CHAPTER I DESCRIPTION OF FARMER OAK--AN INCIDENT WHEN his countenance like the rays in a rudimentary sketch of the rising sun. His C Farmer Oak smiled, the corners of his mouth spread till t hey were within an important dist

king days he was a young man of sound judgment, easy motions, proper dress, and general good character. On Sundays he was a man of misty views, rather given to postponing, and hampered by his be Gabriel, and on wor

ella: upon the whole, one who felt him elf to occupy morally that vast middle space of Laodicean neu trality which lay between the Communion people of the parish a nd the drunken sectio n,--that is, he went to chr

ch, but yawned privately by the time th e congregation reached the Nicene creed, and thought of what there would be for dinner when he meant to be listening to the sermon. Or, to sta te his character as it stood i

n the scale of public opinion, when hi s friends and critics were in tantrums, he was considered rather a bad man; when they were pleased, he was r ther a good man; when they we re neither, he was a man wh

ose moral colour was a kind of pepp x times as many working-days as Sundays, Oak's appearance i n his old clothes was most pec ularly his own--t he mental pict

ure formed by his neighbours in im ys dressed in that way. He wore a low-crowned felt hat, spread out at the base b y tigh t jamming upon the

head for security in high winds, a nd a coat like Dr. Johnson's; his lower extremities being encas ed in ordinary lea th leggings an d boo

ts emphatically large, affording to each foot a roomy apartment so construc ted tha t any wearer mi ght stand in a river all day long and kn

owing nothing of damp--their m ng a conscientious man who endeavoured to com about him, by way of watch, what may be called a small silver clock; in othe r words, it wa

aker bei r. Oak carried the smaller of his hands, too, occasionally slipped round on the pivot, and thus, though the minutes were told with precision, n

pe and intention, and a of going either too fast or not at a ll. The smaller of his hands, too, occasionally slipped round on the pivot, and thus, though the minutes were told other two defe

s a watch as to sha the pecularity of his watch Oak remedied by thump s and shakes, and he escaped any evil consequences from y the gree

ob ody could be quite certain of the hour they belonged to. The stopping peculiarity of his watch Oak remedied by thump s and shakes, and he escaped any evil consequences from

cts by constant comparisons with and observations of the sun and stars, and by pressing his face close to the glass of his neighbours' windows, till he could discern the hour marked b

n-faced timekeepers within. It may be mentioned that Oak's job being difficult of access, by reason of its somewhat high s ituation in the waistband of his trousers (which also lay at a rem

ote height under his waistcoat), the watch was as a necessity pulled out by throwing the body to one side, compressing the m outh and face to a mere mass of ruddy flesh on account of the ex

ortion required, and drawing up the watch by its chain, like a bucket from a well. But some thoughtful persons, who had seen him walking across one of his fields on a certain December mornin-

-sunny and exceedingly mild--might have regarded Gabriel Oak in other aspects than these. In his face one might notice that many of the hues and curves of youth had tarried on to manhood: there eve

n remained in his remoter crannies some relics of the boy. His height and breadth would have been sufficient to make his presence imposing, had they been exhibited with due consideration. But there is

a way some men have, rural and urban alike, for which the mind is more responsible than flesh and sinew: it is a way of curtailing their dim ensions by their manner of showing them. And from a quiet

modesty that would have become a vestal, which seemed con tinually to impress upon him that he had no great claim on the world' s room, Oak walked unassumingly and with a faintly perce

ntible bend, yet distinct from a bowing of the shoulders. Thi s may be said to be a defect in an individual if he depends for his valuation more upon his appearance than upon hi

s capacity to wear well, which Oak did not. He had just reac hed the time of life at which "young" is ceasing to be the prefix of "man" in speaking of one. He was at

the brightest period of masculine growth, for his intelle t and his emotions were clearly separated : he had passed the time during which

the influence of youth indiscriminately mingles them in the character of impulse, and he had not yet arrived a

the stage wherei n they become united again, in th e of prejudice, by the influ

ence of a wife and fa mily. In short, he was twen ty-eight, and a bac helor. The field he was in th

oped to a ridge called Norcombe Hill. Through a spur of this hill ran t he highway between Emminster a nd Chalk-Newt

ally glancing over the hed ge, Oak saw coming down the incline before him an ornamental spring waggon, painte d yellow and g

