SILAS MARNER

By George Eliot

PART 1

Chapter 1

In the days when the spinning-wheels hummed busily in the farmhouses -and even

great ladies, clothed in silk and thread-lace, had their toy spinning-wheels

of polished oak -there might be seen in districts far away among the lanes, or

deep in the bosom of the hills, certain pallid, undersized men, who, by the

side of the brawny country-folk, looked like the remnants of a disinherited

race. The shepherd's dog barked fiercely when one of these alien-looking men

appeared on the upland, dark against the early winter sunset; for what dog

likes a figure bent under a heavy bag? -and these pale men rarely stirred

abroad without that mysterious burden. The shepherd himself, though he had

good reason to believe that the bag held nothing but flaxen thread, or else

the long rolls of strong linen spun from that thread, was not quite sure that

this trade of weaving, indispensable though it was, could be carried on

entirely without the help of the Evil One. In that far-off time superstition

clung easily round every person or thing that was at all unwonted, or even

intermittent and occasional merely, like the visits of the pedlar or the

knife-grinder. No one knew where wandering men had their homes or their

origin; and how was a man to be explained unless you at least knew somebody

who knew his father and mother? To the peasants of old times, the world

outside their own direct experience was a region of vagueness and mystery; to

their untravelled thought a state of wandering was a conception as dim as the

winter life of the swallows that came back with the spring; and even a

settler, if he came from distant parts, hardly ever ceased to be viewed with a

remnant of distrust, which would have prevented any surprise if a long course

of inoffensive conduct on his part had ended in the commission of a crime;

especially if he had any reputation for knowledge, or showed any skill in

handicraft. All cleverness, whether in the rapid use of that difficult

instrument the tongue, or in some other art unfamiliar to villagers, was in

itself suspicious: honest folk, born and bred in a visible manner, were mostly

not overwise or clever -at least, not beyond such a matter as knowing the

signs of the weather; and the process by which rapidity and dexterity of any

kind were acquired was so wholly hidden that they partook of the nature of

conjuring. In this way it came to pass that those scattered linen-weavers

-emigrants from the town into the country -were to the last regarded as aliens

by their rustic neighbours, and usually contracted the eccentric habits which

belong to a state of loneliness.

In the early years of this century, such a linen-weaver, named Silas Marner,

worked at his vocation in a stone cottage that stood among the nutty hedgerows

near the village of Raveloe, and not far from the edge of a deserted

stone-pit. The questionable sound of Silas's loom, so unlike the natural

cheerful trotting of the winnowing-machine, or the simpler rhythm of the

flail, had a half-fearful fascination for the Raveloe boys, who would often

leave off their nutting or birds'-nesting to peep in at the window of the

stone cottage, counterbalancing a certain awe at the mysterious action of the

loom, by a pleasant sense of scornful superiority, drawn from the mockery of

its alternating noises, along with the bent, treadmill attitude of the weaver.

But sometimes it happened that Marner, pausing to adjust an irregularity in

his thread, became aware of the small scoundrels, and, though chary of his

time, he liked their intrusion so ill that he would descend from his loom,

and, opening the door, would fix on them a gaze that was always enough to make

them take to their legs in terror. For how was it possible to believe that

those large brown protuberant eyes in Silas Marner's pale face really saw

nothing very distinctly that was not close to them, and not rather that their

dreadful stare could dart cramp, or rickets, or a wry mouth at any boy who

happened to be in the rear? They had, perhaps, heard their fathers and mothers

hint that Silas Marner could cure folk's rheumatism if he had a mind, and add,

still more darkly, that if you could only speak the devil fair enough, he

might save you the cost of the doctor. Such strange, lingering echoes of the

old demon-worship might perhaps even now be caught by the diligent listener

among the gray-haired peasantry; for the rude mind with difficulty associates

the ideas of power and benignity. A shadowy conception of power that by much

persuasion can be induced to refrain from inflicting harm, is the shape most

easily taken by the sense of the Invisible in the minds of men who have always

been pressed close by primitive wants, and to whom a life of hard toil has

never been illuminated by any enthusiastic religious faith. To them pain and

mishap present a far wider range of possibilities than gladness and enjoyment:

their imagination is almost barren of the images that feed desire and hope,

but is all overgrown by recollections that are a perpetual pasture to fear.

"Is there anything you can fancy that you would like to eat?" I once said to

an old labouring-man, who was in his last illness, and who had refused all the

food his wife had offered him. "No," he answered; "I've never been used to

nothing but common victual, and I can't eat that." Experience had bred no

fancies in him that could raise the phantasm of appetite.

And Raveloe was a village where many of the old echoes lingered, undrowned by

new voices. Not that it was one of those barren parishes lying on the

outskirts of civilization -inhabited by meagre sheep and thinly scattered

shepherds: on the contrary, it lay in the rich, central plain of what we are

pleased to call Merry England, and held farms which, speaking from a spiritual

point of view, paid highly desirable tithes. But it was nestled in a snug,

well-wooded hollow, quite an hour's journey on horseback from any turnpike,

where it was never reached by the vibrations of the coach-horn, or of public

opinion. 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, standing

close upon the road, and lifting more imposing fronts than the rectory, which

peeped from among the trees on the other side of the churchyard -a village

which showed at once the summits of its social life, and told the practised

eye that there was no great park and manor-house in the vicinity, but that

there were several chiefs in Raveloe who could farm badly quite at their ease,

drawing enough money from their bad farming, in those wartimes, to live in a

rollicking fashion, and keep a jolly Christmas, Whitsun, and Eastertide.

It was fifteen years since Silas Marner had first come to Raveloe: he was then

simply a pallid young man, with prominent, short-sighted brown eyes, whose

appearance would have had nothing strange for people of average culture and

experience, but for the villagers near whom he had come to settle it had

mysterious peculiarities which corresponded with the exceptional nature of his

occupation, and his advent from an unknown region called "North'ard". So had

his way of life: he invited no comer to step across his door-sill, and he

never strolled into the village to drink a pint at the Rainbow, or to gossip

at the wheelwright's; he sought no man or woman, save for the purposes of his

calling, or in order to supply himself with necessaries; and it was soon clear

to the Raveloe lasses that he would never urge one of them to accept him

against her will -quite as if he had heard them declare that they would never

marry a dead man come to life again. This view of Marner's personality was not

without another ground than his pale face and unexampled eyes; for Jem Rodney,

the molecatcher, averred that one evening as he was returning homeward he saw

Silas 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; and that,

on coming up to him, he saw that Marner's eyes were set like a dead man's, and

he spoke to him, and shook him, and his limbs were stiff, and his hands

clutched the bag as if they'd been made of iron; but just as he had made up

his mind that the weaver was dead, he came all right again, like, as you might

say, in the winking of an eye, and said "Good-night", and walked off. All this

Jem swore he had seen, more by token that it was the very day he had been

molecatching on Squire Cass's land, down by the old saw-pit. Some said Marner

must have been in a "fit" -a word which seemed to explain things otherwise

incredible; 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 was a stroke, wasn't it? and it was in the nature of a stroke to

partly take away the use of a man's limbs and throw him on the parish, if he'd

got no children to look to. 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 as soon

as you can say "Gee!" But there might be such a thing as a man's soul being

loose from his body, and going out and in, like a bird out of its nest and

back; and that was how folks got overwise, 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 Rodney's story was no more than what might have been expected by

anybody who had seen how Marner had cured Sally Oates, 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; but he was worth speaking fair, if it was only to keep

him from doing you a mischief.

It was partly to this vague fear that Marner was indebted for protecting him

from the persecution that his singularities might have drawn upon him, but

still more to the fact that, the old linen-weaver in the neighbouring parish

of Tarley being dead, his 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. Their sense of his

usefulness would have counteracted any repugnance or suspicion which was not

confirmed by a deficiency in the quality or the tale of the cloth he wove for

them. And the years had rolled on without producing any change in the

impressions of the neighbours concerning Marner, except the change from

novelty to habit. At the end of fifteen years the Raveloe men said just 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 fine sight of money somewhere, and that

he could buy up "bigger men" than himself.

But while opinion concerning him had remained nearly stationary, and his daily

habits had presented scarcely any visible change, Marner's inward life had

been a history and a metamorphosis, as that of every fervid nature must be

when it has fled, or been condemned to solitude. His life, before he came to

Raveloe, had been filled with the movement, the mental activity, and the close

fellowship which, in that day as in this, marked the life of an artisan early

incorporated in a narrow religious sect, where the poorest layman has the

chance of distinguishing himself by gifts of speech, and has, at the very

least, the weight of a silent voter in the government of his community. Marner

was highly thought of in that little hidden world, known to itself as the

church assembling in Lantern Yard; he was believed to be a young man of

exemplary life and ardent faith; and a peculiar interest had been centred in

him ever since he had fallen, at a prayer-meeting, into a mysterious rigidity

and suspension of consciousness which, lasting for an hour or more, had been

mistaken for death. To have sought a medical explanation for this phenomenon

would have been held by Silas himself, as well as by his minister and

fellow-members, a wilful self-exclusion from the spiritual significance that

might lie therein. Silas was evidently a brother selected for a peculiar

discipline; and though the effort to interpret this discipline was discouraged

by the absence, on his part, of any spiritual vision during his outward

trance, yet it was believed by himself and others that its effect was seen in

an accession of light and fervour. A less truthful man than he might have been

tempted into the subsequent creation of a vision in the form of resurgent

memory; a less sane man might have believed in such a creation; but Silas was

both sane and honest, though, as with many honest and fervent men, culture had

not defined any channels for his sense of mystery, and so it spread itself

over the proper pathway of inquiry and knowledge. He had inherited from his

mother some acquaintance with medicinal herbs and their preparation -a little

store of wisdom which she had imparted to him as a solemn bequest -but of late

years he had had doubts about the lawfulness of applying this knowledge,

believing that herbs could have no efficacy without prayer, and that prayer

might suffice without herbs; so that his inherited delight to wander through

the fields in search of foxglove and dandelion and coltsfoot began to wear to

him the character of a temptation.

Among the members of his church there was one young man, a little older than

himself, with whom he had long lived in such close friendship that it was the

custom of their Lantern Yard brethren to call them David and Jonathan. The

real name of the friend was William Dane, and he, too, was regarded as a

shining instance of youthful piety, though somewhat given to over-severity

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; for Marner had one of those

impressible, self-doubting natures which, at an inexperienced age, admire

imperativeness and lean on contradiction. The expression of trusting

simplicity in Marner's face, heightened by that absence of special

observation, that defenceless, deer-like gaze which belongs to large,

prominent eyes, was strongly contrasted by the self-complacent suppression 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 he could never arrive

at anything higher than hope mingled with fear, and listened with longing

wonder when William declared that he had possessed unshaken assurance ever

since, in the period of his conversion, he had dreamed that he saw the words

"calling and election sure" standing by themselves on a white page in the open

Bible. Such colloquies have occupied many a pair of pale-faced weavers, whose

unnurtured souls have been like young winged things, fluttering forsaken in

the twilight.

It had seemed to the unsuspecting Silas that the friendship had suffered no

chill even from his formation of another attachment of a closer kind. For some

months he had been engaged to a young servant-woman, waiting only for a little

increase to their mutual savings in order to their marriage; and it was a

great delight to him that Sarah did not object to William's occasional

presence in their Sunday interviews. It was at this point in their history

that Silas's cataleptic fit occurred during the prayer-meeting; and amidst the

various queries and expressions of interest addressed to him by his

fellow-members, William's suggestion alone jarred with the general sympathy

towards a brother thus singled out for special dealings. He observed that, to

him, this trance looked more like a visitation of Satan than a proof of divine

favour, and exhorted his friend to see that he hid no accursed thing within

his soul. Silas, feeling bound to accept rebuke and admonition as a brotherly

office, felt no resentment, but only pain, at his friend's doubts concerning

him; and to this was soon added some anxiety at the perception that Sarah's

manner towards him began to exhibit a strange fluctuation between an effort at

an increased manifestation of regard and involuntary signs of shrinking and

dislike. 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 recognised

in the prayer-meetings; it could not be broken off without strict

investigation, and Sarah could render 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 brethren 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

interrogation. 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."

"I 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 I 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 I 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. This resolution can be a ground of

surprise only to those who are unacquainted with that obscure religious life

which has gone on in the alleys of our towns. Silas knelt with his brethren,

relying on his own innocence being certified by immediate divine interference,

but feeling that there was sorrow and mourning behind 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. To people accustomed to reason about

the forms in which their religious feeling has incorporated itself, it is

difficult to enter into that simple, untaught state of mind in which the form

and the feeling have never been severed by an act of reflection. We are apt to

think it inevitable that a man in Marner's position should have begun to

question the validity of an appeal to the divine judgment by drawing lots; but

to him this would have been an effort of independent thought such as he had

never known; and he must have made the effort at a moment when all his

energies were turned into the anguish of disappointed faith. If there is an

angel who records the sorrows of men as well as their sins, he knows how many

and deep are the sorrows that spring from false ideas for which no man is

culpable.

Marner went home, and for a whole day sat alone, stunned by despair, without

any impulse 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 messengers 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 2

Even people whose lives have been made various by learning, sometimes find it

hard to keep a fast hold on their habitual views of life, on their faith in

the Invisible, nay, on the sense that their past joys and sorrows are a real

experience, when they are suddenly transported to a new land, where the beings

around them know nothing of their history, and share none of their ideas

-where their mother earth shows another lap, and human life has other forms

than those on which their souls have been nourished. Minds that have been

unhinged from their old faith and love have perhaps sought this Lethean

influence of exile in which the past becomes dreamy because its symbols have

all vanished, and the present too is dreamy because it is linked with no

memories. But even their experience may hardly enable them thoroughly to

imagine what was the effect on a simple weaver like Silas Marner, when he left

his own country and people and came to settle in Raveloe. Nothing could be

more unlike his native town, set within sight of the widespread hillsides,

than this low, wooded region, where he 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,

which had once been to him the altar-place of high dispensations. The

whitewashed walls; the little pews where well-known figures entered with a

subdued rustling, and where first one well-known voice and then another,

pitched in a peculiar key of petition, uttered phrases at once occult and

familiar, like the amulet worn on the heart; the pulpit where the minister

delivered unquestioned doctrine, and swayed to and fro, and handled the book

in a long-accustomed manner; the very pauses between the couplets of the hymn,

as it was given out, and the recurrent swell of voices in song: these things

had been the channel of divine influence to Marner -they were the fostering

home of his religious emotions -they were Christianity and God's kingdom upon

earth. A weaver who finds hard words in his hymn-book knows nothing of

abstractions; as the little child knows nothing of parental love, but only

knows one face and one lap towards which it stretches its arms for refuge and

nurture.

And what could be more unlike that Lantern Yard world than the world in

Raveloe? -orchards looking lazy with neglected plenty; 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. There were no lips in Raveloe from which a word could

fall that would stir Silas Marner's benumbed faith to a sense of pain. In the

early ages of the world, we know, it was believed that each territory was

inhabited and ruled by its own divinities, so that a man could cross the

bordering heights and be out of the reach of his native gods, whose presence

was confined to the streams and the groves and the hills among which he had

lived from his birth. And poor Silas was vaguely conscious of something not

unlike the feeling of primitive men, when they fled thus, in fear or in

sullenness, from the face of an unpropitious deity. 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 abundance, knowing and needing nothing of that trust which, for

him, had been turned to bitterness. The little light he possessed spread its

beams so narrowly that frustrated belief was a curtain broad enough to create

for him the blackness of night.

His first movement after the shock had been to work in his loom; and he went

on with this unremittingly, never asking himself why, now he was come to

Raveloe, he worked far on into the night to finish the tale of Mrs. Osgood's

table-linen sooner than she expected -without contemplating beforehand the

money she would put into his hand for the work. He seemed to weave, like the

spider, from pure impulse, without reflection. Every man's work, pursued

steadily, tends in this way to become an end in itself, and so to bridge over

the loveless chasms of his life. Silas's 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 Silas,

in his solitude, had to provide his own breakfast, dinner, and supper, to

fetch his own water from the well, and to put his own kettle on the fire; and

all these immediate promptings helped, along with the weaving, to reduce his

life to the unquestioning activity of a spinning insect. He hated the thought

of the past; there was nothing that called out his love and fellowship toward

the strangers he had come amongst; and the future was all dark, for there was

no Unseen Love that cared for him. Thought was arrested by utter bewilderment,

now its old narrow pathway was closed, and affection seemed to have died under

the bruise that had fallen on its keenest nerves.

But 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 after 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; no

man expected a share of them, and he loved no man that he should offer him a

share. But what were the guineas to him who saw no vista beyond countless days

of weaving? It was needless for him to ask that, for it was pleasant to him to

feel them in his palm, and look at their bright faces, which were all his own:

it was another element of life, like the weaving and the satisfaction of

hunger, subsisting quite aloof from the life of belief and love from which he

had been cut off. The weaver's hand had known the touch of hard-won money even

before the palm had grown to its full breadth; for twenty years, mysterious

money had stood to him as the symbol of earthly good, and the immediate object

of toil. He had seemed to love it little in the years when every penny had its

purpose for him; for he loved the purpose then. But now, when all purpose was

gone, that habit of looking towards the money and grasping it with a sense of

fulfilled effort made a loam that was deep enough for the seeds of desire; and

as Silas walked homeward across the fields in the twilight, he drew out the

money and thought it was brighter in the gathering gloom.

About this time an incident happened which seemed to open a possibility of

some fellowship with his neighbours. One day, taking a pair of shoes to be

mended, he saw the cobbler's wife seated by the fire, suffering from the

terrible symptoms of heart-disease and dropsy, which he had witnessed as the

precursors of his mother's death. He felt a rush of pity at the mingled sight

and remembrance, and, recalling the relief his mother had found from a simple

preparation of foxglove, he promised Sally Oates to bring her something that

would ease her, since the doctor did her no good. In this office of charity,

Silas felt, for the first time since he had come to Raveloe, a sense of unity

between his past and present life, which might have been the beginning of his

rescue from the insect-like existence into which his nature had shrunk. But

Sally Oates's disease had raised her into a personage of much interest and

importance among the neighbours, and the fact of her having found relief from

drinking Silas Marner's "stuff" became a matter of general discourse. When

Doctor Kimble gave physic, it was natural that it should have an effect; but

when a weaver, who came from nobody knew where, worked wonders with a bottle

of brown waters, the occult character of the process was evident. Such a sort

of thing had not been known since the Wise Woman at Tarley died; and she had

charms as well as "stuff": everybody went to her when their children had fits.

Silas Marner must be a person of the same sort, for how did he know what would

bring back Sally Oates's breath, if he didn't know a fine sight more than

that? The Wise Woman had words that she muttered to herself, so that you

couldn't hear what they were, and if she tied a bit of red thread round the

child's toe the while, it would keep off the water in the head. There were

women in Raveloe, at that present time, who had worn one of the Wise Woman's

little bags round their necks, and, in consequence, had never had an idiot

child, as Ann Coulter had. Silas Marner could very likely do as much, and

more; and now it was all clear how he should have come from unknown parts, and

be so "comical-looking". But Sally Oates must mind and not tell the doctor,

for he would be sure to set his face against Marner: he was always angry about

the Wise Woman, and used to threaten those who went to her that they should

have none of his help any more.

Silas now found himself and his cottage suddenly beset by mothers who wanted

him to charm away the whooping-cough, or bring back the milk, and by men who

wanted stuff against the rheumatics or the knots in the hands; and, to secure

themselves against a refusal, the applicants brought silver in their palms.

Silas might have driven a profitable trade in charms as well as in his small

list of drugs; but money on this condition was no temptation to him. He had

never known an impulse towards falsity, and he drove one after another away

with growing irritation, for the news of him as a wise man had spread even to

Tarley, and it was long before people ceased to take long walks for the sake

of asking his aid. But the hope in his wisdom was at length changed into

dread, for no one believed him when he said he knew no charms and could work

no cures, and every man and woman who had an accident or a new attack after

applying to him, set the misfortune down to Master Marner's ill-will and

irritated glances. Thus it came to pass that his movement of pity towards

Sally Oates, which had given him a transient sense of brotherhood, heightened

the repulsion between him and his neighbours, and made his isolation more

complete.

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. Have not men, shut up in solitary imprisonment, found an

interest in marking the moments by straight strokes of a certain length on the

wall, until the growth of the sum of straight strokes, arranged in triangles,

has become a mastering purpose? Do we not while away moments of inanity or

fatigued waiting by repeating some trivial movement or sound, until the

repetition has bred a want, which is incipient habit? That will help us to

understand how the love of accumulating money grows an absorbing passion in

men whose imaginations, even in the very beginning of their hoard, showed them

no purpose beyond it. 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. In this strange world, made a hopeless riddle

to him, he might, if he had had a less intense nature, have sat weaving,

weaving -looking towards the end of his pattern, or towards the end of his

web, till he forgot the riddle, and everything else but his immediate

sensations; but the money had come to mark off his weaving into periods, and

the money not only grew, but it remained with him. He began to think it was

conscious of him, as his loom was, and he would on no account have exchanged

those coins, which had become his familiars, 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 up 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 was

common in country districts in those days; there were old labourers in the

parish of Raveloe who were known to have their savings by them, probably

inside their flock-beds; but their rustic neighbours, though not all of them

as honest as their ancestors in the days of King Alfred, had not imaginations

bold enough to lay a plan of burglary. How could they have spent the money in

their own village without betraying themselves? They would be obliged to "run

away" -a course as dark and dubious as a balloon journey.

