

CHAPTER I.
 A FACE ON WHICH TIME MAKES BUT
 LITTLE IMPRESSION.²

A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight, and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath³ embrowned itself moment by moment. Overhead the hollow stretch of whitish cloud shutting out the sky was as a tent which had the whole heath for its floor. 5

The heaven being spread with this pallid screen, the earth with the darkest vegetation, their meeting-line at the horizon was clearly marked. In such contrast the heath wore the appearance of an instalment of night which had taken up its place before its astronomical hour was come: darkness had to a great extent arrived hereon, while day stood distinct in the sky. Looking upwards, a furze-cutter would have been inclined to continue work; looking down, he would have decided to finish his faggot and go home.⁴ The distant rims of the world and of the firmament seemed to be a division in time no less than a division in matter. The face of the heath by its mere complexion added half-an-hour to eve; it could in like manner retard the dawn, sadden noon, anticipate the frowning of storms scarcely generated, and intensify the opacity of a moonless midnight to a cause of shaking and dread. 10 15

In fact, precisely at this transitional point of its nightly roll into darkness the great and particular glory of the Egdon waste began, and nobody could be said to understand the heath who had not been there at such a time. It could best be felt when it could not clearly be seen. Its complete effect and explanation lay in this and the succeeding hours before the next dawn: then, and only then, did it tell its true tale. The spot was, indeed, a near relation 20 25

2 ON] upon MS] UPON B 6 by] after MS B

8 screen,] screen, and 80] screen and 95 12 8–9 darkest] swarthiest of MS B

9 meeting-line] closing line MS B 14 distant] meeting MS B

17 eve] evening 80 95 12 23 seen. Its] seen, its MS 80 95 12

23 complete] completed MS1 B 24 lay] lay MS2] lay wrapped MS1] lying MS 80 95 12

25 near] near MS2] close MS1 B

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

of night, and when night showed itself an apparent tendency to gravitate together could be perceived in its shades and the scene. The sombre stretch of rounds and hollows seemed to rise and meet the evening gloom in pure sympathy, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated
 5 it. The obscurity in the air and the obscurity in the land closed together in a black fraternisation towards which each advanced half-way.

The place became full of a watchful intentness now. When other things sank brooding to sleep, the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form⁵ seemed to await something; but it had waited thus,
 10 unmoved, during so many centuries, through the crises of so many things, that it could only be imagined to await one last crisis—the final overthrow.

It was a spot which returned upon the memory of those who loved it with an aspect of peculiar and kindly congruity. Smiling champignons⁶ of flowers and fruit hardly do this, for they are permanently harmonious only with
 15 an existence of better reputation as to its issues than the present. Twilight

1 when night] when the night MS B

1 showed ... apparent] expanded MS2] was <drawi *n.f.*> MS1] was beginning to draw near a certain MS B

2 in] between MS B 2 shades] coming shades MS1

2–3 stretch of ... hollows] stretches of rounds and hollows MS1] stretches of round and hollow MS B

3 and meet] to meet MS B

4–5 sympathy, ... precipitated it] sympathy; putting on the obscurity of night while the night in its fulness was still in the distance. First, the heath exhaled darkness; next, the sky precipitated it MS2] sympathy; putting on the obscurity of night while the <real *n.f.* night> upper night of the sky was still far in the distance. First the heath exhaled darkness; next, the sky precipitated it MS1] sympathy; nay, they anticipated its livery, the heath exhaling darkness as rapidly as the heavens precipitated it MS] sympathy; nay, they anticipated its livery, putting on the obscurity of night while the upper night of the sky was still far in the distance. First, the heath exhaled darkness; next, the heavens precipitated it B

5 The obscurity] And so the obscurity 80 95 12 5 land] land then MS B

6 towards] to MS1 7 The place] It MS1

7 intentness now. When] intentness. When MS2] intentness now. When MS1] intentness now, for when MS] intentness; for when 80 95 12

9 seemed to await] seemed to lie in wait for MS1] seemed thus to await MS B

9–10 something; but ... unmoved.] something. What it seemed to await it is <di *n.f.* ?difficult> hard to say. It had waited unmoved MS2] something. What it seemed to await could hardly have been decided. It had waited unmoved MS1] something. What it awaited none could say. It waited unmoved MS B

