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Discoursing cheerfully to her own small boot. — P. 104

SILAS MARNER

BY

GEORGE ELIOT

Abridged

WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

M. S. H. Thompson
Madras Educational Service (Retired)

With Illustrations

" A child, more than all other gifts
That earth can offer to declining man,
Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts."
— *Wordsworth.*

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INTRODUCTION

GEORGE ELIOT was the assumed name of Mary Anne Evans, who was born in 1819 at Arbury Farm in Warwickshire. She early showed a great love for reading and music, and when only eighteen years of age we find her a close student both of ancient and modern languages. In March 1841 she moved with her father, Robert Evans, an able and energetic estate agent, to Coventry, where she came under the influence of free-thinking friends. Later, in London, she made the acquaintance of Herbert Spencer, who became one of her greatest friends. He introduced her to G. H. Lewes, to whom we owe George Eliot's novels. George Eliot once wrote, 'Writing is part of my religion, and I can write no word that is not prompted from within,' but she was diffident by nature, and it was Lewes who cheered her in her work and encouraged her to put forth her best.

SILAS MARKER, which is considered by many to be George Eliot's most perfect work, was begun in November 1860 and finished on March 10, 1861. In a letter to John Blackwood on January 12, 1861 she said, 'I am writing a story which came across my other plans by a sudden inspiration. It is a story of old-fashioned village life which has unfolded itself from the merest millet seed of thought.' And in another letter to the same person, dated February 24, 1861, she writes, 'It came to me first

of all quite suddenly, as a sort of legendary tale, suggested by my recollection of having once, in early childhood, seen a linen-weaver with a bag on his back.' The book owes its freshness and charm to the writer's vivid recollection of the scenes of her youth, which she describes with sympathy and a quick wit. Writing in 1881, the year after George Eliot's death, Miss Simcox said of her, 'The affectionate clinging of memory and affections to the past is more a principle than an instinct with her.'

The book has been here abridged, but there is much that remains as George Eliot wrote it.

SILAS MARNER

SILAS MARNER

CHAPTER I

RAVELOE

RAVELOE lay in a well-wooded hollow in the rich central plain of England. It was an important-looking village, with a fine old church and large churchyard in the heart of it and two or three large brick-and-stone homesteads with well-walled orchards and ornamental weathercocks near the road. But the village was an hour's journey on horseback from any of the main roads, and the peasants, honest folk, not over-wise or clever — at least not beyond such a matter as knowing the signs of the weather — knew little about the outside world.

There lived here in the early days of the nineteenth century, when every farmhouse in England had its spinning-wheel and even great ladies, clothed in silk and thread-lace, had their toy spinning-wheels of polished oak, a linen-weaver named Silas Marner. All that was known concerning him was that he had come from an unknown region called North'ard. He worked at his loom in a stone cottage that stood among the nutty hedgerows near the village of Raveloe, not far from the edge of a deserted stone-pit. The sound of his loom, so unlike the winnowing-machine or the flail, had a half-fearful fascination for the Raveloe boys. Often when out nutting or bird's-nesting they would look in at the window of the stone cottage to make fun of the rattle

of the loom and the bent figure of the weaver, but not without feelings of awe. Sometimes Marner, pausing to adjust an irregularity in his thread, became aware of the small scoundrels, and though he hated wasting time, he would descend from his loom, open the door, and fix on them a gaze that was always enough to make them take to their heels in terror. For who would believe that those large brown eyes could not see anything distinctly that was not close to them, and not rather that their stare could dart cramp or rheumatism at any boy who happened to be in the rear ?

The old linen-weaver of the neighbouring parish of Tarley being dead, Marner's handicraft made him a highly-welcome settler to the richer housewives of the district, and even to the more provident cottagers, who had their little stock of yarn at the year's end, especially as the quality of the cloth he wove for them was good .and there was no deficiency in-the quantity. But Marner invited no comer to step across his threshold, and he never strolled into the village to drink a pint at the Rainbow, or to gossip at the wheel-wright's. He sought .no man or woman except to receive yarn or deliver cloth, or in order to supply himself with the necessaries of life.

And it was soon clear to the Raveloe lasses that he Avould never urge one ofthem to marry him against her will — quite as if he had heard them declare that they would never marry a dead man come to life again. For a dead man he had appeared to Jem Rodney, the mole-catcher, who was returning home one evening. Jem said that he saw Marner leaning against a stile with a heavy bag on his back, instead of resting the bag on the stile as .a man in his senses would have done. On coming up to

him he saw that his eyes were set like a dead man's, and though he spoke to him and shook him, his limbs were stiff, and his hands clutched the bag as if they had been made of iron. Jem had made up his mind that the weaver was dead, but just then he became all right again, said 'Good-night,' and walked off. All this Jem swore he had seen on the day he had been mole-catching on Squire Cass's land down by the old saw-pit. Some said Marner must have been in a 'fit', but the argumentative Mr. Macey, clerk of the parish, shook his head, and asked if anybody was ever known to go off in a fit and not fall down. A fit, he argued, was a stroke and it was in the nature of a stroke to partly take away the use of a man's limbs, and if he had no children to look after him, for the parish to take care of him. No, no ; it was no stroke that would let a man stand on his legs, like a horse between the shafts, and then walk off so soon as you can say 'Gee !' But there might be such a thing as a man's soul leaving his body, and going out and in, like a bird out of its nest and back; and that was how folks got over-wise, for they went to school in this shell-less state to those who could teach them more than their neighbours could learn with their five senses and the parson. And where did Master Marner get his knowledge of herbs from — and charms too, if he liked to give them away? Jem's story was no more than what might have been expected by anybody who had seen how Marner had cured Sally Gates, and made her sleep like a baby, when her heart had been beating enough to burst her body, for two months and more, while she had been under the doctor's care. He might cure more folks if he would ; at any rate One ought not to offend him, if it was only to keep him from doing you a mischief.

It was now fifteen years since Marner had settled in Raveloe, but at the end of the fifteen years men said the same things about Silas Marner as at the beginning. They did not say them quite so often, but they believed them much more strongly when they did say them. There was only one important addition which the years had brought; it was that Master Marner had laid by a large sum of money somewhere, and that he could buy up ' bigger men ' than himself.

CHAPTER II

NORTHWARD

MARNER came to Raveloe from a northern district,, a pale young man with prominent short-sighted brown eyes. He had been a member of a narrow religious sect known as the church assembling in Lantern Yard. He was highly thought of by the members of the church, who believed him to be a young man of exemplary life and ardent faith. A peculiar interest had been aroused in him ever since he had fallen at a prayer-meeting into a mysterious swoon, which, lasting for an hour or more, had been mistaken for death. Though Silas had seen no vision during his trance, yet he, as well as his ministers and fellow-members firmly believed that this strange experience had come to prepare him for further spiritual enlightenment. Being convinced that he was an object of divine grace, he began to have serious doubts as to whether he should apply his knowledge of medicinal herbs and their

preparation, inherited from his mother, believing that prayer ought to suffice without herbs. Thus his innocent delight to wander through the fields in search of herbs seemed to him to be of the nature of a temptation.

Among the members of his church there was a young man, named William Dane, a little older than himself, with whom he had long lived in close friendship. He too was regarded as a shining instance of youthful piety, though inclined to be severe towards weaker brethren, and to be so dazzled by his own light as to hold himself wiser than his teachers. But whatever blemishes others might discern in William, to his friend's mind he was faultless. The expression of trusting simplicity on Marner's face contrasted strangely with the expression of inward triumph that lurked in the narrow slanting eyes and compressed lips of William Dane. One of the most frequent topics of conversation between the two friends was assurance of salvation. Silas confessed that all he could bring himself to do was humbly to hope for salvation, and he listened with longing wonder when William declared his conviction of having already obtained salvation ever since, in the period of his conversation, he had dreamed that he saw the words 'calling and election sure' standing by themselves on the white page of an open Bible.

For some months before his cataleptic fit occurred Silas had been engaged to a young servant-woman named Sarah, whom he was to marry when there was a little increase in both their savings. It was a great delight to Silas that Sarah did not object to William's occasional presence at their Sunday interviews and that William still remained his friend. But he was a little distressed after

his strange trance when William said that it looked more like a visitation of Satan than a proof of divine favour, and when he exhorted his friend to see that he hid no accursed thing within his soul. It was not the rebuke Silas felt so much as his friend's doubts concerning him. And at this time he noticed a change in Sarah's manner towards him. This change distressed him so that he asked her if she wished to break off their engagement; but she denied this. Their engagement was known to the church, and had been recognized in the prayer-meetings ; so it could not be broken off without strict investigation, and Sarah could give no reason that would be sanctioned by the feeling of the community.

At this time the senior deacon was taken dangerously ill, and, being a childless widower, he was tended night and day by some of the younger brothren or sisters. Silas frequently took his turn in the night-watching with William, the one relieving the other at two in the morning. The old man, contrary to expectation, seemed to be on the way to recovery, when one night Silas, sitting up by his bedside, observed that his usual audible breathing had ceased. The candle was burning low, and he had to lift it to see the patient's face distinctly. Examination convinced him that the deacon was dead — had been dead some time, for the limbs were rigid. Silas asked himself if he had been asleep, and looked at the clock. It was already four in the morning. How was it that William had not come ? In much anxiety he went to seek for help, and soon there were several friends assembled in the house, the minister among them, while Silas went away to his work, wishing he could have met William' to know the reason of his non-appearance.

But at six o'clock, as he was thinking of going to seek his friend, William came, and with him the minister. They came to summon him to Lantern Yard, to meet the church members there; and to his inquiry concerning the cause of the summons the only reply was, 'You will hear.' Nothing further was said until Silas was seated in the vestry, in front of the minister, with the eyes of those who to him represented God's people fixed solemnly upon him. Then the minister, taking out a pocket-knife, showed it to Silas, and asked him if he knew where he had left that knife. Silas said he did not know that he had left it anywhere out of his own pocket, but he was trembling at this strange question. He was then exhorted not to hide his sin, but to confess and repent. The knife had been found in the bureau by the departed deacon's bedside — found in the place where the little bag of church money had lain, which the minister himself had seen the day before. Some hand had removed that bag; and whose hand could it be, if not that of the man to whom the knife belonged? For some time Silas was mute with astonishment; then he said, 'God will clear me; I know nothing about the knife being there, or the money being gone. Search me and my dwelling; you will find nothing but three pound five of my own savings, which William Dane knows I have had these six months.' At this William groaned, but the minister said, 'The proof is heavy against you, brother Marner. The money was taken in the night last past, and no man was with our departed brother but you,, for William Dane declares to us that he was hindered by sudden sickness from going to take his place as usual, and you yourself said that he had not come; and, moreover, you neglected the dead body.'

' l must have slept.' said Silas. Then after a pause he added, ' Or I must have had another visitation like that which you have all seen me under, so that the thief must have come and gone while I was not in the body, but out of the body. But I say again, search me and my dwelling, for l have been nowhere else.'

The search was made, and it ended in William Dane's finding the well-known bag empty, tucked behind the chest of drawers in Silas's chamber! On this William exhorted his friend to confess, and not to hide his sin any longer. Silas turned a look of keen reproach on him, and said, 'William, for nine years that we have gone in and out together have you ever known me tell a lie? But God will clear me.'

'Brother,' said William, ' how do 1 know what you may have done in the secret chambers of your heart, to give Satan an advantage over you ?'

Silas was still looking at his friend. Suddenly a deep flush came over his face, and he was about to speak impetuously, when he seemed checked again by some inward shock, that sent the flush back and made him tremble. But at last he spoke feebly, looking at William, ' I remember now — the knife wasn't in my pocket.'

William said, 'I know nothing of what you mean.' The other persons present, however, began to inquire where Silas meant to say that the knife was, but he would give no further explanation. He only said, ' I am sore stricken; I can say nothing. God will clear me.'

On their return to the vestry there was further deliberation. Any resort to legal measures for ascertaining the culprit was contrary to the principles of the church in Lantern Yard, according to which prosecution was

forbidden to Christians, even had the case held less scandal to the community. But the members were bound to take other measures for finding out the truth, and they resolved on praying and drawing lots. Silas knelt with his brethren, relying on his own innocence being certified by immediate divine interference, but feeling that there was sorrow and mourning in store for him even then — that his trust in man had been cruelly bruised. *The lots declared that Silas Marner was guilty.* He was solemnly suspended from church membership, and called upon to render up the stolen money; only on confession, as the sign of repentance, could he be received once more within the folds of the church. Marner listened in silence. At last, when every one rose to depart, he went towards William Dane and said in a voice shaken by agitation,— 'The last time I remember using my knife was when I took it out to cut a strap for you. I don't remember putting it in my pocket again. *You* stole the money, and you have woven a plot to lay the sin at my door. But you may prosper, for all that. There is no just God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent.'

There was a general shudder at this blasphemy.

William said meekly, 'I leave our brethren to judge whether this is the voice of Satan or not. I can do nothing but pray for you, Silas.'

Poor Marner went out with that despair in his soul — that shaken trust in God and man which is little short of madness to a loving nature. In the bitterness of his wounded spirit he said to himself, *'She* will cast me off too.' And he reflected that, if she did not believe the

testimony against him, her whole faith must be upset as his was.

Marner went home, and for a whole day sat alone, stunned by despair, unable to go to Sarah and attempt to win her belief in his innocence. The second day he took refuge from benumbing unbelief by getting into his loom and working away as usual; and before many hours were past, the minister and one of the deacons came to him with the message from Sarah that she held her engagement to him at an end. Silas received the message mutely, and then turned away from the messenger to work at his loom again. In little more than a month from that time Sarah was married to William Dane; and not long afterwards it was known to the brethren in Lantern Yard that Silas Marner had departed from the town.

CHAPTER lll

GOLD

NOTHING could be more unlike his native town, set within sight of the widespread hill-sides than Raveloe. It was a low, wooded region, where Marner felt hidden even from the heavens by the screening trees and hedgerows. There was nothing here, when he rose in the deep morning quiet and looked out on the dewy brambles and rank tufted grass, that seemed to have any relation with that life centring in Lantern Yard, where the religious observances had-been the channel of divine influences to-him. What could be more unlike the Lantern Yard world

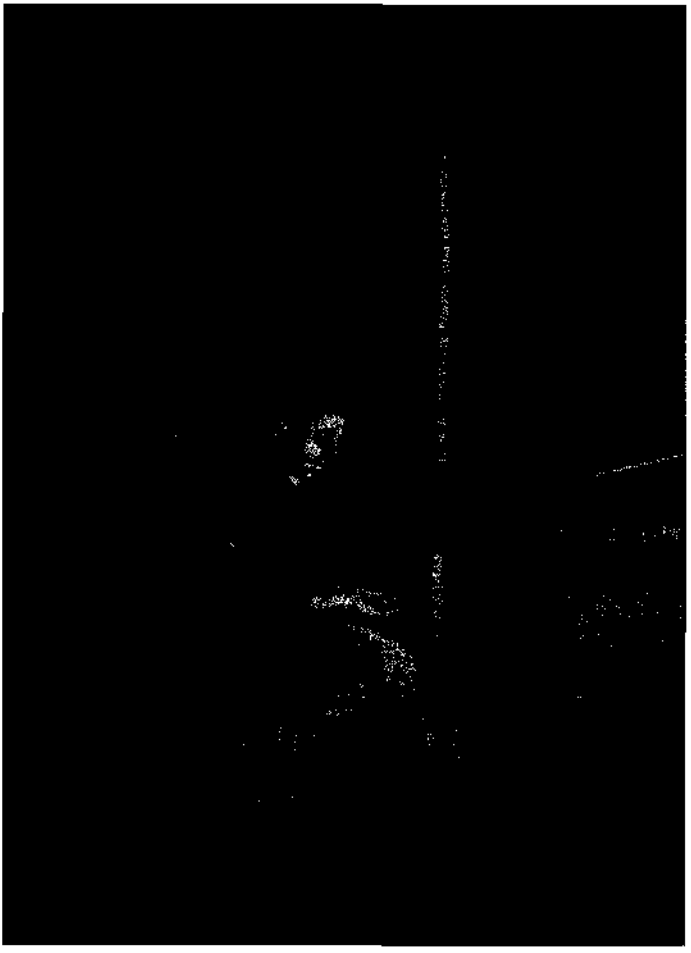
than the world in Raveloe ?— the large church in the wide churchyard, which men gazed at lounging at their own doors in service-time; the purple-faced farmers jogging along the lanes or turning in at the Rainbow; homesteads, where men supped heavily and slept in the light of the evening hearth, and where women seemed to be laying up a stock of linen for the life to come. It seemed to him that the Power he had vainly trusted in among the streets and at the prayer-meetings was very far away from this land in which he had taken refuge, where men lived in careless ease, knowing and needing nothing of that trust which for him had been turned to bitterness. There were no lips in Raveloe from which a word of comfort could fall.

After the shock Marner had sought relief in work, and now that he was come to Raveloe he worked unremittingly in his loom, never asking himself why. He worked far into the night to finish Mrs. Osgood's table-linen sooner than she expected, but without a thought about the money she would put into his hand for the work. He seemed to weave, like the spider, from pure impulse, without reflection. His hand satisfied itself with throwing the shuttle, and his eye with seeing the little squares in the cloth complete themselves under his effort. Then there were the calls of hunger, and in his solitude he had to provide his own meals, to fetch his own water from a well a couple of fields off and to put his own kettle on the fire. He hated the thought of the past as well as the future, and there was nothing that called fortlrhis love and friendship towards the strangers he had come amongst.

At last Mrs. Osgood's table-linen was finished, and Silas was paid in gold. His earnings in his native town,

where he worked for a wholesale dealer, had been at a lower rate. He had been paid weekly, and of his weekly earnings a large proportion had gone to objects of piety and charity. Now, for the first time in his life, he had five bright guineas put into his hand. It was pleasant to him to feel them in his palm and look at their bright faces, which were all his own ; and as he walked homeward across the fields in the twilight, he drew out the money, and thought it was brighter in the gathering gloom. No man expected a share of it, and he loved no man well enough to offer him a share.

Gradually the guineas, the crowns, and the half-crowns grew to a heap, and Marner drew less and less for his own wants, trying to solve the problem of keeping himself strong enough to work sixteen hours a day on as small an outlay as possible. Marner wanted the heaps of ten to grow into a square, and then into a larger square; and every added guinea, while it was itself a satisfaction, bred a new desire. He began to think his money was conscious of him, as his loom was; and he would on no account have exchanged those coins, which he had become familiar with, for other coins with unknown faces. He handled them, he counted them, till their form and colour were like the satisfaction of a thirst to him; but it was only in the night, when his work was done, that he drew them out to enjoy their companionship. He had taken out some bricks in his floor underneath his loom, and here he had made a hole in which he set the iron pot that contained his guineas and silver coins, covering the bricks with sand whenever he replaced them. Not that the idea of being robbed presented itself often or strongly to his mind, hoarding being common in country districts in those days.



He handled them till their form and colour were like the satisfaction of a thirst to him — P. 12

So, year after year, Silas Marner lived in solitude, his guineas rising in the iron pot, and his life narrowing and hardening itself more and more, till it had reduced itself to the functions of weaving and hoarding. Strangely his face and figure shrank. The prominent eyes that used to look trusting and dreamy, now looked as if they had been made to see only one kind of thing that was very small, like tiny grain, for which they hunted everywhere ; and he was so withered and yellow that, although he was not yet forty, the children always called him ' Old Master Marner.'

Yet even in this stage a little incident happened. Ever since he came to Raveloe, he had had a brown earthenware pot, which he held as his most precious utensil among the very few conveniences he had granted himself. It had been his companion for twelve years, always standing on the same spot, always lending its handle to him in the early morning, so that its form had an expression for him of willing helpfulness. One day as he was returning from the well, he stumbled against the step of the stile, and his brown pot, falling with force against the stones that overarched the ditch below him, was broken in three pieces. Silas picked up the pieces, and carried them home with grief in his heart. The brown pot could never be of use to him any more, but he stuck the bits together, and propped the ruin in its old place for a memorial.

This is the history of Silas Marner until the fifteenth year after he came to Raveloe. The livelong day he sat in his loom, his ear filled with its monotony, his eyes bent close down on the slow growth of sameness in the brownish web, his muscles moving with even repetition.

But at night came his revelry: at night he closed his shutters, and made fast his doors, and drew forth his gold. Long ago the heap of coins had become too large for the iron pot to hold them, and he had made for them two thick leather bags, which fitted into their resting-place. How the guineas shone as they came pouring out of the dark leather mouths ! The silver bore no large proportion in amount to the gold, because the long pieces of linen which formed his chief work were always partly paid for in gold, and out 6f the silver he supplied his own bodily wants, choosing always the shillings and sixpences to spend in this way. He loved the guineas best, but he would not change the silver — the crowns and half-crowns that were his own earnings, begotten by his labour ; he loved them all. He spread them out in heaps and bathed his hands in them; then he counted them and set them up in regular piles, and felt their rounded outline between his thumb and fingers, and thought fondly of the guineas that were only half earned by the work in his loom, as if they had been unborn children — thought of the guineas that were coming slowly through the coming years, through all his life, which spread far away before him, the end quite hidden by countless days of weaving. No wonder his thoughts were still with his loom and his money when he made his journeys through the fields and the lanes to fetch and carry home his work, so that his steps never wandered to the hedge-banks and the lane-side in search of the once familiar herbs. These too belonged to the past, from which his life had shrunk away.

But about the Christmas of that fifteenth year a second great change came over Marner's life, and his history became blent in a singular manner with the life of his neighbours.

CHAPTER IV

GODFREY CASS

THE greatest man in Raveloe was Squire Cass, who lived in the large red house with the handsome flight of stone steps in front and the high stables behind it, nearly opposite the church.

The squire's wife had died long ago, and things were not what they ought to have been at the Red House. This probably accounted for the frequency with which the proud Squire condescended to preside in the parlour of the Rainbow rather than in his own parlour at the Red House; also for the fact that his sons had turned out rather ill. The people of Raveloe thought it a weakness in the Squire that he kept all his sons at home in idleness, though he could afford to do so. They shook their heads at the behaviour of the second son, Dunstan, commonly called Dunsey Cass, a spiteful, jeering fellow, who seemed to enjoy his drink the more when other people went dry. At the same time they said it was no matter what became of him, so long as his brother Godfrey, the eldest, a fine open-faced, good natured young man, who would one day be Squire, did not take the same road as his brother. He certainly seemed to have done so of late, for he did not look half so fresh-coloured and open as he used to do. If he went on in that way, he would lose Miss Nancy Lammeter, whom everyone hoped to see some day as mistress of the Red House.

It was the once hopeful Godfrey who was standing, with his hands in his side-pockets and his back to the

fire, in the dark wainscoted parlour, one late November afternoon in that fifteenth year of Silas Marner's life at Raveloe. He seemed to be waiting and listening for some one's approach, and presently the sound of a heavy step, with an accompanying whistle was heard across the large empty entrance-hall.

The door opened, and a thick-set, heavy-looking young man entered, with the flushed face which marked the first stage of intoxication. It was Dunsey, and at the sight of him Godfrey's face parted with some of its gloom to take on the more active expression of hatred. The handsome brown spaniel that lay on the hearth retreated under the chair in the chimney corner.

'Well, Master Godfrey, what do you want with me?' said Dunsey, in a mocking tone. 'You're my elders and betters, you know; I was obliged to come when you sent for me.'

'Why, this is what I want — and just shake yourself sober and listen, will you?' said Godfrey savagely. He had himself been drinking more than was good for him, trying to turn his gloom into uncalculating anger. 'I want to tell you I must hand over that rent of Fowler's to the Squire, or else tell him I gave it you; for he's threatening to distrain for it, and it'll all be out soon, whether I tell him or not. He said just now, before he went out, he should send word to Cox to distrain, if Fowler didn't come and pay up his arrears this week. The Squke's short o' cash, and in no humour to stand any nonsense; and you know what he threatened if ever he found you makeing away with his money again. So see and get the money, and pretty quickly, will you?'

'Oh!' said Dunsey sneering, coming nearer to

his brother and looking in his face. ' Suppose, now, you get the money yourself, and save me the trouble,, eh? Since you was so kind as to hand it over to me' you'll not refuse me the kindness to pay it back for me; it was your brotherly love made you do it, you know.'

Godfrey bit his lips and clenched his fist. 'Don't come near me with that look, else I'll knock you down.'

' Oh no, you won't,' said Dunsey, turning away on his heel, however. ' Because I'm such a good-natured brother, you know. I might get you turned out of house and home, and cut off with a shilling any day. I might tell the Squire how his handsome son was married to that nice young woman, Molly Farren, and was very unhappy because he couldn't live with his drunken wife,, and I should slip into your place as comfortable as could be. But, you see, I don't do it — I'm so easy and good-natured. You'll take any trouble for me. You'll get the hundred pounds for me — I know you will.'

' How can I get the money ? ' said Godfrey, quivering. 'I haven't a shilling to bless myself with. And it's a lie that you'd slip into my place; you'd get yourself turned out too, that's all. For if you begin telling tales, I'll follow. Bob's my father's favourite; you know that very well. He'd only think himself well rid of you.'

' Never mind,' said Dunsey, nodding his head sideways as he looked out of the window. " It'ud be very pleasant to me to go in your company; you're such a handsome brother, and we've always been so fond of quarrelling with one another, I shouldn't know what to

do without you. But you'd like better for us both to stay at home together; I know you would. So you'll manage to get that little sum o' money, and I'll bid you good-bye, though I'm sorry to part.'

Dunstan was moving off, but Godfrey rushed after him and seized him by the arm, saying with an oath,—

'I tell you I have no money; I can get no money.'

'Borrow of old Kimble.'

'I tell you he won't lend me any more, and I shan't ask him.'

'Well, then, sell Wildfire.'

'Yes, that's easy talking. I must have the money directly.'

'Well, you've only got to ride him to the hunt to-morrow. There'll be Bryce and Keating there, for sure. You'll get more bits than one.'

'I dare say, and get back home at eight o'clock, splashed up to the chin. I am going to Mrs. Osgood's birthday dance.'

'Oho !' said Dunsey, turning his head on one side, and trying to speak in a small mincing treble. 'And there's sweet Miss Nancy coming; and we shall dance with her, and promise never to be naughty again, and be taken into favour, and——'

'Hold your tongue about Miss Nancy, you fool,' said Godfrey, turning red, 'else I'll throttle you.'

'What for?' said Dunsey, still in an artificial tone, but taking a whip from the table and beating the butt end of it on his palm. 'You've a very good chance. I'd advise you to creep up her sleeve again ; it'ud be saving time, if Molly should happen to take a drop too much laudanum some day, and make a widower of you. Miss

Nancy wouldn't mind being a second, if she didn't know it. And you've got a good-natured brother who'll keep your secret well, because you'll be so very obliging to him.'