So, year after year, Silas Marner had lived in this solitude, his guineas

rising in the iron pot, and his life narrowing and hardening itself more and

more into a mere pulsation of desire and satisfaction that had no relation to

any other being. His life had reduced itself to the functions of weaving and

hoarding, without any contemplation of an end towards which the functions

tended. The same sort of process has perhaps been undergone by wiser men, when

they have been cut off from faith and love -only, instead of a loom and a heap

of guineas, they have had some erudite research, some ingenious project, or

some well-knit theory. Strangely, Marner's face and figure shrank and bent

themselves into a constant mechanical relation to the objects of his life, so

that he produced the same sort of impression as a handle or a crooked tube,

which has no meaning standing apart. 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, though he was not yet

forty, the children always called him "Old Master Marner".

Yet even in this stage of withering a little incident happened, which showed

that the sap of affection was not all gone. It was one of his daily tasks to

fetch his water from a well a couple of fields off, and for this purpose, 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, and the impress of its

handle on his palm gave a satisfaction mingled with that of having the fresh

clear water. 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 such even repetition that their pause

seemed almost as much a constraint as the holding of his breath. 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 wasted no room in their resting-place, but lent themselves flexibly to

every corner. 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 of 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, like a rivulet that has sunk far

down from the grassy fringe of its old breadth into a little shivering thread,

that cuts a groove for itself in the barren sand.

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 3

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. He was only one among several landed

parishioners, but he alone was honoured with the title of Squire; for though

Mr. Osgood's family was also understood to be of timeless origin -the Raveloe

imagination having never ventured back to that fearful blank when there were

no Osgoods -still, he merely owned the farm he occupied; whereas Squire Cass

had a tenant or two, who complained of the game to him quite as if he had been

a lord.

It was still that glorious wartime which was felt to be a peculiar favour of

Providence towards the landed interest, and the fall of prices had not yet

come to carry the race of small squires and yeomen down that road to ruin for

which extravagant habits and bad husbandry were plentifully anointing their

wheels. I am speaking now in relation to Raveloe and the parishes that

resembled it; for our old-fashioned country life had many different aspects,

as all life must have when it is spread over a various surface, and breathed

on variously by multitudinous currents, from the winds of heaven to the

thoughts of men, which are forever moving and crossing each other with

incalculable results. Raveloe lay low among the bushy trees and the rutted

lanes, aloof from the currents of industrial energy and Puritan earnestness:

the rich ate and drank freely, accepting gout and apoplexy as things that ran

mysteriously in respectable families, and the poor thought that the rich were

entirely in the right of it to lead a jolly life; besides, their feasting

caused a multiplication of orts, which were the heirlooms of the poor. Betty

Jay scented the boiling of Squire Cass's hams, but her longing was arrested by

the unctuous liquor in which they were boiled; and when the seasons brought

round the great merry-makings, they were regarded on all hands as a fine thing

for the poor. For the Raveloe feasts were like the rounds of beef and the

barrels of ale -they were on a large scale, and lasted a good while,

especially in the winter-time. After ladies had packed up their best gowns and

topknots in bandboxes, and had incurred the risk of fording streams on

pillions with the precious burden in rainy or snowy weather, when there was no

knowing how high the water would rise, it was not to be supposed that they

looked forward to a brief pleasure. On this ground it was always contrived in

the dark seasons, when there was little work to be done, and the hours were

long, that several neighbours should keep open house in succession. So soon as

Squire Cass's standing dishes diminished in plenty and freshness, his guests

had nothing to do but to walk a little higher up the village to Mr. Osgood's,

at the Orchards, and they found hams and chines uncut, pork-pies with the

scent of the fire in them, spun butter in all its freshness -everything, in

fact, that appetites at leisure could desire, in perhaps greater perfection,

though not in greater abundance, than at Squire Cass's.

For the Squire's wife had died long ago, and the Red House was without that

presence of the wife and mother which is the fountain of wholesome love and

fear in parlour and kitchen; and this helped to account not only for there

being more profusion than finished excellence in the holiday provisions, but

also for the frequency with which the proud Squire condescended to preside in

the parlour of the Rainbow rather than under the shadow of his own dark

wainscot; perhaps, also, for the fact that his sons had turned out rather ill.

Raveloe was not a place where moral censure was severe, but it was thought a

weakness in the Squire that he had kept all his sons at home in idleness; and

though some license was to be allowed to young men whose fathers could afford

it, people shook their heads at the courses of the second son, Dunstan,

commonly called Dunsey Cass, whose taste for swopping and betting might turn

out to be a sowing of something worse than wild oats. To be sure, the

neighbours said, it was no matter what became of Dunsey -a spiteful, jeering

fellow, who seemed to enjoy his drink the more when other people went dry

-always provided that his doings did not bring trouble on a family like Squire

Cass's, with a monument in the church, and tankards older than King George.

But it would be a thousand pities if Mr. Godfrey, the eldest, a fine

open-faced, good-natured young man, who was to come into the land some day,

should take to going along the same road with his brother, as he had seemed to

do of late. If he went on in that way, he would lose Miss Nancy Lammeter; for

it was well known that she had looked very shyly on him ever since last

Whitsuntide twelvemonth, when there was so much talk about his being away from

home days and days together. There was something wrong, more than common -that

was quite clear; for Mr. Godfrey didn't look half so fresh-coloured and open

as he used to do. At one time everybody was saying, What a handsome couple he

and Miss Nancy Lammeter would make! and if she could come to be mistress at

the Red House, there would be a fine change, for the Lammeters had been

brought up in that way that they never suffered a pinch of salt to be wasted,

and yet everybody in their household had of the best, according to his place.

Such a daughter-in-law would be a saving to the old Squire, if she never

brought a penny to her fortune; for it was to be feared that, notwithstanding

his incomings, there were more holes in his pocket than the one where he put

his own hand in. But if Mr. Godfrey didn't turn over a new leaf, he might say

"Good-bye" to Miss Nancy Lammeter.

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. The fading gray light fell dimly on the walls decorated with guns,

whips, and foxes' brushes, on coats and hats flung on the chairs, on tankards

sending forth a scent of flat ale, and on a half-choked fire, with pipes

propped up in the chimney-corners: signs of a domestic life destitute of any

hallowing charm, with which the look of gloomy vexation on Godfrey's blond

face was in sad accordance. 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 and the gratuitously elated bearing which mark 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 Squire's short o' cash, and in no humour to stand any

nonsense; and you know what he threatened if ever he found you making away

with his money again. So, see and get the money, and pretty quickly, will you?"

"Oh!" said Dunsey sneeringly, 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 tomorrow. There'll be Bryce and

Keating there, for sure. You'll get more bids than one."

"I daresay, and get back home at eight o'clock, splashed up to the chin. I'm

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, he'll 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 overshot his mark, and that there was a point at

which even the hesitating Godfrey might be driven into decision. 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. His natural irresolution and moral cowardice were

exaggerated by a position in which dreaded consequences seemed to press

equally on all sides, and his irritation had no sooner provoked him to defy

Dunstan and anticipate all possible betrayals, than the miseries he must bring

on himself by such a step seemed more unendurable to him than the present

evil. The results of confession were not contingent, they were certain;

whereas betrayal was not certain. From the near vision of that certainty he

fell back on suspense and vacillation with a sense of repose. The disinherited

son of a small squire, equally disinclined to dig and to beg, was almost as

helpless as an uprooted tree, which, by the favour of earth and sky, has grown

to a handsome bulk on the spot where it first shot upward. Perhaps it would

have been possible to think of digging with some cheerfulness if Nancy

Lammeter were to be won on those terms; but since he must irrevocably lose her

as well as the inheritance, and must break every tie but the one that degraded

him and left him without motive for trying to recover his better self, he

could imagine no future for himself on the other side of confession but that

of "'listing for a soldier" -the most desperate step, short of suicide, in the

eyes of respectable families. No! he would rather trust to casualties than to

his own resolve -rather go on sitting at the feast, and sipping the wine he

loved, though with the sword hanging over him and terror in his heart, than

rush away into the cold darkness where there was no pleasure left. The utmost

concession to Dunstan about the horse began to seem easy, compared with the

fulfilment of his own threat. But his pride would not let him recommence the

conversation otherwise 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 thing I've got to call my own, and

the best bit of horseflesh 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 tomorrow 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 daresay -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 tomorrow."

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, which was fed by feelings stronger even than his resentment. 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 'ull 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 tomorrow, 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 tomorrow, 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, and left Godfrey to that

bitter rumination on his personal circumstances which was now unbroken from

day today save by the excitement of sporting, drinking, card-playing, or the

rarer and less oblivious pleasure of seeing Miss Nancy Lammeter. The subtle

and varied pains springing from the higher sensibility that accompanies higher

culture, are perhaps less pitiable than that dreary absence of impersonal

enjoyment and consolation which leaves ruder minds to the perpetual urgent

companionship of their own griefs and discontents. The lives of those rural

forefathers, whom we are apt to think very prosaic figures -men whose only

work was to ride round their land, getting heavier and heavier in their

saddles, and who passed the rest of their days in the half-listless

gratification of senses dulled by monotony -had a certain pathos in them

nevertheless. Calamities came to them too, and their early errors carried hard

consequences: perhaps the love of some sweet maiden, the image of purity,

order, and calm, had opened their eyes to the vision of a life in which the

days would not seem too long, even without rioting; but the maiden was lost,

and the vision passed away, and then what was left to them, especially when

they had become too heavy for the hunt, or for carrying a gun over the

furrows, but to drink and get merry, or to drink and get angry, so that they

might be independent of variety, and say over again with eager emphasis the

things they had said already any time that twelvemonth? Assuredly, among these

flushed and dull-eyed men there were some whom -thanks to their native human

kindness -even riot could never drive into brutality; men who, when their

cheeks were fresh, had felt the keen point of sorrow or remorse, had been

pierced by the reeds they leaned on, or had lightly put their limbs in fetters

from which no struggle could loose them; and under these sad circumstances,

common to us all, their thoughts could find no resting-place outside the

ever-trodden round of their own petty history.

That, at least, was the condition of Godfrey Cass in this six-and-twentieth

year of his life. A movement of compunction, helped by those small indefinable

influences which every personal relation exerts on a pliant nature, had urged

him into a secret marriage, which was a blight on his life. It was an ugly

story of low passion, delusion, and waking from delusion, which needs not to

be dragged from the privacy of Godfrey's bitter memory. He had long known that

the delusion was partly due to a trap laid for him by Dunstan, who saw in his

brother's degrading marriage the means of gratifying at once his jealous hate

and his cupidity. And if Godfrey could have felt himself simply a victim, the

iron bit that destiny had put into his mouth would have chafed him less

intolerably. If the curses he muttered half aloud when he was alone had had no

other object than Dunstan's diabolical cunning, he might have shrunk less from

the consequences of avowal. But he had something else to curse -his own

vicious folly, which now seemed as mad and unaccountable to him as almost all

our follies and vices do when their promptings have long passed away. For four

years he had thought of Nancy Lammeter, and wooed her with tacit, patient

worship, as the woman who made him think of the future with joy: she would be

his wife, and would make home lovely to him, as his father's home had never

been; and it would be easy, when she was always near, to shake off those

foolish habits that were no pleasures, but only a feverish way of annulling

vacancy. Godfrey's was an essentially domestic nature, bred up in a home where

the hearth had no smiles, and where the daily habits were not chastised by the

presence of household order. His easy disposition made him fall in

unresistingly with the family courses, but the need of some tender, permanent

affection, the longing for some influence that would make the good he

preferred easy to pursue, caused the neatness, purity, and liberal orderliness

of the Lammeter household, sunned by the smile of Nancy, to seem like those

fresh bright hours of the morning when temptations go to sleep and leave the

ear open to the voice of the good angel, inviting to industry, sobriety, and

peace. And yet the hope of this paradise had not been enough to save him from

a course which shut him out of it forever. Instead of keeping fast hold of the

strong silken rope by which Nancy would have drawn him safe to the green banks

where it was easy to step firmly, he had let himself be dragged back into mud

and slime, in which it was useless to struggle. He had made ties for himself

which robbed him of all wholesome motive and were a constant exasperation.

Still, there was one position worse than the present: it was the position he

would be in when the ugly secret was disclosed; and the desire that

continually triumphed over every other was that of warding 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 -would have, perhaps, to turn his

back on that hereditary ease and dignity which, after all, was a sort of

reason for living, and would carry with him the certainty that he was banished

forever from the sight and esteem of Nancy Lammeter. The longer the interval,

the more chance there was of deliverance from some, at least, of the hateful

consequences to which he had sold himself; the more opportunities remained for

him to snatch the strange gratification of seeing Nancy, and gathering some

faint indications of her lingering regard. Towards this gratification he was

impelled, fitfully, every now and then, after having passed weeks in which he

had avoided her as the far-off, bright-winged prize that only made him spring

forward and find his chain all the more galling. One of those fits of yearning

was on him now, and it would have been strong enough to have persuaded him to

trust Wildfire to Dunstan rather than disappoint the yearning, even if he had

not had another reason for his disinclination towards the morrow's hunt. That

other reason was the fact that the morning's meet was near Batherley, the

market-town where the unhappy woman lived whose image became more odious to

him every day; and to his thought the whole vicinage was haunted by her. The

yoke a man creates for himself by wrong-doing will breed hate in the kindliest

nature; and the good-humoured, affectionate-hearted Godfrey Cass was fast

becoming a bitter man, visited by cruel wishes, that seemed to enter, and

depart, and enter again, like demons who had found in him a ready-garnished

home.

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

-perhaps because she saw no other career open to her.

Chapter 4

Dunstan Cass, setting off in the raw morning, at the judiciously quiet pace of

a man who is obliged to ride to cover on his hunter, had to take his way along

the lane which, at its farther extremity, passed by the piece of unenclosed

ground called the Stone-pit, where stood the cottage, once a stone-cutter's

shed, now for fifteen years inhabited by Silas Marner. 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, Dunstan Cass, who had often heard talk of Marner's miserliness,

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 the young

squire's prospects? The resource occurred to him now as so easy and agreeable,

especially as Marner's hoard was likely to be large enough to leave Godfrey a

handsome surplus beyond his immediate needs, and enable him to accommodate his

faithful brother, that he had almost turned the horse's head towards home

again. Godfrey would be ready enough to accept the suggestion: he would snatch

eagerly at a plan that might save him from parting with Wildfire. But when

Dunstan's meditation reached this point, the inclination to go on grew strong

and prevailed. He didn't want to give Godfrey that pleasure: he preferred that

Master Godfrey should be vexed. Moreover, Dunstan enjoyed the self-important

consciousness of having a horse to sell, and the opportunity of driving a

bargain, swaggering, and possibly taking somebody in. He might have all the

satisfaction attendant on selling his brother's horse, and not the less have

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.

"Heyday!" said Bryce, who had long had his eye on Wildfire, "you're on your

brother's horse today: how's that?"

"Oh, I've swopped with him," said Dunstan, whose delight in lying, grandly

independent of utility, was not to be diminished by the likelihood that his

hearer would not believe him -"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 accommodated him by taking the horse, though it was

against my will, for I'd got an itch for a mare o' Jortin's -as rare a bit o'

blood as ever you threw your leg across. But I shall keep Wildfire, now I've

got him, though I'd a bid of a hundred and fifty for him the other day, from a

man over at Flitton -he's buying for Lord Cromleck -a fellow with a cast in

his eye, and a green waistcoat. But I mean to stick to Wildfire: I shan't get

a better at a fence in a hurry. The mare's got more blood, but she's a bit too

weak in the hind-quarters."

Bryce, of course, divined that Dunstan wanted to sell the horse, and Dunstan

knew that he divined it (horse-dealing is only one of many human transactions

carried on in this ingenious manner); 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 hedge-stake. 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 happened that

Dunstan, a short time before, having had to get down to arrange his stirrup,

had muttered a good many curses at this interruption, which had thrown him in

the rear of the hunt near the moment of glory, and under this exasperation had

taken the fences more blindly. He would soon have been up with the hounds

again, when the fatal accident happened; and hence he was between eager riders

in advance, not troubling themselves about what happened behind them, and

far-off stragglers, who were as likely as not to pass quite aloof from the

line of road in which Wildfire had fallen. Dunstan, whose nature it was to

care more for immediate annoyances than for remote consequences, no sooner

recovered his legs, and saw that it was all over with Wildfire, than he felt a

satisfaction at the absence of witnesses to a position which no swaggering

could make enviable. Reinforcing himself, after his shake, with a little

brandy and much swearing, he walked as fast as he could to a coppice on his

right hand, through which it occurred to him that he could make his way to

Batherley without danger of encountering any member of the hunt. His first

intention was to hire a horse there and ride home forthwith, for to walk many

miles without a gun in his hand and along an ordinary road was as much out of

the question to him as to other spirited young men of his kind. He did not

much mind about taking the bad news to Godfrey, for he had to offer him at the

same time the resource of Marner's money; and if Godfrey kicked, as he always

did, at the notion of making a fresh debt from which he himself got the

smallest share of advantage, why, he wouldn't kick long: Dunstan felt sure he

could worry Godfrey into anything. The idea of Marner's money kept growing in

vividness, now the want of it had become immediate; the prospect of having to

make his appearance with the muddy boots of a pedestrian at Batherley, and to

encounter the grinning queries of stablemen, stood unpleasantly in the way of

his impatience to be back at Raveloe and carry out his felicitous plan; and a

casual visitation of his waistcoat-pocket, as he was ruminating, awakened his

memory to the fact that the two or three small coins his forefinger

encountered there, were of too pale a colour to cover that small debt, without

payment of which the stable-keeper had declared he would never do any more

business with Dunsey Cass. After all, according to the direction in which the

run had brought him, he was not so very much farther from home than he was

from Batherley; but Dunsey, not being remarkable for clearness of head, was

only led to this conclusion by the gradual perception that there were other

reasons for choosing the unprecedented course of walking home. It was now

nearly four o'clock, and a mist was gathering: the sooner he got into the road

the better. He remembered having crossed the road and seen the fingerpost 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, as if to assure himself that he was

not at all taken by surprise, he set off with the sense that he was

undertaking a remarkable feat of bodily exertion, which somehow and at some

time he should be able to dress up and magnify to the admiration of a select

circle at the Rainbow. When a young gentleman like Dunsey is reduced to so

exceptional a mode of locomotion as walking, a whip in his hand is a desirable

corrective to a too bewildering dreamy sense of unwontedness in his position;

and Dunstan, as he went along through the gathering mist, was 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 guide his steps by dragging his whip

along the low bushes in advance of the hedgerow. 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, for his

own arithmetical convictions were not clear enough to afford him any forcible

demonstration as to the advantages of interest; and 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 three-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 fear lest he

might miss the right way, since he was not certain whether the light were 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

latch-hole, 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, in a way known to primitive housekeepers unpossessed of jacks. 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, carrying consequences of entire novelty. 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? He went no further into

the subtleties of evidence: the pressing question, "Where is the money?" now

took such entire possession of him as to make him quite forget that the

weaver's death was not a certainty. A dull mind, once arriving at an inference

that flatters a desire, is rarely able to retain the impression that the

notion from which the inference started was purely problematic. And Dunstan's

mind was as dull as the mind of a possible felon usually is. 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. Marner's cottage had no thatch;

and Dunstan's first act, after a train of thought made rapid by the stimulus

of cupidity, 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, but it seemed to Dunstan like a long while; and though he was without

any distinct recognition of the possibility that Marner might be alive, and

might re-enter the cottage at any moment, he felt an undefinable dread laying

hold on him, as he rose to his feet with the bags in his hand. He would hasten

out into the darkness, and then consider what he should do with the bags. He

closed 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 5

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, free from the

presentiment of change. The sense of security more frequently springs from

habit than from conviction, and for this reason it often subsists after such a

change in the conditions as might have been expected to suggest alarm. The

lapse of time during which a given event has not happened is, in this logic of

habit, constantly alleged as a reason why the event should never happen, even

when the lapse of time is precisely the added condition which makes the event

imminent. A man will tell you that he has worked in a mine for forty years

unhurt by an accident as a reason why he should apprehend no danger, though

the roof is beginning to sink; and it is often observable that the older a man

gets, the more difficult it is to him to retain a believing conception of his

own death. This influence of habit was necessarily strong in a man whose life

was so monotonous as Marner's -who saw no new people and heard of no new

events to keep alive in him the idea of the unexpected and the changeful; and

it explains simply enough why his mind could be at ease, though he had left

his house and his treasure more defenceless than usual. Silas was thinking

with double complacency 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? These questions were not

distinctly present in Silas's mind; they merely serve to represent the

vaguely-felt foundation of his freedom from anxiety.

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.

Any one who had looked at him as the red light shone upon his pale face,

strange straining eyes, and meagre form, would perhaps have understood the

mixture of contemptuous pity, dread, and suspicion with which he was regarded

by his neighbours in Raveloe. Yet few men could be more harmless than poor

Marner. In his truthful, simple soul, not even the growing greed and worship

of gold could beget any vice directly injurious to others. The light of his

faith quite put out, and his affections made desolate, he had clung with all

the force of his nature to his work and his money; and like all objects to

which a man devotes himself, they had fashioned him into correspondence with

themselves. His loom, as he wrought in it without ceasing, had in its turn

wrought on him, and confirmed more and more the monotonous craving for its

monotonous response. His gold, as he hung over it and saw it grow, gathered

his power of loving together into a hard isolation like its own.