10 many things] many other things MS B 11 overthrow] Overthrow MS

12–13 with an aspect] in tones MS1 15 issues] issue Ht

BOOK FIRST: THE THREE WOMEN

combined with the scenery of Egdon Heath to evolve a thing majestic without severity, impressive without showiness, emphatic in its admonitions, grand in its simplicity. The qualifications which frequently invest the façade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the façade of a palace double its size lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for mere prettiness are utterly wanting. Gay prospects wed happily with gay times; but alas, if times be not gay! Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings over-sadly tinged. Haggard Egdon appealed to a subtler and scarcer instinct, to a more recently learnt emotion, than that which responds to the sort of beauty called charming. 5 10

Indeed, it is a question if the exclusive reign of this orthodox beauty is not approaching its last quarter. The new Vale of Tempe may be a gaunt waste in Thule:⁷ human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young.⁸ The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the mournful sublimity of a moor, a sea, or a mountain will be all of nature that is absolutely in keeping with the moods of the more thinking among mankind. And ultimately, to the commonest tourist, spots like Iceland may become what the vineyards and myrtle-gardens of South Europe are to him now; and Heidelberg and Baden be passed unheeded as he hastens from the Alps to the sand-dunes of Scheveningen.⁹ 15 20

The most thorough-going ascetic could feel that he had a natural right to wander on Egdon: he was keeping within the line of legitimate indulgence when he laid himself open to influences such as these. Colours and beauties so far subdued were, at least, the birthright of all. Only in summer days of 25

4 prison] <palace do *n.f. copy err.*> prison MS

5–6 mere prettiness are] their attractions were MS B] beauty of the accepted kind are 80 95 12

6–7 Gay ... gay times ... gay!] Fair ... fair times ... fair! 80 95 12

11 charming] charming and fair 80 95 12

12 exclusive] ^ MS₁ 14 human ... closer] our souls may find a closer MS₁

15 wearing] of MS₁

16 young.] young. Shall we say that man has grown so accustomed to his spiritual Bastille that he no longer looks forward to, and even shrinks from, <an> \a casual/ emergence into unusual brightness. MS young. Shall ... a casual emergence ... brightness. B

17 mournful] chastened 80 95 12 18 in keeping] consonant MS B

20 to him] ^ MS₁

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

highest feather did its mood touch the level of gaiety. Intensity was more usually reached by way of the solemn than by way of the brilliant, and such a sort of intensity was often arrived at during winter darkness, tempests, and mists. Then Egdon was aroused to reciprocity. The storm was its lover;
 5 and the wind was its friend. Then it became the home of strange phantoms; and it was found to be the hitherto unrecognised original of those wild regions of obscurity which are vaguely felt to be compassing us about in midnight dreams of flight and disaster, and are never thought of after the dream till revived by scenes like this.

10 It was at present a place perfectly accordant with man's nature—neither ghastly, hateful, nor ugly: neither commonplace, unmeaning, nor tame; but, like man, slighted and enduring; and withal singularly colossal and mysterious in its swarthy monotony. As with some persons who have long lived apart, solitude seemed to look out of its countenance. It had a lonely face,
 15 suggesting tragical possibilities.

This obscure, obsolete, superseded country figures in Domesday. Its condition is recorded therein as that of heathy, furzy, briary wilderness—“Bruaria.” Then follows the length and breadth in leagues; and, though some uncertainty exists as to the exact extent of this ancient lineal measure,
 20 it appears from the figures that the area of Egdon down to the present day has but little diminished. “Turbaria Bruaria”—the right of cutting heath-turf—occurs in charters relating to the district. “Overgrown with heth and mosse,” says Leland of the same dark sweep of country.¹⁰

Here at least were intelligible facts regarding landscape—far-reaching
 25 proofs productive of genuine satisfaction. The untameable, Ishmaelitish¹¹

