

"I shall do what I choose," said the Squire, "and I shall 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 so and hand me the money, will you? He'll keep no more hack at my expense. And if you know where he's sneaking—I do say you do—you may tell him to spare himself the journey coming back home. Let him turn ostler, and keep himself. He sha'n't hang on me any more."

"I don't know where he is, sir; 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 he 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 favorable chance which would save him from unpleasant consequences, perhaps even justify his insincerity by manifesting its prudence; and in this point trusting to some throw of Fortune's dice, Godfrey can hardly be called specially old-fashioned. Favorable Chance, I fancy, 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 intallibly 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 X.

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 neighbors who were not on the Commission of the Peace. Such a man was not likely to neglect the clew of the tinder box, and an inquiry was set on foot concerning a peddler, 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 peddlers 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 usual. His own family, who equally expected this issue, the sole difference that the Squire was determined this time forbid him the old quarters, never mentioned his absence; when his uncle Kimble or Mr. Osgood noticed it, the story of his having killed Wildfire, and committed some offense against his father, was enough to prevent surprise. To connect the of Dunsey's disappearance with that of the robbery occurred on the same day, lay quite away from the track of every thought, even Godfrey's, who had better reason than any else to know what his brother was capable of. He remembered no mention of the weaver between them since the time, twenty years ago, when it was their boyish sport to deride him; besides, his imagination constantly created an *alibi*¹ for Stan. 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 amusement of tormenting his elder brother. Even if any 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 monument² and venerable tankards, would not have been suppressed as of unsound tendency. But 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-peddler view considered on the other side a muddle headed and credulous set, who, because

¹ Proof that he was elsewhere when the crime was committed.

² "Mural monument," i.e., a monument or inscription in the wall of a church.

³ Fresh pork.

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 truth 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 neighbors 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 outside, cheerless unknown. It had been a clinging life; and though the object round which its fibers had clung was a dead, disrupted thing, it satisfied the need for clinging. But now the Chance was broken down, the support was snatched away. Marmas puddings, brawn,³ and abundance of spirituous liquors' thoughts could no longer move in their old round, and were throwing the mental originality into the channel of nightmare, 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 meager 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 his thoughts had come round again to the sudden chasm, the empty evening time. And all the evening, as he sat in loneliness by his dull fire, he leaned his elbows on his knees, clasped his head with his hands, and moaned very low,—not one who seeks to be heard.

And yet he was not utterly forsaken in his trouble. The pulsion Marner had always created in his neighbors was dissipated by the new light in which this misfortune had shown him. Instead of a man who had more cunning than honest could come by, and, what was worse, had not the inclination use that cunning in a neighborly way, it was now apparent that Silas had not cunning enough to keep his own. He was generally spoken of as a "poor mused¹ creatur;" and that avoidance of his neighbors, 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 odor of Christmas cooking being on the wind, it was a season when superfluous pork and black puddings are suggested by a present of pigs' pettitoes,² well calculated to dissipate founded prejudices against the clerical character. Neighbors who had nothing but verbal consolation to give, showed a position not only to greet Silas, and discuss his misfortune some length when they encountered him in the village, but 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 cheer him by saying, "Well, Master Marner, you're no worse

¹ Demented.

² Pigs' feet dressed for food.

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 neighbors 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 flavor of our own egoism;¹ but language is a stream that is almost sure to be mack 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 favorably in the opinion of a man whose judgment was not formed lightly, opened the conversation by saying, 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 maring, 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 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 regularly; 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 mind to do a bit o' kindness for a holiday, like, who's got any-

¹ Selfishness.

thing against it? That's my thinking; and I've been clerk this parish forty year, and I know, when the parson and me do the cussing of a Ash Wednesday, there's no cussing o' folks 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 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, as you ha' got more inside you nor 'ull bear daylight, I'm not o' the opinion at all, and so I tell the neighbors. For, says I, you talk o' Master Marner making out a tale; why, it's nonsense, that it 'ud take a 'cute man to make a tale like that; and, says I, 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 neighborly; 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 creature, 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 neighborly. Well, you you've never heard me say 'Amen' since you come into the parts, and I recommend you to lose no time, for it'll be pe-

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 around, 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 churchgoing, 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 neighbors,—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.¹ 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

¹ Christmas, Easter, Michaelmas.