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? A man falling

into dark waters seeks a momentary footing even on sliding stones; and Silas,

by acting as if he believed in false hopes, warded off the moment of despair.

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. There was no untried refuge left for a moment's shelter from the

terrible truth.

Yes, there was a sort of refuge which always comes with the prostration of

thought under an overpowering passion: it was that expectation of

impossibilities, that belief in contradictory images, which is still distinct

from madness, because it is capable of being dissipated by the external fact.

Silas 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,

instinctively seeking this as the strongest assurance of reality.

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 same as 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 less lofty customers of

the house were in the habit of assembling, the parlour on the left being

reserved for the more select society in which Squire Cass frequently enjoyed

the double pleasure of conviviality and condescension. But the parlour was

dark tonight, the chief personages who ornamented its circle being all at Mrs.

Osgood's birthday dance, as Godfrey Cass was. And in consequence of this, the

party on the high-screened seats in the kitchen was more numerous than usual;

several personages, who would otherwise have been admitted into the parlour

and enlarged the opportunity of hectoring and condescension for their betters,

being content this evening to vary their enjoyment by taking their

spirits-and-water where they could themselves hector and condescend in company

that called for beer.

Chapter 6

The conversation, which was at a high pitch of animation when Silas approached

the door of the Rainbow, had, as usual, been slow and intermittent when the

company first assembled. The pipes began to be puffed in a silence which had

an air of severity; the more important customers, who drank spirits and sat

nearest the fire, staring at each other as if a bet were depending on the

first man who winked; while the beer-drinkers, chiefly men in fustian jackets

and smock-frocks, kept their eyelids down and rubbed their hands across their

mouths, as if their draughts of beer were a funereal duty attended with

embarrassing sadness. At last, Mr. Snell, the landlord, a man of a neutral

disposition, accustomed to stand aloof from human differences as those of

beings who were all alike in need of liquor, broke silence, by saying in a

doubtful tone to his cousin the butcher -

"Some folks 'ud say that was a fine beast you druv in yesterday, Bob?"

The butcher, a jolly, smiling, red-haired man, was not disposed to answer

rashly. He gave a few puffs before he spat and replied, "And they wouldn't be

fur wrong, John."

After this feeble, delusive thaw, the silence set in as severely as before.

"Was it a red Durham?" said the farrier, taking up the thread of discourse

after the lapse of a few minutes.

The farrier looked at the landlord, and the landlord looked at the butcher, as

the person who must take the responsibility of answering.

"Red it was," said the butcher, in his good-humoured, husky treble -"and a

Durham it was."

"Then you needn't tell me who you bought it of," said the farrier, looking

round with some triumph; "I know who it is has got the red Durhams o' this

countryside. And she'd a white star on her brow, I'll bet a penny?" The

farrier leaned forward with his hands on his knees as he put this question,

and his eyes twinkled knowingly.

"Well, yes -she might," said the butcher, slowly, considering that he was

giving a decided affirmative. "I don't say contrairy."

"I knew that very well," said the farrier, throwing himself backward again,

and speaking defiantly; "if I don't know Mr. Lammeter's cows, I should like to

know who does -that's all! And as for the cow you've bought, bargain or no

bargain, I've been at the drenching of her -contradick me who will."

The farrier looked fierce, and the mild butcher's conversational spirit was

roused a little.

"I'm not for contradicking no man," he said; "I'm for peace and quietness.

Some are for cutting long ribs -I'm for cutting 'em short myself; but I don't

quarrel with 'em. All I say is, it's a lovely carkiss -and anybody as was

reasonable, it 'ud bring tears into their eyes to look at it."

"Well, it's the cow as I drenched, whatever it is," pursued the farrier,

angrily; "and it was Mr. Lammeter's cow, else you told a lie when you said it

was a red Durham."

"I tell no lies," said the butcher, with the same mild huskiness as before,

"and I contradick none -not if a man was to swear himself black: he's no meat

o' mine, nor none o' my bargains. All I say is, it's a lovely carkiss. And

what I say I'll stick to; but I'll quarrel wi' no man."

"No," said the farrier, with bitter sarcasm, looking at the company generally;

"and p'rhaps you ar'n't pig-headed; and p'rhaps you didn't say the cow was a

red Durham; and p'rhaps you didn't say she'd got a star on her brow -stick to

that, now you're at it."

"Come, come," said the landlord; "let the cow alone. The truth lies atween

you: you're both right and both wrong, as I allays say. And as for the cow's

being Mr. Lammeter's, I say nothing to that; but this I say, as the Rainbow's

the Rainbow. And for the matter o' that, 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?"

Mr. Macey, tailor and parish-clerk, the latter of which functions rheumatism

had of late obliged him to share with a small-featured young man who sat

opposite him, held his white head on one side, and twirled his thumbs with an

air of complacency, slightly seasoned with criticism. He smiled pityingly, in

answer to the landlord's appeal, and said -

"Ay, ay; I know, I know; but I let other folks talk. I've laid by now, and gev

up to the young uns. Ask them as have been to school at Tarley: they've learnt

pernouncing; that's come up since my day."

"If you're pointing at me, Mr. Macey," said the deputy-clerk, with an air of

anxious propriety, "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 a large,

jocose-looking man, an excellent wheelwright in his weekday capacity, but on

Sundays leader of the choir. He winked, as he spoke, at two of the company,

who were known officially as the "bassoon" and the "keybugle," 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 '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.

Crackenthorp's desire, whenever your infirmities should make you unfitting;

and its 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. There's my little lad Aaron, he's got a gift -he can sing a tune off

straight, like a throstle. 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 a principle dangerous to society; "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."

The farrier was puffing his pipe rather fiercely, in some contempt at this

trivial discussion. He had no ear for music himself, and never went to church,

as being of the medical profession, and likely to be in requisition for

delicate cows. But the butcher, having music in his soul, had listened with a

divided desire for Tookey's defeat and for the preservation of the peace.

"To be sure," he said, following up the landlord's 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 countryside. Eh, it's a

pity but what Solomon lived in our village, and could give us a tune when we

liked; eh, Mr. Macey? I'd keep him in liver and lights for nothing -that I

would."

"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 come 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 that

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 heared 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 begun to court Miss Osgood, that's the sister o' the Mr.

Osgood as now is, and a fine handsome lass she was -eh, you can't think -they

pretend this young lass is like her, but that's the way wi' people as don't

know what come before 'em. I should know, for I helped the old rector, Mr.

Drumlow as was, I helped him marry 'em."

Here Mr. Macey paused; he always gave his narrative in instalments, expecting

to be questioned according to precedent.

"Ay, and a partic'lar thing happened, didn't it, Mr. Macey, so as you were

likely to remember that marriage?" said the landlord, in a congratulatory tone.

"I should think there did -a very partic'lar thing," said Mr. Macey, nodding

sideways. "For Mr. Drumlow -poor old gentleman, I was fond on him, though he'd

got a big confused in his head, what wi' age and wi' taking a drop o' summat

warm when the service come of a cold morning. And young Mr. Lammeter, he'd

have no way but he must be married in Janiwary, which, to be sure, 's a

unreasonable time to be married in, for it isn't like a christening or a

burying, as you can't help; and so Mr. Drumlow -poor old gentleman, I was fond

on him -but when he come to put the questions, he put 'em by the rule o'

contrairy, like, and he says, `Wilt thou have this man to thy wedded wife?'

says he, and then he says, `Wilt thou have this woman to thy wedded husband?'

says he. But the partic'larest thing of all is, as nobody took any notice on

it but me, and they answered straight off `yes,' like as if it had been me

saying `Amen' i' the right place, without listening to what went before."

"But you knew what was going on well enough, didn't you, Mr. Macey? You were

live enough, eh?" said the butcher.

"Lor' bless you!" said Mr. Macey, pausing, and smiling in pity at the

impotence of his hearer's imagination -"why, I was all of a tremble: it was as

if I'd been a coat pulled by the two tails, like; for I couldn't stop the

parson, I couldn't take upon me to do that; and yet I said to myself, I says,

`Suppose they shouldn't be fast married, 'cause the words are contrairy?' and

my head went working like a mill, for I was allays uncommon for turning things

over and seeing all round 'em; and I says to myself, `Is't the meanin' or the

words as makes folks fast i' wedlock?' For the parson meant right, and the

bride and bridegroom meant right. But then, when I come to think on it,

meanin' goes but a little way i' most things, for you may mean to stick things

together and your glue may be bad, and then where are you? And so I says to

mysen, `It isn't the meanin', it's the glue.' And I was worreted as if I'd got

three bells to pull at once, when we went into the vestry, and they begun to

sign their names. But where's the use o' talking? -you can't think what goes

on in a 'cute man's inside."

"But you held in for all that, didn't you, Mr. Macey?" said the landlord.

"Ay, I held in tight till I was by mysen wi' Mr. Drumlow, and then I out wi'

everything, but respectful, as I allays did. And he made light on it, and he

says, `Pooh, pooh, Macey, make yourself easy,' he says; `it's neither the

meaning nor the words -it's the regester does it -that's the glue.' So you see

he settled it easy; for parsons and doctors know everything by heart, like, so

as they aren't worreted wi' thinking what's the rights and wrongs o' things,

as I'n been many and many's the time. And sure enough the wedding turned out

all right, on'y poor Mrs. Lammeter -that's Miss Osgood as was -died afore the

lasses was growed up; but for prosperity and everything respectable, there's

no family more looked on."

Every one of Mr. Macey's audience had heard this story many times, but it was

listened to as if it had been a favourite tune, and at certain points the

puffing of the pipes was momentarily suspended, that the listeners might give

their whole minds to the expected words. But there was more to come; and Mr.

Snell, the landlord, duly put the leading question.

"Why, old Mr. Lammeter had a pretty fortin, didn't they say, when he come into

these parts?"

"Well, yes," said Mr. Macey; "but I daresay 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 hosses 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'd got no more grip o' the hoss than if his

legs had been cross-sticks; my grandfather heared 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 hosses; and they said it was a mercy as

the stables didn't get burned down wi' the poor dumb creaturs 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 -they're out o' all

charicter -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 hosses, 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' I 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, who was swelling with impatience for his cue. "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

fingerpost. 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

ventur a ten-pun' 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 ventur 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. I 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. You're

none o' my bargains, and I aren't a-going to try and 'bate your price. If

anybody'll bid for you at your own vallying, let him. 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. I aren't a turntail 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 pikestaff 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 with refreshed irritation; "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 ignirant!" said Mr.

Macey, in deep disgust at the farrier's crass incompetence to apprehend the

conditions of ghostly phenomena.

Chapter 7

Yet the next moment there seemed to be some evidence that ghosts had a more

condescending disposition than Mr. Macey attributed to them; for 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 his strange, unearthly

eyes. The long pipes gave a simultaneous movement, like the antennae of

startled insects, and every man present, not excepting even the sceptical

farrier, had an impression that he saw, not Silas Marner in the flesh, but an

apparition; for the door by which Silas had entered was hidden by the

high-screened seats, and no one had noticed his approach. Mr. Macey, sitting a

long way off the ghost, might be supposed to have felt an argumentative

triumph, which would tend to neutralise his share of the general alarm. Had he

not always said that when Silas Marner was in that strange trance of his, his

soul went loose from his body? Here was the demonstration: nevertheless, on

the whole, he would have been as well contented without it. For a few moments

there was a dead silence, Marner's want of breath and agitation not allowing

him to speak. The landlord, under the habitual sense that he was bound to keep

his house open to all company, and confident in the protection of his unbroken

neutrality, at last took on himself the task of adjuring 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. Crackenthorp."

"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 -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 drownded rat. Sit down and dry yourself,

and speak straight forrard."

"Ah, to be sure, man," said the farrier, who began to feel that he had not

been quite on a par with himself and the occasion. "Let's have no more staring

and screaming, else we'll have you strapped for a madman. That was why I

didn't speak at the first -thinks I, the man's run mad."

"Ay, ay, make him sit down," said several voices at once, well pleased that

the reality of ghosts remained still an open question.

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. The

transient fears of the company were now forgotten in their strong curiosity,

and all faces were turned towards Silas, when 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.

This strangely novel situation of opening his trouble to his Raveloe

neighbours, of sitting in the warmth of a hearth not his own, and feeling the

presence of faces and voices which were his nearest promise of help, had

doubtless its influence on Marner, in spite of his passionate preoccupation

with his loss. Our consciousness rarely registers the beginning of a growth

within us any more than without us: there have been many circulations of the

sap before we detect the smallest sign of the bud.

The slight suspicion with which his hearers at first listened to him,

gradually melted away before the convincing simplicity of his distress: it was

impossible for the neighbours to doubt that Marner was telling the truth, not

because they were capable of arguing at once from the nature of his statements

to the absence of any motive for making them falsely, but because, as Mr.

Macey observed, "Folks as had the devil to back 'em were not likely to be so

mushed" as poor Silas was. Rather, from the strange fact that the robber had

left no traces, and had happened to know the nick of time, utterly

incalculable by mortal agents, when Silas would go away from home without

locking his door, the more probable conclusion seemed to be that his

disreputable intimacy in that quarter, if it ever existed, had been broken up,

and that, in consequence, this ill turn had been done to Marner by somebody it

was quite in vain to set the constable after. Why this preternatural felon

should be obliged to wait till the door was left unlocked, was a question

which did not present itself.

"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 ta'en up.

Let's have no accusing o' the innicent, Master Marner."

Memory was not so utterly torpid in Silas that it could not be wakened by

these words. With a movement of compunction as new and strange to him as

everything else within the last hour, he started from his chair and went close

up to Jem, looking at him as if he wanted to assure himself of the expression

in his face.

"I was wrong," he said -"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 there 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! 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

constable's -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

primises; 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."

By this pregnant speech the farrier had re-established his self-complacency,

and waited with confidence to hear himself named as one of the superlatively

sensible men.

"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."

The landlord agreed with this view, and after taking the sense of the company,

and duly rehearsing a small ceremony known in high ecclesiastical life as the

nolo episcopari, he consented to take on himself the chill dignity of going to

Kench's. But to the farrier's strong disgust, Mr. Macey now started an

objection to his proposing himself as a deputy-constable; for that oracular

old gentleman, claiming to know the law, stated, as a fact delivered to him by

his father, that no doctor could be a constable.

"And you're a doctor, I reckon, though you're only a cow-doctor -for a fly's a

fly, though it may be a hoss-fly," concluded Mr. Macey, wondering a little at

his own "'cuteness."

There was a hot debate upon this, the farrier being of course indisposed to

renounce the quality of doctor, but contending that a doctor could be a

constable if he liked -the law meant, he needn't be one if he didn't like. Mr.

Macey thought this was nonsense, since the law was not likely to be fonder of

doctors than of other folks. Moreover, if it was in the nature of doctors more

than of other men not to like being constables, how came Mr. Dowlas to be so

eager to act in that capacity?

"I don't want to act the constable," said the farrier, driven into a corner by

this merciless reasoning; "and there's no man can say it of me, if he'd tell

the truth. But if there's to be any jealousy and envying about going to

Kench's in the rain, let them go as like it -you won't get me to go, I can

tell you."

By the landlord's intervention, however, the dispute was accommodated. Mr.

Dowlas consented to go as a second person disinclined to act officially; and

so poor Silas, furnished with some old coverings, turned out with his two

companions into the rain again, thinking of the long night-hours before him,

not as those do who long to rest, but as those who expect to "watch for the

morning."

Chapter 8

When Godfrey Cass returned from Mrs. Osgood's party at midnight, he was not

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 footmarks, 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. Mr. Macey, though he joined in the

defence of Marner against all suspicions of deceit, also pooh-poohed the

tinder-box; indeed, repudiated it as a rather impious suggestion, tending to

imply that everything must be done by human hands, and that there was no power

which could make away with the guineas without moving the bricks.

Nevertheless, he turned round rather sharply on Mr. Tookey, when the zealous

deputy, feeling that this was a view of the case peculiarly suited to a

parish-clerk, carried it still further, and doubted whether it was right to

inquire into a robbery at all when the circumstances were so mysterious.

"As if," concluded Mr Tookey -"as if there was nothing but what could be made

out by justices and constables."

"Now, don't you be for overshooting the mark, Tookey," said Mr. Macey, nodding

his head aside admonishingly. "That's what you're allays at; if I throw a

stone and hit, you think there's summat better than hitting, and you try to

throw a stone beyond. What I said was against the tinder-box; I said nothing

against justices and constables, for they're o' King George's making, and it

'ud be ill-becoming a man in a parish office to fly out again' King George."

While these discussions were going on amongst the group outside the Rainbow, a

higher consultation was being carried on within, under the presidency of Mr.

Crackenthorp, the rector, assisted by Squire Cass and other substantial

parishioners. It had just occurred to Mr. Snell, the landlord -he being, as he

observed, a man accustomed to put two and two together -to connect with the

tinder-box, which, as deputy-constable, he himself had had the honourable

distinction of finding, certain recollections of a pedlar who had called to

drink at the house about a month before, and had actually stated that he

carried a tinder-box about with him to light his pipe. Here, surely, was a

clue to be followed out. And as memory, when duly impregnated with ascertained

facts, is sometimes surprisingly fertile, Mr. Snell gradually recovered a

vivid impression of the effect produced on him by the pedlar's countenance and

conversation. He had a "look with his eye" which fell unpleasantly on Mr.

Snell's sensitive organism. To be sure, he didn't say anything particular -no,

except that about the tinder-box -but it isn't what a man says, it's the way

he says it. Moreover, he had a swarthy foreignness of complexion which boded

little honesty.

"Did he wear earrings?" Mr. Crackenthorp wished to know, having some

acquaintance with foreign customs.

"Well -stay -let me see," said Mr. Snell, like a docile clairvoyant, who would

really not make a mistake if she could help it. After stretching the corners

of his mouth and contracting his eyes, as if he were trying to see the

earrings, he appeared to give up the effort, and said, "Well, he'd got

earrings in his box to sell, so it's nat'ral to suppose he might wear 'em. But

he called at every house, a'most, in the village; there's somebody else,

mayhap, saw 'em in his ears, though I can't take upon me rightly to say."

Mr. Snell was correct in his surmise that somebody else would remember the

pedlar's earrings. For on the spread of inquiry among the villagers it was

stated with gathering emphasis that the parson had wanted to know whether the

pedlar wore earrings in his ears, and an impression was created that a great

deal depended on the eliciting of this fact. Of course, every one who heard

the question, not having any distinct image of the pedlar as without earrings,

immediately had an image of him with earrings, larger or smaller, as the case

might be; and the image was presently taken for a vivid recollection, so that

the glazier's wife, a well-intentioned woman, not given to lying, and whose

house was among the cleanest in the village, was ready to declare, as sure as

ever she meant to take the sacrament the very next Christmas that was ever

coming, that she had seen big earrings, in the shape of the young moon, in the

pedlar's two ears; while Jinny Oates, the cobbler's daughter, being a more

imaginative person, stated not only that she had seen them too, but that they

had made her blood creep, as it did at that very moment while there she stood.

Also, by way of throwing further light on this clue of the tinder-box, a

collection was made of all the articles purchased from the pedlar at various

houses, and carried to the Rainbow to be exhibited there. In fact, there was a

general feeling in the village that for the clearing-up of this robbery there

must be a great deal done at the Rainbow, and that no man need offer his wife

an excuse for going there while it was the scene of severe public duties.

Some disappointment was felt, and perhaps a little indignation also, when it

became known that Silas Marner, on being questioned by the Squire and the

parson, had retained no other recollection of the pedlar than that he had

called at his door, but had not entered his house, having turned away at once

when Silas, holding the door ajar, had said that he wanted nothing. This had

been Silas's testimony, though he clutched strongly at the idea of the

pedlar's being the culprit, if only because it gave him a definite image of a

whereabout for his gold after it had been taken away from its hiding-place: he

could see it now in the pedlar's box. But it was observed with some irritation

in the village that anybody but a "blind creatur" like Marner would have seen

the man prowling about, for how came he to leave his tinder-box in the ditch

close by, if he hadn't been lingering there? Doubtless, he had made his

observations when he saw Marner at the door. Anybody might know -and only look

at him -that the weaver was a half-crazy miser. It was a wonder the pedlar

hadn't murdered him; men of that sort, with rings in their ears, had been

known for murderers often and often; there had been one tried at the 'sizes,

not so long ago but what there were people living who remembered it.

Godfrey Cass, indeed, entering the Rainbow during one of Mr. Snell's

frequently repeated recitals of his testimony, had treated it lightly, stating

that he himself had bought a penknife of the pedlar, and thought him a merry

grinning fellow enough; it was all nonsense, he said, about the man's evil

looks. But this was spoken of in the village as the random talk of youth, "as

if it was only Mr. Snell who had seen something odd about the pedlar!" On the

contrary, there were at least half a dozen who were ready to go before Justice

Malam, and give in much more striking testimony than any the landlord could

furnish. 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.

