

FAR FROM THE MADDING CROWD

CHAPTER LVII

A FOGGY NIGHT AND MORNING—CONCLUSION

‘THE most private, secret, plainest wedding that it is possible ‘o have.’

Those had been Bathsheba’s words to Oak one evening, some time after the event of the preceding chapter, and he meditated a full hour by the clock upon how to carry out her wishes to the letter.

‘A license—Oh yes, it must be a license,’ he said to himself at last. ‘Very well, then ; first, a license.’

On a dark night, a few days later, Oak came with mysterious steps from the surrogate’s door, in Casterbridge. On the way home he heard a heavy tread in front of him, and, overtaking the man, found him to be Coggan. They walked together into the village until they came to a little lane behind the church, leading down to the cottage of Laban Tall, who had lately been installed as clerk of the parish, and was yet in mortal terror at church on Sundays when he heard his lone voice among certain hard words of the Psalms, whither no man ventured to follow him.

‘Well, good-night, Coggan,’ said Oak, ‘I’m going down this way.’

‘Oh !’ said Coggan, surprised ; ‘what’s going on to-night, then, make so bold, Mr. Oak ?’

It seemed rather ungenerous not to tell Coggan,