1–2 was ... reached] when reached was mostly reached MS1
 2 than] <that copy err.> MS1 4 mists. Then] mists. ¶ Then MS B
 4 reciprocity. The] reciprocity; for it may be said that the 80] reciprocity; for the 95 12
 4–5 lover; and the] lover, the MS 5 wind was] wind 80 95 12
 5 home] lair MS B 5–6 phantoms; and it] phantoms: it MS B
 10 a place] an environment MS B
 10 with] to MS1 10 neither] a scene <neig copy err.> neither MS1] a scene neither MS B
 12 slighted and] slighted, MS B 13–15 As with ... possibilities.] ^ MS1
 16–17 obscure, ... is recorded] obscure tract of land figures in Domesday. Its condition is
 recorded MS1] obscure tract of land, this superseded country, this obsolete thing, figures in
 Domesday. Its condition is recorded MS B
 18 “Bruaria.” Then] “Bruaria,” and then MS1
 24–25 facts ... proofs] facts <records/> ... facts \proofs/ MS

BOOK FIRST: THE THREE WOMEN

thing that Egdon now was it always had been. Civilisation was its enemy. Ever since the beginning of vegetation its soil had worn the same antique brown dress, the natural and invariable garment of the formation. In its venerable one coat lay a certain vein of satire on human vanity in clothes. A person on a heath in raiment of modern cut and colours wears more or less an anomalous look. We seem to want the oldest and simplest human clothing where the clothing of the earth is so primitive. 5

To recline on a stump of thorn in the central valley of Egdon, between afternoon and night, as now, where the eye could reach nothing of the world outside the summits and shoulders of heathland which filled the whole circumference of its glance, and to know that everything around and underneath had been from prehistoric times as unaltered as the stars overhead, gave ballast to the mind adrift on change,¹² and harassed by the irrepressible New. The great inviolate place had an ancient permanence which the sea cannot claim. Who can say of a particular sea that it is old? Distilled by the sun, kneaded by the moon, it is renewed in a year, in a day, or in an hour. The sea changed, the fields changed, the rivers, the villages, and the people changed, yet Egdon remained. Those surfaces were neither so steep as to be destructible by weather, nor so flat as to be the victims of floods and deposits. With the exception of an aged highway, and a still more aged barrow¹³ presently to be referred to—themselves almost crystallised to natural products by long continuance—even the trifling irregularities were not caused by pickaxe, plough, or spade, but remained as the very finger-touches of the last geological change. 10 15 20

The above-mentioned highway traversed in a curved line the lower levels of the heath, from one horizon to another. In many portions of its course it overlaid an old vicinal way, which branched from the great Western road of 25

1–2 enemy. Ever] enemy; and ever 80 95 12 3 formation] particular formation 95 12
 4 venerable one coat] monomorphous existence MS1] monomorphous costume MS B
 5 A person] For this reason a person MS B
 5 raiment of] ^ MS1 5 wears] has 80 95 12
 6–7 oldest ... clothing] simplest garb of old times MS1
 9 afternoon] eventide MS1 11 everything] well-nigh everything MS1
 12 from] since *inst.* MS1 16 or] ^ MS B
 17 rivers, ... people] rivers changed, the villages changed, the people MS B
 19 victims] victim MS B 21 natural] cosmic MS B
 25 in a curved line] in a straight line MS B] ^ 95 12

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

the Romans, the Via Iceniana, or Ikenild Street,¹⁴ hard by. On the evening under consideration it would have been noticed that, though the gloom had increased sufficiently to confuse the minor features of the heath, the white surface of the road remained almost as clear as ever.

CHAPTER II.
 HUMANITY APPEARS UPON THE SCENE,
 HAND IN HAND WITH TROUBLE.