But by this time Godfrey's interest in the robbery had faded before his

growing anxiety about Dunstan and Wildfire, and he was going, not to Tarley,

but to Batherley, unable to rest in uncertainty about them any longer. The

possibility 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, was a fear that urged itself upon

him more, even, than the thought of an accidental injury; and now that the

dance at Mrs. Osgood's was past, he was irritated with himself that he had

trusted his horse to Dunstan. Instead of trying to still his fears he

encouraged them, with that superstitious impression which clings to us all,

that if we expect evil very strongly it is the less likely to come; and when

he heard a horse approaching at a trot, and saw a hat rising above a hedge

beyond an angle of the lane, he felt as if his conjuration had succeeded. But

no sooner did the horse come within sight than his heart sank again. It was

not Wildfire; and in a few moments more 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

Batherley. 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's 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. But Godfrey could not bend

himself to this. He felt that in letting Dunstan have the money, he had

already been guilty of a breach of trust hardly less culpable than that of

spending the money directly for his own behoof; and yet there was a

distinction between the two acts which made him feel that the one was so much

more blackening than the other as to be intolerable to him.

"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."

Through the remainder of this day Godfrey, with only occasional fluctuations,

kept his will bent in the direction of a complete avowal to his father, and he

withheld the story of Wildfire's loss till the next morning, that it might

serve him as an introduction to heavier matter. The old Squire was accustomed

to his son's frequent absence from home, and thought neither Dunstan's nor

Wildfire's non-appearance a matter calling for remark. Godfrey said to himself

again and again that if he let slip this one opportunity of confession he

might never have another; the revelation might be made even in a more odious

way than by Dunstan's malignity: she might come as she had threatened to do.

And then he tried to make the scene easier to himself by rehearsal: he made up

his mind how he would pass from the admission of his weakness in letting

Dunstan have the money to the fact that Dunstan had a hold on him which he had

been unable to shake off, and how he would work up his father to expect

something very bad before he told him the fact. The old Squire was an

implacable man: he made resolutions in violent anger, and he was not to be

moved from them after his anger had subsided -as fiery volcanic matters cool

and harden into rock. Like many violent and implacable men, he allowed evils

to grow under favour of his own heedlessness, till they pressed upon him with

exasperating force, and then he turned round with fierce severity and became

unrelentingly hard. This was his system with his tenants: he allowed them to

get into arrears, neglect their fences, reduce their stock, sell their straw,

and otherwise go the wrong way -and then, when he became short of money in

consequence of this indulgence, he took the hardest measures and would listen

to no appeal. Godfrey knew all this, and felt it with the greater force

because he had constantly suffered annoyance from witnessing his father's

sudden fits of unrelentingness, for which his own habitual irresolution

deprived him of all sympathy. (He was not critical on the faulty indulgence

which preceded these fits; that seemed to him natural enough.) Still, there

was just the chance, Godfrey thought, that his father's pride might see this

marriage in a light that would induce him to hush it up, rather than turn his

son out and make the family the talk of the country for ten miles round.

This was the view of the case that Godfrey managed to keep before him pretty

closely till midnight, and he went to sleep thinking that he had done with

inward debating. But when he awoke in the still morning darkness he found it

impossible to reawaken his evening thoughts; it was as if they had been tired

out and were not to be roused to further work. Instead of arguments for

confession, he could now feel the presence of nothing but its evil

consequences; the old dread of disgrace came back -the old shrinking from the

thought of raising a hopeless barrier between himself and Nancy -the old

disposition to rely on chances which might be favourable to him, and save him

from betrayal. Why, after all, should he cut off the hope of them by his own

act? He had seen the matter in a wrong light yesterday. He had been in a rage

with Dunstan, and had thought of nothing but a thorough break-up of their

mutual understanding; but what it would be really wisest for him to do was to

try and soften his father's anger against Dunsey, and keep things as nearly as

possible in their old condition. 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 9

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 managing-man

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, who were perhaps every whit as refined as he, but, having

slouched their way through life with a consciousness of being in the vicinity

of their "betters", wanted that self-possession and authoritativeness of voice

and carriage which belonged to a man who thought of superiors as remote

existences with whom he had personally little more to do than with America or

the stars. The Squire had been used to parish homage all his life, used to the

presupposition that his family, his tankards, and everything that was his,

were the oldest and best; and as he never associated with any gentry higher

than himself, his opinion was not disturbed by comparison.

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 beef, and held it up

before the deerhound 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, and that their aged wisdom was constantly in a state of

endurance mitigated by sarcasm. Godfrey waited, before he spoke again, until

the ale had been brought and the door closed -an interval during which Fleet,

the deerhound, 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. But they must turn

over a new leaf -they must. What with mortgages and arrears, I'm as short o'

cash as a roadside pauper. And that fool Kimble says the newspaper's talking

about peace. Why, the country wouldn't have a leg to stand on. Prices 'ud run

down like a jack, and I should never get my arrears, not if I sold all the

fellows up. And there's that damned Fowler, I won't put up with him any

longer; I've told Winthrop to go to Cox this very day. The lying scoundrel

told me he'd be sure to pay me a hundred last month. He takes advantage

because he's on that outlying farm, and thinks I shall forget him."

The Squire had delivered this speech in a coughing and interrupted manner, but

with no pause long enough for Godfrey to make it a pretext for taking up the

word again. He felt that his father meant to ward off any request for money on

the ground of the misfortune with Wildfire, and that the emphasis he had thus

been led to lay on his shortness of cash and his arrears was likely to produce

an attitude of mind the utmost unfavourable for his own disclosure. But he

must go on, now he had begun.

"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, not being sufficiently quick of brain to form a probable guess as

to what could have caused so strange an inversion of the paternal and filial

relations as this proposition of his son to pay him a hundred pounds.

"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 I 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 wouldn't 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 daresay 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. That was a feeble

evasion, but Godfrey was not fond of lying, and, not being sufficiently aware

that no sort of duplicity can long flourish without the help of vocal

falsehoods, he was quite unprepared with invented motives.

"You don'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 -a

very slight impulse suffices for that on a downward road.

"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. He was not likely to be very penetrating in his judgments,

but he had always had a sense that his father's indulgence had not been

kindness, and had had a vague longing for some discipline that would have

checked his own errant weakness and helped his better will. The Squire ate his

bread and meat 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 nothing o' your offering or o' my taking it ill," said the Squire,

whose memory consisted in certain strong impressions unmodified by detail;

"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. "I

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 daresay 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 -perhaps

even justify his insincerity by manifesting its prudence.

In this point of trusting to some throw of fortune's dice, Godfrey can hardly

be called old-fashioned. Favourable Chance is the god of all men who follow

their own devices instead of obeying a law they believe in. Let even a

polished man of these days get into a position he is ashamed to avow, and his

mind will be bent on all the possible issues that may deliver him from the

calculable results of that position. Let him live outside his income, or shirk

the resolute honest work that brings wages, and he will presently find himself

dreaming of a possible benefactor, a possible simpleton who may be cajoled

into using his interest, a possible state of mind in some possible person not

yet forthcoming. Let him neglect the responsibilities of his office, and he

will inevitably anchor himself on the chance that the thing left undone may

turn out not to be of the supposed importance. Let him betray his friend's

confidence, and he will adore that same cunning complexity called Chance,

which gives him the hope that his friend will never know. Let him forsake a

decent craft that he may pursue the gentilities of a profession to which

nature never called him, and his religion will infallibly be the worship of

blessed Chance, which he will believe in as the mighty creator of success. The

evil principle deprecated in that religion is the orderly sequence by which

the seed brings forth a crop after its kind.

Chapter 10

Justice Malam was naturally regarded in Tarley and Raveloe as a man of

capacious mind, seeing that he could draw much wider conclusions without

evidence than could be expected of his neighbours who were not on the

Commission of the Peace. Such a man was not likely to neglect the clue of the

tinder-box, and an inquiry was set on foot concerning a pedlar, name unknown,

with curly black hair and a foreign complexion, carrying a box of cutlery and

jewelry, and wearing large rings in his ears. But either because inquiry was

too slow-footed to overtake him, or because the description applied to so many

pedlars that inquiry did not know how to choose among them, weeks passed away,

and there was no other result concerning the robbery than a gradual cessation

of the excitement it 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 equally

expected this issue, 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. He remembered no mention of the weaver between

them since the time, twelve years ago, when it was their boyish sport to

deride him; and, besides, his imagination constantly created an alibi for

Dunstan: he saw him continually in some congenial haunt, to which he had

walked off on leaving Wildfire -saw him sponging on chance acquaintances, and

meditating a return home to the old amusement of tormenting his elder brother.

Even if any brain in Raveloe had put the said two facts together, I doubt

whether a combination so injurious to the prescriptive respectability of a

family with a mural monument and venerable tankards would not have been

suppressed as of unsound tendency. But Christmas puddings, brawn, and

abundance of spirituous liquors, throwing the mental originality into the

channel of nightmare, are great preservatives against a dangerous spontaneity

of waking thought.

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. The advocates of the tinder-box-and-pedlar view considered the

other side a muddle-headed and credulous set, who, because they themselves

were wall-eyed, supposed everybody else to have the same blank outlook; and

the adherents of the inexplicable more than hinted that their antagonists were

animals inclined to crow before they had found any corn -mere skimming-dishes

in point of depth -whose clear-sightedness consisted in supposing there was

nothing behind a barn-door because they couldn't see through it; so that,

though their controversy did not serve to elicit the fact concerning the

robbery, it elicited some true opinions of collateral importance.

But while poor Silas's loss served thus to brush the slow current of Raveloe

conversation, Silas himself was feeling the withering desolation of that

bereavement about which his neighbours were arguing at their ease. To any one

who had observed him before he lost his gold, it might have seemed that so

withered and shrunken a life as his could hardly be susceptible of a bruise,

could hardly endure any subtraction but such as would put an end to it

altogether. But in reality it had been an eager life, filled with immediate

purpose which fenced him in from the wide, cheerless unknown. It had been a

clinging life; and though the object round which its fibres had clung was a

dead disrupted thing, it satisfied the need for clinging. But now the fence

was broken down -the support was snatched away. Marner's thoughts could no

longer move in their old round, and were baffled by a blank like that which

meets a plodding ant when the earth has broken away on its homeward path. 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; the prospect of handling

and counting it was gone; the evening had no phantasm of delight to still the

poor soul's craving. The thought of the money he would get by his actual work

could bring no 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 head 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 repulsion Marner had

always created in his neighbours was partly dissipated by the new light in

which this misfortune had shown him. Instead of a man who had more cunning

than honest folks could come by, and, what was worse, had not the inclination

to use that cunning in a neighbourly way, it was now apparent that Silas had

not cunning enough to keep his own. He was generally spoken of as a "poor

mushed creatur"; and that avoidance of his neighbours, which had before been

referred to his ill-will and to a probable addiction to worse company, was now

considered mere craziness.

This change to a kindlier feeling was shown in various ways. The odour of

Christmas cooking being on the wind, it was the season when superfluous pork

and black puddings are suggestive of charity in well-to-do families; and

Silas's misfortune had brought him uppermost in the memory of housekeepers

like Mrs. Osgood. Mr. Crackenthorp too, while he admonished Silas that his

money had probably been taken from him because he thought too much of it and

never came to church, enforced the doctrine by a present of pigs' pettitoes,

well calculated to dissipate unfounded prejudices against the clerical

character. Neighbours who had nothing but verbal consolation to give showed a

disposition not only to greet Silas and discuss his misfortune at some length

when they encountered him in the village, but also to take the trouble of

calling at his cottage and getting him to repeat all the details on the very

spot; and then they would try to cheer him by saying, "Well, Master Marner,

you're no worse off nor other poor folks, after all; and if you was to be

crippled, the parish 'ud give you a 'lowance."

I suppose one reason why we are seldom able to comfort our neighbours with our

words is that our good will gets adulterated, in spite of ourselves, before it

can pass our lips. We can send black puddings and pettitoes without giving

them a flavour of our own egoism; but language is a stream that is almost sure

to smack of a mingled soil. There was a fair proportion of kindness in

Raveloe; but it was often of a beery and bungling sort, and took the shape

least allied to the complimentary and hypocritical.

Mr. Macey, for example, coming one evening expressly to let Silas know that

recent events had given him the advantage of standing more favourably in the

opinion of a man whose judgment was not formed lightly, opened the

conversation by saying, as soon as he had seated himself and adjusted his

thumbs -

"Come, Master Marner, why, you've no call to sit a-moaning. You're a deal

better off to ha' lost your money, nor to ha' kep' it by foul means. I used to

think, when you first come into these parts, as you were no better nor you

should be; you were younger a deal than what you are now; but you were allays

a staring, white-faced creatur, partly like a bald-faced calf, as I may say.

But there's no knowing: it isn't every queer-looksed thing as Old Harry's had

the making of -I mean, speaking o' toads and such; for they're often harmless,

and useful against varmin. And it's pretty much the same wi' you, as fur as I

can see. Though as to the yarbs and stuff to cure the breathing, if you

brought that sort o' knowledge from distant parts, you might ha' been a bit

freer of it. And if the knowledge wasn't well come by, why, you might ha' made

up for it by coming to church reg'lar; for as for the children as the Wise

Woman charmed, I've been at the christening of 'em again and again, and they

took the water just as well. And that's reasonable; for if Old Harry's a mind

to do a bit o' kindness for a holiday, like, who's got anything against it?

That's my thinking; and I've been clerk o' this parish forty year, and I know,

when the parson and me does the cussing of a Ash Wednesday, there's no cussing

o' folks as have a mind to be cured without a doctor, let Kimble say what he

will. And so, Master Marner, as I was saying -for there's windings i' things

as they may carry you to the fur end o' the prayer-book afore you get back to

'em -my advice is, as you keep up your sperrits; for as for thinking you're a

deep un, and ha' got more inside you nor 'ull bear daylight, I'm not o' that

opinion at all, and so I tell the neighbours. For, says I, you talk o' Master

Marner making out a tale -why, it's nonsense, that is: it 'ud take a 'cute man

to make a tale like that; and, says I, he looked as scared as a rabbit."

During this discursive address Silas had continued motionless in his previous

attitude, leaning his elbows on his knees, and pressing his hands against his

head. Mr. Macey, not doubting that he had been listened to, paused, in the

expectation of some appreciatory reply, but Marner remained silent. He had a

sense that the old man meant to be good-natured and neighbourly; but the

kindness fell on him as sunshine falls on the wretched -he had no heart to

taste it, and felt that it was very far off him.

"Come, Master Marner, have you got nothing to say to that?" said Mr. Macey at

last, with a slight accent of impatience.

"Oh," said Marner slowly, shaking his head between his hands, "I thank you

-thank you -kindly."

"Ay, ay, to be sure; I thought you would," said Mr. Macey; "and my advice is

-have you got a Sunday suit?"

"No," said Marner.

"I doubted it was so," said Mr. Macey. "Now, let me advise you to get a Sunday

suit: there's Tookey, he's a poor creatur, but he's got my tailoring business,

and some o' my money in it, and he shall make a suit at a low price, and give

you trust, and then you can come to church, and be a bit neighbourly. Why,

you've never heared me say `Amen' since you come into these parts, and I

recommend you to lose no time, for it'll be poor work when Tookey has it all

to himself, for I mayn't be equil to stand i' the desk at all, come another

winter." Here Mr. Macey paused, perhaps expecting some sign of emotion in his

hearer; but not observing any, he went on: "And as for the money for the suit

o' clothes, why, you get a matter of a pound a week at your weaving, Master

Marner, and you're a young man, eh, for all you look so mushed. Why, you

couldn't ha' been five-and-twenty when you come into these parts, eh?"

Silas started a little at the change to a questioning tone, and answered

mildly, "I don't know; I can't rightly say -it's a long while since."

After receiving such an answer as this, it is not surprising that Mr. Macey

observed, later on in the evening at the Rainbow, that Marner's head was "all

of a muddle", and that it was to be doubted if he ever knew when Sunday came

round, which showed him a worse heathen than many a dog.

Another of Silas's comforters, besides Mr. Macey, came to him with a mind

highly charged on the same topic. This was Mrs. Winthrop, the wheelwright's

wife. The inhabitants of Raveloe were not severely regular in their

church-going, and perhaps there was hardly a person in the parish who would

not have held that to go to church every Sunday in the calendar would have

shown a greedy desire to stand well with Heaven, and get an undue advantage

over their neighbours -a wish to be better than the "common run", that would

have implied a reflection on those who had had godfathers and godmothers as

well as themselves, and had an equal right to the burying-service. At the same

time it was understood to be requisite for all who were not household

servants, or young men, to take the sacrament at one of the great festivals:

Squire Cass himself took it on Christmas Day; while those who were held to be

"good livers" went to church with greater, though still with moderate,

frequency.

Mrs. Winthrop was one of these: she was in all respects a woman of scrupulous

conscience, so eager for duties that life seemed to offer them too scantily

unless she rose at half-past four, though this threw a scarcity of work over

the more advanced hours of the morning, which it was a constant problem with

her to remove. Yet she had not the vixenish temper which is sometimes supposed

to be a necessary condition of such habits: she was a very mild, patient

woman, whose nature it was to seek out all the sadder and more serious

elements of life, and pasture her mind upon them. She was the person always

first thought of in Raveloe when there was illness or death in a family, when

leeches were to be applied, or there was a sudden disappointment in a monthly

nurse. She was a "comfortable woman" -good-looking, fresh-complexioned, having

her lips always slightly screwed, as if she felt herself in a sickroom with

the doctor or the clergyman present. But she was never whimpering; no one had

seen her shed tears; she was simply grave and inclined to shake her head and

sigh, almost imperceptibly, like a funereal mourner who is not a relation. 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," and viewing

the stronger sex in the light of animals whom it had pleased Heaven to make

naturally troublesome, like bulls and turkey-cocks.

This good wholesome 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, flat paste-like articles

much esteemed in Raveloe. Aaron, an apple-cheeked youngster of seven, with a

clean starched frill which looked like a plate for the apples, needed all his

adventurous curiosity to embolden him against the possibility that the

big-eyed weaver might do him some bodily injury; and his dubiety was much

increased when, on arriving at the Stone-pits, they heard the mysterious sound

of the loom.

"Ah, it is as I thought," said Mrs. Winthrop sadly.

They had to knock loudly before Silas 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. Formerly, his heart had been as a locked

casket with its treasure inside; but now the casket was empty, and the lock

was broken. Left groping in darkness, with his prop utterly gone, Silas had

inevitably a sense, though a dull and half-despairing one, that if any help

came to him it must come from without; and there was a slight stirring of

expectation at the sight of his fellow-men, a faint consciousness of

dependence on their good will. He opened the door wide to admit Dolly, but

without otherwise returning her greeting than by moving the armchair 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

orbs of the small Aaron, who had made an outwork of his mother's chair, and

was peeping round from behind it.

"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 retreated completely behind his outwork.

"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 around

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

-drearily unconscious of any distinct benefit towards which the cakes and the

letters, or even Dolly's kindness, could tend for him.

"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 daresay; 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 were a mere

accident of the day, and not part of its sacredness. There had been no bells

in Lantern Yard.

"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 twopence 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 sacramem', 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 wickedness. 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 I

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."

Poor Dolly's exposition of her simple Raveloe theology fell rather unmeaningly

on Silas's ears, for there was no word in it that could rouse a memory of what

he had known as religion, and his comprehension was quite baffled by the

plural pronoun, which was no heresy of Dolly's, but only her way of avoiding a

presumptuous familiarity. He remained silent, not feeling inclined to assent

to the part of Dolly's speech which he fully understood -her recommendation

that he should go to church. Indeed, Silas was so unaccustomed to talk beyond

the brief questions and answers necessary for the transaction of his simple

business, that words did not easily come to him without the urgency of a

distinct purpose.

But now little Aaron, having become used to the weaver's awful presence, had

advanced to his mother's side, and Silas, seeming to notice him for the first

time, tried to return Dolly's signs of good will by offering the lad a bit of

lard-cake. Aaron shrank back a little, and rubbed his head against his

mother's shoulder, but still thought the piece of cake worth the risk of

putting his hand out for it.

"Oh, for shame, Aaron!" said his mother, taking him on her lap, however; "why,

you don't want cake again yet awhile. -He's wonderful hearty," she went on,

with a little sigh -"that he is, God knows. He's my youngest, and we spoil him

sadly, for either me or the father must allays hev him in our sight -that we

must."

She stroked Aaron's brown head, and thought it must do Master Marner good to

see such a "picture of a child". But Marner, on the other side of the hearth,

saw the neat-featured, rosy face as a mere dim round, with two dark spots in it.

"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."

Aaron replied by rubbing his forehead against his mother's shoulder.

"Oh, that's naughty," said Dolly gently. "Stan' up, when mother tells you, and

let me hold the cake till you've done."

Aaron was not indisposed to display his talents, even to an ogre, under

protecting circumstances; and after a few more signs of coyness, consisting

chiefly in rubbing the backs of his hands over his eyes, and then peeping

between them at Master Marner, to see if he looked anxious for the "carril",

he at length allowed his head to be duly adjusted, and standing behind the

table, which let him appear above it only as far as his broad frill, so that

he looked like a cherubic head untroubled with a body, he began with a clear

chirp, and in a melody that had the rhythm of an industrious hammer -

"God rest you, merry gentlemen,

Let nothing you dismay,

For Jesus Christ our Saviour

Was born on Christmas Day."

