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Thomas Hardy , Edited by Simon Gatrell
Excerpt
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UNDER THE GREENWOOD TREE

A Rural Painting of the
Dutch School

IN TWO VOLUMES

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VOLUME 1

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PART I
WINTER

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CHAPTER I.
 MELLSTOCK-LANE.

To dwellers in a wood, almost every species of tree has its voice as well as its feature. At the passing of the breeze, the fir-trees sob and moan no less distinctly than they rock; the holly whistles as it battles with itself; the ash 5
 hisses amid its quiverings; the beech rustles while its flat boughs rise and fall. And winter, which modifies the note of such trees as shed their leaves, does not destroy its individuality.

On a cold and starry Christmas-eve less than a generation ago,¹ a man was passing along a lane in the darkness of a plantation that whispered thus 10
 distinctively to his intelligence. All the evidences of his nature were those afforded by the spirit of his footsteps, which succeeded each other lightly and quickly, and by the liveliness of his voice as he sang in a rural cadence:

“With the rose and the lily
 And the daffodowndilly, 15
 The lads and the lasses a-sheep-shearing go.”²

The lonely lane he was following connected the hamlets of Mellstock and Lewgate,³ and to his eyes, casually glancing upward, the silver and black-stemmed birches with their characteristic tufts, the pale gray boughs of oak, the dark-creviced elm, all appeared now as black and flat outlines upon the 20
 sky, wherein the white stars twinkled so vehemently that their flickering seemed like the flapping of wings. Within the woody pass, at a level anything lower than the horizon, all was dark as the grave. The copsewood⁴ forming the sides of the bower interlaced its branches so densely, even at

2 [For variants in the styling of chapter titles see Appendix E] 6 quiverings] quivering MS
 6 while] as MS 7 note] notes MS 8 its] their MS 9 MS Christmas-eve, <ab> less
 9 less . . . ago] within living memory OM 10 along] up OM
 10 lane in] lane near Mellstock Cross, in OM] lane towards Mellstock Cross in W
 17 connected the hamlets of Mellstock] connected one of the hamlets of Mellstock parish with
 Upper Mellstock OM
 18 casually glancing] as they glanced MS 19 oak] beech OM

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this season of the year, that the draught from the north-east flew along the channel with scarcely an interruption from lateral breezes.

At the termination of the wood, the white surface of the lane revealed itself between the dark hedgerows, like a ribbon jagged at the edges; the
 5 irregularity being caused by temporary accumulations of leaves extending from the ditch on either side.

The song (many times interrupted by flitting thoughts which took the place of several bars, and resumed at a point it would have reached had its continuity been unbroken)⁵ now received a more palpable check, in the
 10 shape of “Ho-i-i-i-i-i!” from the dark part of the lane in the rear of the singer, who had just emerged from the trees.

“Ho-i-i-i-i-i!” he answered with unconcern, stopping and looking round, though with no idea of seeing anything more than imagination
 pictured.

15 “Is that thee, young Dick Dewy?” came from the darkness.

“Ay, sure, Michael Mail!”

“Then why not stop for fellow-craters—going to thy own father’s house too, as we be, and knowen us so well?”

Young Dick Dewy faced about and continued his tune in an under-
 20 whistle, implying that the business of his mouth could not be checked at a moment’s notice by the placid emotion of friendship.

Having escaped both trees and hedge, he could now be distinctly seen rising against the sky, his profile appearing on the light background like the portrait of a gentleman in black cardboard.⁶ It assumed the form of a low-
 25 crowned hat, an ordinary-shaped nose, an ordinary chin, an ordinary neck,

1 season] period MS 1 north-east MS2] nor-east MS1 2 lateral] cross MS

2 breezes MS2] breezes through the boughs MS1

3 At the termination of the wood,] After passing the plantation OM] . . . plantation and reaching Mellstock Cross W

8–9 had . . . unbroken] if carried on properly MS

10 dark part of the lane in the rear] crossing lane to Lower Mellstock, on the right W

10 MS the <sing> rear

11 answered with unconcern,] answered with unconcern, & MS] answered, OM

13 round, though with] round <at nothing in particular.> MS1] round with MS2

13–14 anything . . . pictured] anything MS 18 be, and . . . well?] be? MS

22 Having . . . he] Having escaped the bower of trees, he OM] Having come more into the open he W

22 be distinctly] be W 25 an ordinary-shaped MS2] a fairly-well-shaped MS1

PART I: WINTER

and ordinary shoulders. What he consisted of farther down was invisible from lack of sky low enough to picture him on.

