



The Hand Of Ethelberta: Extended Annotated & Illustrated Edition

Thomas Hardy

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This is the extended annotated edition including a rare biographical essay on the life and works of the author.

"The Hand of Ethelberta" (1876) was described by Hardy as "A Comedy in Chapters." It bears out fairly well the claims of its sub-title. The heroine, Ethelberta, is a butler's daughter, who, having been educated above her station, marries a young, wealthy, and well-born husband and is soon left a fashionable widow. She now essays the difficult role of moving in polite society while still preserving secret relations with her family. Her sister becomes her maid, her brother her footman, and once she is actually waited on at a dinner party by her father, the butler. Naturally such a plot furnishes Mr. Hardy with much opportunity for delicate satire on fashionable society as well as for indulging in his accustomed humor. Ethelberta publishes poems, recites her own stories, loves a poor gentleman, is wooed by several eligible suitors, and finally marries a worn-out peer. If it were not that she gets the upper hand of her old husband and is enabled to lift up and support her family the end of the story would be tragic, rather than comic; but, viewed as a whole, it is an amusing comedy which deserves more popularity than it seems to have had. Certainly Mr. Hardy has drawn few more interesting characters than his "squirrel haired" Ethelberta.

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