Dolly listened with a devout look, glancing at Marner in some confidence that

this strain would help to allure him to church.

"That's Christmas music," she said, when Aaron had ended, and had secured his

piece of cake again. "There's no other music equil to the Christmas music

-`Hark the erol angils sing.' And you may judge what it is at church, Master

Marner, with the bassoon and the voices, as you can't help thinking you've got

to a better place a'ready -for I wouldn't speak ill o' this world, seeing as

Them put us in it as knows best -but what wi' the drink, and the quarrelling,

and the bad illnesses, and the hard dying, as I've seen times and times, one's

thankful to hear of a better. The boy sings pretty, don't he, Master Marner?"

"Yes," said Silas, absently, "very pretty."

The Christmas carol, with its hammer-like rhythm, had fallen on his ears as

strange music, quite unlike a hymn, and could have none of the effect Dolly

contemplated. But he wanted to show her that he was grateful, and the only

mode that occurred to him was to offer Aaron a bit more cake.

"Oh, no, thank you, Master Marner," said Dolly, holding down Aaron's willing

hands. "We must be going home now. And so I wish you good-bye, Master Marner;

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. Her simple view of life and its

comforts, by which she had tried to cheer him, was only like a report of

unknown objects, which his imagination could not fashion. The fountains of

human love and of faith in a divine love had not yet been unlocked, and his

soul was still the shrunken rivulet, with only this difference, that its

little groove of sand was blocked up, and it wandered confusedly against dark

obstruction.

And so, 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.

But in Raveloe village the bells rang merrily, and the church was fuller than

all through the rest of the year, with red faces among the abundant dark-green

boughs -faces prepared for a longer service than usual by an odorous breakfast

of toast and ale. Those green boughs, the hymn and anthem never heard but at

Christmas -even the Athanasian Creed, which was discriminated from the others

only as being longer and of exceptional virtue, since it was only read on rare

occasions -brought a vague, exulting sense, for which the grown men could as

little have found words as the children, that something great and mysterious

had been done for them in heaven above and in earth below, which they were

appropriating by their presence. And then the red faces made their way through

the black biting frost to their own homes, feeling themselves free for the

rest of the day to eat, drink, and be merry, and using that Christian freedom

without diffidence.

At Squire Cass's family party that day nobody mentioned Dunstan -nobody was

sorry for his absence, or feared it would be too long. The doctor and his

wife, uncle and aunt Kimble, were there, and the annual Christmas talk was

carried through without any omissions, rising to the climax of Mr. Kimble's

experience when he walked the London hospitals thirty years back, together

with striking professional anecdotes then gathered. Whereupon cards followed,

with aunt Kimble's annual failure to follow suit, and uncle Kimble's

irascibility concerning the odd trick which was rarely explicable to him, when

it was not on his side, without a general visitation of tricks to see that

they were formed on sound principles: the whole being accompanied by a strong

steaming odour of spirits-and-water.

But the party on Christmas Day, being a strictly family party, was not the

pre-eminently brilliant celebration 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 forefathers', time out of mind. This was the occasion

when all the society of Raveloe and Tarley, whether old acquaintances

separated by long rutty distances, or cooled acquaintances separated by

misunderstandings concerning runaway calves, or acquaintances founded on

intermittent condescension, counted on meeting and on comporting themselves

with mutual appropriateness. This was the occasion on which fair dames who

came on pillions sent their bandboxes before them, supplied with more than

their evening costume; for the feast was not to end with a single evening,

like a paltry town entertainment, where the whole supply of eatables is put on

the table at once, and bedding is scanty. The Red House was provisioned as if

for a siege; and as for the spare feather-beds ready to be laid on floors,

they were as plentiful as might naturally be expected in a family that had

killed its own geese for many generations.

Godfrey Cass was looking forward to this New Year's Eve with a foolish,

reckless longing that made him half deaf to his importunate companion, Anxiety.

"Dunsey will be coming home soon: there will be a great blow-up, and how will

you bribe his spite to silence?" said Anxiety.

"Oh, he won't come home before New Year's Eve, perhaps," said Godfrey; "and I

shall sit by Nancy then, and dance with her, and get a kind look from her in

spite of herself."

"But money is wanted in another quarter," said Anxiety, in a louder voice,

"and how will you get it without selling your mother's diamond pin? And if you

don't get it - -"

"Well, but something may happen to make things easier. At any rate, there's

one pleasure for me close at hand: Nancy is coming."

"Yes, and suppose your father should bring matters to a pass that will oblige

you to decline marrying her -and to give your reasons?"

"Hold your tongue, and don't worry me. I can see Nancy's eyes, just as they

will look at me, and feel her hand in mine already."

But Anxiety went on, though in noisy Christmas company, refusing to be utterly

quieted even by much drinking.

Chapter 11

Some women, I grant, would not appear to advantage seated on a pillion, and

attired in a drab joseph and a drab beaver bonnet, with a crown resembling a

small stew-pan; for a garment suggesting a coachman's greatcoat, cut out under

an exiguity of cloth that would only allow of miniature capes, is not well

adapted to conceal deficiencies of contour, nor is drab a colour that will

throw sallow cheeks into lively contrast. It was all the greater triumph to

Miss Nancy Lammeter's beauty that she looked thoroughly bewitching in that

costume, as, seated on the pillion behind her tall, erect father, she held one

arm round him, and looked down, with open-eyed anxiety, at the treacherous

snow-covered pools and puddles, which sent up formidable splashings of mud

under the stamp of Dobbin's foot. A painter would, perhaps, have preferred her

in those moments when she was free from self-consciousness; but certainly the

bloom on her cheeks was at its highest point of contrast with the surrounding

drab when she arrived at the door of the Red House, and saw Mr. Godfrey Cass

ready to lift her from the pillion. She wished her sister Priscilla had come

up at the same time behind the servant, for then she would have contrived that

Mr. Godfrey should have lifted off Priscilla first, and in the meantime she

would have persuaded her father to go round to the horse-block instead of

alighting at the doorsteps. 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 countryside, only a little hot and hasty

now and then, if things were not done to the minute.

All these thoughts rushed through Miss Nancy's mind, in their habitual

succession, in the moments between her first sight of Mr. Godfrey Cass

standing at the door and her own arrival there. Happily, the Squire came out

too, and gave a loud greeting to her father, so that somehow under cover of

this noise she seemed to find concealment for her confusion and neglect of any

suitably formal behaviour, while she was being lifted from the pillion by

strong arms which seemed to find her ridiculously small and light. And there

was the best reason for hastening into the house at once, since the snow was

beginning to fall again, threatening an unpleasant journey for such guests as

were still on the road. These were a small minority; for already the afternoon

was beginning to decline, and there would not be too much time for the ladies

who came from a distance to attire themselves in readiness for the early tea

which was to inspirit them for the dance.

There was a buzz of voices through the house, as Miss Nancy entered, mingled

with the scrape of a fiddle preluding in the kitchen; but the Lammeters were

guests whose arrival had evidently been thought of so much that it had been

watched for from the windows, for Mrs. Kimble, who did the honours at the Red

House on these great occasions, came forward to meet Miss Nancy in the hall,

and conduct her upstairs. Mrs. Kimble was the Squire's sister, as well as the

doctor's wife -a double dignity, with which her diameter was in direct

proportion; so that, a journey upstairs being rather fatiguing to her, she did

not oppose Miss Nancy's request to be allowed to find her way alone to the

Blue Room, where the Miss Lammeters' bandboxes had been deposited on their

arrival in the morning.

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. On the one

hand, there were ladies no less important than the two Miss Gunns, the

wine-merchant's daughters from Lytherly, dressed in the height of fashion,

with the tightest skirts and the shortest waists, and gazed at by Miss

Ladbrook (of the Old Pastures) with a shyness not unsustained by inward

criticism. Partly, Miss Ladbrook felt that her own skirt must be regarded as

unduly lax by the Miss Gunns, and partly that it was a pity the Miss Gunns did

not show that judgment which she herself would show if she were in their

place, by stopping a little on this side of the fashion. On the other hand,

Mrs. Ladbrook was standing in skullcap and front, with her turban in her hand,

curtsying and smiling blandly, and saying, "After you, ma'am," to another lady

in similar circumstances, who had politely offered the precedence at the

looking-glass.

But Miss Nancy had no sooner made her curtsy than an elderly lady came

forward, whose full white muslin kerchief and mob-cap round her curls of

smooth gray hair were in daring contrast with the puffed yellow satins and

topknotted caps of her neighbours. She approached Miss Nancy with much

primness, and said, with a slow, treble suavity -

"Niece, I hope I see you well in health." Miss Nancy kissed her aunt's cheek

dutifully, and answered, with the same sort of amiable primness, "Quite well,

I thank you, aunt; and I hope I see you the same."

"Thank you, niece; I keep my health for the present. And how is my

brother-in-law?"

These dutiful questions and answers were continued until it was ascertained in

detail that the Lammeters were all as well as usual, and the Osgoods likewise,

also that niece Priscilla must certainly arrive shortly, and that travelling

on pillions in snowy weather was unpleasant, though a joseph was a great

protection. Then Nancy was formally introduced to her aunt's visitors, the

Miss Gunns, as being the daughters of a mother known to their mother, though

now for the first time induced to make a journey into these parts; and these

ladies were so taken by surprise at finding such a lovely face and figure in

an out-of-the-way country place that they began to feel some curiosity about

the dress she would put on when she took off her joseph. Miss Nancy, whose

thoughts were always conducted with the propriety and moderation conspicuous

in her manners, remarked to herself that the Miss Gunns were rather

hard-featured than otherwise, and that such very low dresses as they wore

might have been attributed to vanity if their shoulders had been pretty, but

that, being as they were, it was not reasonable to suppose that they showed

their necks from a love of display, but rather from some obligation not

inconsistent with sense and modesty. She felt convinced, as she opened her

box, that this must be her aunt Osgood's opinion, for Miss Nancy's mind

resembled her aunt's to a degree that everybody said was surprising,

considering the kinship was on Mr. Osgood's side; and though you might not

have supposed it from the formality of their greeting, there was a devoted

attachment and mutual admiration between aunt and niece. Even Miss Nancy's

refusal of her cousin Gilbert Osgood (on the ground solely that he was her

cousin), though it had grieved her aunt greatly, had not in the least cooled

the preference which had determined her to leave Nancy several of her

hereditary ornaments, let Gilbert's future wife be whom she might.

Three of the ladies quickly retired, but the Miss Gunns were quite content

that Mrs. Osgood's inclination to remain with her niece gave them also a

reason for staying to see the rustic beauty's toilette. And it was really a

pleasure -from the first opening of the bandbox, where everything smelt of

lavender and rose-leaves, to the clasping of the small coral necklace that

fitted closely round her little white neck. 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 professed whiteness without fulfilling

its profession; the very pins on her pincushion were stuck in after a pattern

from which she was careful to allow no aberration; 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 there was no sort of coiffure that could make Miss Nancy's 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

eardrops, the Miss Gunns could see nothing to criticise except her hands,

which bore the traces of butter-making, cheese-crushing, and even still

coarser work. But Miss Nancy was not ashamed of that, for while she was

dressing she narrated to her aunt how she and Priscilla had packed their boxes

yesterday, because this morning was baking morning, and since they were

leaving home, it was desirable to make a good supply of meat-pies for the

kitchen; and as she concluded this judicious remark, she turned to the Miss

Gunns that she might not commit the rudeness of not including them in the

conversation. The Miss Gunns smiled stiffly, and thought what a pity it was

that these rich country-people, who could afford to buy such good clothes

(really Miss Nancy's lace and silk were very costly), should be brought up in

utter ignorance and vulgarity. She actually said "mate" for "meat", "appen"

for "perhaps", and "oss" for "horse", which, to young ladies living in good

Lytherly society, who habitually said "'orse", even in domestic privacy, and

only said "'appen" on the right occasions, was necessarily shocking. Miss

Nancy, indeed, had never been to any school higher than Dame Tedman's: her

acquaintance with profane literature hardly went beyond the rhymes she had

worked in her large sampler under the lamb and the shepherdess; and in order

to balance an account, she was obliged to effect her subtraction by removing

visible metallic shillings and sixpences from a visible metallic total. There

is hardly a servant-maid in these days who is not better informed than Miss

Nancy; yet she had the essential attributes of a lady -high veracity, delicate

honour in her dealings, deference to others, and refined personal habits -and

lest these should not suffice to convince grammatical fair ones that her

feelings can at all resemble theirs, I will add that she was slightly proud

and exacting, and as constant in her affection towards a baseless opinion as

towards an erring lover.

The anxiety about sister Priscilla, which had grown rather active by the time

the coral necklace was clasped, was happily ended by the entrance of that

cheerful-looking lady herself, with a face made blowsy by cold and damp. After

the first questions and greetings, she turned to Nancy, and surveyed her from

head to foot; then wheeled 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 a slight increase 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 yallow; 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, do you?" Priscilla here turned to

the Miss Gunns, rattling on in too much preoccupation with the delight of

talking, to notice that her candour was not appreciated. "The pretty uns do

for fly-catchers -they keep the men off us. I've no opinion o' the men, Miss

Gunn -I don't know what you have. And as for fretting and stewing about what

they'll think of you from morning till night, and making your life uneasy

about what they're doing when they're out o' your sight -as I tell Nancy, it's

a folly no woman need be guilty of, if she's got a good father and a good

home: let her leave it to them as have got no fortin, and can't help

themselves. As I say, Mr. Have-your-own-way is the best husband, and the only

one I'd ever promise to obey. I know it isn't pleasant, when you've been used

to living in a big way, and managing hogsheads and all that, to go and put

your nose in by somebody else's fireside, or to sit down by yourself to a

scrag or a knuckle; but, thank God! my father's a sober man and likely to

live; and if you've got a man by the chimney-corner, it doesn't matter if he's

childish -the business needn't be broke up."

The delicate process of getting her narrow gown over her head without injury

to her smooth curls obliged Miss Priscilla to pause in this rapid survey of

life, and Mrs. Osgood seized the opportunity of rising and saying -

"Well, niece, you'll follow us. The Miss Gunns will like to go down."

"Sister," said Nancy, when they were alone, "you've offended the Miss Gunns,

I'm sure."

"What have I done, child?" said Priscilla, in some alarm.

"Why, you asked them if they minded about being ugly -you're so very blunt."

"Law, did I? Well, it popped out: it's a mercy I said no more, for I'm a bad

un to live with folks when they don't like the truth. But as for being ugly,

look at me, child, in this silver-coloured silk -I told you how it 'ud be -I

look as yallow as a daffadil. Anybody 'ud say you wanted to make a mawkin of

me."

"No, Priscy, don't say so. I begged and prayed of you not to let us have this

silk if you'd like another better. I was willing to have your choice, you know

I was," said Nancy, in anxious self-vindication.

"Nonsense, child! you know you'd set your heart on this; and reason good, for

you're the colour o' cream. It 'ud be fine doings for you to dress yourself to

suit my skin. What I find fault with is that notion o' yours as I must dress

myself just like you. But you do as you like with me -you always did, from

when first you begun to walk. If you wanted to go the field's length, the

field's length you'd go; and there was no whipping you, for you looked as prim

and innicent as a daisy all the while."

"Priscy," said Nancy, gently, as she fastened a coral necklace, exactly like

her own, round Priscilla's neck, which was very far from being like her own,

"I'm sure I'm willing to give way as far as is right, but who shouldn't dress

alike if it isn't sisters? Would you have us go about looking as if we were no

kin to one another -us that have got no mother and not another sister in the

world? I'd do what was right, if I dressed in a gown dyed with

cheese-colouring; and I'd rather you'd choose, and let me wear what pleases

you."

"There you go again! You'd come round to the same thing if one talked to you

from Saturday night till Saturday morning. It'll be fine fun to see how you'll

master your husband and never raise your voice above the singing o' the kettle

all the while. I like to see the men mastered!"

"Don't talk so, Priscy," said Nancy, blushing. "You know I don't mean ever to

be married."

"Oh, you never mean a fiddlestick's end!" said Priscilla, as she arranged her

discarded dress, and closed her bandbox. "Who shall I have to work for when

father's gone, if you are to go and take notions in your head and be an old

maid, because some folks are no better than they should be? I haven't a bit o'

patience with you -sitting on an addled egg forever, as if there was never a

fresh un in the world. One old maid's enough out o' two sisters; and I shall

do credit to a single life, for God A'mighty meant me for it. Come, we can go

down now. I'm as ready as a mawkin can be -there's nothing a-wanting to

frighten the crows, now I've got my eardroppers in."

As the two Miss Lammeters walked into the large parlour together, any one who

did not know the character of both might certainly have supposed that the

reason why the square-shouldered, clumsy, high-featured Priscilla wore a dress

the facsimile of her pretty sister's, was either the mistaken vanity of the

one, or the malicious contrivance of the other in order to set off her own

rare beauty. But the good-natured, self-forgetful cheeriness and commonsense

of Priscilla would soon have dissipated the one suspicion; and the modest calm

of Nancy's speech and manners told clearly of a mind free from all disavowed

devices.

Places of honour had been kept for the Miss Lammeters near the head of the

principal tea-table in the wainscoted parlour, now looking fresh and pleasant

with handsome branches of holly, yew, and laurel, from the abundant growths of

the old garden; and Nancy felt an inward flutter, that no firmness of purpose

could prevent, when she saw Mr. Godfrey Cass advancing to lead her 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 highest consequence in the parish -at home in a venerable and unique

parlour, which was the extremity of grandeur in her experience, a parlour

where she might one day have been mistress, with the consciousness that she

was spoken of as "Madam Cass", the Squire's wife. These circumstances exalted

her inward drama in her own eyes, and deepened the emphasis with which she

declared to herself that not the most dazzling rank should induce her to marry

a man whose conduct showed him careless of his character, but that "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;

for she was so instinctively neat and adroit in all her actions, and her

pretty lips met each other with such quiet firmness, that it would have been

difficult for her to appear agitated.

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

appropriate compliment. He was not in the least lofty or aristocratic, but

simply a merry-eyed, small-featured, gray-haired man, with his chin propped by

an ample many-creased white neck-cloth which seemed to predominate over every

other point in his person, and somehow to impress its peculiar character on

his remarks; so that to have considered his amenities apart from his cravat

would have been a severe, and perhaps a dangerous, effort of abstraction.

"Ha, Miss Nancy," he said, turning his head within his cravat and 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; for though

these complimentary personalities were held to be in excellent taste in

old-fashioned Raveloe society, reverent love has a politeness of its own which

it teaches to men otherwise of small schooling. But the Squire was rather

impatient at Godfrey's showing himself a dull spark in this way. By this

advanced hour of the day, the Squire was always in higher spirits than we have

seen him in at the breakfast-table, and felt it quite pleasant to fulfil the

hereditary duty of being noisily jovial and patronising: the large silver

snuffbox was in active service, and was offered without fail to all neighbours

from time to time, however often they might have declined the favour. At

present, the Squire had only given an express welcome to the heads of families

as they appeared; but always, as the evening deepened, his hospitality rayed

out more widely, till he had tapped the youngest guests on the back and shown

a peculiar fondness for their presence, in the full belief that they must feel

their lives made happy by their belonging to a parish where there was such a

hearty man as Squire Cass to invite them and wish them well. Even in this

early stage of the jovial mood, it was natural that he should wish to supply

his son's deficiencies by looking and speaking for him.

"Ay, ay," he began, offering his snuffbox to Mr. Lammeter, who for the second

time bowed his head and waved his hand in stiff rejection of the offer, "us

old fellows may wish ourselves young tonight, when we see the mistletoe-bough

in the White Parlour. It's true, most things are gone back'ard in these last

thirty years -the country's going down since the old king fell ill. But when I

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

-ding me if I remember a sample to match her, not when I was a fine young

fellow, and thought a deal about my pigtail. No offence to you, madam," he

added, bending to Mrs. Crackenthorp, who sat by him, "I didn't know you when

you were as young as Miss Nancy here."

Mrs. Crackenthorp -a small blinking woman, who fidgeted incessantly with her

lace, ribbons, and gold chain, turning her head about and making subdued

noises, very much like a guinea-pig that twitches its nose and soliloquises in

all company indiscriminately -now blinked and fidgeted towards the Squire, and

said, "Oh no -no offence."

This emphatic compliment of the Squire's to Nancy was felt by others besides

Godfrey to have a diplomatic significance; and her father gave a slight

additional erectness to his back, as he looked across the table at her with

complacent gravity. That grave and orderly senior was not going to bate a jot

of his dignity by seeming elated at the notion of a match between his family

and the Squire's: he was gratified by any honour paid to his daughter; but he

must see an alteration in several ways before his consent would be vouchsafed.

His spare but healthy person, and high-featured, firm face, that looked as if

it had never been flushed by excess, was in strong contrast, not only with the

Squire's, but with the appearance of the Raveloe farmers generally -in

accordance with a favourite saying of his own, that "breed was stronger than

pasture."

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

said the stout lady of that name, looking round for her husband.