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 the monthly nurse. She was a "comfortable woman," good-looking, young, fresh complexioned, having her lips always slightly screwed up, as if she felt herself in a sick room 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 turkeys and 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-checked 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 have done, at a visit that had been unasked for and unexpected. Formerly, his heart had been as a locked casket with his 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 fellowmen, a faint consciousness of dependence on their goodwill. 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 the 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 'em, if you'd thought well. I don't eat such things myself, for 't'is a bit o' bread's what I like from one year's end to the other; but 't'is a pleasure to see 'em, for 't'is a change, they please 'em, 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, 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 for myself, and there's nobody, not Mr. Macey himself, rightly shows 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.

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

"It's I. H. S.,"¹ said Silas, at which proof of learning Anna peeped round the chair again.

"Well, to be sure, you can read 'em off," said Dolly. "Ben 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, 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, cause o' the rising—for, as I said, if there's any good to be had, we've need on 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 bro' you the cakes; and you see the letters have held better 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, dreadfully conscious 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 go to the church bells this morning, Master Marner? I doubt you didn't know it was Sunday. Living so lone here, you lose count, I dare say; and then, when your loom makes a noise, you can't hear the bells, more partic'lar now the frost kills the sound."

"Yes, I did; I heard 'em," said Silas, to whom Sunday

¹ "I. H. S.," initials of the words *Iesus hominum salvator* ("Savior of men").

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 roast-ing bit, it might be as you couldn't leave it, being a lone man. But there's the bakehus,¹ 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 sacramen', you'd be a deal the better, and you'd know which end you stood on, and you could put your trust i' Them as knows better nor we do, seein' you'd ha' done what it lies on us all to do."

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

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

"No!" said Dolly, in a low tone of wonderment. Then, thinking 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

¹ Bakery.

churches—a many—it was a big town. But I knew nothing '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 kind 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 never had no church, there's no telling how 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 of the praise and glory o' God, as Mr. Macey gives out,—and Mr. Crackenthorp saying good words, and more partic'lar on Sacrament 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 about us 'ull be worse nor we are, and come short o' Theirn.”

Poor Dolly's exposition of her simple Raveloe theology fell rather unmeaningly on Silas's ears, for there was no word in 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 “pictur 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 melody that had the rhythm of an industrious hammer:—

“God rest you, merry gentlemen,
Let nothing you dismay;
For Jesus Christ our Savior
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 equal to the Christmas music—'Hark the herald angels 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' the world, seeing as Them as put us in it knows best; but what with the drink, and the quarreling, and the bad illnesses, and the hard dying, as I've seen times and times, one's thankful to hear of 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 not 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-by, Master Marner; and if you ever feel anyways bad in your inside, as you can't fend² for yourself, I'll come and clean up for you, and get you a bit o' victual, and be willing. But I beg and pray of you to leave off weaving on 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-by, 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 in 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 fountain of human love and divine faith had not yet been unlocked, and

¹ Herald.

² Care.

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 neighborly 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,¹ 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

¹ So called because it expressed the opinions of Athanasius. Its reading or repetition was introduced into England, as a part of the church service on special occasions, about the year 800.

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 strong steaming odor of spirits and water.

But the party on Christmas Day, being a strictly family party, was not the preëminently 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 handboxes 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

¹ "On pillions," i.e., riding on horseback on pads or cushions fastened behind the saddle, and holding on to another rider who sat in the saddle and guided the horse.

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 XI.

SOME women, I grant, would not appear to advantage seated on a pillion, and attired in a drab joseph,¹ and a drab beaver bonnet with a crown resembling a small stewpan; for a garment suggesting a coachman's greatcoat, cut out under an exiguity

¹ A woman's riding habit buttoned down the front.