' I'll tell you what it is,' said Godfrey, quivering and pale again. ' My patience is pretty near at an end. If you'd a little more sharpness in you, you might know that you may urge a man a bit too far, and make one leap as easy as another. I don't know but what it is so now. I may as well tell the Squire everything myself. I should get you off my back, if I got nothing else. And after all hell know some time. She's been threatening to come herself and tell him. So don't flatter yourself that your secrecy's worth any price you choose to ask. You drain me of money till I have got nothing to pacify *her* with, and she'll do as she threatens some day. It's all one. I'll tell my father everything myself, and you may go to the devil.'

Dunsey perceived that he had gone too far, and that Godfrey might do as he had threatened. But he said with an air of unconcern,—

' As you please ; but I'll have a draught of ale first.' And ringing the bell, he threw himself across two chairs, and began to rap the window-seat with the handle of his whip.

Godfrey stood, still with his back to the fire, uneasily moving his fingers among the contents of his side-pockets and looking at the floor. That big muscular frame of his held plenty of animal courage, but helped him to no decision when the dangers to be braved were such as could neither be knocked down nor throttled. As he thought on what he had said, he felt that it would be easier to give in to Dunstan about the horse than to fulfil his threat. But his pride would not let him re-commence

the conversation any other way than by continuing the quarrel. Dunstan was waiting for this, and took his ale in shorter draughts than usual.

' It's just like you,' Godfrey burst out in a bitter tone, ' to talk about my selling Wildfire in that cool way — the last I've got to call my own, and the best bit of horse-flesh I ever had in my life. And if you'd got a spark of pride in you, you'd be ashamed to see the stables emptied and everybody sneering about it. But it's my belief you'd sell yourself, if it was only for the pleasure of making somebody feel he'd got a bad bargain.'

'Ay, ay,' said Dunstan, very placably, 'you do me justice, I see. You know I'm a jewel for 'ticing people into bargains. For which reason I advise you to let *me* sell Wildfire. I'd ride him to the hunt to-morrow for you with pleasure. I shouldn't look so handsome as you in the saddle, but it's the horse they'll bid for, and not the rider.'

' Yes, I dare say — trust my horse to you !'

' As you please,' said Dunstan, rapping the window-seat again with an air of great unconcern. ' It's *you* have got to pay Fowler's money; it's none of my business. You received the money from him when you went to Bramcote, and *you* told the Squire it wasn't paid. I'd nothing to do with that; you chose to be so obliging as to give it me, that was all. If you don't want to pay the money, let it alone ; it's all one to me. But I was willing to accommodate you by undertaking to sell the horse, seeing it's not convenient to you to go so far to-morrow.'

Godfrey was silent for some moments. He would have liked to spring on Dunstan, wrench the whip from his hand, and flog him to within an inch of his life, and

no bodily fear could have deterred him; but he was mastered by another sort of fear. When he spoke again, it was in a half-conciliatory tone.

' Well, you mean no nonsense about the horse, eh? You'll sell him all fair, and hand over the money? If you don't, you know, everything 'll go to smash, for I've got nothing else to trust to. And you'll have less pleasure in pulling the house over my head when your own skull's to be broken too.'

' Ay, ay,' said Dunstan, rising, ' all right. I thought you'd come round. I'm the fellow to bring old Bryce up to the scratch. I'll get you a hundred and twenty for him, if I get you a penny.'

' But it'll perhaps rain cats and dogs to-morrow, as it did yesterday, and then you can't go.' said Godfrey, hardly knowing whether he wished for that obstacle or not.

' Not it,' said Dunstan. 'I'm always lucky in my weather. It might rain if you wanted to go yourself. You never hold trumps, you know — I always do. You've got the beauty, you see, and I've got the luck, so you must keep me by you for your crooked sixpence : you'll ne-ver get along without me.'

' Confound you, hold your tongue,' said Godfrey impetuously. ' And take care to keep sober to-morrow, else you'll get pitched on your head coming home, and Wildfire might be the worse for it.'

' Make your tender heart easy.' said Dunstan, opening the door. ' You never knew me see double when I'd got a bargain to make; it 'ud spoil the fun. Besides, whenever I fall, I'm warranted to fall on my legs.'

With that Dunstan slammed the door behind him,

leaving Godfrey to his bitter thoughts. Godfrey had plunged wildly into the excitement of sport, drinking, and card-playing only to help him to forget his troubles. His secret marriage was the cause of all his unhappiness. He lived in constant fear that the ugly secret would be disclosed, and his chief desire was to ward off the evil day when he would have to bear the consequences of his father's violent resentment for the wound inflicted on his family pride, and forfeit the esteem of Nancy Lammeter. For four years he had thought of her as the woman who made him think of the future with joy and who would make home lovely to him, as his father's had never been. And the good-humoured, affectionate-hearted Godfrey Cass was fast becoming a bitter man, visited by cruel wishes, for wrong-doing will breed hate in the kindliest nature.

What was he to do this evening to pass the time? He might as well go to the Rainbow and hear the talk about the cock-fighting; everybody was there, and what else was there to be done? — though, for his own part, he did not care a button for cock-fighting. Snuff, the brown spaniel, who had placed herself in front of him, and had been watching him for some time, now jumped up in impatience for the expected caress. But Godfrey thrust her away without looking at her, and left the room, followed humbly by the unresenting Snuff.

CHAPTER V

DUNSTAN CASS

DUNSTAN CASS set off very early in the morning. His way lay along the lane which, at its farther extremity, passed by the piece of unenclosed ground called the Stone-pit, where stood Silas Marner's cottage. The spot looked very dreary at this season, with the moist, trodden clay about it, and the red, muddy water high up in the deserted quarry. That was Dunstan's first thought as he approached it; the second was that the old fool of a weaver, whose loom he heard rattling already, had a great deal of money hidden somewhere. How was it that he had never thought of suggesting to Godfrey that he should frighten or persuade the old fellow into lending the money on the excellent security of a young Squire's prospects? The idea seemed so good to him that he almost turned the horse's head towards home again. Godfrey, he knew, would snatch eagerly at a plan that might save him from parting with Wildfire. But then he did not wish to give Godfrey that pleasure ; he preferred that Godfrey should' be vexed. Further, he liked the thought of having a horse to sell, and the opportunity it gave him of driving a bargain, swaggering, and possibly taking somebody in. He might have all the satisfaction of selling his brother's horse, and also the further satisfaction of setting Godfrey to borrow Marner's money. So he rode on to cover.

Bryce and Keating were there, as Dunstan was quite sure they would be — he was such a lucky fellow.

'Hey-day!' said Bryce, who had long had his eye on Wildfire, 'you're on your brother's horse to-day; how's that?'

'Oh, I've swopped with him,' said Dunstan, who delighted in lying,—'Wildfire's mine now.'

'What! has he swopped with you for that big-boned hack of yours?' said Bryce, quite aware that he should *get* another lie in answer.

'Oh, there was a little account between us,' said Dunsey carelessly, 'and Wildfire made it even. I shall keep Wildfire, now I've got him, though I'd a bid of a hundred and fifty for him the other day. But I mean to stick to Wildfire; I shan't get a better at a fence in a hurry.'

Bryce, of course, divined that Dunstan wanted to sell the horse, and Dunstan knew that he divined it; and they both considered that the bargain was in its first stage, when Bryce replied ironically,—

'I wonder at that now; I wonder you mean to keep him; for I never heard of a man who didn't want to sell his horse getting a bid of half as much again as the horse was worth. You'll be lucky if you get a hundred.'

Keating rode up now, and the transaction became more complicated. It ended in the purchase of the horse by Bryce for a hundred and twenty, to be paid on the delivery of Wildfire safe and sound at the Batherley stables.

It did occur to Dunsey that it might be wise for him to give up the day's hunting, proceed at once to Batherley, and, having waited for Bryce's return, hire a horse to carry him home with the money in his pocket.

But the inclination for a run, encouraged by confidence in his luck, and by a draught of brandy from his pocket-pistol at the conclusion of the bargain, was not easy to overcome, especially with a horse under him that would take the fences to the admiration of the field. Dunstan, however, took one fence too many, and got his horse pierced with a hedgestake. His own ill-favoured person, which was quite unmarketable escaped without injury ; but poor Wildfire, unconscious of his price, turned on his flank, and painfully panted his last.

It was now nearly four o'clock, and a mist was gathering; the sooner Dunstan got into the road the better. He remembered having crossed the road and seen the finger-post only a little while before Wildfire broke down ; so, buttoning his coat, twisting the lash of his hunting-whip compactly round the handle, and rapping the tops of his boots with a self-possessed air, he set off in the direction of Raveloe through the gathering mist, always rapping his whip somewhere. It was Godfrey's whip, which he had chosen to take without leave because it had a gold handle. Of course no one could see, when Dunstan held it, that the name *Godfrey Cass* was cut in deep letters on that gold handle ; they could only see that it was a very handsome whip, Dunsey was not without fear that he might meet some acquaintance in whose eyes he would cut a pitiable figure, for mist is no screen when people get close to each other; but when he at last found himself in the well-known Raveloe lanes without having met a soul, he silently remarked that that was part of his usual good luck.

But now the mist, helped by the evening darkness,

was more of a screen than he desired, for it hid the ruts into which his feet were liable to slip — hid everything so that he had to feel his way along with his whip. He must soon, he thought, be getting near the opening at the Stone-pits ; he should find it out by the break in the hedgerow. He found it out, however, by another circumstance which he had not expected — namely, by certain gleams of light, which he presently guessed to proceed from Silas Marner's cottage. That cottage and the money hidden within it had been in his mind continually during his walk, and he had been imagining ways of cajoling and tempting the weaver to part with the immediate possession of his money for the sake of receiving interest. Dunstan felt as if there must be a little frightening added to the cajolery. As for security he regarded it vaguely as a means of cheating a man by making him believe that he would be paid. Altogether, the operation on the miser's mind was a task that Godfrey would be sure to hand over to his more daring and cunning brother — Dunstan had made up his mind to that — and by the time he saw the light gleaming through the chinks of Marner's shutters, the idea of a dialogue with the weaver had become so familiar to him, that it occurred to him as quite a natural thing to make the acquaintance forthwith. There might be several conveniences attending this course : the weaver had possibly got a lantern, and Dunstan was tired of feeling his way. He was still nearly thrQe-quarters of a mile from home, and the lane was becoming unpleasantly slippery, for the mist was passing into rain. He turned up the bank not without some ear lest he might miss the right way, since he was

not certain whether the light was in front or on the side of the cottage. But he felt the ground before him cautiously with his whip-handle and at last arrived safely at the door. He knocked loudly, rather enjoying the idea that the old fellow would be frightened at the sudden noise. He heard no movement in reply ; all was silence in the cottage. Was the weaver gone to bed then ? If so, why had he left a light ? That was a strange forgetfulness in a miser. Dunstan knocked still more loudly, and without pausing for a reply pushed his fingers through the latchhole, intending to shake the door and pull the latch-string up and down not doubting that the door was fastened. But, to his surprise, at this double motion the door opened, and he found himself in front of a bright fire which lit up every corner of the cottage — the bed, the loom, the three chairs, and the table — and showed him that Marner was not there.

Nothing at that moment could be much more inviting to Dunsey than the bright fire on the brick hearth. He walked in, and seated himself by it at once. There was something in front of the fire, too, that would have been inviting to a hungry man, if it had been in a different stage of cooking. It was a small bit of pork suspended from the kettle-hanger by a string passed through a large door-key. But the pork had been hung at the farthest extremity of the hanger, apparently to prevent the roasting from proceeding too rapidly during the owner's absence. ' The old staring simpleton had hot meat for his supper, then ?' thought Dunstan. People had always said he lived on mouldy bread, on purpose to check his appetite. But where could he be at this time, and on such an evening,

leaving his supper in this stage of preparation, and his door unfastened? Dunstan's own recent difficulty in making his way suggested to him that the weaver had perhaps gone outside his cottage to fetch in fuel, or for some such brief purpose, and had slipped into the Stone-pit. That was an interesting idea to Dunstan. If the weaver was dead, who had a right to his money? Who would know where his money was hidden? *Who would know that anybody had come to take it away?* The pressing question, 'Where *is* the money?' took entire possession of him. There were only three hiding-places where he had ever heard of cottagers' hoards being found — the thatch, the bed, and a hole in the floor. Mamer's cottage had no thatch. So Dunstan's first act was to go up to the bed; but while he did so his eyes travelled eagerly over the floor, where the bricks, distinct in the firelight, were discernible under the sprinkling of sand. But not everywhere; for there was one spot, and one only, which was quite covered with sand, and sand showing the marks of fingers, which had apparently been careful to spread it over a given space. It was near the treadles of the loom. In an instant Dunstan darted to that spot, swept away the sand with his whip, and inserting the thin end of the hook between the bricks, found that they were loose. In haste he lifted up two bricks, and saw what he had no doubt was the object of his search; for what could there be but money in those two leathern bags? And from their weight they must be filled with guineas. Dunstan felt round the hole, to be certain that it held no more; then hastily replaced the bricks, and spread the sand over them.

Hardly more than five minutes had passed, since he entered the cottage, though it seemed a long while to Dunstan, as he rose to his feet with the bags in his hand. He hastened out into the darkness, closing the door behind him immediately, that he might shut in the stream of light. A few steps would be enough to carry him beyond betrayal by the gleams from the shutter-chinks and the latch-hole. The rain and darkness had got thicker, and he was glad of it though it was awkward walking with both hands filled, so that it was as much as he could do to grasp his whip, along with one of the bags. But when he had gone a yard or two, he might take his time. So he stepped forward into the darkness.

CHAPTER VI

THE BLOW

WHEN Dunstan Cass turned his back on the cottage, Silas Marner was not more than a hundred yards away from it, plodding along from the village with a sack thrown round his shoulders as an overcoat and with a horn lantern in his hand. His legs were weary, but his mind was at ease. Silas was thinking with double interest of his supper — first, because it would be hot and savoury, and secondly, because it would cost him nothing. For the little bit of pork was a present from that excellent housewife, Miss Priscilla Lammeter, to whom he had this day carried home a handsome piece of linen; and it was only on occasion

of a present like this that Silas indulged himself with roast-meat. Supper was his favourite meal, because it came at his time of revelry, when his heart warmed over his gold; whenever he had roast-meat, he always chose to have it for supper. But this evening he had no sooner ingeniously knotted his string fast round his bit of pork, twisted the string according to rule over his door-key, passed it through the handle, and made it fast on the hanger, than he remembered that a piece of very fine twine was indispensable to his ' setting up' a new piece of work in his loom early in the morning. It had slipped his memory, because in coming from Mr. Lammeter's he had not had to pass through the village; but to lose time by going on errands in the morning was out of the question. It was a nasty fog to turn out into, but there were things Silas loved better than his own comfort; so drawing his pork to the extremity of the hanger, and arming himself with his lantern and his old sack, he set out on what in ordinary weather would have been a twenty minutes' errand. He could not have locked his door without undoing his well-knotted string and retarding his supper; it was not worth his while to make that sacrifice. What thief would find his way to the Stone-pits on such a night as this? and why should he come on this particular night, when he had never come through all the fifteen years before ?

He reached his door in much satisfaction that his errand was done. He opened it, and to his short sighted eyes everything remained as he had left it, except that the fire sent out a welcome increase of heat. He trod about the floor while putting by his lantern and throwing

aside his hat and sack, so as to merge the marks of Dunstan's feet on the sand in the marks of his own nailed boots. Then he moved his pork nearer to the fire, and sat down to the agreeable business of tending the meat and warming himself at the same time.

As soon as he was warm he began to think it would be a long while to wait till after supper before he drew out his guineas, and it would be pleasant to see them on the table before him as he ate his unwonted feast. For joy is the best of wine, and Silas's guineas were a golden wine of that sort.

He rose and placed his candle unsuspectingly on the floor near his loom, swept away the sand without noticing any change, and removed the bricks. The sight of the empty hole made his heart leap violently, but the belief that his gold was gone could not come at once — only terror and the eager effort to put an end to the terror. He passed his trembling hand all about the hole, trying to think it possible that his eyes had deceived him. Then he held the candle in the hole, and examined it curiously, trembling more and more. At last he shook so violently that he let fall the candle, and lifted his hands to his head, trying to steady himself, that he might think. Had he put his gold somewhere else by a sudden resolution last night, and then forgotten it? He searched in every corner; he turned his bed over and shook it and kneaded it; he looked in his brick oven where he laid his sticks. When there was no other place to be searched, he kneeled down again and felt once more all round the hole.

Then he got up from his knees trembling, and looked round at the table. Didn't the gold lie there after all ?

The table was bare. Then he turned and looked behind him — looked all round his dwelling — seeming to strain his brown eyes after some possible appearance of the bags where he had already sought them in vain. He could see every object in his cottage — and his gold was not there.

Again he put his trembling hands to his head, and gave a wild ringing scream, the cry of desolation. For a few moments after, he stood motionless; but the cry had relieved him from the first maddening pressure of the truth. He turned and tottered towards his loom, and got into the seat where he worked to collect his thoughts.

And now that all the false hopes had vanished, and the first shock of certainty was past, the idea of a thief began to present itself; and he entertained it eagerly, because a thief might be caught and made to restore the gold. The thought brought some new strength with it, and he started from his loom to the door. As he opened it the rain beat in upon him, for it was falling more and more heavily. There were no footsteps to be tracked on such a night. Footsteps? When had the thief come? During Silas's absence in the daytime the door had been locked, and there had been no marks of any inroad on his return by daylight. And in the evening, too, he said to himself, everything was the sametas when he had left it. The sand and bricks looked as if they had not been moved. *Was* it a thief who had taken the bags ? or was it a cruel power that no hands could reach, which had delighted in making him a second time desolate ? He shrank from this vaguer dread, and fixed his mind with struggling effort on the robber with hands, who could be reached by hands. His thoughts glanced at all the neighbours who had made

any remarks, or asked any questions which he might now regard as a ground of suspicion. There was Jem Rodney, a known poacher, and otherwise disreputable. He had often met Marner in his journeys across the fields, and had said something jestingly about the weaver's money; nay, he had once irritated Marner by lingering at the fire when he called to light his pipe, instead of going about his business. Jem Rodney was the man ; there was ease in the thought. Jem could be found and made to restore the money. Marner did not want to punish him, but only to get back his gold which had gone from him, and left his soul like a forlorn traveller on an unknown desert. The robber must be laid hold of. Marner's ideas of legal authority were confused, but he felt that he must go and proclaim his loss ; and the great people in the village — the clergyman, the constable, and Squire Cass — would make Jem Rodney, or somebody else, deliver up the stolen money. He rushed out in the rain, under the stimulus of this hope, forgetting to cover his head, not caring to fasten his door; for he felt as if he had nothing left to lose. He ran swiftly, till want of breath compelled him to slacken his pace as he was entering the village at the turning close to the Rainbow.

The Rainbow, in Marner's view, was a place of luxurious resort for rich and stout husbands, whose wives had superfluous stores of linen ; it was the place where he was likely to find the powers and dignities of Raveloe, and where he could most speedily make his loss public. He lifted the latch, and turned into the bright bar or kitchen on the right hand, where the company was assembled.

CHAPTER VII

Mr. **MACEY**

IN all gatherings in the kitchen of the Rainbow Mr. Macey, tailor and parish clerk, held a place of honour. Everybody humoured him, and when he spoke, he was listened to with respect. He had sat listening to the conversation this evening, his white head on one-side, when Mr. Snell, the landlord, a man of neutral disposition, remarked,—

' If the talk is to be o' the Lammeters, *you* know the most upo' that head — eh, Mr. Macey ? You remember when first Mr. Lammeter's father come into these parts and took the Warrens ?'

' Ay, ay! I know, I know,' replied Mr. Macey, trying to smile; ' but I let other folks talk. Ask them as have been to school at Tarley; they've learnt pernouncing; that's come up since my day.'

These remarks were intended for Mr. Tookey, the deputy-clerk, a small-featured young man who sat opposite Mr. Macey.

' If you're pointing at me, Mr. Macey,' said Tookey politely, ' I'm nowise a man to speak out of my place. As the psalm says,—

I know what's right, nor only so,
But also practise what I know.'

' Well, then, I wish you'd keep hold o' the tune,

when it's set for you; if you're for *practising,* I wish you'd *practise* that,' said Ben Winthrop, the wheel-wright, leader of the church choir. He winked as he spoke at two of the company, who were also members of the choir, in the confidence that he was expressing the sense of the musical profession in Raveloe.

Mr. Tookey the deputy-clerk, who shared the unpopularity common to deputies, turned very red, but replied with careful moderation, 'Mr. Winthrop, if you'll bring me any proof as I'm in the wrong, I'm not the man to say I won't alter. But there's people set up their own ears for a standard, and expect the whole choir to follow 'em. There may be two opinions, I hope.'

'Ay, ay,' said Mr. Macey, who felt very well satisfied with this attack on youthful presumption;'you're right there, Tookey. There's allays two 'pinions : there's the o'pinion a man has of himsen, and there's the pinion other folks have on him. There'd be two 'pinions about a cracked bell, if the bell could hear itself.'

'Well, Mr. Macey,' said poor Tookey, serious amidst the general laughter, 'I undertook to partially fill up the office of parish-clerk by Mr. Crackenthrop's desire, whenever your infirmities should make you unfitting ; and it's one of the rights thereof to sing in the choir, else why have you done the same yourself?'

'Ah ! but the old gentleman and you are two folks,' said Ben Winthrop. 'The old gentleman's got a gift. Why, the Squire used to invite him to take a glass, only to hear him sing the "Red Rovier"—didn't he, Mr. Macey ? It's a nat'ral gift. But as for you, Master Tookey, you'd better stick to your "Amens"; your

voice is well enough when you keep it up in your nose. It's your inside as isn't right made for music; it's no better nor a hollow stalk.'

This kind of unflinching frankness was the most piquant form of joke to the company at the Rainbow^ and Ben Winthrop's insult was felt by everybody to have capped Mr. Macey's epigram.

'I see what it is plain enough,' said Mr. Tookey, unable to keep cool any longer. ' There's a consperacy to turn me out o' the choir, as I shouldn't share the Christmas money — that's where it is. But I shall speak to Mr. Crackenthorp ; I'll not be put upon by no man.'

'Nay, nay, Tookey,' said Ben Winthrop; ' we'll pay you your share to keep out of it — that's what we'll do. There's things folks 'ud pay to be rid on, besides varmin.'

'Come, come,' said the landlord, who felt that paying people for their absence was not a principle he could approve of;'a joke's a joke. We're all good friends here, I hope. We must give and take. You're both right and you're both wrong, as I say. I agree wi' Mr. Macey here, as there's two opinions; and if mine was asked, I should say they're both right. Tookey's right and Winthrop's right, and they've only got to split the difference and make themselves even.'

' To be sure,' said his cousin the butcher, following up his conciliatory view, 'we're fond of our old clerk; it's nat'ral, and him used to be such a singer, and got a brother as is known for the first fiddler in this country-side. Eh, it's a pity but what Solomon lived in our village, and could give us a tune when he liked — eh, Mr. Macey?'

'Ay, ay,' said Mr. Macey, in the height of complacency; 'our family's been known for musicianers as far back as anybody can tell. But them things are dying out, as I tell Solomon every time he comes round; there's no voices like what there used to be, and there's nobody remembers what we remember, if it isn't the old crows.'

'Ay, you remember when first Mr. Lammeter's father came into these parts, don't you, Mr. Macey?' said the landlord.

'I should think I did,' said the old man, who had now gone through the complimentary process necessary to bring him up to the point of narration; 'and a fine old gentleman he was — as fine and finer nor the Mr. Lammeter as now is. He came from a bit north'ard, so far as I could ever make out. But there's nobody rightly knows about those parts; only it couldn't be far north'ard, nor much different from this country, for he brought a fine breed o' sheep with him, so there must be pastures there, and everything reasonable. We beared tell as he'd sold his own land to come and take the Warrens, and that seemed odd for a man as had land of his own to come and rent a farm in a strange place. But they said it was along of his wife's dying, though there's reasons in things as nobody knows on — that's pretty much what I've made out: yet some folks are so wise they'll find you fifty reasons straight off, and all the while the real reason's winking at 'em in the corner, and they niver see't. Howsomever, it was soon seen as we'd got a new parish'ner as know'd the rights and customs o' things, and kep' a good house, and was well looked on by everybody. And the young man — that's the Mr.

Lammeter as now is, for he'd niver a sister—soon began to court Miss Osgood-—that's the sister o' the Mr. Osgood as now is, and a fine handsome lass she was. They pretend this young lass is like her, but that's the way wi' people as don't know what come before 'em.'

Here Mr. Macey paused; he always gave his narrative in instalments, expecting to be questioned according to precedent.

' Why, old Mr. Lammeter had a pretty fortin, didn't they say, when he come into these parts ?' asked Mr. Snell.

' Well, yes,' said Mr. Macey ; ' but I dare say it's as much as this Mr. Lammeter's done to keep it whole. For there was allays a talk as nobody could get rich on the Warrens; though he holds it cheap, for it's what they call Charity Land.'

' Ay, and there's few folks know so well as you how it come to be Charity Land, eh, Mr. Macey?' said the butcher.

' How should they ?' said the old clerk with some contempt. ' Why, my grandfather made the grooms' livery for that Mr. Cliff as came and built the big stables at the Warrens. Why, they're stables four times as big as Squire Cass's, for he thought o' nothing but bosses and hunting, Cliff didn't — a Lunnon tailor some folks said, as had gone mad wi' cheating. For he couldn't ride; Lor' bless you, they said he's got no more grip o' the boss than if his legs had been cross sticks; my grandfather beared old Squire Cass say so many and many a time. But ride he would, as if Old Harry had been a-driving him; and he'd a son, a lad o' sixteen' and nothing would his father have him do but he must

ride and ride—though the lad was frighted, they said. And it was a common saying as the father wanted to ride the tailor out o' the lad, and make a gentleman on him — not but what I'm a tailor myself, but in respect as God made me such, I'm proud on it, for " Macey, tailor " 's been wrote up over our door since afore the Queen's heads went out on the shillings. But Cliff, he was ashamed o' being called a tailor, and he was sore vexed as his riding was laughed at, and nobody o' the gentlefolks hereabout could abide him. Howsomever, the poor lad got sickly and died; and the father didn't live long after him, for he got queerer nor ever, and they said he used to go out i' the dead o' the night, wi' a lantern in his hand, to the stables, and set a lot o' lights burning, for he got as he couldn't sleep ; and there he'd stand, cracking his whip and looking at his bosses ; and they said it was a mercy as the stables didn't get burnt down wi' the poor dumb creatures in 'em. But at last he died raving, and they found as he'd left all his property, Warrens and all to a Lunnon Charity, and that's how the Warrens come to be Charity Land; though, as for the stables, Mr. Lammeter never uses 'em. Lor' bless you! if you was to set the doors a-banging in 'em, it'ud sound like thunder half o'er the parish.'

' Ay, but there's more going on in the stables than what folks see by daylight, eh, Mr. Macey ? " said the landlord.

' Ay, ay; go that way of a dark night, that's all.' said Mr. Macey, winking mysteriously,' and then make believe, if you like, as you didn't see lights i' the stables, nor hear the stamping o' the bosses, nor the cracking o'

the whips, and howling too, if it's tow'rt daybreak. " Cliff's Holiday" has been the name of it ever sin' were a boy; that's to say, some said as it was the holiday Old Harry gev him from roasting, like. That's what my father told me, and he was a reasonable man, though there's folks nowadays know what happened afore they were born better nor they know their own business.'

