

A Saturday afternoon in November was approaching the time of twilight, and the vast tract of unenclosed wild known as Egdon Heath 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.

The heaven being spread with this pallid screen and 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-cutter¹ would have been inclined to continue work; looking down, he would have decided to finish his faggot and go home. 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 evening; 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.

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 lying 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 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 it. And so the obscurity in the air and the obscurity in the land closed together in a black fraternization towards which each advanced halfway.

The place became full of a watchful intentness now; for when other things sank brooding to sleep the heath appeared slowly to awake and listen. Every night its Titanic form seemed to await something; but it had waited thus, 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 champignons of flowers and fruit hardly do this, for they are permanently harmonious only with an existence of better reputation as to its issues than the present. Twilight 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 facade of a prison with far more dignity than is found in the facade of a palace double its size lent to this heath a sublimity in which spots renowned for beauty of the accepted kind are utterly wanting. Fair prospects wed happily with fair times; but alas, if times be not fair! Men have oftener suffered from the mockery of a place too smiling for their reason than from the oppression of surroundings oversadly 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 and fair.

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; human souls may find themselves in closer and closer harmony with external things wearing a sombreness distasteful to our race when it was young. The time seems near, if it has not actually arrived, when the chastened 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.

Egdon 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 withal² 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, suggesting tragical possibilities.

This obscure, obsolete, superseded country figures in Domesday³. 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, 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.

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.

Thomas Hardy, *The Return of the Native* (abridged), 1878

1 furze (uncountable): *ajonc(s)*

2 withal (*adv.*): besides, in addition

3 Domesday = Domesday Book, the comprehensive survey of the kingdom of England ordered by William I (Domesday is an archaic spelling of Doomsday).

briar, brier *n.* a white heath, *Erica arborea*.

brood *n.* & *v.* – *n.* **1** the young of an animal (esp. a bird) produced at one hatching or birth. **2** *colloq.* the children in a family. **3** a group of related things. – *v.* **1** *intr.* (often foll. by *on, over*, etc.) worry or ponder (esp. resentfully). **2** *a intr.* sit as a hen on eggs to hatch them. **b** *tr.* sit on (eggs) to hatch them. **3** *intr.* (usu. foll. by *over*) (of silence, storm, etc.) hang or hover closely.

dread *v., n., & adj.* – *v.tr.* **1** (foll. by *that*, or *to* + *infin.*) fear greatly. **2** shrink from; look forward to with great apprehension. **3** be in great fear of. – *n.* **1** great fear, apprehension, awe. **2** an object of fear or awe. – *adj.* **1** dreaded. **2** *archaic* awe-inspiring, revered.

enclose *v.tr.* (also **inclose**) **1** (often foll. by *with, in*) **a** surround with a wall, fence, etc. **b** shut in on all sides. **2** fence in (common land) so as to make it private property. **3** put in a receptacle (esp. in an envelope together with a letter). **4** (usu. as **enclosed** *adj.*) seclude (a religious community) from the outside world.

face *n.* & *v.* – *n.* **1** the front of the head from the forehead to the chin. **2** the expression of the facial features (*had a happy face*). **3** composure, coolness, effrontery. **4** the surface of a thing, esp. as regarded or approached, esp.: **a** the visible part of a celestial body. **b** a side of a mountain etc. (*the north face*). **c** the (usu. vertical) surface of a coal-seam. **d** *Geom.* each surface of a solid. **e** the façade of a building. **f** the plate of a clock or watch bearing the digits, hands, etc. **5** **a** the functional or working side of a tool etc. **b** the distinctive side of a playing card. **c** the obverse of a coin. **6** = TYPEFACE. **7** the outward appearance or aspect (*the unacceptable face of capitalism*). – *v.* **1** *tr. & intr.* look or be positioned towards or in a certain direction (*face towards the window; the room faces north*). **2** *tr.* be opposite (*facing page 20*). **3** *tr.* **a** (often foll. by *out*) meet resolutely or defiantly; confront (*face one's critics*). **b** not shrink from (*face the facts*). **4** *tr.* present itself to; confront (*the problem that faces us; faces us with a problem*). **5** *tr.* **a** cover the surface of (a thing) with a coating, extra layer, etc. **b** put a facing on (a garment). **6** *intr. & tr.* turn or cause to turn in a certain direction.

faggot *n.* (*US fagot*) **1** (usu. in *pl.*) a ball or roll of seasoned chopped liver etc., baked or fried. **2** a bundle of sticks or twigs bound together as fuel. **3** a bundle of iron rods for heat treatment. **4** a bunch of herbs. **5** *sl. derog.* **a** an unpleasant woman. **b** *US* often *offens.* a male homosexual.