But Dr. Kimble (country apothecaries in old days enjoyed that title without

authority of diploma), being a thin and agile man, was flitting about the room

with his hands in his pockets, making himself agreeable to his feminine

patients, with medical impartiality, and being welcomed everywhere as a doctor

by hereditary right -not one of those miserable apothecaries who canvass for

practice in strange neighbourhoods, and spend all their income in starving

their one horse, but a man of substance, able to keep an extravagant table

like the best of his patients. Time out of mind the Raveloe doctor had been a

Kimble; Kimble was inherently a doctor's name; and it was difficult to

contemplate firmly the melancholy fact that the actual Kimble had no son, so

that his practice might one day be handed over to a successor with the

incongruous name of Taylor or Johnson. But in that case the wiser people in

Raveloe would employ Dr. Blick of Flitton -as less unnatural.

"Did you speak to me, my dear?" said the authentic doctor, coming quickly to

his wife's side; but, as if foreseeing that she would be too much out of

breath to repeat her remark, 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, who regarded physic and doctors as many loyal

churchmen regard the Church and the clergy -tasting a joke against them when

he was in health, but impatiently eager for their aid when anything was the

matter with him. He tapped his box, and looked round with a triumphant laugh.

"Ah, she has a quick wit, my friend Priscilla has," said the doctor, choosing

to attribute the epigram to a lady rather than allow a brother-in-law that

advantage over him. "She saves a little pepper to sprinkle over her talk

-that's the reason why she never puts too much into her pies. There's my wife,

now, she never has an answer at her tongue's end; but if I offend her, she's

sure to scarify my throat with black pepper the next day, or else give me the

colic with watery greens. That's an awful tit-for-tat." Here the vivacious

doctor made a pathetic grimace.

"Did you ever hear the like?" said Mrs. Kimble, laughing above her double chin

with much good-humour, aside to Mrs. Crackenthorp, who blinked and nodded, and

amiably intended to smile, but the intention lost itself in small twitchings

and noises.

"I suppose that's the sort of tit-for-tat adopted in your profession, Kimble,

if you've a grudge against a patient," said the Rector.

"Never do have a grudge against our patients," said Mr. Kimble, "except when

they leave us; and then, you see, we haven't the chance of prescribing for

'em. Ha, Miss Nancy," he continued, suddenly skipping to Nancy's side, "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?"

Godfrey, sorely uncomfortable under this significant insistence about Nancy,

and afraid to think where it would end by the time his father had set his

usual hospitable example of drinking before and after supper, saw no course

open but to turn to Nancy and say, with as little awkwardness as possible -

"No; I've not asked her yet, 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, 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. If he had only not been irritable at

cards!

While safe, well-tested personalities were enlivening the tea in this way, the

sound of the fiddle approaching within a distance at which it could be heard

distinctly, made the young people look at each other with sympathetic

impatience for the end of the meal.

"Why, there's Solomon in the hall," said the Squire, "and playing my fav'rite

tune, I 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 keynote 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, lad, I 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. A quaint procession! Old Solomon, in his seedy clothes and

long white locks, seemed to be luring that decent company by the magic scream

of his fiddle -luring discreet matrons in turban-shaped caps, nay, Mrs.

Crackenthorp herself, the summit of whose perpendicular feather was on a level

with the Squire's shoulder -luring fair lasses complacently conscious of very

short waists and skirts blameless of front-folds -luring burly fathers in

large variegated waistcoats, and ruddy sons, for the most part shy and

sheepish, in short nether garments and very long coat-tails.

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 -and the charter

of Raveloe seemed to be renewed by the ceremony. It was not thought of as an

unbecoming levity for the old and middle-aged people to dance a little before

sitting down to cards, but rather as part of their social duties. For what

were these if not to be merry at appropriate times, interchanging visits and

poultry with due frequency, paying each other old-established compliments in

sound traditional phrases, passing well-tried personal jokes, urging your

guests to eat and drink too much out of hospitality, and eating and drinking

too much in your neighbour's house to show that you liked your cheer? And the

parson naturally set an example in these social duties. For it would not have

been possible for the Raveloe mind, without a peculiar revelation, to know

that a clergyman should be a pale-faced memento of solemnities, instead of a

reasonably faulty man whose exclusive authority to read prayers and preach, to

christen, marry, and bury you, necessarily co-existed with the right to sell

you the ground to be buried in and to take tithe in kind; on which last point,

of course, there was a little grumbling, but not to the extent of irreligion

-not of deeper significance than the grumbling at the rain, which was by no

means accompanied with a spirit of impious defiance, but with a desire that

the prayer for fine weather might be read forthwith.

There was no reason, then, why the Rector's dancing should not be received as

part of the fitness of things quite as much as the Squire's, or why, on the

other hand, Mr. Macey's official respect should restrain him from subjecting

the parson's performance to that criticism with which minds of extraordinary

acuteness must necessarily contemplate the doings of their fallible fellow-men.

"The Squire's pretty springe, considering his weight," said Mr. Macey, "and he

stamps uncommon well. But Mr. Lammeter beats 'em all for shapes: you see he

holds his head like a sodger, and he isn't so cushiony as most o' the oldish

gentlefolks -they run fat in general; and he's got a fine leg. The parson's

nimble enough, but he hasn't got much of a leg: it's a bit too thick down'ard,

and his knees might be a bit nearer wi'out damage; but he might do worse, he

might do worse. Though he hasn't that grand way o' waving his hand as the

Squire has."

"Talk o' nimbleness, look at Mrs. Osgood," said Ben Winthrop, who was holding

his son Aaron between his knees. "She trips along with her little steps, so as

nobody can see how she goes -it's like as if she had little wheels to her

feet. She doesn't look a day older nor last year: she's the finest-made woman

as is, let the next be where she will."

"I don't heed how the women are made," said Mr. Macey, with some contempt.

"They wear nayther coat nor breeches: you can't make much out o' their shapes."

"Fayder," said Aaron, whose feet were busy beating out the tune, "how does

that big cock's-feather stick in Mrs. Crackenthorp's yead? Is there a little

hole for it, like in my shuttlecock?"

"Hush, lad, hush; that's the way the ladies dress theirselves, that is," said

the father, adding, however, in an undertone to Mr. Macey: "It does make her

look funny, though -partly like a short-necked bottle wi' a long quill in it.

Hey, by jingo, there's the young Squire leading off now, wi' Miss Nancy for

partners! There's a lass for you! -like a pink-and-white posy -there's nobody

'ud think as anybody could be so pretty. I shouldn't wonder if she's Madam

Cass some day, arter all -and nobody more rightfuller, for they'd make a fine

match. You can find nothing against Master Godfrey's shapes, Macey, I'll bet a

penny."

Mr. Macey screwed up his mouth, leaned his head further on one side, and

twirled his thumbs with a presto 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 tailor, 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 I 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 tonight. And I see he's for taking her

away to sit down, now they're at the end o' the dance: that looks like

sweethearting, 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 a disorder in the general framework of things. 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 more to me 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?"

Godfrey was half conscious that this sudden opportunity of speaking to Nancy

alone had driven him beside himself; but blind feeling had got the mastery of

his tongue. Nancy really felt much agitated by the possibility Godfrey's words

suggested, but this very pressure of emotion that she was in danger of finding

too strong for her roused all her power of self-command.

"I should be glad to see a good change in anybody, Mr. Godfrey," she answered,

with the slightest discernible difference of tone, "but it 'ud 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've no feeling."

"I 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 tonight, and think nothing of the morrow.

Chapter 12

While Godfrey Cass was taking draughts of forgetfulness from the sweet

presence of Nancy, willingly losing all sense of that hidden bond which at

other moments galled and fretted him so as to mingle irritation with the very

sunshine, 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 the

moments of wretched unbenumbed consciousness, the sense of her want and

degradation transformed itself continually into bitterness 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 aggravated her

vindictiveness. Just and self-reproving thoughts do not come to us too

thickly, even in the purest air and with the best lessons of heaven and earth;

how should those white-winged delicate messengers make their way to Molly's

poisoned chamber, inhabited by no higher memories than those of a barmaid's

paradise of pink ribbons and gentlemen's jokes?

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 snow-hidden ruggedness of the long lanes, even the

animation of a vindictive purpose could not keep her spirit from failing. 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. In another moment Molly had flung

something away, but it was not the black remnant -it was an empty phial. 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 supreme immediate longing that curtained

off all futurity -the 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 lost their tension, 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, all wet with snow, its eyes were

caught by a bright glancing light on the white ground, and, with the ready

transition of infancy, it was immediately absorbed in watching the bright

living thing running towards it, yet never arriving. That bright living thing

must be caught; and 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. It was chiefly at night, when he was not occupied in his loom, that he

fell into this repetition of an act for which he could have assigned no

definite purpose, and which can hardly be understood except by those who have

undergone a bewildering separation from a supremely loved object. 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

seemed to narrow his solitude, and touched his yearning with the chill of

despair. 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 arrested, as he had been already

since his loss, by the invisible wand of catalepsy, 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 Marner's sensibility returned, he continued the action which had been

arrested, and closed his door, unaware of the chasm in his consciousness,

unaware of any intermediate change, except that the light had grown dim, and

that he was chilled and faint. He thought 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.

The heap of gold seemed to glow and get larger beneath his agitated gaze. 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 over its head. Could this be his little sister come back to

him in a dream -his little sister whom he had carried about in 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, under the double presence of an inexplicable

surprise and a hurrying influx of memories. 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 fibres that had never been moved in

Raveloe -old quiverings of tenderness -old impressions of awe at the

presentiment of some Power presiding over his life; for his imagination had

not yet extricated itself from the sense of mystery in the child's sudden

presence, and had formed no conjectures of ordinary natural means by which the

event could have been brought about.

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

that mingling of inarticulate cries with "mammy" by which little children

express the bewilderment of waking. Silas pressed it to him, and almost

unconsciously uttered sounds of hushing tenderness, while he bethought himself

that some of his porridge, which had got cool by the dying fire, would do to

feed the child with if it were only warmed up a little.

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 was at

once happily occupied with the primary mystery of her own toes, inviting

Silas, with much chuckling, to consider the mystery too. But the wet boots had

at last suggested to Silas that the child had been walking on the snow, and

this roused him from his entire oblivion of any ordinary means by which it

could have entered or been brought into his house. Under the prompting of this

new idea, and without waiting to form conjectures, he raised the child in his

arms, and went to the door. As soon as he had opened it, there was the cry of

"mammy" again, which Silas had not heard since the child's first hungry

waking. Bending forward, he could just discern 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 so as

almost to escape from 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 13

It was after the early supper-time at the Red House,and the entertainment was

in that stage when bashfulness itself had passed into easy jollity, when

gentlemen, conscious of unusual accomplishments, could at length be prevailed

on to dance a hornpipe, and when the Squire preferred talking loudly,

scattering snuff, and patting his visitors' backs, to sitting longer at the

whist-table -a choice exasperating to uncle Kimble, who, being always volatile

in sober business hours, became intense and bitter over cards and brandy,

shuffled before his adversary's deal with a glare of suspicion, and turned up

a mean trump-card with an air of inexpressible disgust, as if in a world where

such things could happen one might as well enter on a course of reckless

profligacy. When the evening had advanced to this pitch of freedom and

enjoyment, it was usual for the servants, the heavy duties of supper being

well over, to get their share of amusement by coming to look on at the

dancing; so that the back regions of the house were left in solitude.

There were two doors by which the White Parlour was entered from the hall, and

they were both standing open for the sake of air; but the lower one was

crowded with the servants and villagers, and only the upper doorway was left

free. Bob Cass was figuring in a hornpipe, and his father, very proud of this

lithe son, whom he repeatedly declared to be just like himself in his young

days in a tone that implied this to be the very highest stamp of juvenile

merit, was the centre of a group who had placed themselves opposite the

performer, not far from the upper door. Godfrey was standing a little way off,

not to admire his brother's dancing, but to keep sight of Nancy, who was

seated in the group near her father. He stood aloof, because he wished to

avoid suggesting himself as a subject for the Squire's fatherly jokes in

connection with matrimony and Miss Nancy Lammeter's beauty, which were likely

to become more and more explicit. But he had the prospect of dancing with her

again when the hornpipe was concluded, and in the meanwhile it was very

pleasant to get long glances at her quite unobserved.

But when Godfrey was lifting his eyes from one of those long glances, they

encountered an object as startling to him at that moment as if it had been an

apparition from the dead. It was an apparition from that hidden life which

lies, like a dark by-street, behind the goodly ornamented facade that meets

the sunlight and the gaze of respectable admirers. It was his own child

carried in Silas Marner's arms. That was his instantaneous impression,

unaccompanied by doubt, though he had not seen the child for months past; and

when the hope was rising that he might possibly be mistaken, Mr. Crackenthorp

and Mr. Lammeter had already advanced to Silas, in astonishment at this

strange advent. Godfrey joined them immediately, unable to rest without

hearing every word -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?"

"I'm come for the doctor -I want the doctor," Silas had said, in the first

moment, to Mr. Crackenthorp.

"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 -an ugly

inmate to have found a nestling-place in Godfrey's kindly disposition; but no

disposition is a security from evil wishes to a man whose happiness hangs on

duplicity.

"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, now frowned and hid her

face, now lifted up her head again and looked round placably, until a touch or

a coaxing word brought back the frown, and made her bury 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, in anticipation of his own conscience.)

"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."

The proposition to take the child from him had come to Silas quite

unexpectedly, and his speech, uttered under a strong sudden impulse, was

almost like a revelation to himself: a minute before, he had no distinct

intention about the child.

"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, I 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 on his rapid way to the Stone-pits 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 so good as tell my

husband to come, on your way back -he's at the Rainbow, I doubt -if you found

him anyway 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 painfully preoccupied 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 forever uneasy under the weakness that forbade the

renunciation. And at this moment his mind leaped away from all restraint

towards the sudden prospect of deliverance from his long bondage.

"Is she dead?" said the voice that predominated over every other within him.

"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." But

across that vision came the other possibility -"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 tomorrow. 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, such as we feel before some quiet majesty or beauty in the earth

or sky -before a steady glowing planet, or a full-flowered eglantine, or the

bending trees over a silent pathway. The wide-open blue eyes looked up at

Godfrey's without any uneasiness or sign of recognition: the child could make

no visible audible claim on its father; and the father felt a strange mixture

of feelings, a conflict of regret and joy, that the pulse of that little heart

had no response for the half-jealous yearning in his own, when the blue eyes

turned away from him slowly, and fixed themselves on the weaver's queer face,

which was bent low down to look at them, while the small hand began to pull

Marner's withered cheek with loving disfiguration.

"You'll take the child to the parish tomorrow?" asked Godfrey, speaking as

indifferently as he could.

"Who says so?" said Marner, sharply. "Will they make me take her?"

"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's 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."

"No; but I've seen the time when I might have quarrelled with him for it

myself. It's too late now, though. If the child ran into the fire, your aunt's

too fat to overtake it: she could only sit and grunt like an alarmed sow. But

what a fool you are, Godfrey, to come out in your dancing-shoes and stockings

in this way -and you one of the beaux of the evening, and at your own house!

What do you mean by such freaks, young fellow? Has Miss Nancy been cruel, and

do you want to spite her by spoiling your pumps?"

"Oh, everything has been disagreeable tonight. I was tired to death of jigging

and gallanting, and that bother about the hornpipes. And I'd got to dance with

the other Miss Gunn," said Godfrey, glad of the subterfuge his uncle had

suggested to him.

The prevarication and white lies which a mind that keeps itself ambitiously

pure is as uneasy under as a great artist under the false touches that no eye

detects but his own, are worn as lightly as mere trimmings when once the

actions have become a lie.

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 recognised: those were not

days of active inquiry and wide report; and as for the registry of their

marriage, that was a long way off, buried 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.

And when events turn out so much better for a man than he has had reason to

dread, is it not a proof that his conduct has been less foolish and

blameworthy than it might otherwise have appeared? When we are treated well,

we naturally begin to think that we are not altogether unmeritorious, and that

it is only just we should treat ourselves well, and not mar our own good

fortune. Where, after all, would be the use of his confessing the past to

Nancy Lammeter, and throwing away his happiness? -nay, hers? for he felt some

confidence that she loved him. 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 14

There was a pauper's burial that week in Raveloe, and up Kench Yard at

Batherley it was known that the dark-haired woman with the fair child, who had

lately come to lodge there, was gone away again. That was all the express note

taken that Molly had disappeared from the eyes of men. But the unwept death

which, to the general lot, seemed as trivial as the summer-shed leaf, was

charged with the force of destiny to certain human lives that we know of,

shaping their joys and sorrows even to the end.

Silas Marner's determination to keep the "tramp's child" was matter of hardly

less surprise and iterated talk in the village than the robbery of his money.

That softening of feeling towards him which dated from his misfortune, that

merging of suspicion and dislike in a rather contemptuous pity for him as lone

and crazy, was now accompanied with a more active sympathy, especially amongst

the women. Notable mothers, who knew what it was to keep children "whole and

sweet"; 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 equally 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 neighbourly

offices were the most acceptable to Marner, for they were rendered without any

show of bustling instruction. 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

wi' 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, "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 arter 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 betimes 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, I'll 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

eying 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 catechise, 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. His mind was too busy

trying to give some definite bearing to Dolly's words for him to think of

answering her.

"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 forever 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, "I'll 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, the Rector deciding that a double baptism was the lesser

risk to incur; and on this occasion Silas, making himself as clean and tidy as

he could, appeared for the first time within the church, and shared in the

observances held sacred by his neighbours. He was quite unable, by means of

anything he heard or saw, to identify the Raveloe religion with his old faith;

if he could at any time in his previous life have done so, it must have been

by the aid of a strong feeling ready to vibrate with sympathy, rather than by

a comparison of phrases and ideas; and now for long years that feeling had

been dormant. He had no distinct idea about the baptism and the church-going,

except that Dolly had said it was for the good of the child; and in this way,

as the weeks grew to months, the child created fresh and fresh links between

his life and the lives from which he had hitherto shrunk continually into

narrower isolation. Unlike the gold which needed nothing, and must be

worshipped in close-locked solitude -which was hidden away from the daylight,

was deaf to the song of birds, and started to no human tones -Eppie was a

creature of endless claims and ever-growing desires, seeking and loving

sunshine and living sounds and living movements; making trial of everything,

with trust in new joy, and stirring the human kindness in all eyes that looked

on her. The gold had kept his thoughts in an ever-repeated circle, leading to

nothing beyond itself; but Eppie was an object compacted of changes and hopes

that forced his thoughts onward, and carried them far away from their old

eager pacing towards the same blank limit -carried them away to the new things

that would come with the coming years, when Eppie would have learned to

understand how her father Silas cared for her; and made him look for images of

that time in the ties and charities that bound together the families of his

neighbours. The gold had asked that he should sit weaving longer and longer,

deafened and blinded more and more to all things except the monotony of his

loom and the repetition of his web; but Eppie called him away from his

weaving, and made him think all its pauses a holiday, reawakening his senses

with her fresh life, even to the old winter-flies that came crawling forth in

the early spring sunshine, and warming him into joy because she had 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, while

Eppie toddled 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: so that when it

came, she set up her small back and laughed 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,

there was a sense of crowding remembrances from which he turned away timidly,

taking refuge in Eppie's little world, that lay lightly on his enfeebled spirit.

As the child's mind was growing into knowledge, his mind was growing into

memory; as her life unfolded, his soul, long stupefied in a cold, narrow

prison, was unfolding too, and trembling gradually into full consciousness.

It was an influence which must gather force with every new year: the tones

that stirred Silas's heart grew articulate, and called for more distinct

answers; shapes and sounds grew clearer for Eppie's eyes and ears, and there

was more that "Dad-dad" was imperatively required to notice and account for.

Also, by the time Eppie was three years old, she developed a fine capacity for

mischief, and for devising ingenious ways of being troublesome, which found

much exercise, not only for Silas's patience, but for his watchfulness and

penetration. Sorely was poor Silas puzzled on such occasions by the

incompatible demands of love. 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."

Silas was impressed with the melancholy truth of this last remark; but his

force of mind failed before the only two penal methods open to him, not only

because it was painful to him to hurt Eppie, but because he trembled at a

moment's contention with her, lest she should love him the less for it. Let

even an affectionate Goliath get himself tied to a small tender thing,

dreading to hurt it by pulling, and dreading still more to snap the cord, and

which of the two, pray, will be master? 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.

For example. He had wisely chosen a broad strip of linen as a means of

fastening her to his loom when he was busy: it made a broad belt round her

waist, and was long enough to allow of her reaching the truckle-bed and

sitting down on it, but not long enough for her to attempt any dangerous

climbing. One bright summer's morning Silas had been more engrossed than usual

in "setting up" a new piece of work, an occasion on which his scissors were in

requisition. These scissors, owing to an especial warning of Dolly's, had been

kept carefully out of Eppie's reach; but the click of them had had a peculiar

attraction for her ear, and watching the results of that click, she had

derived the philosophic lesson that the same cause would produce the same

effect. Silas had seated himself in his loom, and the noise of weaving had

begun; but he had left his scissors on a ledge which Eppie's arm was long

enough to reach; and now, like a small mouse, watching her opportunity, she

stole quietly from her corner, secured the scissors, and toddled to the bed

again, setting up her back as a mode of concealing the fact. She had a

distinct intention as to the use of the scissors; and having cut the linen

strip in a jagged but effectual manner, 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: Eppie had run out by herself

-had perhaps fallen into the Stone-pit. Silas, shaken by the worst fear that

could have befallen him, rushed out, calling "Eppie!" and ran eagerly about

the unenclosed space, exploring the dry cavities into which she might have

fallen, and then gazing with questioning dread at the smooth red surface of

the water. 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 habitually took her to stroll. But the grass was high in the meadow,

and there was no descrying her, if she were there, except by a close search

that would be a trespass on Mr. Osgood's crop. Still, that misdemeanour must

be committed; and poor Silas, after peering all round the hedgerows, traversed

the grass, beginning with perturbed vision to see Eppie behind every group of

red sorrel, and to see her moving always farther off as he approached. 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, so as to leave a wide margin of good adhesive mud. Here,

however, sat Eppie, discoursing cheerfully to her own small boot, which she

was using as a bucket to convey the water into a deep hoof-mark, while her

little naked foot was planted comfortably on a cushion of olive-green mud. A

red-headed calf was observing her with alarmed doubt through the opposite hedge.