ALONG the road walked an old man. He was white-headed as a mountain,
 bowed in the shoulders, and faded in general aspect. He wore a glazed hat, 5
 an ancient boat-cloak, and shoes; his brass buttons bearing an anchor upon
 their face. In his hand was a silver-headed walking-stick, which he used as a
 veritable third leg, perseveringly dotting the ground with its point at every
 few inches' interval. One would have said that he had been, in his day, a
 naval officer of some order or other. 10

Before him stretched the long, laborious road, dry, empty, and white. It
 was quite open to the heath on each side, and bisected that vast dark surface
 like the parting-line on a head of raven hair, diminishing and bending away
 on the furthest horizon.¹⁵

The old man frequently stretched his eyes ahead to gaze over the tract 15
 that he had yet to traverse. At length he discerned, a long distance in front
 of him, a moving spot, which appeared to be a vehicle, and it proved to be
 going the same way as that in which he himself was journeying. It was the
 single atom of life that the scene contained, and it only served to render the
 general loneliness more evident. Its rate of advance was slow, and the old 20
 man gained upon it sensibly.

When he drew nearer he perceived it to be a spring van,¹⁶ ordinary in
 shape, but singular in colour, this being a lurid red. The driver walked
 beside it. Like his van, he was completely red. One dye of that tincture cov-
 ered his clothes, the cap upon his head, his boots, his face, his hands. He 25
 was not temporarily overlaid with the colour: it permeated him.

5-7 bowed ... hand was a] and his shoulders were bowed. He presented a generally faded aspect,
 and wore an obsolete <b n.f.><illeg. ?boat-cloak> and garters, carrying in his hand a MS1
 8 perseveringly] sedulously MS1 9-10 One would ... other.] ^ MS1
 10 order] sort 80 95 12 11 dry, empty] dry straight MS] dry, straight B
 13 raven] black 80 95 12 13 and bending away] to a point MS B
 16 had yet] yet had MS B 20 evident] palpable MS B 24 it. Like] it; and, like 80 95 12
 25 face,] face, and 80 95 12 26 colour] colour as with dirt MS B

THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

The old man knew the meaning of this. The traveller with the cart was a reddleman¹⁷—a person whose vocation it was to supply farmers with red-
 ding for their sheep. He was one of a class rapidly becoming extinct in Wes-
 sex, filling at present in the rural world the place which, during the last
 5 century, the dodo occupied in the world of animals.¹⁸ He is a curious, inter-
 esting, and nearly perished link between obsolete forms of life and those
 which generally prevail.

The decayed officer, by degrees, came up alongside his fellow-wayfarer,
 and wished him good evening. The reddleman turned his head, and replied
 10 in sad and occupied tones. He was young, and his face, if not exactly hand-
 some, approached so near to handsome that nobody would have contra-
 dicted an assertion that it really was so in its natural colour. His eye, which
 glared so strangely through his stain, was in itself attractive—keen as that
 of a bird of prey, and blue as autumn mist. He had neither whisker nor
 15 moustache, which allowed the soft curves of the lower part of his face to
 be apparent. His lips were thin, and though, as it seemed, compressed by
 thought, there was a pleasant twitch at their corners now and then. He was
 clothed throughout in a tight-fitting suit of corduroy, excellent in quality,
 not much worn, and well chosen for its purpose; but deprived of its original
 20 colour by his trade. It showed to advantage the good shape of his figure. A
 certain well-to-do air about the man suggested that he was not poor for his
 degree. The natural query of an observer would have been, Why should
 such a promising being as this have hidden his prepossessing exterior by
 adopting that singular occupation?

After replying to the old man's greeting he showed no inclination to con-
 25 tinue in talk, although they still walked side by side, for the elder traveller
 seemed to desire company. There were no sounds but that of the booming
 wind upon the stretch of tawny herbage around them, the cracking wheels,
 the tread of the men, and the footsteps of the two shaggy ponies which drew
 30 the van. They were small, hardy animals, of a breed between Galloway and
 Exmoor, and were known as "heath-croppers" here.¹⁹