'What do you say to that, eh. Dowlas?' said the landlord, turning to the farrier. There's a nut for *you* to crack.'

Mr. Dowlas was the negative spirit in the company, and was proud of his position.

'Say? I say what a man *should say* as doesn't shut his eyes to look at a finger-post. I say as I'm ready to wager any man ten pound, if he'll stand out wi' me any dry night in the pasture before the Warren stables, as we shall neither see lights nor hear noises, if it isn't the blowing of our own noses. That's what I say. and I've said it many a time ; but there's nobody 'ull venture a tenpun' note on their ghos'es as they make so sure of.'

' Why, Dowlas, that's easy betting, that is,' said Ben Winthrop. ' You might as well bet a man as he wouldn't catch the rheumatise if he stood up to 's neck in the pool of a frosty night. It 'ud be fine fun for a man to win his bet as he'd catch the rheumatise. Folks as believe in Cliff's Holiday aren't a-going to venture near it for a matter o' ten pound.'

' If Master Dowlas wants to know the truth on it,' said Mr. Macey with a sarcastic smile, tapping his thumbs together, ' he's no call to lay any bet; let him go and stan' by himself — there's nobody 'ull hinder

him—and then he can let the parish'ners know if they're wrong.'

'Thank you ! I'm obliged to you,' said the farrier with a snort of scorn. 'If folks are fools, it's no business o' mine. .' don't want to make out the truth about ghos'es ; I know it a'ready. But I'm not against a bet — everything fair and open. Let any man bet me ten pound as I shall see Cliff's Holiday, and I'll go and stand by myself. I want no company. I'd as lief do it as I'd fill this pipe.'

'Ah, but who's to watch you, Dowlas, and see you do it ? That's no fair bet,' said the butcher.

'No fair bet,' replied Mr. Dowlas angrily. 'I should like to hear any man stand up and say I want to bet unfair. Come now, Master Lundy, I should like to hear you say it.'

'Very like you would,' said the butcher. 'But it's no business o' mine. I'm for peace and quietness, I am.'

'Yes; that's what every yapping cur is when you hold a stick up at him,' said the farrier. 'But I'm afraid o' neither man nor ghost, and I'm ready to lay a fair bet. .' aren't a turn-tail cur.'

'Ay, but there's this in it, Dowlas,' said the landlord, speaking in a tone of much candour and tolerance. 'There's folks, i' my opinion, they can't see ghos'es, not if they stood as plain as a pike-staff before 'em. And there's reason i' that. For there's my wife, now, can't smell, not if she'd the strongest o' cheese under her nose. I never see'd a ghost myself; but then I says to myself, "Very like I haven't got the smell for 'em." I mean, putting a ghost for a smell, or else contrairiways. And so I'm for holding with both sides; for, as I say, the

truth lies between 'em. And if Dowlas was to go and stand and say he'd never seen a wink o' Cliff's Holiday all the night through, I'd back him; and if anybody said as Cliff's Holiday was certain sure for all that, I'd back *him* too. For the smell's what I go by.'

The landlord's analogical argument was not well received by the farrier, a man intensely opposed to compromise.

' Tut, tut,' he said, setting down his glass; ' what's the smell got to do with it? Did ever a ghost give a man a black eye? That's what I should like to know. If ghos'es want me to believe in 'em, let 'em leave off skulking i' the dark and i' lone places; let 'em come where there's company and candles.'

' As if ghos'es 'ud want to be believed in by anybody so ignorant!' said Mr. Macey, with deep disgust.

CHAPTER VIII

THE MYSTERIOUS THIEF

THE next moment the pale, thin figure of Silas Marner was suddenly seen standing in the warm light, uttering no word, but looking round at the company with strange unearthly eyes. Every man present, not excepting even the farrier, thought that it was not Silas Marner that stood before them, but his spirit. For a few moments there was dead silence, Marner's want of breath and agitation not allowing him to speak.

The landlord, who was bound to keep his house

open to all company, at last took on himself the task of addressing the ghost.

'Master Marner,' he said, in a conciliatory tone; 'what's lacking to you? What's your business here?'

'Robbed!' said Silas gaspingly. 'I've been robbed! I want the constable — and the Justice and Squire Cass '•— and Mr. Crakenthorp.'

'Lay hold on him, Jem Rodney,' said the landlord, the idea of a ghost subsiding; he's off his head, I doubt. He's wet through.'

Jem Rodney was the outermost man, and sat conveniently near Marner's standing-place; but he declined to give his services.

'Come and lay hold on him yourself, Mr. Snell, if you've a mind,' said Jem rather sullenly. 'He's been robbed, and murdered too, for what I know,' he added in a muttering tone.

'Jem Rodney!'said Silas, turning and fixing his strange eyes on the suspected man.

'Ay, Master Marner, what do ye want wi' me?' said Jem, trembling a little and seizing his drinking-can as a defensive weapon.

'If it was you stole my money,' said Silas, clasping his hands entreatingly, and raising his voice to a cry, 'give it me back, and I won't meddle with you. I won't set the constable on you. Give it me back, and I'll let you have a guinea.'

'Me stole your money!' said Jem angrily. 'I'll pitch this can at your eye if you talk o' *my* stealing your money.'

'Come, come, Master Marner,' said the landlord, now rising resolutely and seizing Marner by the

shoulder, ' if you've got any information to lay, speak it out sensible, and show as you're in your right mind, if you expect anybody to listen to you. You're as wet as a drowned rat. Sit down and dry yourself, and speak straight forrard.'

The landlord forced Marner to take off his coat, and then to sit down on a chair aloof from every one else in the centre of the circle and in the direct rays of the fire. The weaver, too feeble to have any distinct purpose beyond that of getting help to recover his money, submitted unresistingly. All faces were turned towards him, and the landlord, having seated himself again, said,—

' Now then, Master Marner, what's this you've got to say — as you've been robbed? Speak out.'

' He'd better not say again as it was me robbed him,' cried Jem Rodney hastily. ' What could I ha' done with his money? I could as easy steal the parson's surplice and wear it.'

' Hold your tongue, Jem, and let's hear what he's got to say,' said the landlord.—' Now then, Master Marner.'

Silas now told his story, under frequent questioning, as the mysterious character of the robbery became evident.

The slight suspicion with which his hearers at first listened to him now gradually melted away. It was impossible for the neighbours to doubt that Marner was telling the truth, because, as Mr. Macey observed,' Folks as had the devil to back 'em were not likely to be so mushed' as poor Silas was.

' It isn't Jem Rodney as has done this work, Master

Marner,'said the landlord. ' You mustn't be a-casting your eye at poor Jem. There may be a bit of a reckoning against Jem for the matter of a hare or so, if anybody was bound to keep their eyes staring open, and niver to wink ; but Jem's been a-sitting here drinking his can like the decentest man i" the parish, since before you left your house, Master Marner, by your own account.'

' Ay, ay,' said Mr. Macey ;' let's have no accusing o' the innicent. That isn't the law. There must be folks to swear again' a man before he can be ra'en up. Let's have no accusing o' the innicent, Master Marner.'

Marner started from his chair — as he thought of Lantern Yard,— and going close up to Jem, he looked at him as if he wanted to assure himself of the expression in his face. Then he said slowly —

' It was wrong; yes, yes — I ought to have thought. There's nothing to witness against you, Jem. Only you'd been into my house oftener than anybody else, and so you came into my head. I don't accuse you — I won't accuse anybody — only,' he added, lifting up his hands to his head, and turning away with bewildered misery, 'I try — I try to think where my guineas can be.'

' Ay, ay, they're gone where it's hot enough to melt 'em, I doubt,' said Mr. Macey.

' Tchuh !' said the farrier. And then he asked, with a cross-examining air, ' How much money might therd be in the bags, Master Marner ?'

'Two hundred and seventy-two pounds, twelve and sixpence, last night when I counted it,' said Silas, seating himself again, with a groan.

' Pooh !' said the -farrier, ' why they'd be none so heavy to carry. Some tramp's been in, that's all; and

as for the no footmarks, and the bricks and the sand being all right, why your eyes are pretty much like a insect's, Master Marner; they're obliged to look so close, you can't see much at a time. It's my opinion as, if I'd been you, or you'd been me — for it comes to the same thing — you wouldn't have thought you'd found everything as you left it. But what I vote is, as two of the sensiblest o' the company should go with you to Master Kench, the constables — he's ill i' bed, I know that much — and get him to appoint one of us his deppity; for that's the law, and I don't think anybody 'ull take upon him to contradick me there. It isn't much of a walk to Kench's ; and then, if it's me as 'is deppity, I'll go back with you, Master Marner, and examine your premises; and if anybody's got any fault to find with that, I'll thank him to stand up and say it out like a man.'

'Let us see how the night is, though,' said the landlord, who also considered himself personally concerned in this proposition. 'Why, it rains heavy still,' he said, returning from the door.

'Well, I'm not the man to be afraid o' the rain,' said the farrier. 'For it'll look bad when Justice Malam hears as respectable men like us had a information laid before 'em and took no steps.'

So poor Silas, furnished with some old coverings, turned out with his two companions into the rain again, thinking wearily of the long night hours before him.

CHAPTER IX

GODFREY'S ANXIETY

WHEN Godfrey Cass returned from Mrs. Osgood's party at midnight, he was much surprised to learn that Dunsey had not come home. Perhaps he had not sold Wildfire, and was waiting for another chance; perhaps on that foggy afternoon he had preferred housing himself at the Red Lion at Batherley for the night, if the run had kept him in that neighbourhood — for he was not likely to feel much concern about leaving his brother in suspense. Godfrey's mind was too full of Nancy Lammeter's looks and behaviour, too full of the exasperation against himself and his lot, which the sight of her always produced in him, for him to give much thought to Wildfire, or to the probabilities of Dunstan's conduct.

The next morning the whole village was excited by the story of the robbery, and Godfrey, like every one else, was occupied in gathering and discussing news about it, and in visiting the stone-pits. The rain had washed away all possibility of distinguishing foot-marks, but a close investigation of the spot had disclosed, in the direction opposite to the village, a tinder-box, with a flint and steel, half sunk in the mud. It was not Silas's tinder-box, for the only one he had ever had was still standing on his shelf; and the inference generally accepted was that the tinder-box in the ditch was somehow connected with the robbery. A small minority shook

their heads, and intimated their opinion that it was not a robbery to have much light thrown on it by tinder-boxes, that Master Marner's tale had a queer look with it, and that such things had been known as a man's doing himself a mischief, and then setting the justice to look for the doer. But when questioned closely as to their grounds for this opinion, and what Master Marner had to gain by such false pretences, they only shook their heads as before, and observed that there was no knowing what some folks counted gain; moreover, that everybody had a right to their own opinions, grounds or no grounds, and that the weaver, as everybody knew, was partly crazy.

There was a consultation regarding the robbery at the Rainbow under the presidency of Mr. Crackcnthorp, the rector, assisted by Squire Cass and other influential parishioners, at which Mr. Snell, the landlord, recounted certain recollections of a pedlar who had called to drink at the house about a month before. The man had actually stated, Mr. Snell said, that he carried a tinder-box about with him to light his pipe. Here, surely, was a clue to be followed out.

Soon the whole village was talking about the pedlar and it was beginning to be assumed that it was he who had stolen the money. It was true that Godfrey Cass had said that it was all nonsense, — since he had himself bought a penknife of the pedlar, and had thought him a merry grinning fellow enough,— but then what Godfrey had said was nothing but the random talk of youth. It was not only Mr. Snell who had seen something odd about him. It was to be hoped Mr. Godfrey would not go to Tarley and throw cold water on what

Mr. Snell said there, and so prevent the justice from drawing up a warrant. He was suspected of intending this, when, after midday, he was seen setting off on horseback in the direction of Tarley.

Godfrey was riding not to Tarley, but to Batherley. He could not understand why he had had no news yet of Dunstan and Wildfire, and he could not rest in uncertainty about them any longer. He was afraid that Dunstan had played him the ugly trick of riding away with Wildfire, to return at the end of a month when he had gambled away or otherwise squandered the price of the horse, and he was irritated with himself that he had trusted his horse to Dunstan, now that the dance at Mrs. Osgood's was past.

Godfrey had not ridden far when he heard a horse approaching at a trot, and he thought it must be Dunstan returning. But in a few moments he discerned that the rider was not Dunstan, but Bryce, who pulled up to speak, with a face that implied something disagreeable.

' Well, Mr. Godfrey, that's a lucky brother of yours' that Master Dunsey ; isn't he ? '

' What do you mean ?' said Godfrey hastily.

' Why, hasn't he been home yet ?' said Bryce.

'Home? No. What has happened ? Be quick. What has he done with my horse ? '

'Ah! I thought it was yours, though he pretended you had parted with it to him.'

' Has he thrown him down and broken his knees ? ' said Godfrey, flushed with exasperation.

' Worse than that,' said Bryce. ' You see, I'd made a bargain with him to buy the horse for a hundred and twenty — a swinging price ; but I always liked the

horse. And what does he do but go and stake him — fly at a hedge with stakes in it, atop of a bank with a ditch before it. The horse had been dead a pretty good while when he was found. So he hasn't been home since, has he ? '

' Home ? No,' said Godfrey ; ' and he'd better keep away. Confound me for a fool! I might have known this would be the end of it.'

' Well, to tell you the truth,' said Bryce, ' after I'd bargained for the horse it did come into my head that he might be riding and selling the horse without your knowledge, for I didn't believe it was his own. I knew Master Dunsey was up to his tricks sometimes. But where can he be gone ? He's never been seen at Bather-ley. He couldn't have been hurt, for he must have walked off.'

' Hurt?' said Godfrey bitterly. ' He'll never be hurt; he's made to hurt other people.'

' And so you *did* give him leave to sell the horse, eh?' said Bryce.

' Yes; I wanted to part with the horse — he was always a little too hard in the mouth for me.' said Godfrey. His pride making him wince under the idea that Bryce guessed the sale to be a matter of necessity. 'I was going to see after him; I thought some mischief had happened. I'll go back now,' he added, turning the horse's head, and wishing he could get rid of Bryce; for he felt that the long-dreaded crisis in his life was close upon him. ' You're coming on to Raveloe, aren't you.'

'Well, no, not now,'said Bryce. 'I *was* coming round there, for I had to go to Flitton, and I thought

I might as well take you in my way, and just let you know all I knew myself about the horse. I suppose Master Dunsey didn't like to show himself till the ill news had blown over a bit. He's perhaps gone to pay a visit at the Three Crowns, by Whitbridge; I know he's fond of the house.'

' Perhaps he is,'said Godfrey, rather absently. Then rousing himself, he said, with an effort at carelessness, ' We shall hear of him soon enough, I'll be bound.'

' Well, here is my turning,' said Bryce, not surprised to perceive that Godfrey was rather ' down'; ' so I'll bid you good-day, and wish I may bring you better news another time.'

Godfrey rode along slowly, representing to himself the scene of confession to his father from which he felt that there was now no longer any escape. The revelation about the money must be made the very next morning; and if he withheld the rest, Dunstan would be sure to come back shortly, and finding that he must bear the brunt of his father's anger, would tell the whole story out of spite, even though he had nothing to gain by it. There was one step, perhaps, by which he might still win Dunstan's silence and put off the evil day; he might tell his father that he had himself spent the money paid to him by Fowler; and as he had never been guilty of such an offence before, the affair would blow over after a little storming. Bui Godfrey could not bring himself to do this.

' I don't pretend to be a good fellow,' he said to himself; 'but I'm not a scoundrel—at least I'll stop short somewhere. I'll bear the consequences of what I *have* done sooner than make believe I've done what

I never would have done. I'd never have spent the money for my own pleasure ; I was tortured into it.'

Godfrey spent the rest of the day trying to nerve himself to make a full confession the next day to his father, and for the present he withheld from him the story of Wildfire's loss. But with the morning light the old dread of disgrace came back — the old disposition to rely on chances which might save him from betrayal. He thought it would be really wisest for him to try and soften his father's anger against Dunsey, and keep things as nearly as possible in their old condition. And if Dunsey did not come back for a few days (and Godfrey did not know but that the rascal had enough money in his pocket to enable him to keep away still longer), everything might blow over.

CHAPTER X

SQUIRE CASS

GODFREY rose and took his own breakfast earlier than usual, but lingered in the wainscoted parlour till his younger brothers had finished their meal and gone out, awaiting his father, who always took a walk with his manager before breakfast. Every one breakfasted at a different hour in the Red House, and the Squire was always the latest, giving a long chance to a rather feeble morning appetite before he. tried it. The table had been spread with substantial eatables nearly two hours before he presented himself—a tall, stout man of sixty, with a face in which the knit brow and rather

hard glance seemed contradicted by the slack and feeble mouth. His person showed marks of habitual neglect, his dress was slovenly ; and yet there was something in the presence of the old Squire distinguishable from that of the ordinary farmers in the parish.

He glanced at his son as he entered the room, and said, ' What, sir ! haven't *you* had your breakfast yet ?' But there was no pleasant morning greeting between them; not because of any unfriendliness, but because the sweet flower of courtesy is not a growth of such homes as the Red House.

' Yes, sir,' said Godfrey, ' I've had my breakfast, but I was waiting to speak to you.'

' Ah! well,' said the Squire, throwing himself indifferently into his chair, and speaking in a ponderous, coughing fashion, which was felt in Raveloe to be a sort of privilege of his rank, while he cut a piece of beaf and held it up before the deer-hound that had come in with him. 'Ring the bell for my ale, will you? You youngsters' business is your own pleasure, mostly. There's no hurry about it for anybody but yourselves.'

The Squire's life was quite as idle as his sons', but it was a fiction kept up by himself and his contemporaries in Raveloe that youth was exclusively the period of folly. Godfrey waited, before he spoke again, until the ale had been brought and the door closed — an interval during which Fleet, the deer-hound, had consumed enough bits of beef to make a poor man's holiday dinner.

' There's been a cursed piece of ill-luck with Wildfire.' he began; ' happened the day before yesterday.'

' What! broke his knees ?' said the Squire, after

taking a draught of ale. 'I thought you knew how to ride better than that, sir. I never threw a horse down in my life. If I had, I might ha' whistled for another, for *my* father wasn't quite so ready to unstring as some other fathers I know of.'

'It's worse than breaking the horse's knees — he's been staked and killed,' he said, as soon as his father was silent and had begun to cut his meat. 'But I wasn't thinking of asking you to buy me another horse; I was only thinking I'd lost the means of paying you with the price of Wildfire, as I'd meant to do. Dunsey took him to the hunt to sell him for me the other day, and after he'd made a bargain for a hundred and twenty with Bryce, he went after the hounds, and took some fool's leap or other that did for the horse at once. If it hadn't been for that, I should have paid you a hundred pounds this morning.'

'The Squire had laid down his knife and fork, and was staring at his son in amazement.

'The truth is, sir — I'm very sorry — I was quite to blame,' said Godfrey. 'Fowler did pay that hundred pounds. He paid it to me when I was over there one day last month. And Dunsey bothered me for the money, and I let him have it, because I hoped T should be able to pay it you before this.'

The Squire was purple with anger before his son had done speaking, and found utterance difficult. 'You let Dunsey have it, sir? And how long have you been so thick with Dunsey that you must *collogue* with him to embezzle my money? Are you turning out a scamp? I tell you I won't have it. I'll turn the whole pack of you out of the house together, and marry again. I'd

have you to remember, sir, my property's got no entail on it, since my grandfather's time the Casses can do as they like with their land. Remember that, sir. Let Dunsey have the money ! Why should you let Dunsey have the money ? There's some lie at the bottom of it.'

' There's no lie, sir,' said Godfrey. I would not have spent the money myself: but Dunsey bothered me, and I was a fool, and let him have it. But I meant to pay it, whether he did or not. That's the whole story. I never meant to embezzle money, and I'm not the man to do it. You never knew me do a dishonest trick, sir.'

' Where's Dunsey, then ? What do you stand talking there for ? Go and fetch Dunsey, as I tell you, and let him give account of what he wanted the money for and what he's done with it. He shall repent it. I'll turn him out. I said I would, and I'll do it. He shan't brave me. Go and fetch him.'

' Dunsey isn't come back, sir.'

' What! did he break his own neck, then ?' said the Squire, with some disgust at the idea that in that case he could not fulfil his threat.

' No, he wasn't hurt, I believe, for the horse was found dead, and Dunsey must have walked off. I dare say we shall see him again by and by. I don't know where he is.'

' And what must you be letting him have my money for ? Answer me that', said the Squire, attacking Godfrey again, since Dunsey was not within reach.

' Well, sir, I don't know,' said Godfrey hesitatingly.

'You didn't know? I tell you what it is, sir. You've been up to some trick, and you've been bribing him not to tell,' said the Squire, with a sudden acuteness

which startled Godfrey, who felt his heart beat violently at the nearness of his father's guess. The sudden alarm pushed him on to take the next step.

'Why, sir,' he said, trying to speak with careless ease, 'it was a little affair between me and Dunsey; it's no matter to anybody else. It's hardly worth while to pry into young men's fooleries; it wouldn't have made any difference to you, sir, if I'd not had the bad luck to lose Wildfire. I should have paid you the money.'

'Fooleries! Pshaw! it's time you'd done with fooleries. And I'd have you know, sir, you *must* ha' done with 'em,' said the Squire, frowning and casting an angry glance at his son. 'Your goings-on are not what I shall find money for any longer. There's my grandfather had his stables full o' horses, and kept a good house too, and in worse times, by what I can make out; and so might I, if I hadn't four good-for-nothing fellows to hang on me like horse-leeches. I've been too good a father to you all — that's what it is. But I shall pull up, sir.'

Godfrey was silent.

The Squire ate his bread and meet hastily, took a deep draught of ale, then turned his chair from the table, and began to speak again.

'It'll be all the worse for you, you know; you'd need try and help me keep things together.'

'Well, sir, I've often offered to take the management of things; but you know you've taken it ill always, and seemed to think I wanted to push you out of your place.'

'I know noth'ng o' your offering or o'my taking

it ill,' said the Squire, 'but I know one while you seemed to be thinking o' marrying, and I didn't offer to put any obstacles in your way, as some fathers would. I'd as lieve you married Lammeter's daughter as anybody. I suppose if I'd said you nay, you'd ha' kept on with it; but for want o' contradiction you've changed your mind. You're a shilly-shally fellow; you take after your poor mother. She never had a will of her own; a woman has no call for one, if she's got a proper man for her husband. But *your* wife had need have one, for you hardly know your own mind enough to make both your legs walk one way. The lass hasn't said downright she won't have you, has she?'

' No,' said Godfrey, feeling very hot and uncomfortable; 'but I don't think she will.'

' Think! Why haven't you the courage to ask her? Do you stick to it, you want to have *her* — that's the thing?'

' There's no other woman I want to marry,' said Godfrey evasively.

'Well, then, let me make the offer for you, that's all, if you haven't the pluck to do it yourself. Lammeter isn't likely to be loath for his daughter to marry into *my* family, I should think. And as for the pretty lass, she wouldn't have her cousin; and there's nobody else, as I see, could ha' stood in your way.'

' I'd rather let it be, please sir, at present,' said Godfrey, in alarm. *' 1* think she's a little offended with me just now, and I should like to speak for myself. A man must manage these things for himself.'

' Well, speak, then, and manage it, and see if you

can't turn over a new leaf. That's what a man must do when he thinks o' marrying.'

' I don't see how I can think of it at present, sir. You wouldn't like to settle me on one of the farms, I suppose, and I don't think she'd come to live in this house with all my brothers. It's a different sort of life to what she's been used to.'

'Not come to live in this house? Don't tell me. You ask her, that's all,' said the Squire, with a short, scornful laugh.

'I'd rather let the thing be at present, sir,' said Godfrey. 'I hope you won't try to hurry it on by saying anything.'

' I shall do what I choose,' said the Squire, ' and I shall let you know I'm master ; else you may turn out, and find an estate to drop into somewhere else. Go out and tell Winthrop not to go to Cox's, but wait for me. And tell 'em to get my horse saddled. And stop: look out and get that hack o' Dunsey's sold, and hand me the money, will you? He'll keep no more hacks at my expense. And if you know where he's sneaking — I dare say you do — you may tell him to spare himself the journey o' coming back home. Let him turn 'ostler, and keep himself. He shan't hang on me any more.'

' I don't know where he is; and if I did, it isn't my place to tell him to keep away,' said Godfrey, moving towards the door.

' Confound it, sir, don't stay arguing, but go and order my horse,' said the Squire, taking up a pipe.

Godfrey left the room, hardly knowing whether he were more relieved by the sense that the interview was ended without having made any change in his position,

or more uneasy that he had entangled himself still further in prevarication and deceit. What had passed about his proposing to Nancy had raised a new alarm, lest by some after-dinner words of his father's to Mr. Lammeter he should be thrown into the embarrassment of being obliged absolutely to decline her when she seemed to be within his reach. He fled to his usual refuge - that of hoping for some unforeseen turn of fortune, some favourable chance which would save him from unpleasant consequences.

CHAPTER XI

DOLLY WINTHROP

AS the weeks passed away, there was a gradual cessation of the excitement the robbery had caused in Raveloe. Dunstan Cass's absence was hardly a subject of remark. He had once before had a quarrel with his father, and had gone off, nobody knew whither, to return at the end of six weeks, take up his old quarters unforbidden, and swagger as usual. His own family, who also expected this, with the sole difference that the Squire was determined this time to forbid him the old quarters, never mentioned his absence; and when his uncle Kimble or Mr. Osgood noticed it, the story of his having killed Wildfire and committed some offence against his father was enough to prevent surprise. To connect the fact of Dunsey's disappearance with that of the robbery occurring on the same day lay quite away from the track of every one's thought —

even Godfrey's who had better reason than any one else to know what his brother was capable of. When the robbery was talked of at the Rainbow and elsewhere, in good company, the balance continued to waver between the rational explanation founded on the tinder-box and the theory of an impenetrable mystery that mocked investigation.

Meanwhile Silas was feeling the withering desolation of his loss. His thoughts could no longer move in their old round, and were baffled by a perfect blank. The loom was there, and the weaving, and the growing pattern in the cloth; but the bright treasure in the hole under his feet was gone, and the prospect of handling and counting it. Nor could the thought of the money he would get by his work bring any joy, for its meagre image was only a fresh reminder of his loss, and hope was too heavily crushed by the sudden blow for his imagination to dwell on the growth of a new hoard from that small beginning.

He filled up the blank with grief. As he sat weaving, he every now and then moaned low, like one in pain; it was the sign that his thoughts had come round again to the sudden chasm — to the empty evening time. And all the evening, as he sat in his loneliness by his dull fire, he leaned his elbows on his knees, and clasped his liead with his hands, and moaned very low — not as one who seeks to be heard.