Here was clearly a case of aberration in a christened child which demanded

severe treatment; but 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 idea that she might run away again

and come to harm gave him unusual resolution, 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 the

proposition opened a pleasing novelty. Seeing that he must proceed to

extremities, 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!"

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, the burden of her misdeeds being borne

vicariously by father Silas. The stone hut was made a soft nest for her, lined

with downy patience; and also in the world that lay beyond the stone hut she

knew nothing of frowns and denials.

Notwithstanding 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.

Hitherto he had been treated very much as if he had been a useful gnome or

brownie -a queer and unaccountable creature, who must necessarily be looked at

with wondering curiosity and repulsion, and with whom one would be glad to

make all greetings and bargains as brief as possible, but who must be dealt

with in a propitiatory way, and occasionally have a present of pork or

garden-stuff to carry home with him, seeing that without him there was no

getting the yarn woven. But now Silas met with open smiling faces and cheerful

questioning, as a person whose satisfactions 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 outdoor work -you're

partly as handy as a woman, for weaving comes next to spinning." Elderly

masters and mistresses, seated observantly in large kitchen armchairs, shook

their heads over the difficulties attendant on rearing children, felt Eppie's

round arms and legs, and pronounced them remarkably firm, and told 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; and

the small boys and girls approached her slowly, with cautious movement and

steady gaze, like little dogs face to face with one of their own kind, till

attraction had reached the point at which the soft lips were put out for a

kiss. 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 -from men and women with parental looks and tones, to the

red ladybirds and the round pebbles.

Silas began now to think of Raveloe life entirely in relation to Eppie: she

must have everything that was a 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, wherewith he could

have no communion: as some man who has a precious plant to which he would give

a nurturing home in a new soil, thinks of the rain and the sunshine and all

influences in relation to his nursling, and asks industriously for all

knowledge that will help him to satisfy the wants of the searching roots, or

to guard leaf and bud from invading harm. The disposition to hoard had been

utterly crushed at the very first by the loss of his long-stored gold: the

coins he earned afterwards seemed as irrelevant as stones brought to complete

a house suddenly buried by an earthquake; the sense of bereavement was too

heavy upon him for the old thrill of satisfaction to arise again at the touch

of the newly earned coin. And now something had come to replace his hoard

which gave a growing purpose to the earnings, drawing his hope and joy

continually onward beyond the money.

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 15

There was one person, as you will believe, who watched with keener though more

hidden interest than any other, the prosperous growth of Eppie under the

weaver's care. He dared not do anything that would imply a stronger interest

in a poor man's adopted child than could be expected from the kindliness of

the young Squire, when a chance meeting suggested a little present to a simple

old fellow whom others noticed with good will; but he told himself that the

time would come when he might do something towards furthering the welfare of

his daughter without incurring suspicion. Was he very uneasy in the meantime

at his inability to give his daughter her birthright? I cannot say that he

was. The child was being taken care of, and would very likely be happy, as

people in humble stations often were -happier, perhaps, than those who are

brought up in luxury.

That famous ring that pricked its owner when he forgot duty and followed

desire -I wonder if it pricked very hard when he set out on the chase, or

whether it pricked but lightly then, and only pierced to the quick when the

chase had long been ended, and hope, folding her wings, looked backward and

became regret?

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, while 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 2

Chapter 16

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, retarded by friendly greetings

and questions, the richer parishioners who had chosen this bright Sunday

morning as eligible 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 recognise, in spite of Time, who has laid his hand on them all. The

tall blond 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. Often the soul is ripened into fuller goodness while age

has spread an ugly film, so that mere glances can never divine the

preciousness of the fruit. But the years have not been so cruel to Nancy. The

firm yet placid mouth, the clear veracious glance of the brown eyes, speak now

of a nature that has been tested and has kept its highest qualities; and even

the costume, with its dainty neatness and purity, has more significance now

the coquetries of youth can have nothing to do with it.

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 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 recognise 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

gaze; 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, who has vainly tried to chastise her curly

auburn hair into smoothness under her brown bonnet: the hair ripples as

obstinately as a brooklet under the March breeze, and the little ringlets

burst away from the restraining comb behind and show themselves below the

bonnet-crown. Eppie cannot help being rather vexed about her hair, for there

is no other girl in Raveloe who has hair at all like it, and she thinks hair

ought to be smooth. She does not like to be blameworthy even in small things:

you see how neatly her prayer-book is folded in her spotted handkerchief.

That good-looking young fellow, in a new fustian suit, who walks behind her,

is not quite sure upon the question of hair in the abstract, when Eppie puts

it to him, and thinks that perhaps straight hair is the best in general, but

he doesn't want Eppie's hair to be different. She surely divines that there is

someone 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?"

"I can dig it for you, Master Marner," said the young man in fustian, 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 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 it 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 gentlefolks' 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.

"Oh, 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."

Eppie was now aware that her behaviour was under observation, but it was only

the observation of a friendly donkey, browsing with a log fastened to his foot

-a meek donkey, not scornfully critical of human trivialities, but thankful to

share in them, if possible, by getting his nose scratched; and Eppie did not

fail to gratify him with her usual notice, though it was attended with the

inconvenience of his following them, painfully, up to the very door of their

home.

But the sound of a sharp bark inside, as Eppie put the key in the door,

modified the donkey's views, and he limped away again without bidding. The

sharp bark 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;

for 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, whose

claims on neighbourly help were not to be matched in Raveloe. Any superstition

that remained concerning him had taken an entirely new colour; and 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 leastwise that the robber would

be made to answer for it -for, as Mr. Macey observed of himself, his faculties

were as strong as ever.

Silas sat down now and watched Eppie with a satisfied 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 grate and oven

added to his conveniences: he loved the old brick hearth as he had loved his

brown pot -and was it not there when he had found Eppie? The gods of the

hearth exist for us still; and let all new faith be tolerant of that

fetichism, lest it bruise its own roots.

Silas ate his dinner more silently than usual, soon laying down his knife and

fork, and watching half abstractedly Eppie's play with Snap and the cat, by

which her own dining was made rather a lengthy business. Yet it was a sight

that might well arrest wandering thoughts: Eppie, with the rippling radiance

of her hair and the whiteness of her rounded chin and throat set off by the

dark-blue cotton gown, laughing merrily as the kitten held on with her four

claws to one shoulder, like a design for a jug-handle, while Snap on the right

hand and Puss on the other put up their paws towards a morsel which she held

out of the reach of both -Snap occasionally desisting in order to remonstrate

with the cat by a cogent worrying growl on the greediness and futility of her

conduct; till Eppie relented, caressed them both, and divided the morsel

between them.

But at last Eppie, glancing at the clock, checked the play, and said "Oh,

daddy, you're wanting to go into the sunshine to smoke your pipe. But I must

clear away first, so as the house may be tidy when godmother comes. I'll make

haste -I won't be long."

Silas had taken to smoking a pipe daily during the last two years, having been

strongly urged to it by the sages of Raveloe, as a practice "good for the

fits"; and this advice was sanctioned by Dr. Kimble, on the ground that it was

as well to try what could do no harm -a principle which was made to answer for

a great deal of work in that gentleman's medical practice. Silas did not

highly enjoy smoking, and often wondered how his neighbours could be so fond

of it; but a humble sort of acquiescence in what was held to be good had

become a strong habit of that new self which had been developed in him since

he had found Eppie on his hearth: it had been the only clue his bewildered

mind could hold by in cherishing this young life that had been sent to him out

of the darkness into which his gold had departed. By seeking what was needful

for Eppie, by sharing the effect that everything produced on her, he had

himself come to appropriate the forms of custom and belief which were the

mould of Raveloe life; and as, with reawakening sensibilities, memory also

reawakened, he had begun to ponder over the elements of his old faith, and

blend them with his new impressions, till he recovered a consciousness of

unity between his past and present. The sense of presiding goodness and the

human trust which come with all pure peace and joy, had given him a dim

impression that there had been some error, some mistake, which had thrown that

dark shadow over the days of his best years; and as it grew more and more easy

to him to open his mind to Dolly Winthrop, he gradually communicated to her

all he could describe of his early life. The communication was necessarily a

slow and difficult process, for Silas's meagre power of explanation was not

aided by any readiness of interpretation in Dolly, whose narrow outward

experience gave her no key to strange customs, and made every novelty a source

of wonder that arrested them at every step of the narrative. It was only by

fragments, and at intervals which left Dolly time to revolve what she had

heard till it acquired some familiarity for her, that Silas at last arrived at

the climax of the sad story -the drawing of lots, and its false testimony

concerning him; and this had to be repeated in several interviews, under new

questions on her part as to the nature of this plan for detecting the guilty

and clearing the innocent.

"And yourn's the same Bible, you're sure o' that, Master Marner -the Bible as

you brought wi' you from that country -it's the same as what they've got at

church, and what Eppie's a-learning to read in?"

"Yes," said Silas, "every bit the same; and there's drawing o' lots in the

Bible, mind you," he added in a lower tone.

"Oh dear, dear," said Dolly in a grieved voice, as if she were hearing an

unfavourable report of a sick man's case. She was silent for some minutes; at

last she said -

"There's wise folks, happen, as know how it all is; the parson knows, I'll be

bound; but it takes big words to tell them things, and such as poor folks

can't make much out on. I can never rightly know the meaning o' what I hear at

church, only a bit here and there, but I know it's good words -I do. But what

lies upo' your mind -it's this, Master Marner: as, if Them above had done the

right thing by you, They'd never ha' let you be turned out for a wicked thief

when you was innicent."

"Ah!" said Silas, who had now come to understand Dolly's phraseology, "that

was what fell on me like as if it had been red-hot iron; because, you see,

there was nobody as cared for me or clave to me above nor below. And him as

I'd gone out and in wi' for ten year and more, since when we was lads and went

halves -mine own familiar friend in whom I trusted, had lifted up his heel

again' me, and worked to ruin me."

"Eh, but he was a bad un -I can't think as there's another such," said Dolly.

"But I'm o'ercome, Master Marner; I'm like as if I'd waked and didn't know

whether it was night or morning. I feel somehow as sure as I do when I've laid

something up though I can't justly put my hand on it, as there was a rights in

what happened to you, if one could but make it out; and you'd no call to lose

heart as you did. But we'll talk on it again; for sometimes things come into

my head when I'm leeching or poulticing, or such, as I could never think on

when I was sitting still."

Dolly was too useful a woman not to have many opportunities of illumination of

the kind she alluded to, and she was not long before she recurred to the

subject.

"Master Marner," she said, one day that she came to bring home Eppie's

washing, "I've been sore puzzled for a good bit wi' that trouble o' yourn and

the drawing o' lots; and it got twisted back'ards and for'ards, as I didn't

know which end to lay hold on. But it come to me all clear like, that night

when I was sitting up wi' poor Bessy Fawkes, as is dead and left her children

behind, God help 'em -it come to me as clear as daylight; but whether I've got

hold on it now, or can anyways bring it to my tongue's end, that I don't know.

For I've often a deal inside me as'll never come out; and for what you talk o'

your folks in your old country niver saying prayers by heart nor saying 'em

out of a book, they must be wonderful cliver; for if I didn't know `Our

Father', and little bits o' good words as I can carry out o' church wi' me, I

might down o' my knees every night, but nothing could I say."

"But you can mostly say something as I can make sense on, Mrs. Winthrop," said

Silas.

"Well, then, Master Marner, it come to me summat like this: I can make nothing

o' the drawing o' lots and the answer coming wrong; it 'ud mayhap take the

parson to tell that, and he could only tell us i' big words. But what come to

me as clear as the daylight, it was when I was troubling over poor Bessy

Fawkes, and it allays comes into my head when I'm sorry for folks, and feel as

I can't do a power to help 'em, not if I was to get up i' the middle o' the

night -it comes into my head as Them above has got a deal tenderer heart nor

what I've got -for I can't be anyways better nor Them as made me; and if

anything looks hard to me, it's because there's things I don't know on; and

for the matter o' that, there may be plenty o' things I don't know on, for

it's little as I know -that it is. And so, while I was thinking o' that, you

come into my mind, Master Marner, and it all come pouring in: if I felt i' my

inside what was the right and just thing by you, and them as prayed and drawed

the lots, all but that wicked un, if they'd ha' done the right thing by you if

they could, isn't there Them as was at the making on us, and knows better and

has a better will? And that's all as ever I can be sure on, and everything

else is a big puzzle to me when I think on it. For there was the fever come

and took off them as were full-growed, and left the helpless children; and

there's the breaking o' limbs; and them as 'ud do right and be sober have to

suffer by them as are contrairy -eh, there's trouble i' this world, and

there's things as we can niver make out the rights on. And all as we've got to

do is to trusten, Master Marner -to do the right thing as fur as we know, and

to trusten. For if us as knows so little can see a bit o' good and rights, we

may be sure as there's a good and a rights bigger nor what we can know -I feel

it i' my own inside as it must be so. And if you could but ha' gone on

trustening, Master Marner, you wouldn't ha' run away from your fellow-creaturs

and been so lone."

"Ah, but that 'ud ha' been hard," said Silas, in an undertone; "it 'ud ha'

been hard to trusten then."

"And so it would," said Dolly, almost with compunction: "them things are

easier said nor done; and I'm partly ashamed o' talking."

"Nay, nay," said Silas, "you're i' the right, Mrs. Winthrop -you're i' the

right. There's good i' this world -I've a feeling o' that now; and it makes a

man feel as there's a good more nor he can see, i' spite o' the trouble and

the wickedness. That drawing o' the lots is dark; but the child was sent to

me: there's dealings with us -there's dealings."

This dialogue took place in Eppie's earlier years, when Silas had to part with

her for two hours every day, that she might learn to read at the dame school,

after he had vainly tried himself to guide her in that first step to learning.

Now that she was grown up, Silas had often been led, in those moments of quiet

outpouring which come to people who live together in perfect love, to talk

with her too of the past, and how and why he had lived a lonely man until she

had been sent to him. For it would have been impossible for him to hide from

Eppie that she was not his own child: even if the most delicate reticence on

the point could have been expected from Raveloe gossips in her presence, her

own questions about her mother could not have been parried, as she grew up,

without that complete shrouding of the past which would have made a painful

barrier between their minds. So Eppie had 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. The tender and peculiar love with which Silas had reared her in almost

inseparable companionship with himself, aided by the seclusion of their

dwelling, had preserved her from the lowering influences of the village talk

and habits, and had kept her mind in that freshness which is sometimes falsely

supposed to be an invariable attribute of rusticity. Perfect love has a breath

of poetry which can exalt the relations of the least-instructed human beings;

and this breath of poetry had surrounded Eppie from the time when she had

followed the bright gleam that beckoned her to Silas's hearth; so that it is

not surprising if, in other things besides her delicate prettiness, she was

not quite a common village maiden, but had a touch of refinement and fervour

which came from no other teaching than that of tenderly nurtured unvitiated

feeling. She was too childish and simple for her imagination to rove into

questions about her unknown father; for a long while it did not even occur to

her that she must have had a father; and the first time that the idea of her

mother having had a husband presented itself to her was when Silas showed her

the wedding-ring which had been taken from the wasted finger, and had been

carefully preserved by him in a little lacquered box shaped like a shoe. He

delivered this box into Eppie's charge when she had grown up, and she often

opened it to look at the ring; but still she thought hardly at all about the

father of whom it was the symbol. Had she not a father very close to her, who

loved her better than any real fathers in the village seemed to love their

daughters? On the contrary, who her mother was, and how she came to die in

that forlornness, were questions that often pressed on Eppie's mind. Her

knowledge of Mrs. Winthrop, who was her nearest friend next to Silas, made her

feel that a mother must be very precious; and she had again and again asked

Silas to tell her how her mother looked, whom she was like, and how he had

found her against the furze bush, led towards it by the little footsteps and

the outstretched arms. The furze bush was there still; and this afternoon,

when Eppie came out with Silas into the sunshine, it was the first object that

arrested her eyes and thoughts.

"Father," she said, in a tone of gentle gravity, which sometimes came like a

sadder, slower cadence across her playfulness, "we shall take the furze bush

into the garden; it'll come into the corner, and just against it I'll put

snowdrops and crocuses, 'cause Aaron says they won't die out, but'll always

get more and more."

"Ah, child," said Silas, always ready to talk when he had his pipe in his

hand, apparently enjoying the pauses more than the puffs, "it wouldn't do to

leave out the furze bush; and there's nothing prettier to my thinking, when

it's yallow with flowers. But it's just come into my head 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 dillicate 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.

"Oh, 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 Silas puffed again dutifully at the pipe, which occupied his

other arm. An ash in the hedgerow behind made a fretted screen from the sun,

and threw happy playful shadows all about them.

"Father," said Eppie, very gently, after they had been sitting in silence a

little while, "if I was to be married, ought I to be married with my mother's

ring?"

Silas gave an almost imperceptible start, though the question fell in with the

undercurrent of thought in his own mind, and then said, in a subdued tone,

"Why, Eppie, have you been a-thinking on it?"

"Only this last week, father," said Eppie, ingenuously, "since Aaron talked to

me about it."

"And what did he say?" said Silas, still in the same subdued way, as if he

were anxious lest he should fall into the slightest tone that was not for

Eppie's good.

"He 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."

"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 his pipe as if it were useless

to pretend to smoke any longer, "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 no; 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 that medicinal

appliance from the ground.

"Nay, child," said Silas, "I've done enough for today. I think, mayhap, a

little of it does me more good than so much at once."

Chapter 17

While Silas and Eppie were seated on the bank discoursing in the fleckered

shade of the ash-tree, Miss Priscilla Lammeter was resisting her sister's

arguments that it would be better to take tea at the Red House, and let her

father have a long nap, than drive home to the Warrens so soon after dinner.

The family party (of four only) were seated round the table in the dark

wainscoted parlour, with the Sunday dessert before them, of fresh filberts,

apples, and pears, duly ornamented with leaves by Nancy's own hand before the

bells had rung for church.

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 mantelpiece.

All other signs of sporting and outdoor 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.

"Now, father," said Nancy, "is there any call for you to go home to tea?

Mayn't you just as well stay with us? -such a beautiful evening as it's likely

to be."

The old gentleman had been talking with Godfrey about the increasing poor-rate

and the ruinous times, and had not heard the dialogue between his daughters.

"My dear, you must ask Priscilla," he said, in the once firm voice, now become

rather broken. "She manages me and the farm too."

"And reason good as I should manage you, father," said Priscilla, "else you'd

be giving yourself your death with rheumatism. And as for the farm, if

anything turns out wrong, as it can't but do in these times, there's nothing

kills a man so soon as having nobody to find fault with but himself. It's a

deal the best way o' being master, to let somebody else do the ordering, and

keep the blaming in your own hands. It 'ud save many a man a stroke, I believe."

"Well, well, my dear," said her father, with a quiet laugh, "I didn't say you

don't manage for everybody's good."

"Then manage so as you may stay tea, Priscilla," said Nancy, putting her hand

on her sister's arm affectionately. "Come now; and we'll go round the garden

while father has his nap."

"My dear child, he'll have a beautiful nap in the gig, for I shall drive. And

as for staying tea, I can't hear of it; for there's this dairymaid, now she

knows she's to be married, turned Michaelmas, she'd as lief pour the new milk

into the pig-trough as into the pans. That's the way with 'em all: it's as if

they thought the world 'ud be new-made because they're to be married. So come

and let me put my bonnet on, and there'll be time for us to walk round the

garden while the horse is being put in."

When the sisters were treading the neatly swept garden-walks, between the

bright turf that contrasted pleasantly with the dark cones and arches and

wall-like hedges of yew, Priscilla said -

"I'm as glad as anything at your husband's making that exchange o' land with

cousin Osgood, and beginning the dairying. It's a thousand pities you didn't

do it before; for it'll give you something to fill your mind. There's nothing

like a dairy if folks want a bit o' worrit to make the days pass. For as for

rubbing furniture, when you can once see your face in a table there's nothing

else to look for; but there's always something fresh with the dairy; for even

in the depths o' winter there's some pleasure in conquering the butter, and

making it come whether or no. My dear," added Priscilla, pressing her sister's

hand affectionately as they walked side by side, "you'll never be low when

you've got a dairy."

"Ah, Priscilla," said Nancy, returning the pressure with a grateful glance of

her clear eyes, "but it won't make up to Godfrey: a dairy's not so much to a

man. And it's only what he cares for that ever makes me low. I'm contented

with the blessings we have, if he could be contented."

