

CHAPTER 8

And there was always in his mind that Spring day in ninety-eight when he had paced through Brookfield village as in some horrifying nightmare, half-struggling to escape into an outside world where the sun still shone and where every thing had happened differently. Young Faulkner had met him there in the lane outside the School. "Please, sir, may I have the afternoon off? My people are coming up."

"Eh? What's that? Oh, yes, yes,....."

Can I miss chapel, too, sir?"

"Yes..... yes....."

"And can I go to the station to meet them?"

He nearly answered; "You can go to blazes for all I care. My wife is dead and my child is dead, and I wish I were dead myself."

Actually he nodded and stumbled on. He did not want to talk to anybody or to receive condolences; he wanted to get used to things, if he could, before facing the kind words of others. He took his fourth form as usual after call-over, setting them grammar to learn by heart while he himself stayed at his desk in a cold, continuing trance. Suddenly someone said: "Please, sir, there are a lot of letters for you."

So there were; he had been leaning his elbows on them; they were all addressed to him by name. He tore them open one after the other, but each contained nothing but a blank sheet of paper. He thought in a distant way that it was rather peculiar, but he made no comment; the incident gave hardly an impact upon his vastly greater preoccupations. Not till days afterwards did he realize that it had been a piece of April foolery.

They had died on the same day, the mother and the child just born; on April 1st, 1898.