

THE NEW WESSEX EDITION

Old Mrs Chundle and
Other Stories

with

The Famous Tragedy of the
Queen of Cornwall

THOMAS HARDY

EDITED BY
F. B. Pinion

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THE NEW WESSEX EDITION OF THE STORIES OF THOMAS HARDY
VOLUME THREE

Editorial arrangement, introduction and notes

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'The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall'

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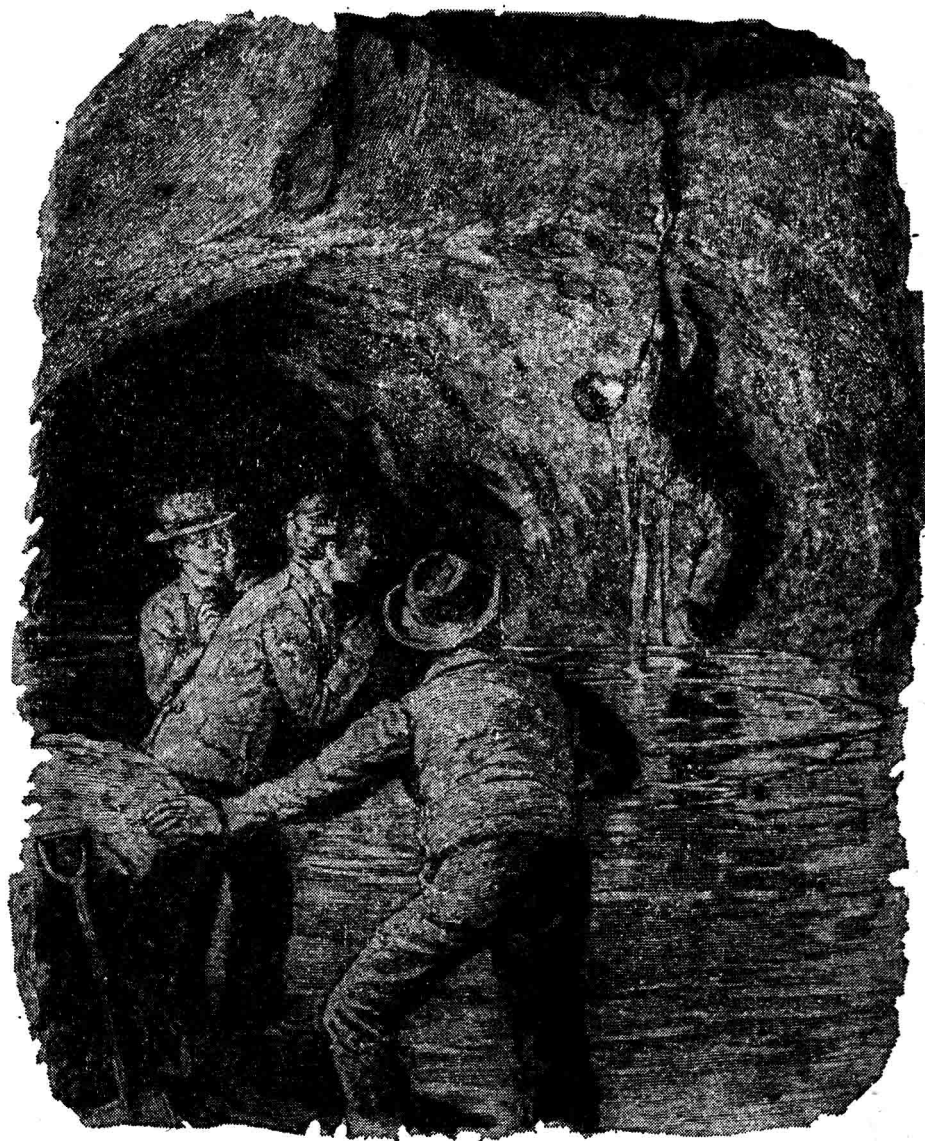
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'Upheld by the rope I floated across to the spot under the opening', an illustration from the periodical publication of 'Our Exploits at West Poley', in The Household, March 1893

List of Illustrations

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'Imaginary View of Tintagel Castle at the Time of the Tragedy', Hardy's own drawing for *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall* 184

'Imaginary Aspect of the Great Hall at the Time of the Tragedy', Hardy's own drawing for *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall* 187

Introduction

OF THE two other volumes of Hardy's short stories in the New Wessex Edition, the first contains *Wessex Tales* and *A Group of Noble Dames*, the second *Life's Little Ironies* and *A Changed Man*. This third volume is devoted mainly to short stories which have remained hitherto uncollected. Four of these have never previously been published in Great Britain.

The collection is arranged as follows: stories intended for adult readers; a longer story or novelette adapted from Hardy's first (unpublished) novel, 'The Poor Man and the Lady'; outlines of stories which he never completed; and two stories for young people. Hardy's late poetic drama, *The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall*, follows, the text being that of the revised and enlarged edition of 1924. Notes on all sections of the volume are provided at the end.

The earliest of Hardy's completed short stories (the outline of a novelette) suggests that in 1874 he was prepared to write a magazine story more hastily than he appears ever to have done subsequently. By contrast, it gives us some idea of the intensive thought he had devoted to the best of *Far from the Madding Crowd* and his previous novels.

The interest of 'An Indiscretion in the Life of an Heiress' relates principally to its origin, but the circumstances of its composition, after the completion of *The Return of the Native*, make one realize how relatively light was the task of rounding out a romantic story from those portions of 'The Poor Man and the Lady' which had not been used in his early novels. In his old age he rather disparagingly described the story he had salvaged as 'a sort of patchwork of the remains'; he had rejected the more satirical and unreal elements. At the same time he thought it would be amusing to restore the original as far as he could, from memory, from the modifications which were preserved in his published fiction, and from a fragment of the manuscript he still possessed. Clearly

he thought better of the plan, for all that remained of the manuscript, after being bound and presented to Florence Hardy on the anniversary of her wedding in February 1917, was destroyed.

The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall was written, partly as a tribute to the memory of Hardy's own 'Iseult' (Emma Gifford, who became his first wife), and in fulfilment of a hope which had been deferred for more than half a century. In execution and intention, the play shows commendable originality. Hardy 'tried to avoid turning the rude personages of, say, the fifth century into respectable Victorians', as he felt Tennyson, Swinburne, and Matthew Arnold had done in their several ways. He put into practice a principle which seemed right to him when he saw *Hedda Gabler* in 1891 – that the length of the action represented should coincide with the time of acting – and advocated a 'mumming' performance which would create an 'antique spell', a sense of time-distance, and of the resurrection of 'old, unhappy, far-off things'. His ideas on the staging of the play are sensible and progressive.

For Hardy scholars and readers the interest of this rather miscellaneous volume must be considerable, ranging as it does in effect from his first major work to his latest. It gives evidence of both haste and very careful preparation. Some of Hardy's subjects, completed or merely contemplated, may occasion surprise. He believed that adults require unusual or exciting events to hold their interest, and the two stories he wrote for young people show conclusively that he could have excelled in juvenile fiction. The literary merit of this collection is variable but altogether far from negligible. Even in the least carefully prepared work, fascinating touches and situations are to be found. The stories rarely fail to hold one's attention, and one, 'Old Mrs Chundle', though not highly finished, must rank among Hardy's finest. In close juxtaposition it provides a wider range of responses than any other of his stories; and it is a reflection of the age in which he lived that, as far as is known, he made no effort to publish it.

F. B. PINION

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