And yet he was not utterly forsaken in his trouble. The sympathy of all Raveloe went out to him, especially now that every one saw that his strange avoidance of his neighbours was not due to ill-will or his association with the powers of darkness, but to mere craziness, for

it was now apparent that he had not cunning enough even to look after his own. So he became to be spoken of as a ' poor mushed creature.'

His misfortune brought Marner uppermost in the memory of housekeepers like Mrs. Osgood, and various gifts of pork and the like came from well-to-do families. Neighbours who had nothing to give him took the trouble of calling at his cottage to try to cheer him. Mr. Macey, calling one evening, advised him to go to church and be a bit neighbourly. Another visitor, Mrs. Winthrop, the wheel-wright's wife, advised him to do so too.

Mrs. Winthrop was a good-looking, fresh-complexioned, good-natured woman — always the first person to be thought of in Raveloe when there was illness or death in a family. No one had seen her shed tears ; she was simply grave and inclined to shake her head and sigh almost imperceptibly. It seemed surprising that Ben Winthrop, who loved his quart-pot and his joke, got along so well with Dolly; but she took her husband's jokes and joviality as patiently as everything else considering that' men *would be* so.'

This good woman could hardly fail to have her mind drawn strongly towards Silas Marner, now that he appeared in the light of a sufferer; and one Sunday afternoon she took her little boy Aaron with her, and went to call on Silas, carrying in her hand some small lard-cakes. Silas was busy in his loom when they arrived, and they had to knock loudly before he heard them ; but when he did come to the door, he showed no impatience, as he would once have done, at a visit that had been unasked for and unexpected. He opened the

door wide to admit Dolly, but without otherwise returning her greeting than by moving the arm-chair a few inches as a sign that she was to sit down in it.

Dolly, as soon as she was seated, removed the white cloth that covered her lard-cakes, and said in her gravest way,—

'I'd a baking yisterday, Master Marner, and the lard-cakes turned out better nor common ; and I'd ha' asked you to accept some, if you'd thought well. I don't eat such things myself, for a bit o' bread's what I like from one year's end to the other; but men's stomichs are made so comical, they want a change — they do, I know, God help 'em.'

Dolly sighed gently as she held out the cakes to Silas, who thanked her kindly and looked very close at them, absently, being accustomed to look so at everything he took into his hand — eyed all the while by the wondering bright eyes of the small Aaron, who was peeping round from behind his mother's chair.

' There's letters pricked on 'em,' said Dolly. ' I can't read 'em myself, and there's nobody, not Mr. Macey himself, rightly knows what they mean; but they've a good meaning, for they're the same as is on the pulpit-cloth at church. — What are they, Aaron, my dear ?'

Aaron moved further away.

' Oh go ; that's naughty,' said his mother mildly.

' Well, whativer the letters are, they've a good meaning; and it's a stamp as has been in our house, Ben says, ever since he was a little un, and his mother used to put it on the cakes, and I've allays put it on too; for if there's any good, we've need of it i' this world.'

'It's I. H. S.,' said Silas, at which proof of learning Aaron peeped round the chair again.

' Well, to be sure, you can read 'em off,' said Dolly. ' Ben's read 'em to me many and many a time, but they slip out o' my mind again; the more's the pity, for they're good letters, else they wouldn't be in the church. And so I prick 'em on all the loaves and all the cakes, though sometimes they won't hold, because o' the rising — for , as I said, if there's any good to be got, we've need of it i' this world, that we have. And I hope they'll bring good to you, Master Marner, for it's wi' that will I brought you the cakes; and you see the letters have held better nor common.'

Silas was as unable to interpret the letters as Dolly, but there was no possibility of misunderstanding the desire to give comfort that made itself heard in her quiet tones. He said, with more feeling than before, ' Thank you — thank you kindly.' But he laid down the cakes, and seated himself absently.

' Ah, if there's good anywhere, we've need of it,' repeated Dolly, who did not lightly forsake a serviceable phrase. She looked at Silas pityingly as she went on. ' But you didn't hear the church bells this morning, Master Marner? I doubt you didn't know it was Sunday. Living so lone here you lose your count, I dare say ; and then, when your loom makes a noise, you can't hear the bells, more partic'lar now the frost kills the sound,'

' Yes, I did ; I heard 'em,' said Silas, to whom Sunday bells meant nothing.

' Dear heart!' said Dolly, pausing before she spoke again. ' But what a pity it is you should work of a Sunday, and not clean yourself — if you *didn't* go to

church; for if you'd a roasting bit, it might be as you couldn't leave it being a lone man. But there's the bakehus, if you could make up your mind to spend a two pence on the oven now, and then — not every week, in course; I shouldn't like to do that myself— you might carry your bit o' dinner there; for it's nothing but right to have a bit o' summat hot of a Sunday, and not to make it as you can't know your dinner from Saturday. But now, upo' Christmas day, this blessed Christmas as is ever coming, if you was to take your dinner to the bakehus, and go to church, and see the holly and the yew, and hear the anthim, and then take the sacramen', you'd be a deal the better, and you'd know which end you stood on, and you could put your trust i' Them as knows better nor we do, seein' you'd ha' done what it lies on us all to do.'

Dolly's exhortation, which was an unusually long effort of speech for her, was uttered in the soothing, persuasive tone with which she would have tried to prevail on a sick man to take his medicine, or a basin of gruel for which he had no appetite. Silas had never before been closely urged on the point of his absence from church, which had only been thought of as a part of his general queerness; and he was too direct and simple to evade Dolly's appeal.

'Nay, nay,' he said, 'I know nothing o' church; I've never been to church,'

' No!' said Dolly, in a low tone of wonderment. Then bethinking herself of Silas's advent from an unknown country, she said,' Could it ha' been as they'd no church where you was born ? '

' Oh yes,' said Silas meditatively, sitting in his usual

posture of leaning on his knees and supporting his head. ' There was churches — a many — it was a big town. But I knew nothing of 'em; I went to chapel.'

Dolly was much puzzled at this new word, but she was rather afraid of inquiring further, lest ' chapel ' might mean some haunt of wikedness. After a little thought she said,—

' Well, Master Marner, it's niver too late to turn over a new leaf; and if you've niver had no church, there's no telling the good it'll do you. For 1 feel so set up and comfortable as niver was, when I've been and heard the prayers, and the singing to the praise and glory o' God, as Mr. Macey gives out; and Mr. Crackenthorp saying good words, and more partic'lar on Sacramen' Day. And if a bit o' trouble comes, I feel as I can put up wi' it, for I've looked for help i' the right quarter, and gev myself up to Them as we must all give ourselves up to at the last; and if we'n done our part, it isn't to be believed as Them as are above us 'ull be worse nor we are and come short o' Their'n.' Marner remained silent, not feeling inclined to assent to the part of Dolly's speech which he understood — her recommendation that he should go to church.

Meanwhile little Aaron had become used to the weaver's awful presence, and advanced to his mother's side.

' He's my youngest,' said Dolly, stroking Aaron's brown head, ' and we spoil him sadly, for either me or the father must allays hev him in our sight — that we must. And he's got a voice like a bird — you wouldn't think,' Dolly went on ; ' he can sing a Christmas carril as his father's taught him; and I take it for a token as

he'll come to good, as he can learn the good tunes so quick.—Come, Aaron, stan' up and sing the carril to Master Marner; come.'

After a few signs of coyness, consisting chiefly in rubbing the backs of his hands over his eyes, and then peeping between them at Marner, Aaron sang the first verse of a carol with a clear chirp. Dolly listened with a devout look, glancing at Marner in some confidence that this would help to allure him to church.

' That's Christmas music,' she said when Aaron had ended. There's no other music equil to the Christmas music. And you may judge what it is at church, Master Marner. The boy sings pretty, don't he ?'

'Yes,'said Silas absently, ' very pretty.' And he offered Aaron a bit of the lard-cake.

But Dolly Winthrop held down the willing little hands, and said, ' Oh no, thank you, Master Marner. We must be going home now. And so I wish you good-bye; and if'you ever feel anyways bad in your inside, as you can't fend for yourself, I'll come and clean up for you, and get you a bit o' victual, and willing. But I beg and pray of you to leave off weaving of a Sunday, for it's bad for soul and body; and the money as comes i' that way 'ull be a bad bed to lie down on at the last, if it doesn't fly away, nobody knows where, like the white frost. And you'll excuse me being that free with you, Master Marner, for I wish you well — I do.— Make your bow, Aaron.'

Silas said, ' Good-bye, and thank you kindly.' as he opened the door for Dolly, but he couldn't help feeling relieved when she was gone — relieved that he might weave again and moan at his ease.

Notwithstanding the honest persuasions of Mr. Macey and Dolly Winthrop, Silas spent his Christmas Day in loneliness, eating his meat in sadness of heart, though the meat had come to him as a neighbourly present. In the morning he looked out on the black frost that seemed to press cruelly on every blade of grass, while the half-icy red pool shivered under the bitter wind; but towards evening the snow began to fall, and curtained from him even that dreary outlook, shutting him close up with his narrow grief. And he sat in his robbed home through the livelong evening, not caring to close his shutters or lock his door, pressing his head between his hands and moaning, till the cold grasped him and told him that his fire was gray.

Nobody in this world but himself knew that he was the same Silas Marner who had once loved his fellow with tender love, and trusted in an unseen goodness. Even to himself that past experience had become dim.

CHAPTER XII

NANCY **LAMMETER**

THE party on Christmas Day being a strictly family party was not the chief event of the season at the Red House. It was the great dance on New Year's Eve that made the glory of Squire Cass's hospitality, as of his forefather's, time out of mind.

Godfrey Cass was looking forward to this New Year's Eve with a foolish, reckless longing. ' Hold your tongue, and don't worry me,' he 'said to his fears, ' I

can see Nancy's eyes, just as they will look at me, an feel her hand in mine already.'

It was Mr. Godfrey Cass whom Miss Nancy Lammeter saw standing at the door of the Red House as she rode up, seated on the pillion behind her tall, erect father, with one arm round him, looking thoroughly bewitching. Godfrey was ready there to lift her from the pillion, though — well, it was very painful, when you had made it quite clear to a young man that you were determined not to marry him, however much he might wish it, that he would still continue to pay you marked attentions : besides, why didn't he always show the same attentions, if he meant them sincerely, instead of being so strange as Mr. Godfrey Cass was — sometimes behaving as if he didn't want to speak to her, and taking no notice of her for weeks and weeks, and then, all on a sudden, almost making love again? Moreover, it was quite plain he had no real love for her, else he would not let people have *that* to say of him which they did say. Did he suppose that Miss Nancy Lammeter was to be won by any man, squire or no squire, who led a bad life ? That was not what she had been used to see in her own father, who was the soberest and best man in that country-side — only a little hot and hasty now and then, if things were not done to the minute.

Happily, the Squire came out too, and gave a loud greeting to her father. Amidst the noise Nancy hoped, while she was being lifted from the pillion by strong arms which seemed to find her ridiculously small and light, that her confusion was unnoticed. And there was the best reason for hastening into the house at once, since the snow was beginning to fall again.

There was a buzz of voices through the house as she entered, mingled with the scrape of a fiddle preluding in the kitchen. Mrs. Kimble, the Squire's sister, who did the honours on these great occasions, came forward to meet her in the hall and conduct her upstairs, though Miss Nancy asked to be allowed to find her way alone to the Blue Room, and Mrs. Kimble did not oppose the request, because of the journey upstairs being rather fatiguing to her. The Lammeters were guests whose arrival had evidently been thought of so much that it had been watched for from the windows.

There was hardly a bedroom in the house where feminine compliments were not passing and feminine toilettes going forward, in various stages, in space made scanty by extra beds spread upon the floor; and Miss Nancy, as she entered the Blue Room, had to make her little formal curtsy to a group of six. She had no sooner made it than her aunt, Mrs. Osgood, came forward to ask how she was, and to remain with her while she dressed.

Everything belonging to Miss Nancy was of delicate purity and nattiness. Not a crease was where it had no business to be, not a bit of her linen that was not perfectly white. The very pins on her pincushion were stuck in after a pattern. And as for her own person, it gave the same idea of perfect unvarying neatness as the body of a little bird. It is true that her light-brown hair was cropped behind like a boy's, and was dressed in front in a number of flat rings that lay quite away from her face ; but no way of doing her hair could make her cheek and neck look otherwise than pretty. And when at last she stood complete in her silvery twilled silk,

her lace tucker, her coral necklace, and coral ear-drops, there was nothing to criticize except her hands, which bore the traces of butter-making, cheese-crushing, and even still coarserjwork. But Miss Nancy was not ashamed of that. Though she had never been to any school higher than Dame Tedman's, she had the instincts of a lady.

As Miss Nancy's coral necklace was clasped, her sister Priscilla entered the room, with her face red with the cold and damp.

After the first questions and greetings, she turned to Nancy and surveyed her from head to foot, wheeling her round, to ascertain that the back view was equally faultless.

' What do you think o' *these* gowns, Aunt Osgood ? ' said Priscilla, while Nancy helped her to unrobe.

' Very handsome indeed, niece,' said Mrs. Osgood, with an air of formality. She always thought Niece Priscilla too rough.

' I'm obliged to have the same as Nancy, you know, for all I'm five years older, and it makes me look yellow; for she never *will* have anything without I have mine just like it, because she wants us to look like sisters. And I tell her folks 'ull think it's my weakness makes me fancy as I shall look pretty in what she looks pretty in. For I *am* ugly — there's no denying that; I feature my father's family. But, law! I don't mind,' and so Priscilla rattled on.

As the two Miss Lammeters walked into the large parlour together, they found that places of honour had been reserved for them near the head of the principal tea-table. Mr. Godfrey Cass advanced to lead Nancy to a seat between himself and Mr, Crackenthorp, while

Priscilla was called to the opposite side between her father and the Squire.

It certainly did make some difference to Nancy that the lover she had given up was the young man of quite the greatest consequence in the parish — at home in a venerable and unique parlour, a parlour where *she* might one day have been mistress. But she declared to herself that not the most dazzling rank would induce her to marry a man whose conduct showed him careless of his character. Still ' love once, love always' was the motto of a true and pure woman, and no man should ever have any right over her which would be a call on her to destroy the dried flowers that she treasured, and always would treasure, for Godfrey Cass's sake. And Nancy was capable of keeping her word to herself under very trying conditions. Nothing but a becoming blush betrayed the moving thoughts that urged themselves upon her as she accepted the seat next to Mr. Crackenthorp.

It was not the Rector's practice to let a charming blush pass without an appropriate compliment.

' Ha, Miss Nancy.' he said, smiling down pleasantly upon her, ' when anybody pretends this has been a severe winter, I shall tell them I saw the roses blooming on New Year's Eve — eh, Godfrey, what do *you* say ?'

Godfrey made no reply, and avoided looking at Nancy very markedly.

' Ay, ay,' chimed in the Squire, offering his snuff-box to Mr. Lammeter, for the second time, ' us old fellows may wish ourselves young to-night, when we see the mistletoe-bough in the White Parlour. It's true most things are gone back'ard in these last thirty years, but

when I look at Miss Nancy here, I begin to think the lasses keep up their quality.'

' Miss Nancy's wonderful like what her mother was, though; isn't she, Kimble?' said Mrs. Kimble.

' Did you speak to me, my dear ? ' said the Doctor, coming quickly to his wife's side ; and then not waiting for an answer, he went on immediately, ' Ha, Miss Priscilla, the sight of you revives the taste of that super-excellent pork pie. I hope the batch isn't near an end.'

' Yes, indeed it is, Doctor,' said Priscilla ; ' but I'll answer for it the next shall be as good. My pork pies don't turn out well by chance.'

' Not as your doctoring does, eh, Kimble ?—because folks forget to take your physic, eh ?' said the Squire, tapping his box, and looking round with a triumphant laugh.

' Ah, she has a quick wit, my friend Priscilla has,' said the Doctor, as if she had made the remark, and not his brother-in-law. ' She saves a little pepper to sprinkle over her talk ; that's the reason why she never puts too much into her pies.'

Then suddenly skipping to Nancy's side, ' Ha, Miss Nancy.' he said, 'you won't forget your promise? You're to save a dance for me, you know.'

' Come, come, Kimble, don't you be too for'ard,' said the Squire ; ' give the young uns fair play. There's my son Godfrey 'll be wanting to have a round with you if you run off with Miss Nancy. He's bespoke her for the first dance, I'll be bound.—Eh, sir, what do you say?' he continued, throwing himself backward and looking at Godfrey. ' Haven't you asked Miss Nancy to open the dance with you ?'

[6] No, I've not asked her yet,' Godfrey said, feeling very uncomfortable, ' but I hope she'll consent — if somebody else hasn't been before me.'

' No, I've not engaged myself,' said Nancy, quietly though blushingly. (If Mr. Godfrey founded any hopes on her consenting to dance with him, he would soon be undeceived ; but there was no need for her to be uncivil.)

' Then I hope you've no objections to dancing with me,' said Godfrey, beginning to lose the sense that there was anything uncomfortable in this arrangement.

' No objections,' said Nancy in a cold tone.

'Ah, well, you're a lucky fellow, Godfrey,' said Uncle Kimble. ' But you're my godson, so I won't stand in your way. — Else I'm not so very old, eh, my dear ?' he went on, skipping to his wife's side again. 'You wouldn't mind my having a second after you were gone not if I cried a good deal first ?'

' Come, come, take a cup o' tea and stop your tongue, do,' said good-humoured Mrs. Kimble, feeling some pride in a husband who must be regarded as so clever and amusing by the company generally.

The sound of the fiddle approaching within a distance at which it could be heard distinctly made the young people very impatient and to wish for the end of the meal.

' Why, there's Solomon in the hall,' said the Squire, ' and playing my fav'rite tune, .' believe — " The flaxen-headed ploughboy "; he's for giving us a hint as we aren't enough in a hurry to hear him play '.—' Bob,' he called out to his third long-legged son, who was at the other end of the room,' open the door, and tell Solomon to come in. He shall give us a tune here.'

Bob obeyed, and Solomon walked in, fiddling as he walked, for he would on no account break off in the middle of a tune.

' Here, Solomon,' said the Squire with loud patronage, ' round here, my man. Ah ! I knew it was " The flaxen-headed ploughboy " ; there's no finer tune.'

Solomon Macey, a small, hale old man, with an abundant crop of long white hair reaching nearly to his shoulders, advanced to the indicated spot, bowing reverently while he fiddled, as much as to say that he respected the company though he respected the key-note more. As soon as he had repeated the tune and lowered his fiddle, he bowed again to the Squire and the Rector, and said, ' I hope I see your honour and your reverence well, and wishing you health and long life and a happy New Year. And wishing the same to you Mr. Lammeter, sir, and to the other gentlemen, and the madams, and the young lasses.'

As Solomon uttered the last words, he bowed in all directions solicitously, lest he should be wanting in due respect. But thereupon he immediately began to prelude, and fell into the tune which he knew would be taken as a special compliment by Mr. Lammeter.

' Thank ye, Solomon, thank ye,' said Mr. Lammeter when the fiddle paused again. ' That's " Over the hills and far away ", that is. My father used to say to me, whenever we heard that tune, "Ah, had .' come from over the hills and far away." There's a many tunes I don't make head or tail of; but that speaks to me like the blackbird's whistle. I suppose it's the name; there's a deal in the name of a tune.'

But Solomon was already impatient to prelude again'

and presently broke with much spirit into ' Sir Roger de Coverley,' at which there was a sound of chairs pushed back and laughing voices.

' Ay, ay, Solomon, we know what that means,' said the Squire, rising. ' It's time to begin the dance, eh? Lead the way, then, and we'll all follow you.'

So Solomon, holding his white head on one side and playing vigorously, marched forward at the head of the gay procession into the White Parlour, where the mistletoe bough was hung, and multitudinous tallow candles made rather a brilliant effect, gleaming from among the berried holly boughs, and reflected in the old-fashioned oval mirrors fastened in the panels of the white wainscot.

Already Mr. Macey and a few other privileged villagers, who were allowed to be spectators on these great occasions, were seated on benches placed for them near the door; and great was the admiration and satisfaction in that quarter when the couples had formed themselves for the dance, and the Squire led off with Mrs. Crackenthorp, joining hands with the Rector and Mrs. Osgood. That was as it should be — that was what everybody had been used to.

' Hey, by jingo,' exclaimed Ben Winthrop, ' there's the young Squire leading off now, wi' Miss Nancy for partners! There's a lass for you I—like a pink-and-white posy; there's nobody 'ud think as any body could be so pritty. I shouldn't wonder if she's Madam Cass some day, after all; and nobody more rightfuller, for they'd make a fine match. You can find nothing against Master Godfrey's shapes, Macey, l'll bet a penny.'

Mr. Macey screwed up his mouth, leaned his head

farther on one side, and twirled his thumbs with a rapid movement as his eyes followed Godfrey up the dance. At last he summed up his opinion.

'Pretty well down'ard, but a bit too round i' the shoulder-blades. And as for them coats as he gets from the Flitton tailors, they're a poor cut to pay double money for.'

'Ah Mr. Macey, you and me are two folks,' said Ben, slightly indignant at this carping. 'When I've got a pot o' good ale, I like to swaller it, and do my inside good, i'stead o' smelling and staring at it to see if I can't find faut wi' the brewing. I should like you to pick me out a finer-limbed young fellow nor Master Godfrey— one as 'ud knock you down easier, or's more pleasanter looksed when he's piert and merry.'

'Tchuh!' said Mr. Macey, provoked to increased severity, 'he isn't come to his right colour yet; he's partly like a slack-baked pie. And I doubt he's got a soft place in his head, else why should he be turned round the finger by that offal Dunsey as nobody's seen o' late, and let him kill that fine hunting hoss as was the talk o' the country? And one while he was allays after Miss Nancy, and then it all went off again, like a smell o'hot porridge, as I may say. That wasn't my way when .' went a-coorting.'

'Ah, but mayhap Miss Nancy hung off like, and your lass didn't,' said Ben.

'I should say she didn't,' said Mr. Macey significantly. 'Before I said " sniff," I took care to know as she'd say " snaff," and pretty quick too. I wasn't a-going to open *my* mouth, like a dog at a fly, and snap it to again, wi' nothing to swaller.'

' Well, I think Miss Nancy's a-coming round again.' said Ben, ' for Master Godfrey doesn't look so down-hearted to-night. And I see he's for taking her away to sit down, now they're at the end o' the dance; that looks like sweet hearting, that does.'

The reason why Godfrey and Nancy had left the dance was not so tender as Ben imagined. In the close press of couples a slight accident had happened to Nancy's dress, which, while it was short enough to show her neat ankle in front, was long enough behind to be caught under the stately stamp of the Squire's foot, so as to rend certain stitches at the waist, and cause much sisterly agitation in Priscilla's mind, as well as serious concern in Nancy's. One's thoughts may be much occupied with love-struggles, but hardly so as to be insensible to an accident to one's clothes. Nancy had no sooner completed her duty in the figure they were dancing than she said to Godfrey, with a deep blush, that she must go and sit down till Priscilla could come to her ; for the sisters had already exchanged a short whisper and an open-eyed glance full of meaning. No reason less urgent than this could have prevailed on Nancy to give Godfrey this opportunity of sitting apart with her. As for Godfrey, he was feeling so happy and oblivious under the long charm of the country-dance with Nancy that he got rather bold on the strength of her confusion, and was capable of leading her straight away, without leave asked, into the adjoining small parlour, where the card-tables were set.

' Oh no, thank you,' said Nancy coldly, as soon as she perceived where he was going, ' not in there. I'll wait here till Priscilla's ready to come to me. I'm sorry

to bring you out of the dance and make myself troublesome.'

'Why, you'll be more comfortable here by yourself,' said the artful Godfrey. 'I'll leave you here till your sister can come.' He spoke in an indifferent tone.

That was an agreeable proposition, and just what Nancy desired; why, then, was she a little hurt that Mr. Godfrey should make it? They entered, and she seated herself on a chair against one of the card-tables, as the stiffest and most unapproachable position she could choose.

'Thank you, sir,' she said immediately. 'I needn't give you any more trouble. I'm sorry you've had such an unlucky partner.'

'That's very ill-natured of you,' said Godfrey, standing by her without any sign of intended departure,' to be sorry you've danced with me.'

'Oh no, sir, I don't mean to say what's ill-natured at all,' said Nancy, looking distractingly prim and pretty. 'When gentlemen have so many pleasures, one dance can matter but very little.'

'You know that isn't true. You know one dance with you matters to me more than all the other pleasures in the world.'

It was a long, long while since Godfrey had said anything so direct as that, and Nancy was startled. But her instinctive dignity and repugnance to any show of emotion made her sit perfectly still, and only throw a little more decision into her voice as she said,—

' No, indeed, Mr. Godfrey, that's not known to me, and I have very good reasons for thinking different. But if it's true, I don't wish to hear it.'

' Would you never forgive me then, Nancy — never think well of me, let what would happen ? Would you never think the present made amends for the past? Not if I turned a good fellow, and gave up everything you didn't like?'

' I should be glad to see a good change in anybody, Mr. Godfrey,' Nancy answered, with the slightest discernible difference of tone, ' but it 'lid be better if no change was wanted.'

' You're very hard-hearted, Nancy,' said Godfrey pettishly. ' You might encourage me to be a better fellow. I'm very miserable. But you have no feeling.'

'l think those have the least feeling that act wrong to begin with,' said Nancy, sending out a flash in spite of herself. Godfrey was delighted with that little flash, and would have liked to go on and make her quarrel with him ; Nancy was so exasperatingly quiet and firm. But she was not indifferent to him *yet.*

The entrance of Priscilla, bustling forward and saying, ' Dear heart alive, child, let us look at this gown,' cut off Godfrey's hopes of a quarrel.

' I suppose I must go now,' he said to Priscilla.

' It's no matter to me whether you go or stay,' said that frank lady, searching for something in her pocket with a preoccupied brow.

' Do *you* want me to go ? ' said Godfrey, looking at Nancy, who was now standing up by Priscilla's order.

' As you like.' said Nancy, trying to recover all her former coldness, and looking down carefully at the hem of her gown.

' Then I like to stay,' said Godfrey, with a reckless determination to get as much of this joy as he could to-night and think nothing of the morrow.

CHAPTER XIII

A LITTLE CHILD

MEANWHILE Godfrey's wife was walking with slow, uncertain steps through the snow-covered Raveloe lanes, carrying her child in her arms.

This journey on New Year's Eve was a premeditated act of vengeance which she had kept in her heart ever since Godfrey, in a fit of passion, had told her he would sooner die than acknowledge her as his wife. There would be a great party at the Red House on New Year's Eve, she knew; her husband would be smiling and smiled upon, hiding *her* existence in the darkest corner of his heart. But she would mar his pleasure; she would go in her dingy rags, with her faded face, once as handsome as the best, with her little child that had its father's hair and eyes, and disclose herself to the Squire as his eldest son's wife. It is seldom that the miserable can help regarding their misery as a wrong inflicted by those who are less miserable. Molly knew that the cause of her dingy rags was not her husband's neglect, but the demon Opium to whom she was enslaved, body and soul, except in the lingering mother's tenderness that refused to give him her hungry child. She knew this well; and yet, in her clear moments, when she was always very wretched, the sense of her want and degradation made her feel bitter towards Godfrey. *He* was well off; and if she had her rights, she would be well off too. The belief that he repented his marriage and suffered from it only made her more vindictive.