"It drives me past patience," said Priscilla, impetuously, "that way o' the

men -always wanting and wanting, and never easy with what they've got: they

can't sit comfortable in their chairs when they've neither ache nor pain, but

either they must stick a pipe in their mouths, to make 'em better than well,

or else they must be swallowing something strong, though they're forced to

make haste before the next meal comes in. But joyful be it spoken, our father

was never that sort o' man. And if it had pleased God to make you ugly, like

me, so as the men wouldn't ha' run after you, we might have kept to our own

family, and had nothing to do with folks as have got uneasy blood in their

veins."

"Oh, don't say so, Priscilla," said Nancy, repenting that she had called forth

this outburst; "nobody 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."

"Oh, I know," said Priscilla, smiling sarcastically, "I know the way o' wives;

they set one on to abuse their husbands, and then they turn round on one and

praise 'em as if they wanted to sell 'em. But father'll be waiting for me; we

must turn now."

The large gig with the steady old gray was at the front door, and Mr. Lammeter

was already on the stone steps, passing the time in recalling to Godfrey what

very fine points Speckle had when his master used to ride him.

"I always would have a good horse, you know," said the old gentleman, not

liking that spirited time to be quite effaced from the memory of his juniors.

"Mind you bring Nancy to the Warrens before the week's out, Mr. Cass," was

Priscilla's parting injunction, as she took the reins, and shook them gently,

by way of friendly incitement to Speckle.

"I shall just take a turn to the fields against the Stone-pits, Nancy, and

look at the draining," said Godfrey.

"You'll be in again by teatime, dear?"

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

It was Godfrey's custom on a Sunday afternoon to do a little contemplative

farming in a leisurely walk. Nancy seldom accompanied him; for the women of

her generation -unless, like Priscilla, they took to outdoor management -were

not given to much walking beyond their own house and garden, finding

sufficient exercise in domestic duties. So, when Priscilla was not with her,

she usually sat with Mant's Bible before her, and after following the text

with her eyes for a little while, she would gradually permit them to wander as

her thoughts had already insisted on wandering.

But Nancy's Sunday thoughts were rarely quite out of keeping with the devout

and reverential intention implied by the book spread open before her. She was

not theologically instructed enough to discern very clearly the relation

between the sacred documents of the past which she opened without method, and

her own obscure, simple life; but the spirit of rectitude, and the sense of

responsibility for the effect of her conduct on others, which were strong

elements in Nancy's character, had made it a habit with her to scrutinise her

past feelings and actions with self-questioning solicitude. Her mind not being

courted by a great variety of subjects, she filled the vacant moments by

living inwardly, again and again, through all her remembered experience,

especially through the fifteen years of her married time, in which her life

and its significance had been doubled. She recalled the small details, the

words, tones, and looks, in the critical scenes which had opened a new epoch

for her by giving her a deeper insight into the relations and trials of life,

or which had called on her for some little effort of forbearance, or of

painful adherence to an imagined or real duty -asking herself continually

whether she had been in any respect blameable. This excessive rumination and

self-questioning is perhaps a morbid habit inevitable to a mind of much moral

sensibility when shut out from its due share of outward activity and of

practical claims on its affections -inevitable to a noble-hearted, childless

woman, when her lot is narrow. "I can do so little -have I done it all well?"

is the perpetually recurring thought; and there are no voices calling her away

from that soliloquy, no peremptory demands to divert energy from vain regret

or superfluous scruple.

There was one main thread of painful experience in Nancy's married life, and

on it hung certain deeply felt scenes, which were the oftenest revived in

retrospect. The short dialogue with Priscilla in the garden had determined the

current of retrospect in that frequent direction this particular Sunday

afternoon. The first wandering of her thought from the text, which she still

attempted dutifully to follow with her eyes and silent lips, was into an

imaginary enlargement of the defence she had set up for her husband against

Priscilla's implied blame. The vindication of the loved object is the best

balm affection can find for its wounds: "A man must have so much on his mind",

is the belief by which a wife often supports a cheerful face under rough

answers and unfeeling words. And Nancy's deepest wounds had all come from the

perception that the absence of children from their hearth was dwelt on in her

husband's mind as a privation to which he could not reconcile himself.

Yet sweet Nancy might have been expected to feel still more keenly the denial

of a blessing to which she had looked forward with all the varied expectations

and preparations, solemn and prettily trivial, which fill the mind of a loving

woman when she expects to become a mother. Was there not a drawer filled with

the neat work of her hands, all unworn and untouched, just as she had arranged

it there fourteen years ago -just, but for one little dress, which had been

made the burial-dress? But under this immediate personal trial Nancy was so

firmly unmurmuring that years ago she had suddenly renounced the habit of

visiting this drawer, lest she should in this way be cherishing a longing for

what was not given.

Perhaps it was this very severity towards any indulgence of what she held to

be sinful regret in herself that made her shrink from applying her own

standard to her husband. "It is very different -it is much worse for a man to

be disappointed in that way: a woman can always be satisfied with devoting

herself to her husband, but a man wants something that will make him look

forward more -and sitting by the fire is so much duller to him than to a

woman." And always, when Nancy reached this point in her meditations -trying

with predetermined sympathy to see everything as Godfrey saw it -there came a

renewal of self-questioning. Had she done everything in her power to lighten

Godfrey's privation? Had she really been right in the resistance which had

cost her so much pain six years ago and again four years ago -the resistance

to her husband's wish that they should adopt a child? Adoption was more remote

from the ideas and habits of that time than of our own; still Nancy had her

opinion on it. It was as necessary to her mind to have an opinion on all

topics, not exclusively masculine, that had come under her notice, as for her

to have a precisely marked place for every article of her personal property;

and her opinions were always principles to be unwaveringly acted on. They were

firm, not because of their basis, but because she held them with a tenacity

inseparable from her mental action. On all the duties and proprieties of life,

from filial behaviour to the arrangements of the evening toilet, pretty Nancy

Lammeter, by the time she was three-and-twenty, had her unalterable little

code, and had formed every one of her habits in strict accordance with that

code. She carried these decided judgments within her in the most unobtrusive

way: they rooted themselves in her mind, and grew there as quietly as grass.

Years ago, we know, she insisted on dressing like Priscilla, because "it was

right for sisters to dress alike", and because "she would do what was right if

she wore a gown dyed with cheese-colouring". That was a trivial but typical

instance of the mode in which Nancy's life was regulated.

It was one of those rigid principles, and no petty egoistic feeling, which had

been the ground of Nancy's difficult resistance to her husband's wish. 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. And so

far, perhaps, the wisest of men could scarcely make more than a verbal

improvement in her principle. But the conditions under which she held it

apparent that a thing was not meant to be, depended on a more peculiar mode of

thinking. She would have given up making a purchase at a particular place if

on three successive times rain, or some other cause of Heaven's sending, had

formed an obstacle; and she would have anticipated a broken limb or other

heavy misfortune to any one who persisted in spite of such indications.

"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, who was 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."

It might seem singular that Nancy -with her religious theory pieced together

out of narrow social traditions, fragments of church doctrine imperfectly

understood, and girlish reasonings on her small experience -should have

arrived by herself at a way of thinking so nearly akin to that of many devout

people whose beliefs are held in the shape of a system quite remote from her

knowledge: singular, if we did not know that human beliefs, like all other

natural growths, elude the barriers of system.

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 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; and by a common fallacy,

he imagined the measure would be easy because he had private motives for

desiring it. This was rather a coarse mode of estimating Silas's relation to

Eppie; but we must remember that many of the impressions which Godfrey was

likely to gather concerning the labouring-people around him would favour the

idea that deep affections can hardly go along with callous palms and scant

means; and he had not had the opportunity, even if he had had the power, of

entering intimately into all that was exceptional in the weaver's experience.

It was only the want of adequate knowledge that could have made it possible

for Godfrey deliberately to entertain an unfeeling project: his natural

kindness had outlived that blighting time of cruel wishes, and Nancy's praise

of him as a husband was not founded entirely on a wilful illusion.

"I was right," she said to herself, when she had recalled all their scenes of

discussion -"I feel I was right to say him nay, though it hurt me more than

anything; but how good Godfrey has been about it! Many men would have been

very angry with me for standing out against their wishes; and they might have

thrown out that they'd had ill-luck in marrying me; but Godfrey has never been

the man to say me an unkind word. It's only what he can't hide: everything

seems so blank to him, I know; and the land -what a difference it 'ud make to

him, when he goes to see after things, if he'd children growing up that he was

doing it all for! But I won't murmur; and perhaps if he'd married a woman

who'd have had children, she'd have vexed him in other ways."

This possibility was Nancy's chief comfort; and to give it greater strength,

she laboured to make it impossible that any other wife should have had more

perfect tenderness. She had been forced to vex him by that one denial. Godfrey

was not insensible to her loving effort, and did Nancy no injustice as to the

motives of her obstinacy. It was impossible to have lived with her fifteen

years and not be aware that an unselfish clinging to the right, and a

sincerity clear as the flower-born dew, were her main characteristics; indeed,

Godfrey felt this so strongly that his own more wavering nature, too averse to

facing difficulty to be unvaryingly simple and truthful, was kept in a certain

awe of this gentle wife who watched his looks with a yearning to obey them. It

seemed to him impossible that he should ever confess to her 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 on 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.

Meanwhile, why could he not make up his mind to the absence of children from a

hearth brightened by such a wife? Why did his mind fly uneasily to that void,

as if it were the sole reason why life was not thoroughly joyous to him? I

suppose it is the way with all men and women who reach middle age without the

clear perception that life never can be thoroughly joyous: under the vague

dullness of the gray hours, dissatisfaction seeks a definite object, and finds

it in the privation of an untried good. Dissatisfaction seated musingly on a

childless hearth thinks with envy of the father whose return is greeted by

young voices -seated at the meal where the little heads rise one above another

like nursery plants, it sees a black care hovering behind every one of them,

and thinks the impulses by which men abandon freedom, and seek for ties, are

surely nothing but a brief madness. In Godfrey's case there were further

reasons why his thoughts should be continually solicited by this one point in

his lot: his conscience, never thoroughly easy about Eppie, now gave his

childless home the aspect of a retribution; and as the time passed on, under

Nancy's refusal to adopt her, any retrieval of his error became more and more

difficult.

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 forever

buried.

"I 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 revery, 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 all one 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 daresay 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

such signs of excitement as Jane had spoken of, and Godfrey would not be

likely to return by the village road, but by the fields. She continued to

stand, however, looking at the placid churchyard with the long shadows of the

gravestones across the bright green hillocks, and at the glowing autumn

colours of the Rectory trees beyond. Before such calm external beauty the

presence of a vague fear is more distinctly felt -like a raven flapping its

slow wing across the sunny air. Nancy wished more and more that Godfrey would

come in.

Chapter 18

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, unequal to the considerate skill with

which he would have wished to make his revelation. "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.

"Oh, 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'd 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, as at a crisis which suspended affection.

"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

meditative 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 -oh, Godfrey -if we'd had her from the first, if you'd taken to her as

you ought, she'd have loved me for her mother -and you'd have been happier

with 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 be 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 19

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. The excitement had not passed away:

it had only reached that stage when the keenness of the susceptibility makes

external stimulus intolerable -when there is no sense of weariness, but rather

an intensity of inward life, under which sleep is an impossibility. Any one

who has watched such moments in other men remembers the brightness of the eyes

and the strange definiteness that comes over coarse features from that

transient influence. It is as if a new fineness of ear for all spiritual

voices had sent wonder-working vibrations through the heavy mortal frame -as

if "beauty born of murmuring sound" had passed into the face of the listener.

Silas's face showed that sort of transfiguration, as he sat in his armchair

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 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 lookout to do everything we could towards making you

comfortable."

A plain man like Godfrey Cass, speaking under some embarrassment, necessarily

blunders on words that are coarser than his intentions, and that are likely to

fall gratingly on susceptible feelings. While he 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. He had been full of his own penitence and resolution to

retrieve his error as far as the time was left to him; he was possessed with

all-important feelings, that were to lead to a predetermined course of action

which he had fixed on as the right, and he was not prepared to enter with

lively appreciation into other people's feelings counteracting his virtuous

resolves. 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 year ago, and claim her before I'd come to love her, i'stead 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 year. 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, unqualified by experience to discern the pregnancy of Marner's simple

words, felt rather angry again. It seemed to him that the weaver was very

selfish (a judgment readily passed by those who have never tested their own

power of sacrifice) 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 were Silas or Eppie that was more

deeply stirred by this last speech of Godfrey's. Thought had been very busy in

Eppie as she listened to the contest between her old long-loved father and

this new unfamiliar father who had suddenly come to fill the place of that

black featureless shadow which had held the ring and placed it on her mother's

finger. Her imagination had darted backward in conjectures, and forward in

previsions, of what this revealed fatherhood implied; and there were words in

Godfrey's last speech which helped to make the previsions especially definite.

Not that these thoughts, either of past or future, determined her resolution

-that was determined by the feelings which vibrated to every word Silas had

uttered; but they raised, even apart from these feelings, 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, struggling for the

self-conquest necessary to the uttering of the difficult words. They came out

tremulously.

"I'll say no more. Let it be as you will. Speak to the child. I'll hinder

nothing."

Even Nancy, with all the acute sensibility of her own affections, shared her

husband's view, that Marner was not justifiable in his wish to retain Eppie,

after her real father had avowed himself. She felt that it was a very hard

trial for the poor weaver, but her code allowed no question that a father by

blood must have a claim above that of any foster-father. Besides, Nancy, used

all her life to plenteous circumstances and the privileges of

"respectability", could not enter into the pleasures which early nurture and

habit connect with all the little aims and efforts of the poor who are born

poor: to her mind Eppie, in being restored to her birthright, was entering on

a too long withheld but unquestionable good. Hence she heard Silas's last

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 ha' 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 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 i' 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 been used to be happy together every day, and I

can't think o' no happiness without him. And he says he'd nobody i' 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 church, as 'ud make them as I'm fond of think me unfitting company

for 'em. What could I 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's 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

shouldn't 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 victuals, 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. This

frustration of a purpose towards which he had set out under the exalted

consciousness that he was about to compensate in some degree for the greatest

demerit of his life made him feel the air of the room 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.

Chapter 20

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 feeling. At last Godfrey turned his head towards

her, and their eyes met, dwelling in that meeting without any movement on

either side. That quiet mutual gaze of a trusting husband and wife is like the

first moment of rest or refuge from a great weariness or a great danger -not

to be interfered with by speech or action which would distract the sensations

from the fresh enjoyment of repose.

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. I must see who it is she's thinking of

marrying."

"If it won't do any good to make the thing known," said Nancy, who thought she

might now allow herself the relief of entertaining a feeling which she had

tried to silence before, "I should be very thankful for father and Priscilla

never to be troubled with knowing what was done in the past, more than about

Dunsey: it can't be helped, their knowing that."

"I shall put it in my will -I think I shall put it in my will. I shouldn't

like to leave anything to be found out, like this about Dunsey," said Godfrey,

meditatively. "But I can't see anything but difficulties that 'ud come from

telling it now. I must do what I can to make her happy in her own way. I've a

notion," he added, after a moment's pause, "it's Aaron Winthrop she meant she

was engaged to. I remember seeing him with her and Marner going away from

church."

"Well, he's very sober and industrious," said Nancy, trying to view the matter

as cheerfully as possible.

Godfrey fell into thoughtfulness again. Presently he looked up at Nancy

sorrowfully, and said -

"She's a very pretty, nice girl, isn't she, Nancy?"

"Yes, dear; and with just your hair and eyes: I wondered it had never struck

me before."

"I think she took a dislike to me at the thought of my being her father: I

could see a change in her manner after that."

"She couldn't bear to think of not looking on Marner as her father," said

Nancy, not wishing to confirm her husband's painful impression.

"She thinks I did wrong by her mother as well as by her. She thinks me worse

than I am. But she must think it; she can never know all. It's part of my

punishment, Nancy, for my daughter to dislike me. I should never have got into

that trouble if I'd been true to you -if I hadn't been a fool. I'd no right to

expect anything but evil could come of that marriage -and when I shirked doing

a father's part too."

Nancy was silent: her spirit of rectitude would not let her try to soften the

edge of what she felt to be a just compunction. He spoke again after a little

while, but the tone was rather changed: there was tenderness mingled with the

previous self-reproach.

"And I got you, Nancy, in spite of all; and yet I've been grumbling and uneasy

because I hadn't something else -as if I deserved it."

"You've never been wanting to me, Godfrey," said Nancy, with quiet sincerity.

"My only trouble would be gone if you resigned yourself to the lot that's been

given us."

"Well, perhaps it isn't too late to mend a bit there. Though it is too late to

mend some things, say what they will."

Chapter 21

The next morning, when Silas and Eppie were seated at their breakfast, he said

to her -

"Eppie, there's a thing I've had on my mind to do this two year, and now the

money's been brought back to us, we can do it. I've been turning it over and

over in the night, and I think we'll set out tomorrow, while the fine days

last. We'll leave the house and everything for your godmother to take care on,

and we'll make a little bundle o' things and set out."

"Where to go, daddy?" said Eppie, in much surprise.

"To my old country -to the town where I was born -up Lantern Yard. I want to

see Mr. Paston, the minister: something may ha' come out to make 'em know I

was innicent o' the robbery. And Mr. Paston was a man with a deal o' light -I

want to speak to him about the drawing o' the lots. And I should like to talk

to him about the religion o' this countryside, for I partly think he doesn't

know on it."

Eppie was very joyful, for there was the prospect not only of wonder and

delight at seeing a strange country, but also of coming back to tell Aaron all

about it. Aaron was so much wiser than she was about most things -it would be

rather pleasant to have this little advantage over him. Mrs. Winthrop, though

possessed with a dim fear of dangers attendant on so long a journey, and

requiring many assurances that it would not take them out of the region of

carriers' carts and slow wagons, was nevertheless well pleased that Silas

should revisit his own country, and find out if he had been cleared from that

false accusation.

"You'd be easier in your mind for the rest o' your life, Master Marner," said

Dolly " -that you would. And if there's any light to be got up the Yard as you

talk on, we've need of it i' this world, and I'd be glad on it myself, if you

could bring it back."

So on the fourth day from that time, 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. Silas, bewildered by the

changes thirty years had brought over his native place, had stopped several

persons in succession to ask them the name of this town, that he might be sure

he was not under a mistake about it.

"Ask for Lantern Yard, father -ask this gentleman with the tassels on his

shoulders a-standing at the shop door; he isn't in a hurry like the rest,"

said Eppie, in some distress at her father's bewilderment, and ill at ease,

besides, amidst the noise, the movement, and the multitude of strange,

indifferent faces.

"Eh, my child, he won't know anything about it," said Silas: "gentlefolks

didn't ever go up the Yard. But happen somebody can tell me which is the way

to Prison Street, where the jail is. I know the way out o' that as if I'd seen

it yesterday."

With some difficulty, after many turnings and new inquiries, they reached

Prison Street; and the grim walls of the jail, the first object that answered

to any image in Silas's memory, cheered him with the certitude, which no

assurance of the town's name had hitherto given him, that he was in his native

place.

"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."

"Oh, father, I'm like as if 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, begrimed 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 graveyard 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."

Conclusion

There was one time of the year which was held in Raveloe to be especially

suitable for a wedding. It was when the great lilacs and laburnums in the

old-fashioned gardens showed their golden and purple wealth above the

lichen-tinted walls, and when there were calves still young enough to want

bucketfuls of fragrant milk. People were not so busy then as they must become

when the full cheese-making and the mowing had set in; and besides, it was a

time when a light bridal dress could be worn with comfort and seen to advantage.

Happily the sunshine fell more warmly than usual on the lilac tufts the

morning that Eppie was married, for her dress was a very light one. She had

often thought, though with a feeling of renunciation, that the perfection of a

wedding-dress would be a white cotton, with the tiniest pink sprig at wide

intervals; so that when Mrs. Godfrey Cass begged to provide one, and asked

Eppie to choose what it should be, previous meditation had enabled her to give

a decided answer at once.

Seen at a little distance as she walked across the churchyard and down the

village, she seemed to be attired in pure white, 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 a son 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 today,

because Mr. Cass had had to go away to Lytherly, 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."

Nancy came out now to welcome her father and sister; and the wedding group had

passed on beyond the Red House to the humbler part of the village.

Dolly Winthrop was the first to divine that old Mr. Macey, who had been set in

his armchair 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 rheumatise."

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.

But by this means they could not only enjoy the slow advent of their pleasure;

they had also ample leisure to talk of Silas Marner's strange history, and

arrive by due degrees at the conclusion that he had brought a blessing on

himself by acting like a father to a lone, motherless child. Even the farrier

did not negative this sentiment: on the contrary, he took it up as peculiarly

his own, and invited any hardy person present to contradict him. But he met

with no contradiction; and all differences among the company were merged in a

general agreement with Mr. Snell's sentiment, that when a man had deserved his

good luck, it was the part of his neighbours to wish him joy.

As the bridal group approached, a hearty cheer was raised in the Rainbow yard;

and Ben Winthrop, whose jokes had retained their acceptable flavour, found it

agreeable to turn in there and receive congratulations; not requiring the

proposed interval of quiet at the Stone-pits before joining the company.

Eppie had a larger garden than she had ever expected there now; and in other

ways there had been alterations at the expense of Mr. Cass, the landlord, 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.

"Oh, father," said Eppie, "what a pretty home ours is! I think nobody could be

happier than we are."