1 cart was] cart <with *n.c. inst.*> was MS 4 filling] and filling MS1

4 world] place *inst. ELH* MS1 12 colour] state of colour MS1

24 adopting that singular] adopt<ed>]ing] that curious MS1

25 greeting] question MS1 28 cracking] crackling 95 12

31–19.1 here. ¶ Now ... the reddleman] here. ¶ *ff. not cont.* The reddleman MS1

BOOK FIRST: THE THREE WOMEN

Now, as they thus pursued their way, the reddleman occasionally left his companion's side, and, stepping behind the van, looked into its interior through a small window. The look was always anxious. He would then return to the old man, who made another remark about the state of the country, to which the reddleman again abstractedly replied, and then again they would lapse into silence. The silence conveyed to neither any sense of awkwardness; in these lonely places wayfarers, after a first greeting, frequently plod on for miles without speech; contiguity amounts to a tacit conversation where, otherwise than in cities, such contiguity can be put an end to on the merest inclination, and where not to put an end to it is inter-
 course in itself. 5
 10

Possibly these two might not have spoken again till their parting, had it not been for the reddleman's visits to his van. When he returned from his fifth time of looking in the old man said, "You have something inside there besides your load?" 15

"Yes."

"Somebody who wants looking after?"

"Yes."

Not long after this a faint cry sounded from the interior. The reddleman hastened to the back, looked in, and came away again. 20

"You have a child there, my man?"

"No, sir, I have a woman."

"The deuce you have! Why did she cry out?"

"Oh, she has fallen asleep, and not being used to travelling, she's uneasy, and keeps dreaming." 25

"A young woman?"

"Yes, a young woman."

"That would have interested me forty years ago. Perhaps she's your wife?"

3 window] window there MS

4-5 state of the country] weather MS1] state of the country and so on 80 95 12

7 wayfarers, ... greeting,] native wayfarers MS1

13 he] <his> copy err. inst. MS1 16 Yes] Yes m'ister MS

17 after?] after, seemingly? MS1] after. MS 19 faint cry sounded] sound came MS B

19 interior.] interior. It was a faint cry, apparently the voice of a female. MS B

21 You ... child there] You have <\What—have n.c./> a woman or child in there MS1

22 No, sir,] Yes, MS1] No, MS 23 The deuce ... cry out?] Why did she cry out? MS1

28 That would ... wife?] Perhaps she's your wife? MS4] The devil 'tis! Perhaps she is your wife? MS3] H'm. Perhaps she's your wife? MS2] H'm: that would ... wife? MS1

 THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE

“My wife!” said the other bitterly. “She’s above mating with such as I. But there’s no reason why I should tell you about that.”

“That’s true. And there’s no reason why you should not. What harm can I do to you or to her?”

5 The reddleman looked in the old man’s face. “Well, sir,” he said at last, “I knew her before to-day, though perhaps it would have been better if I had not. But she’s nothing to me, and I am nothing to her; and she wouldn’t have been in my van if any better carriage had been there to take her.”

“Where, may I ask?”

10 “At Southerton.”²⁰

“I know the town well. What was she doing there?”

“Oh, not much—to gossip about. However, she’s tired to death now, and not at all well, and that’s what makes her so restless. She dropped off into a nap about an hour ago, and ’twill do her good.”

15 “A nice-looking girl, no doubt?”

“You would say so.”

The other traveller turned his eyes with interest towards the van window, and, without withdrawing them, said, “I presume I might look in upon her?”

20 “No,” said the reddleman, abruptly. “It is getting too dark for you to see much of her; and, more than that, I have no right to allow you. Thank God she sleeps so well: I hope she won’t wake till she’s home.”

“Who is she? One of the neighbourhood?”

“’Tis no matter who, excuse me.”

25 “It is not that girl of Blooms-End, who has been talked about more or less lately? If so, I know her; and I can guess what has happened.”

5 sir] neighbour MS₁ 6 though] and MS₁ 9 Where, may I ask?] Where? MS₁

10 Southerton] Anglebury 95 12 11 I know the town well.] ^ MS₁

15 girl] maid MS₁

18–19 I presume ... upon her?] Maybe I might look in upon her neighbour? She wouldn’t know. MS₁

22 well: ... home.] well. MS₁

25 It is not that girl of] I can half guess. Tis n’t that <illeg. two char./> young damsel o’ MS₁] It is not that damsel of MS B

25 Blooms-End] Blooms-end 78 e.e.

26 know her; and ... happened] know her. MS₂] know her; and I can guess what has happened<, or I’ll be shot!><—if I can’t I’ll be shot!> MS₁