She had set out at an early hour, but had lingered on the road, inclined by her indolence to believe that if she waited under a warm shed, the snow would cease to fall. She had waited longer than she knew, and now that she found herself belated in the long rugged lanes hidden in snow, her courage began to fail her. It was seven o'clock, and by this time she was not very far from Raveloe, but she was not familiar enough with those monotonous lanes to know how near she was to her journey's end. She needed comfort, and she knew but one comforter — the familiar demon in her bosom ; but she hesitated a moment, after drawing out the black remnant, before she raised it to her lips. In that moment the mother's love pleaded for painful consciousness rather than oblivion — pleaded to be left in aching weariness rather than to have the encircling arms benumbed so that they could not feel the dear burden. ln another moment Molly had flung something away; but it was not the black remnant — it was an empty phiai And she walked on again under the breaking cloud, from which there came now and then the light of a quickly veiled star, for a freezing wind had sprung up since the snowing had ceased. But she walked always more and more drowsily, and clutched more and more automatically the sleeping child at her bosom.

Slowly the demon was working his will, and cold and weariness were his helpers. Soon she felt nothing but a strong longing to lie down and sleep. She had arrived at a spot where her footsteps were no longer checked by a hedgerow, and she had wandered vaguely, unable to distinguish any objects, notwithstanding the wide whiteness around her and the growing starlight. She sank

down against a straggling furze bush — an easy pillow enough; and the bed of snow, too, was soft She did not feel that the bed was cold, and did not heed whether the child would wake and cry for her. But her arms had not yet relaxed their instinctive clutch, and the little one slumbered on as gently as if it had been rocked in a lace trimmed cradle.

But the complete torpor came at last: the fingers opened, the arms unbent. Then the little head fell away from the bosom, and the blue eyes opened wide on the cold starlight. At first there was a little peevish cry of 'mammy.' and an effort to regain the pillowing arm and bosom; but mammy's ear was deaf, and the pillow seemed to be slipping away backward. Suddenly, as the child rolled downward on its mother's knees, ail wet with snow, its eyes were caught by a bright glancing light on the white ground. In an instant the child had slipped on all fours, and held out one little hand to catch the gleam. But the gleam would not be caught in that way, and now the head was held up to see where the cunning gleam came from. It came from a very bright place; and the little one, rising on its legs, toddled through the snow, the old grimy shawl in which it was wrapped trailing behind it, and the queer little bonnet dangling at its back — toddled on to the open door of Silas Marner's cottage, and right up to the warm hearth, where there was a bright fire of logs and sticks, which had thoroughly warmed the old sack (Silas's greatcoat) spread out on the bricks to dry. The little one, accustomed to be left to itself for long hours without notice from its mother, squatted down on the sack, and spread its tiny hands towards the blaze in perfect contentment,

gurgling and making many inarticulate communications to the cheerful fire, like a new-hatched gosling beginning to find itself comfortable. But presently the warmth had a lulling effect, and the little golden head sank down on the old sack, and the blue eyes were veiled by their delicate half-transparent lids.

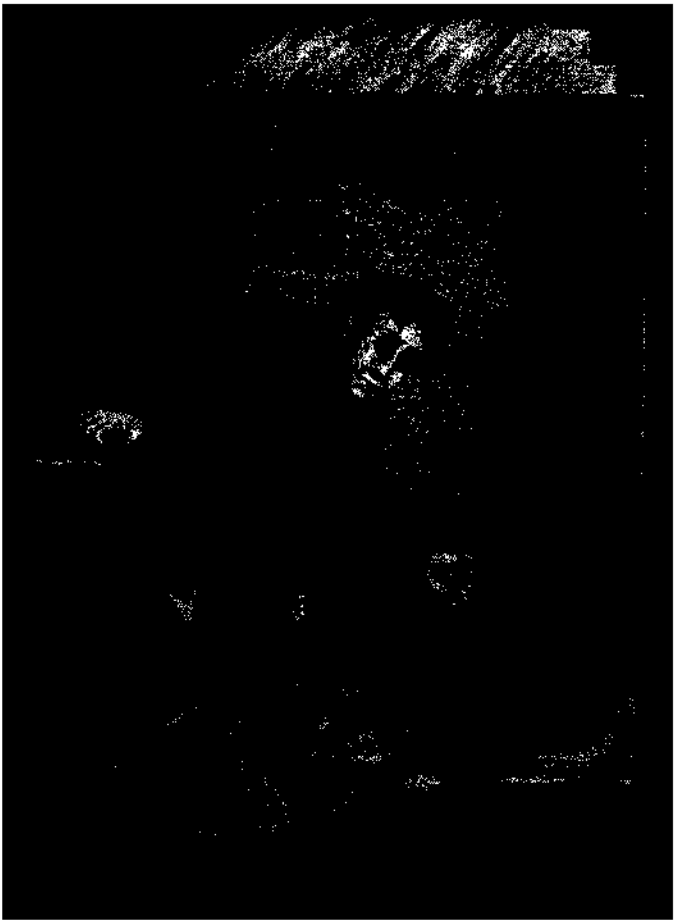
But where was Silas Marner while this strange visitor had come to his hearth? He was in the cottage, but he did not see the child. During the last few weeks, since he had lost his money, he had contracted the habit of opening his door and looking out from time to time, as if he thought that his money might be somehow coming back to him, or that some trace, some news of it, might be mysteriously on the road, and be caught by the listening ear or the straining eye.

In the evening twilight, and later whenever the night was not dark, Silas looked out on that narrow prospect round the Stone-pits, listening and gazing, not with hope, but with mere yearning and unrest.

This morning he had been told by some of his neighbours that it was New Year's Eve, and that he must sit up and hear the old year rung out and the new rung in, because that was good luck, and might bring his money back again. This was only a friendly Raveloe way of jesting with the half-crazy oddities of a miser, but it had perhaps helped to throw Silas into a more than usually excited state. Since the oncoming of twilight he had opened his door again and again, though only to shut it immediately at seeing all distance veiled by the falling snow. But the last time he opened it the snow had ceased, and the clouds were parting here and there. He stood and listened, and gazed for a long

while — there was really something on the road coming towards him then, but he caught no sign of it; and the stillness and the wide trackless snow made his solitude all the more terrible. He went in again, and put his right hand on the latch of the door to close it, but he did not close it. He was attacked by a cataleptic fit, and stood like a graven image, with wide but sightless eyes, holding open his door, powerless to resist either the good or evil that might enter there.

When the fit was over, Marner closed his door, and thought that nothing had happened, though he noticed that the light had grown dim, and that he was chilled and faint. This he thought was because he had been too long standing at the door and looking out. Turning towards the hearth, where the two logs had fallen apart, and sent forth only a red uncertain glimmer, he seated himself on his fireside chair, and was stooping to push his logs together when to his blurred vision it seemed as if there were gold on the floor in front of the hearth. Gold —his own gold —brought back to him as mysteriously as it had been taken away ! He felt his heart begin to beat violently, and for a few moments he was unable to stretch out his hand and grasp the restored treasure. In his excitement the heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger. He leaned forward at last, and stretched forth his hand; but instead of the hard coin with the familiar resisting outline, his fingers encountered soft warm curls. In utter amazement Silas fell on his knees and bent his head low to examine the marvel. it was a sleeping child — a round, fair thing, with soft yellow rings all ovejr its head. Could this be his little sister come back to him in a dream — his little sister whom he had carried about in



Silas fell on his knees.....it was a sleeping child — P. 84

his arms for a year before she died, when he was a small boy without shoes or stockings ? That was the first thought that darted across Silas's blank wonderment. *Was* it a dream? He rose to his feet again, pushed his logs together, and, throwing .on some dried leaves and sticks, raised a flame. But the flame did not disperse the vision; it only lit up more distinctly the little round form of the child and its shabby clothing. It was very much like his little sister. Silas sank into his chair powerless. How and when had the child come in without his knowledge ? He had never been beyond the door. But along with that question, and almost thrusting it away, there was a vision of the old home and the old streets leading to Lantern Yard; and within that vision another, of the thoughts which had been present with him in those far-off scenes. The thoughts were strange to him now, like old friendships impossible to revive; and yet he had a dreamy feeling that this child was somehow a message come to him from that far-off life. It stirred feelings that had never been moved in Raveloe — old promptings of tenderness — old impressions of awe at the thought of some Power presiding over his life.

But there was a cry on the hearth. The child had awaked, and Marner stooped to lift it on his knee. It clung round his neck, and burst louder and louder into cries of ' mammy'. Silas pressed it to him, and almost unconsciously uttered sounds of hushing tenderness, while he thought of giving it some of his porridge.

He had plenty to do through the next hour. The porridge, sweetened with some dry brown sugar from an old store which he had refrained from using for himself, stopped the cries of the little one, and made her

lift her blue eyes with a wide, quiet gaze at Silas as he put the spoon into her mouth. Presently she slipped from his knee, and began to toddle about, but with a pretty stagger that made Silas jump up and follow her lest she should fall against anything that would hurt her. But she only fell in a sitting posture on the ground, and began to pull at her boots, looking up at him with a crying face as if the boots hurt her. He took her on his knee again, but it was some time before it occurred to Silas's dull bachelor mind that the wet boots were the grievance, pressing on her warm ankles. He got them off with difficulty, and baby sat playing with her toes and looking up at Silas and laughing.

But the wet boots had at last suggested to Silas that the child had been walking on the snow, and so taking her up in his arms, he went to the door. As soon as he had opened it, there was the cry of 'mammy!' again, and now he noticed, as he bent forward, the marks made by the little feet on the virgin snow, and he followed their track to the furze bushes. 'Mammy!' the little one cried again and again, stretching itself forward, until it almost fell out of Silas's arms, before he himself was aware that there was something more than the bush before him — that there was a human body' with the head sunk low in the furze, and half-covered with the shaken snow.

CHAPTER XIV

THE RELEASE

IT was after the early supper-time at the Red House, and the bashful were no longer slow but were entering into all the fun of the evening. The Squire talked loudly, scattering snuff and patting his visitors' backs, preferring this to sitting at the whist-table. The servants, the heavy duties of supper being well over now, were at the lower door of the White Parlour, looking on at the dancing.

Godfrey had been stealing long glances at Nancy as she sat, near her father, watching Bob Cass, who was figuring in a hornpipe, when his eyes met an object as startling to him at that moment as if it had been an apparition from the dead — his own child, carried in Silas Marner's arms! Mr. Crackenthorp and Mr. Lammeter had already advanced to Silas, and Godfrey, unable to rest without hearing every word, joined them immediately — trying to control himself, but conscious that if any one noticed him, they must see that he was white-lipped and trembling.

But now all eyes at that end of the room were bent on Silas Marner. The Squire himself had risen, and asked angrily, ' How's this ? — what's this ? — what do you do coming in here in this way? '

[6] I'm come for the Doctor — I want the Doctor,' Silas had said, in the first moment, to Mr. Crackenthorp.

[4] Why, what's the matter, Marner ?' said the Rector.

' The Doctor's here; but say quietly what you want him for.'

'It's a woman,' said Silas, speaking low and half breathlessly, just as Godfrey came up. ' She's dead, I think — dead in the snow at the Stone-pits, not far from my door.'

Godfrey felt a great throb. There was one terror in his mind at that moment; it was that the woman might *not* be dead. That was an evil terror for a man of Godfrey's kindly disposition.

' Hush, hush !' said Mr. Crackenthorp. ' Go out into the hall there. I'll fetch the Doctor to you— Found a woman in the snow, and thinks she's dead,' he added, speaking low, to the Squire. ' Better say as little about it as possible; it will shock the ladies. Just tell them -a poor woman is ill from cold and hunger. I'll go and fetch Kimble.'

By this time, however, the ladies had pressed forward, curious to know what could have brought the solitary linen-weaver there under such strange circumstances, and interested in the pretty child, who, half alarmed and half attracted by the brightness and the numerous company, no\t frowned and hid her face now lifted up her head again, and buried her face with new determination.

' What child is it ? ' said several ladies at once, and among the rest Nancy Lammeter, addressing Godfrey.

' I don't know — some poor woman's who has been found in the snow, I believe,' was the answer Godfrey wrung from himself with a terrible effort. (' After all, *am* I certain ?' he hastened to add to himself.)

' Why, you'd better leave the child here, then, Master

Marner,' said good-natured Mrs. Kimble, hesitating, however, to take those dingy clothes into contact with her own ornamented satin bodice. 'I'll tell one o' the girls to fetch it.'

'No, no; I can't part with it; I can't let it go,' said Silas abruptly. 'It's come to me : I've a right to keep it.'

'Did you ever hear the like?' said'Mrs. Kimble in mild surprise to her neighbour.

'Now, ladies, I must trouble you to stand aside,' said Mr. Kimble, coming from the card-room, in some bitterness at the interruption, but drilled by the long habit of his profession into obedience to unpleasant calls, even when he was hardly sober.

'It's a nasty business turning out now, eh, Kimble ?' said the Squire. 'He might ha' gone for your young fellow — the 'prentice there — what's his name ?'

'Might ? ay, what's the use of talking about might ?' growled Uncle Kimble, hastening out with Marner, and followed by Mr. Crackenthorp and Godfrey.— 'Get me a pair of thick boots, Godfrey, will you? And stay — let somebody run to Winthrop's and fetch Dolly; she's the best woman to get. Ben was here himself before supper; is he gone ?'

'Yes, sir ,l met him,' said Marner: 'but I couldn't stop to tell him anything, only I said I was going for the doctor, and he said the Doctor was at the Squire's. And I made haste and ran, and there was nobody to be seen at the back o' the house, and so I went in to where the company was.'

The child, no longer distracted by the bright light and the smiling women's faces, began to cry and call

for 'mammy,' though always clinging to Marner, who had apparently won her thorough confidence. Godfrey had come back with the boots, and felt the cry as if some fibre were drawn tight within him.

' I'll go.' he said hastily, eager for some movement; ' I'll go and fetch the woman — Mrs. Winthrop.'

' Oh, pooh! send somebody else,' said Uncle Kimble, hurrying away with Marner.

' You'll let me know if I can be of any use, Kimble,' said Mr. Crackenthorp. But the Doctor was out of hearing.

Godfrey too had disappeared. He was gone to snatch his hat and coat, having just reflection enough to remember that he must not look like a madman; but he rushed out of the house into the snow without heeding his thin shoes.

In a few minutes he was walking quickly to the Stonepits by the side of Dolly, who, though feeling that she was entirely in her place in encountering cold and snow on an errand of mercy, was much concerned at a young gentleman's getting his feet wet under a like impulse.

' You'd a deal better go back, sir,' said Dolly, with respectful compassion. ' You've no call to catch cold ; and I'd ask you if you'd be good as tell my husband to come, on your way back — he's at the Rainbow, I doubt — if you found him any way sober enough to be o' use. Or else, there's Mrs. Snell 'ud happen send the boy up to fetch and carry, for there may be things wanted from the Doctor's.'

' No, I'll stay; now I'm once out, I'll stay outside here,' said Godfrey when they came opposite Marner's

cottage. 'You can come and tell me if I can do anything.'

'Well, sir, you're very good; you've a tender heart,' said Dolly, going to the door.

Godfrey was too upset in mind to feel a twinge of self-reproach at this undeserved praise. He walked up and down, unconscious that he was plunging ankle deep in snow, unconscious of everything but trembling suspense about what was going on in the cottage, and the effect of each alternative on his future lot. No, not quite unconscious of everything else. Deeper down, and half-smothered by passionate desire and dread, there was the sense that he ought not to be waiting on these alternatives; that he ought to accept the consequences of his deeds, own the miserable wife, and fulfil the claims of the helpless child. But he had not moral courage enough to contemplate that active renunciation of Nancy as possible for him; he had only conscience and heart enough to make him for ever uneasy under the weakness that forbade the renunciation. And at this moment his mind leaped away from all restraint toward the sudden prospect of deliverance from his long bondage.

'Is she dead?' he repeated to himself. 'If she is, I may marry Nancy; and then I shall be a good fellow in future, and have no secrets, and the child — shall be taken care of somehow.' Then again he said, 'She may live, and then it's all up with me.'

Godfrey never knew how long it was before the door of the cottage opened and Mr. Kimble came out. He went forward to meet his uncle, prepared to suppress the agitation he must feel, whatever news he was to hear.

'I waited for you, as I'd come so far,' he said, speaking first.

'Pooh! it was nonsense for you to come out; why didn't you send one of the men? There's nothing to be done. She's dead — has been dead for hours, I should say.'

'What sort of woman is she?' said Godfrey, feeling the blood rush to his face.

'A young woman, but emaciated, with long black hair. Some vagrant — quite in rags. She's got a wedding-ring on, however. They must fetch her away to the workhouse to-morrow. Come, come along.'

'I want to look at her,' said Godfrey. 'I think I saw such a woman yesterday. I'll overtake you in a minute or two.'

Mr. Kimble went on, and Godfrey turned back to the cottage. He cast only one glance at the dead face on the pillow, which Dolly had smoothed with decent care; but he remembered that last look at his unhappy, hated wife so well that at the end of sixteen years every line in the worn face was present to him when he told the full story of this night.

He turned immediately towards the hearth, where Silas Marner sat lulling the child. She was perfectly quiet now, but not asleep — only soothed by sweet porridge and warmth into that wide-gazing calm which makes us older human beings, with our inward turmoil, feel a certain awe in the presence of a little child. The wide-open blue eyes looked up at Godfrey's without any uneasiness or sign of recognition, while the father felt a strange mixture of feelings — a conflict of regret and joy.

'You'll take the child to the parish to-morrow?' asked Godfrey, speaking as indifferently as he could.

'Who says so?' said Marner sharply. 'Will they make me take hei?'

'Why, you wouldn't like to keep her, should you — an old bachelor like you?'

'Till anybody shows they've a right to take her away from me,' said Marner. 'The mother's dead, and I reckon it's got no father; it's a lone thing, and I'm a lone thing. My money's gone — I don't know where; and this is come from I don't know where. I know nothing; I'm partly mazed.'

'Poor little thing!' said Godfrey. 'Let me give something towards finding it clothes.'

He had put his hand in his pocket and found half a guinea, and thrusting it into Silas's hand, he hurried out of the cottage to overtake Mr. Kimble.

'Ah, I see it is not the same woman I saw,' he said as he came up. 'It's a pretty little child. The old fellow seems to want to keep it: that's strange for a miser like him. But I gave him a trifle to help him out; the parish isn't likely to quarrel with him for the right to keep the child.'

Godfrey reappeared in the White Parlour with dry feet, and, since the truth must be told, with a sense of relief and gladness that was too strong for painful thoughts to struggle with. For could he not venture now, whenever opportunity offered, to say the tenderest things to Nancy Lammeter — to promise her and himself that he would always be just what she would desire to see him? There was no danger that his dead wife would be recognized. Those were not days of active inquiry

and wide report; and as for the registry of their marriage, that was a long way off, hurried in unturned pages, away from every one's interest but his own. Dunsey might betray him if he came back; but Dunsey might be won to silence.

As for the child, he would see that it was cared for; he would never forsake it; he would do everything but own it. Perhaps it would be just as happy in life without being owned by its father, seeing that nobody could tell how things would turn out, and that — is there any other reason wanted? — well, then, that the father would be much happier without owning the child.

CHAPTER XV

EPPIE

SILAS MARNER'S determination to keep the 'tramp's child' was another great surprise to the village, especially to the women.

Notable mothers, who knew what it was to keep children 'whole and sweet,' as well as lazy mothers, who knew what it was to be interrupted in folding their arms and scratching their elbows by the mischievous propensities of children just firm on their legs, were alike interested in conjecturing how a lone man would manage with a two-year old child on his hands, and were equally ready with their suggestions — the notable chiefly telling him what he had better do, and the lazy ones being emphatic in telling him what he would never be able to do.

Among the notable mothers Dolly Winthrop was the one whose help and suggestions were the most acceptable to Marner, for they were made without any fuss and bother. Silas had shown her the half-guinea given to him by Godfrey, and had asked her what he should do about getting some clothes for the child.

' Eh, Master Marner,' said Dolly, ' there's no call to buy, no more nor a pair o' shoes, for I've got the little petticoats as Aaron wore five years ago; and it's ill spending the money on them baby-clothes, for the child 'ull grow like grass i' May, bless it—that it will.'

And the same day Dolly brought her bundle, and displayed to Marner one by one the tiny garments in their due order of succession, most of them patched and darned, but clean and neat as fresh-sprung herbs. This was the introduction to a great ceremony with soap and water, from which baby came out in new beauty, and sat on Dolly's knee, handling her toes and chuckling and patting her palms together with an air of having made several discoveries about herself, which she communicated by alternate sounds of ' gug-gug-gug' and 'mammy.' The mammy' was not a cry of need or uneasiness : Baby had been used to utter it without expecting either tender sound or touch to follow.

' Anybody 'ud think the angils in heaven couldn't be prettier,' said Dolly, rubbing the golden curls and kissing them. "And to think of its being covered wf them dirty rags; and the poor mother — froze to death! But there's Them as took care of it and brought it to your door, Master Marner. The door was open, and it walked in over the snow, like as if it had been a little starved robin. Didn't you say the door was open?'

'Yes,' said Silas meditatively — 'yes; the door was open. The money's gone I don't know where, and this is come from I don't know where.'

He had not mentioned to any one his unconsciousness of the child's entrance, shrinking from questions which might lead to the fact he himself suspected — namely, that he had been in one of his trances.

' Ah,' said Dolly, with soothing gravity, [k] it's like the night and the morning, and the sleeping and the waking, and the rain and the harvest — one goes and the other comes, and we know nothing how nor where. We may strive and scrat and fend, but it's little we can do after all; the big things come and go wi' no striving o' our'n— they do, that they do; and I think you're in the right on it to keep the little un, Master Marner, seeing as it's been sent to you, though there's folks as thinks different. You'll happen be a bit moithered with it while it's so little : but I'll come, and welcome, and see to it for you. I've a bit o' time to spare most days ; for when one gets up bstimes i' the morning, the clock seems to stan' still tow'rt ten, afore it's time to go about the victual. So as I say, Fll come and see to the child for you, and welcome.'

'Thank you... kindly,' said Silas, hesitating a little, ' I'll be glad if you'll tell me things. But,' he added uneasily, leaning forward to look at Baby with some jealousy, as she was resting her head backward against Dolly's arm and eyeing him contentedly from a distance — ' but I want to do things for it myself, else it may get fond o' somebody else, and not fond o' me. I've been used to fending for myself in the house; I can learn, I can learn.'

'Eh, to be sure,' said Dolly gently. 'I've seen men as are wonderful handy wi' children. The men are awk'ard and contrairy mostly, God help 'em; but when the drink's out of 'em, they aren't unsensible, though they're bad for leeching and bandaging — so fiery and unpatient. You see this goes first, next the skin,' proceeded Dolly, taking up the little shirt and putting it on.

'Yes,' said Marner docilely, bringing his eyes very close, that they might be initiated in the mysteries; whereupon Baby seized his head with both her small arms and put her lips against his face with purring noises,

'See there,' said Dolly, with a woman's tender tact, 'she's fondest o' you. She wants to go o' your lap, I'll be bound. Go then, take her, Master Marner; you can put the things on, and then you can say as you've done for her from the first of her coming to you.'

Marner took her on his lap, trembling with an emotion mysterious to himself, at something unknown dawning on his life. Thought and feeling were so confused within him that if he had tried to give them utterance, he could only have said that the child was come instead of the gold — that the gold had turned into the child. He took the garments from Dolly, and put them on under her teaching — interrupted, of course, by Baby's gymnastics.

'There, then! why, you take to it quite easy, Master Marner,' said Dolly; 'but what shall you do when you're forced to sit in your loom? For she'll get busier and mischievouser every day — she will, bless her. It's lucky as you've got that high hearth i'stead of a grate, for that keeps the fire more out of her reach; but if you've got anything as can be spilt or broke, or as is fit

to cut her fingers off, she'll be at it, and it is but right you should know.'

Silas meditated a little while in some perplexity. ' I'll tie her to the leg o' the loom,' he said at last — ' tie her with a good long strip o' something.'

' Well, mayhap that'll do, as it's a little gell, for they're easier persuaded to sit i' one place nor the lads. I know what the lads are, for I've had four — four I've had God knows — and if you was to take and tie 'em up, they'd make a fighting and a crying as if you was ringing the pigs. But I'll bring you my little chair, and some bits o' red rag and things for her to play wi'; an' she'll sit and chatter to 'em as if they was alive. Eh, if it wasn't a sin to the lads to wish 'em made different, bless 'em, I should ha' been glad for one of 'em to be a little gell; and to think as I could ha' taught her to scour, and mend, and the knitting, and everything! But I can teach 'em this little un, Master Marner, when she gets old enough.'

'But she'll be *my* little un,' said Marner, rather hastily ; ' she'll be nobody else's.'

' No, to be sure ; you'll have a right to her, if you're a father to her, and bring her up according. But,' added Dolly, coming to a point which she had determined beforehand to touch upon, ' you must bring her up like christened folks's children, and take her to church, and let her learn her catechize, as my little Aaron can say off—the "I believe," and everything, and " hurt nobody by word or deed " — as well as if he was the clerk. That's what you must do, Master Marner, if you'd do the right thing by the orphin child.'

Marner's pale face flushed suddenly under a new anxiety, for he did not quite follow Dolly.

' And it's my belief,' she went on, ' as the poor little creature has never been christened, and it's nothing'but right as the parson should be spoke to ; and if you was noways unwilling, I'd talk to Mr. Macey about it this very day. For if the child ever went anyways wrong, and you hadn't done your part by it, Master Marner — 'noculation, and everything to save it from harm — it 'ud be a thorn i' your bed for ever o' this side the grave; and I can't think as it 'ud be easy lying down for anybody when they'd got to another world if they hadn't done their part by the helpless children as come wi'out their own asking.'

Dolly herself was disposed to be silent for some time now, for she had spoken from the depths of her own simple belief; and was much concerned to know whether her words would produce the desired effect on Silas. He was puzzled and anxious, for Dolly's word ' christened' conveyed no distinct meaning to him. He had only heard of baptism, and had only seen the baptism of grown-up men and women.

' What is it as you mean by " christened " ?' he said at last timidly. ' Won't folks be good to her without it ?'

'Dear, dear, Master Marner!' said Dolly, with gentle distress and compassion. ' Had you never no father nor mother as taught you to say your prayers, and as there's good words and good things to keep us from harm ?'

' Yes,' said Silas in a low voice; ' I know a deal about that — used to, used to. But your ways are different; my country was a good way.off.' He paused a

few moments, and then added more decidedly, 'But I want to do everything as can be done for the child; and whatever's right for it i' this country, and you think 'ull do it good, I' ll act according, if you' ll tell me.'