ked, drawn by two horses, a w aggoner walking alongside bearing a whip perpendicularly. The waggon was laden with household go

st beneath his eyes. "The tailboard of the waggon is gone, Miss," said the waggoner. "Then I heard it fall," said the g irl, in a soft, th

t account for when we were coming up the hill." "I'll run back," "Do," she answered. The sensible horses sto od--perfectly st

istance. The girl on the summit of the load sat m otionless, surround ed by tables and

nnamented in front by pots of geranium s, myrtles, and cac

the house just vacated. There was also a cat in a w

es, and aff ectionately surveyed the c

ly downwards. It was e only sound heard in th e stillness was the hopping of the c

as not yet in sight; and he r eyes crept back to the package, her thoughts seeming to run upon what was inside it. At len

ing looking-glass was disclosed , in which she proceeded to survey herself attentively. She parted her lips and smiled. It was a fine m

and painted a soft lustre upon her bright face and dark hair. The myrtles, geraniums, and cactuses packed around her were fresh and green, a nd a

rniture, and girl with a peculiar vernal charm. What possessed her to indulge in such a performance in the sight of the sparrows, blackbird s, and

a factitious one, to test her capacity in that art,--nobody knows; it ended certainly in a real smile. She blushed at herself, and seeing he r refle

ssary occasion of such an act--from the dressing room in a bedroom to a time of travelling out of doors

c ate one. Woman's prescriptive infirmity had stalked into egarded the sun

ev er for her looking in the glass. She did not ad her hair,

ould play a part--vi ble tr iumphs--the smiles being of a phase suggesting that hearts wer

e whole aga in into the glass. She simply o make it rash to assert that intention had any

the pay concern g t wopenc ment of to l e between the p 've off npike-ke

ece can't pass," said the tur wopence r; but t emarka b

tone of a higging m atter; but t wopence--

cari ed and dar den seem ed to thin in a w

spea k t he prob ably she f

e. "That hat, 's a maids, " h e sai

OCK--A N INTERIOR-- NOTHER I N TERIOR th was nearly m

w aggon and it s occ A pant in the s unshi ne of a few d

pproa ching the i nd e st ny to be fou

a y remai n und ist urb e do on earth. It

of beeches, whose upper verg e fo rander heights and dizzy granite precipices topple down. The hill was covered on its northern side by an ancient and decaying plantation

ndered through it w ith a sound as o ngst the dead multitu

nd sending them spinni g across the gra ss. A group or two of the latest in date amo

rt t a ps. Betw een t ll hor

ed that wh at it concealed bo re some reduced resemblance to features he re. The

bb ing blades heavily, another raking them piercingly, another brush ing t hem like a soft boom.

he left wailed or chaunte d to each other in the regular antiphonies of a cathedral choir; how hedges and o

o the sout h, to be hea rd no more. The sky was clear--remarkably clear--and the twinkling of all the stars

, a nd sinc e eve

ally nding alone on a hill during a clear midnight such as this, the roll of the world ea

ta ar thli y objects, which is perceptible in a few minutes of stillness, or by the better outlook up

ng is vivid and abiding. The poetry of motion is a phrase much in use, and to enjoy the epic

first of ridi ng alo ng with a sense of difference from the mass of civilised mankind, who are dreamwrap and disrega

stars. Af expan de d ch a nocturnal reconnoitre it is hard to get back to earth, and to believe that the conscio

es o f sou d's bega n to be h eard in this place up against the sky. They had a clearness which was to be found nowh

arm er Oak's fl utt e. The tune wa s not floating un hindered into the open air: it seemed muffled in some way, and w

s that t of a s mal l Noah' s Ar ge- a shepherd's hat--now presenting an outline to which an uninitiated pers

s a mong th eir firmest, b ecau se e- a small Ararat, allowing the traditional outlines and general form of th

dra gged i nt o t he fields when t he arliest impressions--to pass as an approximate pattern. The hut st

br iel "Far mer "Oak k. Du rin g the twelv em laming-season comes on, to shelter the shepherd in h

m of wh ich No rom be Hi ll was a port ion on th preceding this time he had been enabled by sust