Scuffling, halting, irregular footsteps of various kinds were now heard coming up the hill from the dark interior of the grove, and presently there emerged severally five men of different ages and gaits, all of them working 5
 villagers of the parish of Mellstock. They too had lost their rotundity with the daylight, and advanced against the sky in flat outlines, like some procession in Assyrian or Egyptian incised work.⁷ They represented the chief portion of Mellstock parish choir.

The first was a bowed and bent man, who carried a fiddle under his arm, and 10
 walked as if engaged in studying some subject connected with the surface of the road. He was Michael Mail, the man who had halloosed to Dick.

The next was Mr. Robert Penny,⁸ boot- and shoe-maker, a little man, who though rather round-shouldered, walked as if that fact had not come 15
 to his own knowledge, moving on with his back very hollow and his face fixed on the north quarter of the heavens before him, so that his lower waistcoat-buttons came first, and then the remainder of his figure. His features were invisible, yet when he occasionally looked round, two faint moons of light gleamed for an instant from the precincts of his eyes, denoting that he wore spectacles of a circular form. 20

The third was Elias Spinks, who walked perpendicularly and dramatically. The fourth outline was that of Joseph Bowman, who had now no distinctive appearance beyond that of a human being. Finally came a weak lath-like form,⁹ trotting and stumbling along with one shoulder forward and his head

3 Scuffling MS] Shuffling T1 4 hill . . . grove, and] hill, and W

5 emerged severally] emerged from the shade severally W

7–8 outlines . . . work] outlines like the processions in Assyrian & Etruscan art MS] outlines, which suggested some processional design on Greek or Etruscan pottery OM

11 studying . . . with the] studying the MS 12 halloosed] hollaed MS

13 Robert Penny underlined in red ink, and above the words written also in red ink: [His real name was Robert Reason. T.H.] MS

16 north] north-east OM 16 his lower MS2] his chin & MS1

17 and then the remainder of his figure MS2] bringing up the remainder of his body MS1

17 His] Though his MS 18 yet when] when MS

18 he . . . round MS2] he looked round occasionally MS1

19 MS light <flash> gleamed 20 wore . . . form MS2] wore circular spectacles MS1

22 fourth . . . of MS2] fourth character was MS1

22 was that of Joseph Bowman] was Joseph Bowman's OM

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inclined to the left, his arms dangling nervelessly in the wind as if they were empty sleeves. This was Thomas Leaf.¹⁰

“Where be the boys?” said Dick to this somewhat indifferently-matched assembly.

5 The eldest of the group, Michael Mail, cleared his throat from a great depth.

“We told them to keep back at home for a time, thinken they wouldn’t be wanted yet awhile; and we could choose the tuens, and so on.”

“Father and grandfather William have expected ye a little sooner. I have just been for a run to warm my feet.”

10 “To be sure father did! To be sure ’a did expect us—to taste the little barrel beyond compare that he’s going to tap.”¹¹

“Od rabbit it all! Never heard a word of it!” said Mr. Penny, small gleams of delight appearing upon his spectacle-glasses, Dick meanwhile singing parenthetically,

15 “The lads and the lasses a-sheep-shearing go.”

“Neighbours, there’s time enough to drink a sight of drink now afore bedtime,” said Mail.

“Trew, trew—time enough to get as drunk as lords!” replied Bowman cheerfully.

20 This argument being convincing, they all advanced between the varying hedges and the trees dotting them here and there, kicking their toes occasionally among the crumpled leaves. Soon appeared glimmering indications of the few cottages forming the small hamlet of Lewgate, for which they were bound, whilst the faint sound of church-bells ringing a Christmas peal¹² could be heard
 25 floating over upon the breeze from the direction of Mintfield parish¹³ on the other side of the hills. A little wicket¹⁴ admitted them to a garden, and they proceeded up the path to Dick’s house.

3–4 this ... assembly] this assembly MS 5 throat ... depth] throat MS

9 run to] run round by Ewelease Stile and Hollow Hill to W

10 sure father did MS2] sure ’a did MS1

12 Penny ... Dick] Penny— Dick MS] Penny, gleams ... Dick W 15 The] And the MS

18 trew ... replied MS2] trew, replied MS1

20 argument being] argument being taken as OM] opinion being taken as W

23 Lewgate] Upper Mellstock OM

24 of church-bells] of village bells MS1] of church bells MS2

25 Mintfield parish] Longpuddle and Weatherbury parishes OM 26 a] the OM