'Well, then, Master Marner,' said Dolly, inwardly rejoiced, Til ask Mr. Macey to speak to the parson about it; and you must fix on a name for it, because it must have a name giv' it when it's christened.'

'My mother's name was Hephzibah,' said Silas, 'and my little sister was named after her.'

'Eh, that's a hard name,' said Dolly. 'I partly think it isn't a christened name.'

'It's a Bible name,' said Silas, old ideas recurring.

'Then I've no call to speak again'it,' said Dolly, rather startled by Silas's knowledge on this head; 'but you see I'm no scholard, and I'm slow at catching the words. My husband says I'm allays like as if I was putting the haft for the handle — that's what he says — for he's very sharp, God help him. But it was awk'ard calling your little sister by such a hard name when you'd got nothing big to say, like —wasn't it, Master Marner?'

'We called her Eppie,' said Silas.

'Well, if it was noways wrong to shorten the name, it 'ud be a deal handier. And so I'll go now, Master Marner, and I'll speak about the christening afore dark; and I wish you the best o' luck, and it's my belief as it'll come to you if you do what's right by the orphin child. And there's the 'noculation to be seen to; and as to washing its bits o' things, you need look to nobody but me, for I can do 'em wi' one hand when I've got my suds about. Eh, the blessed angil! You'll let me bring my Aaron one o' these days, and he'll show her his

little cart as his father's made for him, and the black-and-white pup as he's got a-rearing.'

Baby *was* christened, and Silas, making himself as clean and tidy as he could, appeared for the first time within the church. He had no distinct idea about the baptism and the church-going, but Dolly had said it was for the good of the child, and that was enough for him.

As the weeks grew to months, the child created fresh links between his life and the lives of those around him. Unlike the gold which needed nothing, Eppie was a creature of ever-growing desires, seeking and loving sunshine, and living sounds, and living movements, and making all who saw her love her and her pretty ways. As Silas thought of the coming years, when Eppie would understand how he cared for her, it was in the family ties of his neighbours that he saw a picture of the days to come. Gradually he awoke to a new life. His gold had made him sit weaving longer and longer, but Eppie often called him away from his weaving, and made him think the pauses a holiday, filling his life with some of the freshness of her young life and some of its joy.

And when the sunshine grew strong and lasting, so that the buttercups were thick in the meadows, Silas might be seen in the sunny midday, or in the late afternoon when the shadows were lengthening under the hedgerows, strolling out with uncovered head to carry Eppie beyond the Stone-pits to where the flowers grew, till they reached some favourite bank where he could sit down. Here Eppie would toddle to pluck the flowers, and make remarks to the winged things that murmured happily above the bright petals, calling 'Dad-dad's attention continually by bringing him the flowers. Then

she would turn her ear to some sudden bird-note, and Silas learned to please her by making signs of hushed stillness, that they might listen for the note to come again. And when it came, she would set up her small back and laugh with gurgling triumph. Sitting on the banks in this way, Silas began to look for the once familiar herbs again, and as the leaves, with their unchanged outline and markings, lay on his palm, he thought of the days long past, though only for a moment.

When Eppie was three, she was full of mischief, and she could be troublesome in many ways. Marner watched over her, and tried to be patient, for he did not like to punish her. But Dolly Winthrop told him that punishment was good for Eppie ; and that, as for rearing a child without making it tingle a little in soft and safe places now and then, it was not to be done.

'To be sure, there's another thing you might do, Master Marner,' added Dolly meditatively: 'you might shut her up once i' the coal-hole. That was what I did wi' Aaron, for I was that silly wi' the youngest lad as I could never bear to smack him. Not as I could find i' my heart to let him stay i' the coal-hole more nor a minute, but it was enough to colly him all over, so as he must be new washed and dressed, and it was as good as a rod to him — that was. But I put it upo' your conscience, Master Marner, as there's one of'em you must choose — ayther smacking or the coal-hole — else she'll get so masterful there'll be no holding her.'

There was truth in what Dolly said, but she gave advice hard to follow, not only because it was painful to Marner to hurt Eppie, but he was afraid lest, should he punish her, she would love him the less for it. To those

who looked on, it was clear that Eppie, with her short toddling steps, must lead father Silas a pretty dance on any fine morning when circumstances favoured mischief.

Dolly had warned Marner to keep his scissors out of Eppie's reach, and he always took care to do so. One morning, however, he was particularly busy in his loom, and he forgetfully left the scissors on a ledge which Eppie's arm was long enough to reach. Their click had had a peculiar attraction for her ear, and she had often seen Marner cut with them. Now like a small mouse, watching her opportunity, she stole quietly from her corner, and securing the scissors, she toddled back to her chair. In a jagged but effectual manner she cut the broad linen strip with which Marner had tied her to his loom, and in two moments she had run out at the open door, where the sunshine was inviting her while poor Silas believed her to be a better child than usual. It was not until he happened to need his scissors that the terrible fact burst upon him. Then shaken by the fear that she had fallen into the Stone-pit, he rushed out calling ' Eppie,' and ran eagerly about the unenclosed space, exploring the dry cavities into which she might have fallen. Then he gazed at the smooth red surface of the water, and the cold drops stood on his brow. How long had she been out ? There was one hope — that she had crept through the stile and got into the fields, where he always took her to stroll. But the grass was high in the meadow, and so after peering all round the hedgerows, he traversed the grass. But the meadow was searched in vain; and he got over the stile into the next field, looking with dying hope towards a small pond which was now reduced to its summer shallowness,

with a wide margin of wet clay. Here, however, sat Eppie, talking cheerfully to her own small boot, which she was using as a bucket to convey the water into a deep hoofmark, while her little naked foot was planted comfortably on a cushion of olive-green mud. A red-headed calf was gazing at her through the opposite hedge.

Silas, overcome with convulsive joy at finding his treasure again, could do nothing but snatch her up and cover her with half-sobbing kisses. It was not until he had carried her home, and had begun to think of the necessary washing, that he recollected the need that he should punish Eppie and 'make her remember'. The fear that she might run away again and come to harm made him feel that he really ought to punish her, and for the first time he determined to try the coal-hole, a small closet near the hearth.

'Naughty, naughty Eppie,' he suddenly began, holding her on his knee, and pointing to her muddy feet and clothes, — 'naughty to cut with the scissors and run away. Eppie must go into the coal-hole for being naughty. Daddy must put her in the coal-hole.'

He half expected that this would be shock enough, and that Eppie would begin to cry. But instead of that she began to shake herself on his knee, as if she liked the thought of being in the coal-hole. Seeing that he must carry out his threat, he put her into the coal-hole, and held the door closed, with a trembling sense that he was using a strong measure. For a moment there was silence, but then came a little cry, 'Opy, opy!' and Silas let her out again, saying, 'Now, Eppie 'ull never

be naughty again, else she must go in the coal-hole, a black, naughty place.'

The weaving must stand still a long while this morning, for now Eppie must be washed and have clean clothes on ; but it was to be hoped that this punishment would have a lasting effect, and save time in future — though perhaps it would have been better if Eppie had cried more.

In half an hour she was clean again, and Silas having turned his back to see what he could do with the linen band, threw it down again, with the reflection that Eppie would be good without fastening for the rest of the morning. He turned round again, and was going to place her in her little chair near the loom, when she peeped out at him with black face and hands again, and said, ' Eppie in de toal-hole P

This total failure of the coal-hole discipline shook Silas's belief in the efficacy of punishment. ' She'd take it all for fun,' he observed to Dolly, 'if I didn't hurt her, and that I can't do, Mrs. Winthrop. If she makes me a bit o' trouble, I can bear it. And she's got no tricks but what she'll grow out of.'

' Well, that's partly true, Master Marner,' said Dolly sympathetically; ' and if you can't bring your mind to frighten her off touching things, you must do what you can to keep 'em out of her way. That's what I do wi' the pups as the lads are allays a-rearing. They *will* worry and gnaw — worry and gnaw they will, if it was one's Sunday cap as hung anywhere so as they could drag it. They know no difference, God help 'em; it's the pushing o' the teeth as sets 'em on, that's what it is.'

So Eppie was reared without punishment, Silas

bearing with her little deeds of mischief. The stone hut was made a happy home for her and also in the world that lay beyond the stone hut she knew nothing of frowns and denials.

In spite of the difficulty of carrying her and his yarn or linen at the same time, Silas took her with him in most of his journeys to the farmhouses, unwilling to leave her behind at Dolly Winthrop's who was always ready to take care of her; and little curly-headed Eppie' the weaver's child became an object of interest at several outlying homesteads, as well as in the village. Silas met with open smiling faces and cheerful questioning as a person whose hopes and difficulties could be understood. Everywhere he must sit a little and talk about the child, and words of interest were always ready for him. ' Ah, Master Marner, you'll be lucky if she takes the measles soon and easy!' or, ' Why, there isn't many lone men 'ud ha' been wishing to take up with a little un like that. But I reckon the weaving makes you handier than men as do out-door work; you are partly as handy as a woman for weaving comes next to spinning.' Elderly masters and mistresses, seated in large kitchen arm-chairs, felt Eppie's round arms and legs, and pronounced them remarkably firm, telling Silas that if she turned out well (which, however, there was no telling), it would be a fine thing for him to have a steady lass to do for him when he got helpless. Servant maidens were fond of carrying her out to look at the hens and chickens, or to see if any cherries could be shaken down in the orchard. No child was afraid of approaching Silas -when Eppie was near him — there was no repulsion around him now, either for young or old; for the little child had come to link him

once more with the whole world. There was love between him and the child that blent them into one, and there was love between the child and the world.

Silas began now to think of Raveloe life entirely in relation to Eppie — she must have everything that was good in Raveloe; and he listened docilely, that he might come to understand better what this life was, from which for fifteen years he had stood aloof as from a strange thing.

In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's.

CHAPTER XVI

THE DAY OF HAPPINESS

GODFREY CASS'S cheek and eye were brighter than ever now. He was so undivided in his aims that he seemed like a man of firmness. No Dunsey had come back. People had made up their minds that he was gone for a soldier, or gone "out of the country", and no one cared to be specific in their inquiries on a subject delicate to a respectable family. Godfrey had ceased to see the shadow of Dunsey across his path; and the path now lay straight forward to the accomplishment of his best, longest-cherished wishes. Everybody said Mr. Godfrey had taken the right turn; and it was pretty clear what would be the end of things, for there were not many days in the week that he was not seen riding to the Warrens. Godfrey himself, when he was asked jocosely if the day had been fixed, smiled with the pleasant consciousness of a lover who could say 'yes,' if he liked. He felt a reformed man, delivered from temptation ; and the vision of his future life seemed to him as a promised land for which he had no cause to fight. He saw himself with all his happiness centred on his own hearth, where Nancy would smile on him as he played with the children.

And that other child,— not on the hearth — he would not forget it; he would see that it was well provided for. That was a father's duty.

PART II

CHAPTER XVII

THE STONE COTTAGE

IT was a bright autumn Sunday, sixteen years after Silas Marner had found his new treasure on the hearth. The bells of the old Raveloe church were ringing the cheerful peal which told that the morning service was ended, and out of the arched doorway in the tower came slowly, now and again stopped by friendly greetings and questions, the richer parishioners who had chosen this bright Sunday morning for church-going. It was the rural fashion of that time for the more important members of the congregation to depart first, while their humbler neighbours waited and looked on, stroking their bent heads or dropping their curtsies to any large ratepayer who turned to notice them.

Foremost among these advancing groups of well-clad people, there are some whom we shall recognize, in spite of Time, who has laid his hand on them all. The tall blonde man of forty is not much changed in feature from the Godfrey Cass of six-and-twenty. He is only fuller in flesh, and has only lost the indefinable look of youth — a loss which is marked even when the eye is undulled and the wrinkles are not yet come. Perhaps the pretty woman, not much younger than he, who is leaning on his arm, is more changed than her husband. The lovely bloom that used to be always on her cheek now comes but fitfully, with the fresh morning air or with some strong surprise; yet to all who love human

faces best for what they tell of human experience, Nancy's beauty has a heightened interest. The firm yet placid mouth, the clear honest glance of the brown eyes, speak now of a nature that has been tested and has kept its highest qualities.

Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey Cass (any higher title has died away from Raveloe lips since the old Squire was gathered to his fathers and his inheritance was divided} have turned round to look for the tall aged man and the plainly-dressed woman who are a little behind — Nancy having observed that they must wait for 'father and Priscilla' — and now they all turn into a narrower path leading across the churchyard to a small gate opposite to the Red House. We will not follow them now ; for may there not be some others in this departing congregation whom we should like to see again — some of those who are not likely to be handsomely clad and whom we may not recognize so easily as the master and mistress of the Red House ?

But it is impossible to mistake Silas Marner. His large brown eyes seem to have gathered a longer vision, as is the way with eyes that have been short-sighted in early life, and they have a less vague, a more answering look; but in everything else one sees signs of a frame much enfeebled by the lapse of the sixteen years. The weaver's bent shoulders and white hair give him almost the look of advanced age, though he is not more than five-and-fifty; but there is the freshest blossom of youth close by his side — a blonde dimpled girl of eighteen, with a wealth of curly auburn hair.

Eppie surely divines that there is some one behind her who is thinking about her very particularly, and

mustering courage to come to her side as soon as they are out in the lane, else why should she look rather shy, and take care not to turn away her head from her father Silas, to whom she keeps murmuring little sentences as to who was at church, and who was not at church, and how pretty the red mountain-ash is over the rectory wall.

'I wish *we* had a little garden, father, with double daisies in, like Mrs. Winthrop's,' said Eppie, when they were out in the lane; 'only they say it'ud take a deal of digging and bringing fresh soil — and you couldn't do that, could you, father? Anyhow, I shouldn't like you to do it, for it 'ud be too hard work for you.'

'Yes, I could do it, child, if you want a bit o' garden. These long evenings I could work at taking in a little bit o' the waste — just enough for a root or two o' flowers for you, and again i' the morning I could have a turn wi' the spade before I sat down to the loom. Why didn't you tell me before as you wanted a bit o' garden ?'

'.'can dig it for you, Master Marner,' said a young man in fustian, who had been walking behind her and who was now by Eppie's side, entering into the conversation without the trouble of formalities. '.It'll be play to me after I've done my day's work, or any odd bits o' time when the work's slack. And I'll bring you some soil from Mr. Cass's garden — he'll let me and willing.'

'Eh, Aaron, my lad, are you there?' said Silas; 'I wasn't aware of you; for when Eppie 's talking o' things, I see nothing but what she's a-saying. Well, if you could help me with the digging, we might get her a bit o' garden all the sooner.'

'Then if you'll think well and good,' said Aaron, 'I'll come to the Stone-pits this afternoon, and we'll

settle what land's to be taken in, and I'll get up an hour earlier i' the morning, and begin on it.'

' But not if you don't promise me not to work at the hard digging, father,' said Eppie. ' For I shouldn't ha' said anything about it,' she added, half-bashfully, half-roguishly, only Mrs. Winthrop said as Aaron 'ud be so good, and——'

' And you might ha' known without mother telling you,' said Aaron. ' And Master Marner knows too, I hope, as I'm able and willing to do a turn o' work for him, and he won't do me the unkindness to anyways take it out o' my hands.'

' There, now, father, you won't work in it till it's all easy,' said Eppie, ' and you and me can mark out the beds, and make holes and plant the roots. It'll be a deal livelier at the Stone-pits when we've got some flowers, for I always think the flowers can see us and know what we're talking about. And I'll have a bit o' rosemary and bergamot and thyme, because they're so sweet-smelling; but there's no lavender only in the gentlefolk's gardens, I think.'

' That's no reason why you shouldn't have some,' said Aaron, 'for I can bring you slips of anything ; I'm forced to cut no end of 'em when I'm gardening, and throw 'em away mostly. There's a big bed o' lavender at the Red House; the missis is very fond of it.'

' Well,' said Silas gravely, ' so as you don't make free for us, or ask for anything as is worth much at the Red House; for Mr. Cass's been so good to us, and built us up the new end o' the cottage, and given us beds and things, as I couldn't abide to be imposin' for garden-stuff or anything else.'

'No, no, there's no imposin,' said Aaron; 'there's never a garden in all the parish but what there's endless waste in it for want o' somebody as could use everything *up.* It's what I think to myself sometimes, as there need nobody run short o' victuals if the land was made the most on, and there was never a morsel but what could find its way to a mouth. It sets one thinking o' that—gardening does. But I must go back now, else mother 'ull be in trouble as I aren't there.'

'Bring her with you this afternoon, Aaron,' said Eppie; 'I shouldn't like to fix about the garden and her not know everything from the first—should *you* father?'

'Ay, bring her if you can, Aaron,' said Silas; 'she's sure to have a word to say as'll help us to set things on their right end.'

Aaron turned back up the village, while Silas and Eppie went on up the lonely sheltered lane.

'O daddy!' she began, when they were in privacy, clasping and squeezing Silas's arm, and skipping round to give him an energetic kiss. 'My little old daddy! I'm so glad. I don't think I shall want anything else when we've got a little garden; and I knew Aaron would dig it for us,' she went on with roguish triumph —'I knew that very well.'

'You're a deep little puss, you are,' said Silas, with the mild, passive happiness of love-crowned age in his face; 'but you'll make yourself fine and beholden to Aaron.'

'Oh, no I shan't,' said Eppie, laughing and frisking; 'he likes it.'

'Come, come, let me carry your prayer-book, else you'll be dropping it, jumping i' that way.'

There was the sound of a sharp bark inside, as Eppie put the key in the door. It was the sign of an excited welcome that was awaiting them from a knowing brown terrier, who after dancing at their legs in a hysterical manner, rushed with a worrying noise at a tortoise-shell kitten under the loom, and then rushed back with a sharp bark again, as much as to say, ' I have done my duty by this feeble creature, you perceive'; while the lady mother of the kitten sat sunning her white bosom in the window, and looked round with a sleepy air of expecting caresses, though she was not going to take any trouble for them.

The presence of this happy animal life was not the only change which had come over the interior of the stone cottage. There was no bed now in the living-room, and the small space was well filled with decent furniture, all bright and clean enough to satisfy Dolly Winthrop's eye. The oaken table and three-cornered oaken chair were hardly what was likely to be seen in so poor a cottage. They had come, with the beds and other things, from the Red House. Mr. Godfrey Cass, as every one said in the village, did very kindly by the weaver, and it was nothing but right a man should be looked on and helped by those who could afford it, when he had brought up an orphan child and been father and mother to her — and had lost his money, too, so as he had nothing but what he worked for week by week, and when the weaving was going down too — for there was less and less flax spun — and Master Marner was none so young. Nobody was jealous of the weaver, for he was regarded as an exceptional person, who had special claims on neighbourly help. Mr. Macey, now a

very feeble old man of fourscore and six, never seen except in his chimney corner or sitting in the sunshine at his door-sill, was of opinion that when a man had done what Silas had done by an orphan child, it was a sign that his money would come to light again, or that the robber would be made to answer for it.

Silas sat down now and watched Eppie with a satisfled gaze as she spread the clean cloth, and set on it the potato-pie, warmed up slowly in a safe Sunday fashion, by being put into a dry pot over a slowly-dying fire, as the best substitute for an oven. For Silas would not consent to have a gtate and oven added to his conveniences; he loved the old brick hearth as he had loved his brown pot; and was it not there where he had found Eppie?

Silas ate his dinner more silently than usual, often laying down his knife and fork as his gaze rested on the rippling radiance of Eppie's hair and the whiteness of her rounded chin and throat set off by the dark-blue cotton gown. Eppie was not quite a common village maiden, but had a touch of refinement and nice feelings. The tender and peculiar love with which Silas had reared her in almost inseparable companionship with himself in the little cottage away from the village had preserved her from the lowering influences of the village talk and habits.

After dinner everything was cleared away, so that the house might be tidy when Dolly came, and Silas and Eppie came out into the sunshine.

'It's just come into my head,' said Silas as they walked out, 'what we're to do for a fence—mayhap Aaron can help us to a thought; but a fence we must

have, else the donkeys and things 'ull come and trample everything down. And fencing's hard to be got at, by what I can make out.'

'Oh, I'll tell you, daddy,' said Eppie, clasping her hands suddenly after a minute's thought. 'There's lots o' loose stones about, some of 'em not big, and we might lay 'em atop of one another and make a wall; you and me could carry the smallest, and Aaron 'ud carry the rest — I know he would.'

'Eh, my precious un,' said Silas,' there isn't enough stones to go all round; and as for you carrying, why, wi' your little arms you couldn't carry a stone no bigger than a turnip. You're dellicate made, my dear,' he added, with a tender intonation; 'that's what Mrs. Winthrop says.'

'Oh, I'm stronger than you think, daddy,' said Eppie; 'and if there wasn't stones enough to go all round, why they'll go part o' the way, and then it'll be easier to get sticks and things for the rest. See here, round the big pit, what a many stones !'

She skipped forward to the pit, meaning to lift one of the stones and exhibit her strength, but she started back in surprise.

'O father, just come and look here,' she exclaimed; 'come and see how the water's gone down since yesterday ! Why, yesterday the pit was ever so full!'

'Well, to be sure,' said Silas, coming to her side. 'Why, that's the draining they've begun on, since harvest, i' Mr. Osgood's fields, I reckon. The foreman said to me the other day, when I passed by 'em, " Master Marner," he said," I shouldn't wonder if we lay your bit o' waste as dry as a bone." It was Mr. Godfrey Cass,

he said, had gone into the draining; he'd been taking these fields o' Mr. Osgood.'

'How odd it'll seem to have the old pit dried up.' said Eppie, turning away, and stooping to lift rather a large stone. 'See, daddy, I can carry this quite well,' she said, going along with much energy for a few steps, but presently letting it fall.

'Ah, you're fine and strong, aren't you ?' said Silas, while Eppie shook her aching arms and laughed. 'Come, come, let us go and sit down on the bank against the stile there, and have no more lifting. You might hurt yourself, child. You'd need have somebody to work for you — and my arm isn't over strong.'

Silas uttered the last sentence slowly, as if it implied more than met the ear ; and Eppie, when they sat down on the bank, nestled close to his side, and, taking hold caressingly of the arm that was not over strong, held it on her lap, while an ash in the hedgerow behind threw happy playful shadows all around.

'Father,' said Eppie very gently, after they had been sitting in silence a little while, 'Aaron said he should like to be married, because he was a-going in four-and-twenty, and had got a deal of gardening work, now Mr. Mott's given up ; and he goes twice a week regular to Mr. Cass's, and once to Mr. Osgood's, and they're going to take him on at the Rectory.'

'And who is it as he's wanting to marry ?' said Silas, with rather a sad smile.

'Why, me, to be sure, daddy,' said Eppie, with dimpling laughter, kissing her father's cheek; 'as'if he'd want to marry anybody else!'

'And you mean to have him, do you?' said Silas.

' Yes, some time,' said Eppie, ' I don't know when. Everybody's married some time, Aaron says. But I told him that wasn't true; for, I said, look at father — he's never been married.'

Eppie had now long known how her mother had died on the snowy ground, and how she herself had been found on the hearth by father Silas, who had taken her golden curls for his lost guineas brought back to him.

' No, child,' said Silas; ' your father was a lone man till you was sent to him.'

' But you'll never be lone again, father,' said Eppie tenderly. ' That was what Aaron said — " I could never think o' taking you away from Master Marner, Eppie." And I said, "It 'ud be no use if you did, Aaron." And he wants us all to live together, so as you needn't work a bit, father, only what's for your own pleasure ; and he'd be as good as a son to you — that was what he said.'

'And should you like that, Eppie?' said Silas, looking at her.

'I shouldn't mind it, father,' said Eppie, quite simply. 'And I should like things to be so as you needn't work much. But if it wasn't for that, I'd sooner things didn't change. I'm very happy. I like Aaron to be fond of me, and come and see us often, and behave pretty to you. He always *does* behave pretty to you, doesn't he, father ?'

' Yes, child, nobody could behave better,' said- Silas emphatically. ' He's his mother's lad.'

' But I don't want any change,' said Eppie. ' I should like to go on a long, long while just as we are. Only Aaron does want a change; and he made me cry a

bit — only a bit—because he said I didn't care for him, for if I cared for him I should want us to be married, as he did.'

'Eh, my blessed child,' said Silas, laying down the pipe which he had taken to smoking daily during the last two years because, he had been strongly urged to do so, with the approval of Dr. Kimble, by the sages of Raveloe as a practice " good for the fits ",' you're o'er young to be married. We'll ask Mrs. Winthrop — we'll ask Aaron's mother what *she* thinks; if there's a right thing to do, she'll come at it. But there's this to be thought on, Eppie : things *will* change, whether we like it or not; things won't go on for a long while just as they are and no difference. I shall get older and helplesser, and be a burden on you, belike, if I don't go away from you altogether. Not as I mean you'd think me a burden — I know you wouldn't — but it 'ud be hard upon you; and when I look for'ard to that, I like to think as you'd have somebody else besides me — somebody young and strong, as'll outlast your own life, and take care on you to the end.' Silas paused, and resting his wrists on his knees, lifted his hands up and down meditatively as he looked on the ground.

'Then, would you like me to be married, father?' said Eppie, with a little trembling in her voice.

'I'll not be the man to say no, Eppie,' said Silas emphatically; 'but we'll ask your godmother. She'll wish the right thing by you and her son, too.'

'There they come, then,' said Eppie. 'Let us go and meet 'em. Oh, the pipe! won't you have it lit again, father?' said Eppie, lifting the pipe from the ground.

'Nay, child,' said Silas; 'I've done enough for to-day. I think mayhap a little of it does me more good than so much at once.'

CHAPTER XVIII

THE EMPTY HOME

IT is Sunday afternoon in the Red House, and after dinner, — and as Silas and Eppie are seated on the bank in the fleckered shade of the ash-tree.

A great change has come over the dark wainscoted parlour since we saw it in Godfrey's bachelor days, and under the wifeless reign of the old Squire. Now all is polish, on which no yesterday's dust is ever allowed to rest, from the yard's width of oaken boards round the carpet to the old Squire's gun and whips and walking-sticks ranged on the stag's antlers above the mantel-piece. All other signs of sporting and out-door occupation Nancy has removed to another room; but she has brought into the Red House the habit of filial reverence, and preserves sacredly in a place of honour these relics of her husband's departed father. The tankards are on the side-table still, *'but* the bossed silver is undimmed by handling, and there are no dregs to send forth unpleasant suggestions — the only prevailing scent is of the lavender and rose-leaves that fill the vases of Derbyshire spar. All is purity and order in this once dreary room, for fifteen years ago it was entered by a new presiding spirit.

'I shall just take a turn to the fields against the

Stone-pits, Nancy, and look at the draining,' said Godfrey.

[6] You'll be in again by tea-time, dear?'

' Oh yes, I shall be back in an hour.'

It was Godfrey's custom on a Sunday afternoon to walk leisurely round the farm to see if there were any improvements he could think of. Nancy seldom accompanied him, and this afternoon, after her father and sister had left for the Warrens, she sat alone with her Bible open before her. But though she followed the text with her eyes, her thoughts were with her husband. The absence of children from their hearth she knew was a great grief to him, and she heard herself saying over again what she had said to her sister a little earlier in the afternoon, when they were alone in the garden.