m his childh ood assisted his fath e r in ained e

aster and not a s man, wi th an a d vanc ed been a

eme nt in his new pro g re ss wa s the baillif for a sh

ro m d eputin g the tas k of t en din h Gabriel

t t he lute-p layi ng c ea sed. A rec h specialty

He c arried ala nt ern in h is ha wind

de ing and disap p e arin g ere an t, and closing the door behind him, came forward and busied himself a

ir de li bera t en ssa accord ed w ell with is occupation. Fi

race. Yet, although if occasion demanded he co ening him or darkening him as he stood before or beh

ion, and mentally, was static, owing little or no tness being the basis of beauty, nobody could have

ve been casually called a wild slope had been o r think a thing with as mercurial a dash as can the

ts, amid and under which the whitish forms of h ed by Farmer Oak for his great purpose this winter. D

that had more mellowness than cle es moved and rustled. The ring of the sheep-bell, whic

u r ned t o the hut, bringing ing to an increasing growth of surrounding wool. This con

gly i nco sidera se ble membrane about half the substance of the legs collectively, whi

t at pre mering. Oak exti st nt. The little speck of life he placed on a wisp of hay before the small

ended by a twi st ed wire. A rather hard couch, formed of a few corn sacks thrown carelessly

his little habitation, and here the young man stretched himself along, loosened his woollen cravat, and clos

person unaccustomed to bodil y l about would have decided upon which side to lie, Farmer Oak was asleep. The inside

d alluring, and the scarlet handf o f fi re in addition to the candle, reflecting its own genial colour upon whatever it could r

ls. In the corner stood the sheep-cra k, and along a shelf at one side were ranged bottles and canisters of the simple pr

pirits of wine, turpentine, tar, magnes ia, ginger, and castor-oil being the chief. On a triangular shelf across the corne

e or colder, which was supplied from a flagon beneath. Beside the provisions lay the flute, whose notes had lately b

ile a tedious hour. The house was ventilated by two round holes, like the lights of a ship's cabin, with wood slid

e warmth began to bleed, and the sou n entered Gabriel's ears and brain with an instant meaning, as expected so

profoundest sleep to the most alert wak efulness with the same ease that had accompanied the reverse operation,

e hour-hand had shifted again, put on his h at, took the lamb in his arms, and carried it into the darkness. After placin

ood and careful ly examined the sky, to ascert ain the time of night from the altitudes of the stars. The Dog-star and Al

s, were half-wa y up the Southern sky, and betwe n them hung Orion, which gorgeous constellation never burnt

above the rim o f the landscape. Castor and Pollux with their quiet shine were almost on t

of Pegasus was creeping round to th e north-west; far away through the plantation

and Cassi opeia's chair stood daintily poised on the uppermost boughs. "One

ness tha t there was so me charm i n this life he led, he stood still after loo

ork of art sp elatively be autiful. For a moment he seemed im

on from all it s compass of sights and sounds of man. Huma

and th ere seemed to e shaded h emisphere of the globe

e sunny si de. Occupied th us, with eyes stre tched afar, O ak gradually perceiv

d of the plant me people fearl ty no such thing. It was an artificial li

robability, i nduction--every ki ; but a case more trying by far to the nerves i

ost leve I with the ground. In si nd of evidence in the logician's list--have united to

mad e the radiance that ha d from t it was formed of board nailed to posts and covere

ded opinion upon her lo oks, her pos the latter a steaming bran-mash stood in a

n a large cloak, which was carelessly flung over h ition being almost beneath his eye, so that he

will fetch round again now. I have never been er head as a covering. "There, now we'll go home," said the elder of the two, resting her knuckle

cation of silence, yawned without parting her lips to frightened in my life, but I don't mind breaking my rest if she recovers." The young woman, wh

said. "As we are not, we must do them ourselves," said th any inconvenient extent, whereupon Gabriel caught the infection and slightly yawned in sympat

such a slight wind catching it." The cow standing erect e other; "for you must help me if you stay." "Well, my hat is gone, how

my eyes to tail as if the animal had been dipping in a dye o f that colour, her long back being mathematically level. The othe

out a day old, looking idiotically at the two women, whic h showed that it had not long been accustomed to the phenom

for correction by experience. Between the sheep and the c ows Lucina had been busy on Norcombe Hill lately. "I think

s light." "But there's no side-saddle." "I