ghastly *adj. & adv.* – *adj.* **1** horrible, frightful. **2** *colloq.* objectionable, unpleasant. **3** deathlike, pallid. – *adv.* in a ghastly or sickly way.

heath *n.* **1** an area of flattish uncultivated land with low shrubs. **2** a plant growing on a heath, esp. heather.

heed *v. & n.* – *v.tr.* attend to; take notice of. – *n.* careful attention.

instalment *n.* (*US installment*) **1** a sum of money due as one of several usu. equal payments for something, spread over an agreed period of time. **2** any of several parts, esp. of a television or radio serial or a magazine story, published or shown in sequence at intervals.

knead *v.tr.* **1** **a** work (a yeast mixture, clay, etc.) into dough, paste, etc. by pummelling. **b** make (bread, pottery, etc.) in this way. **2** blend or weld together (*kneaded them into a unified group*). **3** massage (muscles etc.) as if kneading.

league¹ *n.* & *v.* – *n.* **1** a collection of people, countries,

groups, etc., combining for a particular purpose, esp. mutual protection or cooperation. **2** an agreement to combine in this way. **3** a group of sports clubs which compete over a period for a championship. **4** a class of contestants. – *v.intr.* join in a league.

league² *n. archaic* a varying measure of travelling-distance by land, usu. about three miles.

pallid *adj.* pale, esp. from illness.

rim *n.* & *v.* – *n.* **1** a raised hedge or border. **b** a margin or verge, esp. of something circular. **2** the part of a pair of spectacles surrounding the lenses. **3** the outer edge of a wheel, on which the tyre is fitted. – *v.tr.* (**rimmed, rimming**) **1** **a** provide with a rim. **b** be a rim for or to. **2** edge, border.

slight *adj., v., & n.* – *adj.* **1** **a** inconsiderable; of little significance (*has a slight cold; the damage is very slight*). **b** barely perceptible (*a slight smell of gas*). **c** not much or great or thorough, inadequate, scanty (*a conclusion based on very slight observation; paid him slight attention*). **2** slender, frail-looking. **3** (in *superl.*, with *neg.* or *interrog.*) any whatever (*paid not the slightest attention*). – *v.tr.* treat or speak of (a person etc.) as not worth attention, fail in courtesy or respect towards, markedly neglect. – *n.* a marked piece of neglect, a failure to show due respect.

supersede *v.tr.* **1** **a** adopt or appoint another person or thing in place of. **b** set aside; cease to employ. **2** (of a person or thing) take the place of.

swarthy *adj.* dark, dark-complexioned.

tale *n.* **1** a narrative or story, esp. fictitious and imaginatively treated. **2** a report of an alleged fact, often malicious or in breach of confidence.

tract¹ *n.* **1** a region or area of indefinite, esp. large, extent (*pathless desert tracts*). **2** *Anat.* an area of an organ or system (*respiratory tract*).

tract² *n.* a short treatise in pamphlet form esp. on a religious subject.

waste *v., adj., & n.* – *v.* **1** *tr.* use to no purpose or for inadequate result (waste time). **2** *tr.* fail to use (esp. an opportunity). **3** *tr. & intr.* wear gradually away, make or become weak; wither. **4** *tr.* ravage, devastate. **5** *intr.* be expended without useful effect. – *adj.* **1** superfluous; no longer serving a purpose. **2** (of a district, etc.) not inhabited or cultivated; desolate. – *n.* **1** the act or an instance of wasting; extravagant or ineffectual use of an asset, of time, etc. **2** waste material or food; refuse; useless remains or by-products. **3** a waste region; a desert etc. **4** the state of being used up; diminution by wear and tear.

wild *adj., adv., & n.* – *adj.* **1** (of an animal or plant) in its original natural state (esp. of species or varieties allied to others that are not wild). **2** not civilized, barbarous. **3** (of scenery, etc.) having a conspicuously desolate appearance. **4** unrestrained, disorderly, uncontrolled (*a wild youth; wild hair*). **5** tempestuous, violent (*a wild night*). **6** **a** excited, frantic (*wild with excitement; wild delight*). **b** (foll. by *about*) *colloq.* enthusiastically devoted to (a person or subject). **7** *colloq.* infuriated, angry (*makes me wild*). **8** haphazard, ill-aimed, rash (*a wild guess; a wild shot; a wild venture*). **9** (of a horse, game-bird, etc.) shy; easily-startled. **10** *colloq.* exciting, delightful. **11** (of a card) having any rank chosen by the player holding it (*the joker is wild*). – *adv.* in a wild manner (shooting wild). – *n.* a wild tract.