' Nobody,' she had said, ' has any occasion to find fault with Godfrey. It's natural he should be disappointed at not having any children. Every man likes to have somebody to work for and lay by for, and he always counted so on making a fuss with 'em when they were little. There's many another man 'ud hanker more than he does. He's the best of husbands.'

She wondered if she had done right in opposing her husband's wish expressed six years ago, and again four years ago, that they should adopt a child. But to adopt a child because children of your own had been denied you was to try and choose your lot in spite of Providence.

The adopted child, she was convinced, would never turn out well, and would be a curse to those who had wilfully and rebelliously sought what it was clear that, for some high reason, they were better without. When you

saw a thing was not meant to be, said Nancy, it was a bounden duty to leave off so much as wishing for it.

'But why should you think the child would turn out ill?' said Godfrey in his remonstrances. 'She has thriven as well as child can do with the weaver; and *he* adopted her. There isn't such a pretty little girl anywhere else in the parish, or one fitter for the station we could give her. Where can be the likelihood of her being a curse to anybody?'

'Yes, my dear Godfrey,' said Nancy, sitting with her hands tightly clasped together, and with yearning, regretful affection in her eyes. 'The child may not turn out ill with the weaver. But, then, he didn't go to seek her, as we should be doing. It will be wrong; I feel sure it will. Don't you remember what that lady we met at the Royston Baths told us about the child her sister adopted? That was the only adopting I ever heard of— and the child was transported when it was twenty-three. Dear Godfrey, don't ask me to do what I know is wrong; I should never be happy again. I know it's very hard for *you* — it's easier for me — but it's the will of Providence.'

Godfrey had from the first specified Eppie, then about twelve years old, as a child suitable for them to adopt. It had never occurred to him that Silas would rather part with his life than with Eppie. Surely the weaver would wish the best to the child he had taken so much trouble with, and would be glad that such good fortune should happen to her. She would always be very grateful to him, and he would be well provided for to the end of his life —provided for as the excellent part he had done by the child deserved. Was it not an appropriate thing

for people in a higher station to take a charge off the hands of a man in a lower? It seemed an eminently appropriate thing to Godfrey, for reasons that were known only to himself.

It seemed to him impossible that he should ever confess to Nancy the truth about Eppie; she would never recover from the repulsion the story of his earlier marriage would create, told to her now, after that long concealment. And the child too, he thought, must become an object of repulsion; the very sight of her would be painful The shock to Nancy's mingled pride and ignorance of the world's evil might even be too much for her delicate frame. Since he had married her with that secret in his heart, he must keep it there to the last. Whatever else he did, he could not make an irreparable breach between himself and this long-loved wife.

On this Sunday afternoon it was already four years since there had been any allusion to the subject between them, and Nancy supposed that it was for ever buried.

'l wonder if he'll mind it less or more as he gets older,' she thought; ' I'm afraid more. Aged people feel the miss of children. What would father do without Priscilla? And if I die, Godfrey will be very lonely—not holding together with his brothers much. But I won't be over-anxious and trying to make things out beforehand ; I must do my best for the present.'

With that last thought Nancy roused herself from her reverie and turned her eyes again towards the forsaken page. It had been forsaken longer than she imagined, for she was presently surprised by the appearance of

the servant with the tea-things. It was, in fact, a little before the usual time for tea; but Jane had her reasons.

' Is your master come into the yard, Jane ?'

'No, 'm, he isn't,' said Jane, with a slight emphasis, of which, however, her mistress took no notice.

' I don't know whether you've seen 'em, 'm,' continued Jane, after a pause, ' but there's folks making haste one all way afore the front window, I doubt something's happened. There's niver a man to be seen i' the yard, else I'd send and see. I've been up into the top attic, but there's no seeing anything for trees. I hope nobody's hurt, that's all.'

' Oh no, I dare say there's nothing much the matter,' said Nancy. ' It's perhaps Mr. Snell's bull got out again as he did before.'

' I wish he mayn't gore anybody then, that's all,' said Jane, not altogether despising a hypothesis which covered a few imaginary calamities.

' That girl is always terrifying me,' thought Nancy; ' I wish Godfrey would come in.'

She went to the front window and looked as far as she could see along the road, with an uneasiness which she felt to be childish, for there were now no signs of the excitement which Jane had spoken of. But she continued to stand there, looking at the placid churchyard with the long shadows of the gravestones.

CHAPTER XIX

THE CONFESSION

SOME one opened the door at the other end of the room and Nancy felt that it was her husband. She turned from the window with gladness in her eyes, for the wife's chief dread was stilled.

' Dear, I'm so thankful you're come.' she said, going towards him. ' I began to get——'

She paused abruptly, for Godfrey was laying down his hat with trembling hands, and turned towards her with a pale face and a strange unanswering glance, as if he saw her indeed, but saw her as part of a scene invisible to herself. She laid her hand on his arm, not daring to speak again; but he left the touch unnoticed, and threw himself into his chair.

Jane was already at the door with the hissing urn. ' Tell her to keep away, will you?' said Godfrey; and when the door was closed again he exerted himself to speak more distinctly.

' Sit down, Nancy — there,' he said, pointing to a chair opposite him. ' I came back as soon as I could, to hinder anybody's telling you but me. I've had a great shock—but I care most about the shock it'll be to you.'

'It isn't father and Priscilla?' said Nancy with quivering lips, clasping her hands together tightly on her lap.

' No, it's nobody living,' said Godfrey.' It's Dunstan — my brother Dunstan, that we lost sight of sixteen

years ago. We've found him—found his body—his skeleton.'

The deep dread Godfrey's look had created in Nancy made her feel these words a relief. She sat in comparative calmness to hear what else he had to telL He went on,—

' The Stone-pit has gone dry suddenly—from the draining, I suppose; and there he lies—has lain for sixteen years, wedged between two great stones. There's his watch and seals, and there's my gold-handled hunting-whip, with my name on. He took it away, without my knowing, the day he went hunting on Wildfire, the last time he was seen:'

Godfrey paused; it was not so easy to say what came next. ' Do you think he drowned himself? ' said Nancy, almost wondering that her husband should be so deeply shaken by what had happened all those years ago to an unloved brother, of whom worse things had been augured.

' No, he fell in,' said Godfrey, in a low but distinct voice, as if he felt some deep meaning in the fact. Presently he added, ' Dunstan was the man that robbed Silas Marner.'

The blood rushed to Nancy's face and neck at this surprise and shame, for she had been bred up to regard even a distant kinship with crime as a dishonour.

' O Godfrey!' she said with compassion in her tone, for she had immediately reflected that the dishonour must be felt still more' keenly by her husband.

' There was the money in the pit.' he continued,—'all the weaver's money. Everything's been gathered up, and they're taking the skeleton to the Rainbow.

But I came back to tell you : there was no hindering it; you must know.'

He was silent, looking on the ground for two long minutes. Nancy would have said some words of comfort under this disgrace, but she refrained, from an instinctive sense that there was something behind — that Godfrey had something else to tell her. Presently he lifted his eyes to her face, and kept them fixed on her as he said,—

' Everything comes to light, Nancy, sooner or later. When God Almighty wills it, our secrets are found out. I've lived with a secret on my mind, but I'll keep it from you no longer. I wouldn't have you know it by somebody else and not by me — I wouldn't have you find it out after I'm dead. I'll tell you now. It's been " I will" and "I won't" with me all my life —I'll make sure of myself now.'

Nancy's utmost dread had returned. The eyes of the husband and wife met with awe in them.

'Nancy,' said Godfrey slowly, 'when I married you, I hid something from you — something I ought to have told you. That woman Marner found dead in the snow — Eppie's mother — that wretched woman — was my wife: Eppie is my child.'

He paused, dreading the effect of his confession. But Nancy sat quite still, only that her eyes dropped and ceased to meet his. She was pale and quiet as a statue, clasping her hands on her lap.

'You'll never think the same of me again,' said Godfrey after a little while, with some tremor in his voice.

She was silent.

'I oughtn't to have left the child unowned; I oughtn't to have kept it from you. But I couldn't bear to give

you up, Nancy. I was led away into marrying her — I suffered for it.'

Still Nancy was silent, looking down; and he almost expected that she would presently get up and say she would go to her father's. How could she have any mercy for faults that must seem so black to her, with her simple, severe notions?

But at last she lifted up her eyes to his again and spoke. There was no indignation in her voice — only deep regret.

'Godfrey, if you had but told me this six years ago, we could have done some of our duty by the child. Do you think I'd have refused to take her in if I'd known she was yours?'

At that moment Godfrey felt all the bitterness of an error that was not simply futile, but had defeated its own end. He had not measured this wife with whom he had lived so long. But she spoke again, with more agitation.

'And — O Godfrey — if we'd had her from the first, if you'd taken to her as you ought, she'd have loved me. I could better have bore my little baby dying, and our life might have been more like what we used to think it 'ud be.'

The tears fell, and Nancy ceased to speak.

'But you wouldn't have married me then, Nancy, if I'd told you,' said Godfrey, urged, in the bitterness of his self-reproach, to prove to himself that his conduct had not been utter folly. 'You may think you would now, but you wouldn't then. With your pride and your father's, you'd have hated having anything to do with me after the talk there'd have been.'

'I can't say what I should have done about that,

Godfrey. I should never have married anybody else. But I wasn't worth doing wrong for — nothing is in this world. Nothing is so good as it seems beforehand — not even our marrying wasn't, you see.' There was a faint sad smile on Nancy's face as she said the last words.

' I'm a worse man than you thought I was, Nancy,' said Godfrey, rather tremulously. ' Can you forgive me ever?'

The wrong to me is but little, Godfrey; you've made it up to me — you've been good to me for fifteen years. It's another you did the wrong to; and I doubt it can never be all made up for.'

'But we can take Eppie now,' said Godfrey. "I won't mind the world knowing at last. I'll i'e plain and open for the rest o' my life.'

' It'll be different coming to us, now she's grown up,' said Nancy, shaking her head sadly. 'But it's your duty to acknowledge her and provide for her; and I'll do my part by her, and pray to God Almighty to make her love me.'

' Then we'll go together to Silas Marner's this very night, as soon as everything's quiet at the Stone-pits.'

CHAPTER XX

WHEN A MAN TURNS A BLESSING FROM HIS DOOR

BETWEEN eight and nine o'clock that evening, Eppie and Silas were seated alone in the cottage. After the great excitement the weaver had undergone from the events of the afternoon, he had felt a longing for this quietude, and had even begged Mrs. Winthrop and Aaron, who had naturally lingered behind every one else, to leave him alone with his child.

Silas's face was lit up with happiness as he sat in his arm-chair and looked at Eppie. She had drawn her own chair towards his knees, and leaned forward, holding both his hands, while she looked up at him. On the table near them, lit by a candle, lay the recovered gold—the old long-loved gold, ranged in orderly heaps, as Silas used to range it in the days when it was his only joy. He had been telling her how he used to count it every night, and how his soul was utterly desolate till she was sent to him.

'At first I'd a sort o' feeling come across me now and then,' he was saying in a subdued tone, 'as if you might be changed into the gold again; for sometimes, turn my head which way I would, I seemed to see the gold; and I thought I should be glad if I could feel it, and find it was come back. But that didn't last long. After a bit, I should have thought it was a curse come again, if it had drove you from me, for I'd got to feel

the need o' your looks and your voice and the touch o' your little fingers. You didn't know then, Eppie, when you were such a little un — you didn't know what your old father Silas felt for you.'

' But I know now, father,' said Eppie. ' If it hadn't been for you, they'd have taken me to the workhouse, and there'd have been nobody to love me.'

' Eh, my precious child, the blessing was mine. If you hadn't been sent to save me, I should ha' gone to the grave in my misery. The money was taken away from me in time; and you see it's been kept — kept till it was wanted for you. It's wonderful — our life is wonderful. '

Silas sat in silence a, few minutes, looking at the money. ' It takes no hold of me now,' he said ponderingly — ' the money doesn't; I wonder if it ever could again — I doubt it might, if I lost you, Eppie. I might come to think I was forsaken again, and lose the feeling that God was good to me,'

At that moment there was a knocking at the door ; and Eppie was obliged to rise without answering Silas. Beautiful she looked, with the tenderness of gathering tears in her eyes and a slight flush on her cheeks, as she stepped to open the door. The flush deepened when she saw Mr. and Mrs. Godfrey Cass. She made her little rustic curtsy, and held the door wide for them to enter.

' We're disturbing you very late, my dear,' said Mrs. Cass, taking Eppie's hand and looking in her face with an expression of anxious interest and admiration. Nancy herself was pale and tremulous.

Eppie, after placing chairs for Mr. and Mrs. Cass, went to stand against Silas, opposite to them.

' Well, Marner,' said Godfrey, trying to speak with perfect firmness, ' it's a great comfort to me to see you with your money again that you've been deprived of so many years. It was one of my family did you the wrong—the more grief to me—and I feel bound to make up to you for it in every way. Whatever I can do for you will be nothing but paying a debt, even if I looked no further than the robbery. But there are other things I'm beholden — shall be beholden to you for, Marner.'

Godfrey checked himself. It had been agreed between him and his wife that the subject of his fatherhood should be approached very carefully, and that, if possible, the disclosure should be reserved for the future, so that it might be made to Eppie gradually. Nancy had urged this because she felt strongly the painful light in which Eppie must inevitably see the relation between her father and mother.

Silas, always ill at ease when he was being spoken to by ' betters,' such as Mr. Cass — tall, powerful, florid men, seen chiefly on horseback — answered with some constraint,—

' Sir, I've a deal to thank you for a'ready. As for the robbery, I count it no loss to me. And if I did, you couldn't help it; you aren't answerable for it.'

'You may look at it in that way, Marner, But I never can; and I hope you'll let me act according to my own feeling of what's just. I know you're easily contented; you've been a hard-working man all your life.

' Yes, sir, yes,' said Marner meditatively. 'I should ha' been bad off without my work; it was what I held by when everything else was gone from me.'

' Ah,' said Godfrey, applying Marner's words simply to his bodily wants, 'it was a good trade for you in this country, because there's been a great deal of linen-weaving to be done. But you're getting rather past such close work, Marner; it's time you laid by and had some rest. You look a good deal pulled down, though you're not an old man, *are* you?'

' Fifty-five, as near as I can say, sir,' said Silas.

' Oh, why, you may live thirty years longer—look at old Macey! And that money on the table, after all, is but little. It won't go far either way—whether it's put out to interest, or you were to live on it as long as it would last; it wouldn't go far if you'd nobody to keep but yourself, and you've had two to keep for a good many years now.'

' Eh, sir,' said Silas, unaffected by anything Godfrey was saying, 'I'm in no fear o' want. We shall do very well—Eppie and me 'ull do well enough. There's few working-folks have got so much laid by as that. I don't know what it is to gentlefolks, but I look upon it as a deal—almost too much. And as for us, it's little we want.'

' Only the garden, father,' said Eppie, blushing up to the ears the moment after.

' You love a garden, do you, my dear?' said Nancy, thinking that this turn in the point of view might help her husband. ' We should agree in that; I give a deal of time to the garden.'

' Ah, there's plenty of gardening at the Red House.' said Godfrey, surprised at the difficulty he found in approaching a proposition which had seemed so easy to him in the distance. ' You've done a good part by Eppie,

Marner, for sixteen years. It'ud be a great comfort to you to see her well provided for, wouldn't it? She looks blooming and healthy, but not fit for any hardships; she doesn't look like a strapping girl come of working parents. You'd like to see her taken care of by those who can leave her well off, and make a lady of her; she's more fit for it than for a rough life, such as she might come to have in a few years' time.'

A slight flush came over Marner's face, and disappeared, like a passing gleam. Eppie was simply wondering Mr. Cass should talk so about things that seemed to have nothing to do with reality, but Silas was hurt and uneasy.

'I don't take your meaning, sir,' he answered, not having the words at command to express the mingled feelings with which he had heard Mr. Cass's words.

'Well, my meaning is this, Marner,' said Godfrey, determined to come to the point. 'Mrs. Cass and I, you know, have no children — nobody to be the better for our good home and everything else we have — more than enough for ourselves. And we should like to have somebody in the place of a daughter to us — we should like to have Eppie, and treat her in every way as our own child. It'ud be a great comfort to you in your old age, I hope, to see her fortune made in that way, after you've been at the trouble of bringing her up so well. And it's right you should have every reward for that. And Eppie, I'm sure, will always love you and be grateful to you; she'd come and see you very often, and we should all be on the look-out to do everything we could towards making you comfortable.'

While Godfrey had been speaking, Eppie had quietly

passed her arm behind Silas's head, and let her hand rest against it caressingly; she felt him trembling violently. He was silent for some moments when Mr. Cass had ended — powerless under the conflict of emotions, all alike painful. Eppie's heart was swelling at the sense that her father was in distress ; and she was just going to lean down and speak to him, when one struggling dread at last gained the mastery over every other in Silas, and he said faintly,—

' Eppie, my child, speak. I won't stand in your way. Thank Mr. and Mrs. Cass.'

Eppie took her hand from her father's head, and came forward a step. Her cheeks were flushed, but not with shyness this time; the sense that her father was in doubt and suffering banished that sort of self-consciousness. She dropped a low curtsy, first to Mrs. Cass and then to Mr. Cass, and said,—

' Thank you, ma'am — thank you, sir. But I can't leave my father, nor own anybody nearer than him. And I don't want to be a lady — thank you all the same' (here Eppie dropped another curtsy). 'I couldn't give up the folks I've been used to.'

Eppie's lip began to tremble a little at the last words. She retreated to her father's chair again, and held him round the neck ; while Silas, with a subdued sob, put up his hand to grasp hers.

The tears were in Nancy's eyes, but her sympathy, with Eppie was naturally divided with distress on her husband's account. She dared not speak, wondering what was going on in her husband's mind.

Godfrey felt an irritation inevitable to almost all of us when we encounter an unexpected obstacle. The

agitation with which he spoke again was not quite unmixed with anger.

'But I've a claim on you, Eppie — the strongest of all claims. It's my duty, Marner, to own Eppie as my child, and provide for her. She's my own child; her mother was my wife. I've a natural claim on her that must stand before every other.'

Eppie had given a violent start, and turned quite pale. Silas, on the contrary, who had been relieved by Eppie's answer from the dread lest his mind should be in opposition to hers, felt the spirit of resistance in him set free, not without a touch of parental fierceness. 'Then, sir,' he answered, with an accent of bitterness that had been silent in him since the memorable day when his youthful hope had perished — 'then, sir, why didn't you say so sixteen years ago, and claim her before I'd come to love her, fstead o' coming to take her from me now, when you might as well take the heart out o' my body? God gave her to me because you turned your back upon her, and He looks upon her as mine. You've no right to her! When a man turns a blessing from his door, it falls to them as take it in.'

'I know that, Marner. I was wrong. I've repented of my conduct in that matter,' said Godfrey, who could not help feeling the edge of Silas's words.

'I'm glad to hear it, sir,' said Marner, with gathering excitement; 'but repentance doesn't alter what's been going on for sixteen years. Your coming now and saying "I'm her father" doesn't alter the feelings inside us. It's me she's been calling her father ever since she could say the word.'

'But I think you might look at the thing more

reasonably, Marner,' said Godfrey, unexpectedly awed by the weaver's direct truth-speaking. 'It isn't as if she was to be taken quite away from you, so that you'd never see her again. She'll be very near you, and come to see you very often. She'll feel just the same towards you.'

'Just the same?' said Marner, more bitterly than ever. 'How'll she feel just the same for me as she does now, when we eat o' the same bit and drink o' the same cup, and think o' the same things from one day's end to another? Just the same? That's idle talk. You'd cut us i' two.'

Godfrey felt rather angry again. It seemed to him that the weaver was very selfish to oppose what was undoubtedly for Eppie's welfare; and he felt himself called upon, for her sake, to assert his authority.

'I should have thought, Marner,' he said, severely—'I should have thought your affection for Eppie would make you rejoice in what was for her good, even if it did call upon you to give up something. You ought to remember your own life's uncertain, and she's at an age now when her lot may soon be fixed in a way very different from what it would be in her father's home—she may marry some low working man, and then, whatever I might do for her, I couldn't make her well-off. You're putting yourself in the way of her welfare; and though I'm sorry to hurt you after what you've done, and what I've left undone, I feel now it's my duty to insist on taking care of my own daughter. I want to do my duty.'

It would be difficult to say whether it was Silas or Eppie that was more deeply stirred by this last speech of Godfrey's. As Eppie listened to the contest between her

old, long-loved father and this new, unfamiliar father, she recalled to her mind the black, featureless shadow which she had so often pictured to herself as having held the ring and placed it on her mother's finger. Her thought raised a repulsion towards the offered lot and the newly-revealed father.

Silas, on the other hand, was again stricken in conscience, and alarmed lest Godfrey's accusation should be true—lest he should be raising his own will as an obstacle to Eppie's good. For many moments he was mute, but at last the words came, though tremulously.

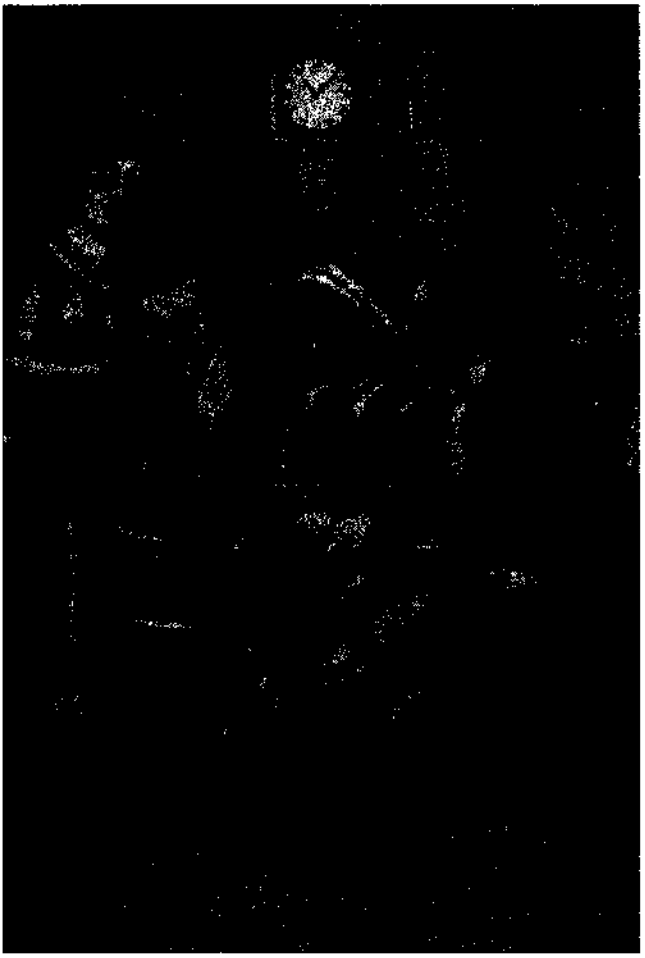
' I'll say no more. Let it be as you will. Speak to the child. I'll hinder nothing.'

Nancy heard Silas's words with relief, and thought, as Godfrey did, that their wish was achieved.

' Eppie, my dear,' said Godfrey — looking at his daughter not without some embarrassment under the sense that she was old enough to judge him—' it'll always be our wish that you should show your love and gratitude to one who's been a father to you so many years, and we shall want to help you to make him comfortable in every way. But we hope you'll come to love us as well; and though I haven't been what a father should have been to you all these years, I wish to do the utmost in my power for you for the rest of my life, and provide for you as my only child. And you'll have the best of mothers in my wife — that'll be a blessing you haven't known since you were old enough to know it.'

' My dear, you'll be a treasure to me,' said Nancy, in her gentle voice. ' We shall want for nothing when we have our daughter.'

Eppie did not come forward and curtsy as she had



She held Silas's hand in hers, and grasped it firmly — P. 141

done before. She held Silas's hand in hers, and grasped it firmly —it was a weaver's hand, with a palm and fingertips that were sensitive to such pressure — while she spoke with colder decision than before.

' Thank you, ma'am — thank you, sir, for your offers — they're very great, and far above my wish. For I should have no delight in life any more if I was forced to go away from my father, and knew he was sitting at home, a-thinking of me and feeling lone. We've tjpen used to be happy together every day, and I can't think o' no happiness without him. And he says he'd nobody f the world till I was sent to him, and he'd have nothing when I was gone. And he's took care of me and loved me from the first, and I'll cleave to him as long as he lives, and nobody shall ever come between him and me.'

' But you must make sure, Eppie,' said Silas in a low voice — ' you must make sure as you won't ever be sorry, because you've made your choice to stay among poor folks, and with poor clothes and things, when you might ha' had everything o' the best.'

His sensitiveness on this point had increased as he listened to Eppie's words of faithful affection.

' I can never be sorry, father,' said Eppie. 'I shouldn't know what to think on or to wish for with fine things about me, as I haven't been used to. And it 'ud be poor work for me to put on things, and ride in a gig, and sit in a place at a church, as 'ud make them as I'm fond of think me unfitting company for 'em. What could .' care for then ?'

Nancy looked at Godfrey with a pained, questioning glance. But his eyes were fixed on the floor, where he was moving the end of his stick, as if he were pondering

on something absently. She thought there was a word which might perhaps come better from her lips than from his.

' What you say is natural, my dear child; it's natural you should cling to those who've brought you up.' she said mildly; 'but there is a duty you owe to your lawful father. There's perhaps something to be given up on more sides than one. When your father opens his home to you, I think it's right you should not turn your back on it.'

'I can't feel as I've got any father but one,' said Eppie, impetuously, while the tears gathered. 'I've always thought of a little home where he'd sit i' the corner, and I should fend and do everything for him. I can't think o' no other home. I wasn't brought up to be a lady, and I can't turn my mind to it. I like the working folks and their houses and their ways. And,' she ended passionately, while the tears fell, 'I'm promised to marry a working man, as'll live with father, and help me to take care of him.'

Godfrey looked up at Nancy with a flushed face and smarting, dilated eyes. The air of the room seemed stifling.

'Let us go,' he said, in an undertone.

' We won't talk of this any longer now,' said Nancy, rising. ' We're your well-wishers, my dear — and yours too, Marner. We shall come and see you again. It's getting late now.'

In this way she covered her husband's abrupt departure, for Godfrey had gone straight to the door, unable to say more.

Nancy and Godfrey walked home under the starlight

in silence. When they entered the oaken parlour, Godfrey threw himself into his chair, while Nancy laid down her bonnet and shawl and stood on the hearth near her husband, unwilling to leave him even for a few minutes, and yet fearing to utter any word lest it might jar on his feelings. At last Godfrey turned his head towards her, and their eyes met, dwelling in that meeting without any movement on either side.

But presently he put out his hand, and as Nancy placed hers within it, he drew her towards him, and said, —

' That's ended !'

She bent to kiss him, and then said, as she stood by his side, ' Yes, I'm afraid we must give up the hope of having her for a daughter. It wouldn't be right to want to force her to come to us against her will. We can't alter her bringing up and what's come of it.'

' No,' said Godfrey, with a keen decisiveness of tone, in contrast with his usually careless and unemphatic speech;' there's debts we can't pay like money debts, by paying extra for the years that have slipped by. While I've been putting off and putting off the trees have been growing — it's too late now. Marner was in the right in what he said about a man's turning away a blessing from his door ; it falls to somebody else. I wanted to pass for childless once, Nancy — I shall pass for childless now against my wish.'

Nancy did not speak immediately, but after a little while she asked —' You won't make it known, then, about Eppie's being your daughter ? '

'No — where would be the good to anybody? — only harm. I must do what I can for her in the state of life she chooses.' ,

CHAPTER XXI

THE DEAD PAST

THE next week Silas and Eppie, in their Sunday clothes, with a small bundle tied in a blue linen handkerchief, were making their way through the streets of a great manufacturing town. After many enquiries they reached Prison Street, and when Marner saw the grim prison walls, he knew he was in his native place, in which thirty yearsJhad brought bewildering changes.

' Ah,' he said, drawing a long breath, ' there's the jail, Eppie ; that's just the same — I aren't afraid now. It's the third turning on the left hand from the jail doors — that's the way we must go.'

' Oh, what a dark, ugly place !' said Eppie. ' How it hides the sky! It's worse than the workhouse. I'm glad you don't live in this town now, father. Is Lantern Yard like this street?'

• ' My precious child,' said Silas, smiling, ' it isn't a big street like this. I never was easy i' this street myself, but I was fond o' Lantern Yard. The shops here are all altered, I think — I can't make 'em out; but I shall know the turning, because it's the third.'

' Here it is,' he said, in a tone of satisfaction, as they came to a narrow alley. ' And then we must go to the left again, and then straight for'ard for a bit, up Shoe Lane; and then we shall be at the entry next to the o'erhanging window, where there's the nick in the road for the water to run. Eh, I can see it all.'

' O father, I'm like as I was stifled,' said Eppie. ' I couldn't ha' thought as any folks lived i' this way so close together. How pretty the Stone-pits 'ull look when we get back.'

' It looks comical to *me,* child, now—and smells bad. I can't think as it usened to smell so.'

Here and there a sallow, begrimmed face looked out from a gloomy doorway at the strangers, and increased Eppie's uneasiness, so that it was a longed-for relief when they issued from the alleys into Shoe Lane, where there was a broader strip of sky.

' Dear heart,' said Silas, ' why, there's people coming out o' the Yard as if they'd been to chapel at this time o' day — a weekday noon!'

Suddenly he started and stood still with a look of distressed amazement that alarmed Eppie. They were before an opening in front of a large factory, from which men and women were streaming for their midday meal.

" Father,' said Eppie, clasping his arm, 'what's the matter ?'

But she had to speak again and again before Silas could answer her.

' It's gone, child,' he said at last, in strong agitation — ' Lantern Yard's gone. It must ha' been here, because here's the house with the o'erhanging window — I know that — it's just the same; but they've made this new opening; and see that big factory! It's all gone — chapel and all."

'Come into that little brush-shop and sit down, father; they'll let you sit down,' said Eppie, always on the watch lest one of her father's strange attacks should come on. ' Perhaps the people can tell you all about it.'

But neither from the brushmaker, who had come to Shoe Lane only ten years ago, when the factory was already built, nor from any other source within his reach, could Silas learn anything of the old Lantern Yard friends or of Mr. Paston, the minister.

'The old place is all swep' away,' Silas said to Dolly Winthrop on the night of his return — 'the little grave-yard and everything. The old home's gone; I've no home but this now. I shall never know whether they got at the truth o' the robbery, nor whether Mr. Paston could ha' given me any light about the drawing o' the lots. It's dark to me, Mrs. Winthrop, that is; I doubt it'll be dark to the last.'

'Well, yes, Master Marner,' said Dolly, who sat with a placid listening face, now bordered by gray hairs. 'I doubt it may. It's the will o' Them above as a many things should be dark to us; but there's some things as I've never felt i' the dark about, and they're mostly what comes i' the day's work. You were hard done by that once, Master Marner, and it seems as you'll never know the rights of it; but that doesn't hinder there *being* a rights. Master Marner, for all it's dark to you and me.'

'No,' said Silas, 'no; that doesn't hinder. Since the time the child was sent to me and I've come to love her as myself, I've had light enough to trusten by; and now she says she'll never leave me, I think I shall trusten till I die.'

CHAPTER XXII

WEDDING BELLS

HAPPILY the sunshine fell more warmly than usual the morning that Eppie was married, for her dress was a very light one. Seen at a little distance as she walked across the churchyard and down the village, she seemed to be attired in pure white — though there were the tiniest pink sprigs at wide intervals on her gown, the gift of Mrs. Godfrey Cass — and her hair looked like the dash of gold on a lily. One hand was on her husband's arm, and with the other she clasped the hand of her father Silas.

'You won't be giving me away, father.' she had said before they went to church : ' you'll only be taking Aaron to be ajson to you.'

Dolly Winthrop walked behind with her husband; and there ended the little bridal procession.

There were many eyes to look at it, and Miss Priscilla Lammeter was glad that she and her father had happened to drive up to the door of the Red House just in time to see this pretty sight. They had.come to keep Nancy company to-day, because Mr. Cass had had to go away to Lytherley for special reasons. That seemed to be a pity, for otherwise he might have gone, as Mr. Crackenthorp and Mr. Osgood certainly would, to look on at the wedding feast which he had ordered at the Rainbow, naturally feeling a great interest in the weaver who had been wronged by one of his own family.

'I could ha' wished Nancy had had the luck to find a child like that and bring her up.' said Priscilla to her father as they sat in the gig ; 'I should ha' had something young to think of then, besides the lambs and the calves.'

'Yes, my dear, yes,' said Mr. Lammeter; 'one feels that as one gets older. Things look dim to old folks; they'd need have some young eyes about 'em to let 'em know the world's the same as it used to be.'

Dolly Winthrop was the first to divine that old Mr. Macey, who had been set in his arm-chair outside his own door, would expect some special notice as they passed, since he was too old to be at the wedding feast.

'Mr. Macey's looking for a word from us,' said Dolly ; 'he'll be hurt if we pass him and say nothing — and him so racked with rheumatiz.'

So they turned aside to shake hands with the old man. He had looked forward to the occasion, and had his premeditated speech.

'Well, Master Marner,' he said in a voice that quavered a good deal, 'I've lived to see my words come true. I was the first to say there was no harm in you, though your looks might be again' you ; and I was the first to say you'd get your money back. And it's nothing but rightful as you should. And I'd ha' said the "Amens," and willing, at the holy matrimony ; but Tookey's done it a good while now, and I hope you'll have none the worse luck.'

In the open yard before the Rainbow the party of guests were already assembled, though it was still nearly an hour before the appointed feast-time. It was a hearty cheer they raised when the bridal group approached.

At the Stone-pits Eppie had a larger garden than she had ever expected; and in other ways there had been alterations at the expense of Mr. Cass, the land-lord, to suit Silas's larger family. For he and Eppie had declared that they would rather stay at the Stone-pits than go to any new home. The garden was fenced with stones on two sides, but in front there was an open fence, through which the flowers shone with answering gladness as the four united people came within sight of them.

'O father,' said Eppie, 'what a pretty home ours is! I think nobody could be happier than we are.'

The End

NOTES

In the Notes that follow words the meaning of which can be easily ascertained from a good school dictionary have been omitted.

CHAPTER I

Page 1 *Raveloe* pronounced *ravlou. Thread-lace-* hand-made lace, more expensive than the machine-made lace of to-day. *Northward* - i.e. Northward, towards the north; the north country. *Nutty hedgerows* - hedges of nut trees; it has been calculated that not less than one and a quarter million acres of land were occupied at the time by hedgerows in England and Wales.

P. 2 *Drink a pint* - of beer. *Mole-catching* - a mole is a small animal like a mouse with very small eyes and soft fur. It burrows in the ground. Moles are caught for their fur.

P. 3 *the parish* - the parish council administers the Poor Law; paupers are sent to the poor-house. *No$_9$ no, etc.* - indirect speech; there are other cases of this in the book, *those who could, etc.,* - i.e. evil spirits.

CHAPTER II

P. 4 *light* - wisdom.

P. 5 *assurance of salvation* - " I am persuaded," wrote John Wesley, " we may know if we are now in a state of salvation … If we can never have any certainty of our being in a state of salvation, good reason it is

that every moment should be spent not in joy, but in fear and trembling." *calling and election sure* - the words are from *If Peter* 1. 10.

P. 6 *accursed thing* see *Joshua.* VII 1. *deacon* - among other duties he dispenses charity.

P. 7 *will clear me* - will make my honesty clear. *Three pound five,* £ 3. 5s.

P. 8 *gone in and out* - lived; a Biblical phrase; *St. John* X. 9. *inward shock* - at finding himself about to accuse his friend in public, *stricken* - afflicted; *Isaiah* V. 5.

P. 9 *the folds of the church—St. John* X. 11. *the voice of Satan* - his wicked nature was now showing itself.

CHAPTER III

P. 10 *where the religious observances, etc.,* - the observances made up Marner's religion, he derived spiritual strength through them.

CHAPTER IV

P. 15 *went dry* - had nothing to drink.

P. 16 *dark wainscoted parlour* - 'Wainscot' is a wooden lining or boarding of the walls of rooms. The wainscot of some country seats is quite black from age. *distrain* - to take possession of property as security for non-payment of rent.

P. 17 *cut off with a shilling-left* only a shilling, i.e. disinherited, *Ifud* - it would.

P. 18 *a small mincing treble* - Dunstan spoke with a sort of lisp, trying to imitate the affected pronunciation of a girl; *treble* - high-pitched voice, *creep up her sleeve*- gain her favour.

P. 19 *get you off my back-get* rid of you.

P. 20 *'ticlng* - enticing.

P. 21 *go to smash -l* shall be ruined (for the Squire will get to know everything). *bring...up to the scratch*- get him to do what we want him to.

P. 21 *hold trumps* - the metaphor is from cards. *crooked sixpence* - which is supposed to bring luck, *see double* - i.e. get drunk, *fall on my legs* - get out of any difficulty.

CHAPTER V

P. 23 *taking in* - cheating, *cover* - woods or undergrowth sheltering game.

P. 24 *made it even* - compensated me. *at a fence* - at taking or jumping over a fence, *getting a bid* - when he got a bid.

P. 25 *pocket pistol*- a dram flask for the pocket, in " self-defence because we cannot get a dram on the road " (Brewer), *hedgestake* - a strong stick pointed at one end that was standing vertically on the other side of the hedge, *ill-favoured* - ugly.

P. 27 *latchhole* - a hole in the door through which the latch-string used to be passed. A person wishing to open a door pulled the latch-string from outside, and so raised the latch to which the string was tied inside.

P. 28 *brief purpose* - something that would not take long to do. *the hook* - a hunting-whip has a hooked handle with a loop of leather at the end.

CHAPTER VI

P. 29 *horn lantern* - a lantern fitted with thin sheets of horn instead of glass.

P. 30 *hanger* - hook, *setting up* - Marner wanted a thin piece of twine to tie up some yarn in position in his loom, *retarding his supper* - he would have had to cook his supper on his return.

P. 31 *joy——wine* - cf. Hunger is the best sauce.

P. 33 *poacher* - a man who trespasses on another's property and steals game, *going about his business* - going away, leaving the cottage, *dignities, dignitaries* - the chief men.

CHAPTER VII

We have here examples of the speech of the uneducated, of provincialisms.

P. 34 *keep hold 6'the tune* - sing in harmony with the other members of the choir, not sing out of tune.

P. 35 *sense* - opinion, *two folks* - two very different kinds of persons, *take a glass* - have a drink. *Amens* - In Christian Churches the word amen is said at the end of prayers, etc., by all the people together.

P. 36 *your inside* - i.e. you have no ear for music. *Christmas money* - the choir went round singing carols at Christmas to the houses of the well-to-do, and received small donations; the money thus collected was divided among the members of the choir, *put upon* - bullied. *varmin* - vermin (rats, etc.).

P. 37 *the complimentary process* - Mr. Macey had to be paid a good many compliments and coaxed before he could be got to relate his experiences — before he became talkative, *along of*- on account.

P. 38 *Old Harry* - Satan.

P. 39 *Queen's heads* - the queen referred to is Queen Anne, *queerer nor ever* - madder than ever.

P. 40 *nut.. ..to crack* - a problem to solve, *venture a ten pun' note* - bet ten pounds.

P. 41 *yapping cur* - barking dog. *pike-staff-* a staff with a pike or sharp point at the end to guard against slipping, *holding with* - agreeing with.

CHAPTER VIII

P. 44 *mushed* - worn out, crushed.

P. 45 *a bit of a reckoning* - a charge or two of poaching might with justice be brought against Jem. *if anybody___wink* - if one is not prepared to overlook a fault or two. *where it's hot enough* - the Devil has got them.

CHAPTER IX

P. 47 *tinder* - something that burns readily, like scorched linen, used for kindling fire from a spark.

P. 48 *grounds or no grounds* - whether they could give reasons for their opinions or not. *throw cold water on* - make little of, seek to discredit.

P. 49 *broken his knees* - let him fall and cut the skin of his knees, *swinging price* - high price.

P. 50 *hard in the mouth* - insensible to the bit; cf. [c] soft - mouthed.'

P. 51 *take you in my way* - visit you on my way. *had blown over* - was no longer so distressing. ' *down* '- gloomy, dejected, *bear the brunt of-* get the worst of it from his father, (because it was he who had actually spent the money).

CHAPTER X

P. 52 *giving a long chance, etc.*, - hoping that by having his breakfast late he would feel hungry and ready for it. *knit brow* - a sort of perpetual frown, which made him look a man of strong will.

P. 53 *slack and feeble mouth* - his loose lips indicated a-weak will, *the sweet flower etc.* - one does not expect to find courtesy in such a home; see page 19-20. *ponderous* - loud.

P. 54 *whistled for* - asked in vain for. The reference, says Brewer, is to sailors' whistling for the wind. *unstring* - his money-bag; give money, *did for* - killed. *thick with* - intimate with, *collogue* - plot; from a Latin word meaning ' to speak together.'

P- 55 *no entail-'to* entail' means 'to settle an estate on a series of heirs, so that the immediate possessor may not dispose of it.'

P. 56 *my grandfather* - supply ' who'. *like horse-leeches* - his sons drain him of every penny, as leeches suck blood until they are gorged; cf. *hang on me.*

P. 58 *pull up* - stop being good to you; a metaphor from driving, *keep things together* - keep the family property intact.

P. 57 *as lieve* - as willing (that), *shilly-shally* - irresolute; inclining first to one course and then another, *take after* - resemble, *call* - need.

P. 58 *Turn over a new leaf*- lead a better life and not be so extravagant, *sneaking* - hiding, *'ostler* - hostler, a man who looks after the horses at an inn. *hang on me*- be supported by me.

P. 59 *prevarication* - lying. " He who prevaricates, talks all round the question, hoping to dodge it, and disclose nothing." (Webster.)

CHAPTER XI

P. 59 *track* - no one's thought tended in that direction, no one for a moment suspected Dunstan of having committed the robbery.

P. 60 *impenetrable* - that could not be explained; Mr. Macey's opinion, *withering disolation* - Marner's moral nature was withering (like a tree) for want of an object to love and cherish, for his was a clinging, loving nature, *baffled* - as he had nothing to live for, his mind was becoming a blank, *chasm* - his loss was a terrible break in his life, like a yawning chasm.

P. 61 *quatt-pot* - his beer.

P. 62 *nor* - than.

P. 63 .'. *H. S.* - the initial letters of *Jesus hominum salvator,* Latin for ' Jesus, Saviour of men,' in classical Latin .' serving for the vowel i and the consonant.' The letters were embroidered on the cloth hanging over the front of the pulpit. *Absently* - in an absent-minded manner, not thinking of what he was doing, *(the frost) kills the sound* - deadens the sound.

P. 64 *bakehus* - bakery. *Sacrametf* - a holy rite in the Christian Church, *which end etc.,* - you would be less confused than you are at present (for you would learn to put your trust in God). *advent* - arrival.

P. 65 *Chapel* - a ' chapel' is a Dissenter's place of worship, *set up* - strengthened. *Them* - Dolly referred to God indirectly, considering this a more respectful mode of reference.

P. 66 *he'll come to good* - he will grow up to be a good man. *allure him* - encourage him (to go to Church). *fend-* manage for or look after yourself; an abbreviation of ' defend.' *victual* - food, *a bad bed etc.,* - the

money you earn on a Sunday will be powerless to help you when you lie on your death-bed and seek peace of mind but in vain; 'to lie in the bed one has made' means to accept the consequences of one's conduct. *white frost* - which disappears with the rising of the sun. *you'll excuse, etc.,*- you will forgive me for making bold to say this much.

P. 67 *narrow grief*- referring to his lack of interest in life, *grey* - gone out, leaving only grey ashes, *time out of mind* - as far back as anybody would remember, and beyond that again.

CHAPTER XII

P. 68 *well...* - Nancy's thoughts are here described. *hot* - quick-tempered.

P. 69 *did the honours* - acted as hostess, *feminine compliments etc.,* - in almost every bedroom of the house there were ladies busily engaged dressing and talking to each other; *toilettes* - dressing, *nattiness* - neatness.

P. 70 *Dame Tedman's (school)* - the village school kept by an old woman of that name, *weakness* - vanity. .' *feature -1* take after my father's family in looks.

P. 71 *dazzling rank* - the prospect of being the Squire's wife, *any right* - as a husband; if Nancy married, she would have to forget Godfrey and destroy the flowers which he had given her and which she had preserved. *mistletoe-bough* - a small branch of the mistletoe; a plant growing on apple and other trees; a girl standing under the mistletoe bough can be kissed.

P. 72 *pepper* - smart, witty remarks, *a round* - of boxing, a fight.

P. 73 *hopes* - of her consenting to marry him. *slop your tongue* - stop speaking; cf. hold your tongue.

P, 74 *loud patronage* - in a loud, patronizing tone of voice, *key-note* - the note with which he had started. *solicitously* - eager or anxious not to offend anyone, but to please all. *prelude* - play a few introductory notes.

P. 75 *Sir Roger de Coverley* - the name of an English country dance, *white parlour* - the wainscot was painted white to make the room look bright and cheerful. *posy* - bouquet (of pink and white flowers).

P. 76 *carping* - finding fault with without reason. *piert* -' pert,' in good spirits, *slack-baked*- a half baked pie, the crust of which is still white instead of being a deep brown, *turned round etc.*, - so easily led or influenced, *offal* - worthless, *all went off-he* ceased to court her. *hung off*- was cold in her manner, gave him no encouragement, *sniff*- Mr Macey means that he first satisfied himself that the girl cared for him, and would accept him, before he proposed, *snap it to* - close it.

P. 77 *the figure* - a complete set of movements. *oblivious* - forgetful of all that might occur to upset his happiness.

P. 79 *a flash* - a look of indignation; Godfrey was delighted to see her break through her reserves, and speak at last from her heart, *a preoccupied brow* - with a face that showed she was thinking of the dress and of what she should do to mend it, and not of Godfrey.

CHAPTER XIII

P. 80 *dingy* - dirty, *lingering mother's tenderness* - a few promptings still of a mother's love, *clear moments*- moments when she could think clearly.

P. 81 *belated* - overtaken by night, *familiar demon'* or ' *familiar spirit*' - a demon or evil spirit supposed to attend at call, *quickly veiled star* - a wind had sprung up,, and was dispersing the clouds, hurrying them across the sky; through rifts in them stars occasionally appeared, only to be hidden the next moment by a mass of cloud.

P. 82 *a straggling furze bush* - an isolated furze bush growing some little distance away from the hedgerow ; *furze* - a thorny evergreen shrub with beautiful yellow flowers called also *gorse.*

P. 83 *the old year, etc.,* - in Christian Churches a bell is rung at midnight on the last day of the year to usher in the new year; read Tennyson's lines beginning ' Ring out wild bells.'

CHAPTER XIV

P. 87 *was figuring in* - was dancing (and was the centre of interest).

P. 90 *fibre* - a sudden pang of remorse ; the father's heart in him went out to the child.

P. 91 *a twinge, etc.,* - a prick of conscience, for his conduct towards the woman was worthy of censure rather than praise.

CHAPTER xv

P. 94 *notable mothers* - devoted mothers noted for their care of their children, *whole and sweet* - healthy and clean.

P. 95 *call* - necessity.

P. 96 *scrat* - scratch, i.e. dig; here, 'work hard.' *moithered* - worried or troubled.,

P. 97 *leeching* - applying leeches to others to draw blood, the leech being formerly used very extensively by doctors, *mysteries* - of how to dress a child, *done fur her* - attended to her ; taken care of her.

P. 98 *ringing pigs* - putting rings in their noses; when ringed, pigs cannot put their snouts in the soil and damage crops, *catechise,* 'catechism' - Dolly refers to the brief course of instruction in religious doctrines given in the Prayer Book.

P. 99 *a thorn* - a favourite metaphor of Dolly's; cf. *Psalms,* XLI, 3. " Thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness."

P. 100 *putting——handle* - getting hold of things by the wrong end, the metaphor being from the grasping of a knife by the blade instead of by its handle; Dolly always bungled things, *suds* - a solution of soap in hot water.

P. 101 *family ties* - in the home life of his neighbours he saw a picture of what his own life would be when Eppie was grown up.

P. 102 *set up...back-s&l* up erect, *gurgling triumph*- a joyful laugh at having heard the sound, *tingle* - smart. *colly* - blacken. .' *put it, etc.* - I ask whether your conscience does not tell you that, etc.

P. 103 *must lead... dance* - must give father Silas a good deal of trouble, *burst upon him* - the fact struck terror into his mind ; the fact dawned upon him.

P. 105 *pushing '? the teeth* - the cutting of the teeth through the gums.

P. 106 *takes the measles* - it is supposed to be better for a child to have this disease when it is young than when it is grown up.

P. 107 *In old days,* see *Genesis,* XIX. 1-25. There are three periods into which Silas Marner's life may be divided :

1. The period or stage of blind trust and faith in God and man, covering about the first twenty-five years of his life, when he was a member of the church assembling in Lantern yard.
2. The ' withering' stage from the time he left Lantern Yard to the coming of Eppie, a period of fifteen years.
3. The period of full and complete life and the gradual restoration of his faith in God.

CHAPTER XVI

P. 108 *the right turn-he* had turned over a new leaf, *promised land,* see *Genesis* XII. 7, etc. *no cause to fight* - there was no need for him to exert himself in any way; his future happiness was assured him.

CHAPTER XVII

P. Ill *stroking their bent heads* - raising their fore-fingers to their foreheads ; this was the form of salutation adopted by the men. *fuller in flesh* - stouter.

P. 112 *gathered to his fathers* - dead and buried; see *Genesis* XXV. 8. *blonde* - of fair complexion, with light hair and blue eyes.

P. 114 *slips-* cuttings, *abide to be* - could not bear to be.

P. 115 *right* em.'-the proper way. *a deep little puss* - a cunning little thing, *fine and beholden* - very much under an obligation.

P. 116 *did very kindly by* - treated very kindly.

P. 117 *doorsill* - door-step, *would come to light*- would be found, *would be..... answer for it* - would be punished. *set off by* - contrasting with. *mayhap* - perhaps.

P. 118 *hard to be got at* - expensive.

P. 119 *a-going in for four-and-twenty* - will soon be twenty-four years old. *dimpling laughter* - dimples formed as she laughed.

P. 120 *behave pretty* - treat you in a respectful manner, *he's his mother's lad-he* takes after his mother.

P. 121 *o'er young* - too young, *belike* - perhaps.

CHAPTER XVIII

P. 122 *oaken boards* - the boarded floor; the boards are waxed and polished, *filial reverence* - a son's regard for his father, *bossed silver* - silver dishes, etc., ornamented with raised designs, *spar* - any bright crystalline mineral, *take a turn* - walk to the fields and back.

P. 123 *lay by for* - save up for.

P. 124 *station* - position in life.

P. 125 *to take a charge off, etc..,* - to relieve him of the responsibility of bringing up the child, *holding with* - agreeing with.

P. 126 *No, 'm* - no madam, *not altogether despising, etc.,* - she thought it possible that the bull had got out, and she began to imagine that he had gored somebody, etc. *placid* - where everything was quiet.

CHAPTER XIX

P. 130 *futile* - silly, *measured-he* had not understood his wife; he now saw, too late, that the precaution of secrecy was quite unnecessary.

P. 131 *made it up* - compensated for it.

CHAPTER **XX**

P. 133 *takes no hold of me-has* no attraction for me.

P. 134 *held by* - clung to.

P. 135 *close work* - hard, unremitting labour. *laid by* - a vulgarism for 'lay by' (« ceased work).

P. 136 *strapping girl*- strong, healthy girl *take your meaning* - understand you.

P. 137 *conflict of emotions* - fear at the prospect of losing Eppie and the wish to do the best for her. *swelling* - she was deeply grieved, *one struggling dread* - the fear that Eppie might be willing to leave him. *stand in your way* - spoil your prospects, *distress on, etc.,* - she could not help feeling sorry for her husband, so that she could not altogether sympathise with Eppie.

P. 138 *the edge* - the perfect truth.

P. 140 *shadow* - Eppie had had a hazy idea of her father, of whom no one in the village knew anything.

P. 142 *dilated eyes* - wide open eyes.

CHAPTER XXI

P. 144 *nick* - drain or gutter.

P. 145 *usened*- used.

P. 146 *swep*[9] - swept; there is not a trace left of the chapel, *hard done by* - treated badly, *for all* - in spite of its being, etc.

CHAPTER XXII

P. 147 *dash of gold*- some species of lily are white with just a little yellow in the centre.

P. 148 *racked with rheumatiz* - tortured with rheumatism, *quavered* - trembled.

Exercises in Composition

I. 1. Describe the steps by which the coming of Eppie gradually withdrew Marner from his unsocial life.

2. Give some of the characteristics of the country life of Raveloe.

3. Describe carefully the change that took place in Silas Marner's inward life during the first fifteen years of his residence at Raveloe.

4. Tell the story of Godfrey Cass.

5. Compare Nancy Cass with Priscilla Lammeter.

6. Write a character sketch of Dolly Winthrop.

7. What periods of time elapse in the story ?

8. Which remark do you consider the wittiest in Chapter VII ?

II. *Explain:* 1-P. 106 2-P. 138 3-P. 146

1. In spite of the difficulty of carrying her and his yarn or linen at the same time, Silas took her with him in most of his journeys to the farmhouses, unwilling to leave her behind at Dolly Winthrop's who was always ready to take care of her; and little curly-headed Eppie, the weaver's child became an object of interest at several outlying homesteads, as well as in the village.

2. ' When a man turns a blessing from his door, it falls to them as take it in.'

3. It's the will o' Them above as a many things should be dark to us; but there's some things as I've never felt i' the dark about, and they're mostly what comes i' the day's work.