He had once been used to love those words and to feel the rocklike basis of them as fixed unshakably beneath the rolling sea of the music; now he sang the melody only. A little later, as though he had no right to indulge himself even in this, it died on the air; and only the noise of his thick, stiffened boots could have been heard crushing the frozen stubble, as he went staggering under his load toward the barn.

XI

When he reached the worm fence of the hemp field, he threw his load from his shoulder upon the topmost rail, and, holding it there with one hand, climbed over. He had now to cross the stable lot. Midway of this, he passed a rick of hay. Huddled under the sheltered side were the sheep of the farm, several in number and of the common sort. At the sight of him, they always bleated familiarly, but this evening their long,

quavering, gray notes were more penetrating, more insistent than usual. These sensitive, gentle creatures, whose instincts represent the accumulating and inherited experiences of age upon age of direct contact with nature, run far ahead of us in our forecasting wisdom; and many a time they utter their disquietude and warning in language that is understood only by themselves. The scant flock now fell into the wake of David, their voices blending in a chorus of meek elegiacs, their fore feet crowding close upon his heels. The dog, yielding his place, fell into their wake, as though covering the rear; and so this little procession of friends moved in a close body toward the barn.

David put his hemp in the saddle-house; a separate hemp-house they were not rich enough to own. He had chosen this particular part of the barn because it was dryest in roof and floor. Several bales of hemp were already piled against the logs on one side; and besides these,

the room contained the harness, the cart and the wagon gear, the box of tar, his maul and wedges, his saddle and bridle, and sundry implements used in the garden or on the farm. It was almost dark in there now, and he groped his way.

The small estate of his father, comprising only some fifty or sixty acres, supported little live stock: the sheep just mentioned, a few horses, several head of cattle, a sow and pigs. Every soul of these inside or outside the barn that evening had been waiting for David. They had begun to think of him and call for him long before he had quit work in the field. Now, although it was not much later than usual, the heavy cloud made it appear so; and all these creatures, like ourselves, are deceived by appearances and suffer greatly from imagination. They now believed that it was far past the customary time for him to appear, that they were nearing the verge of starvation; and so they were bewailing in a dejected way his unaccountable

absence and their miserable lot — with no one to listen.

Scarcely had the rattling of the iron latch of the saddle-house apprised them of his arrival before every dumb brute — dumb, as dumb men say — experienced a cheerful change of mind, and began to pour into his ears the eager, earnest, gratifying tale of its rights and its wrongs. What honest voices as compared with the human — sometimes. No question of sincerity could have been raised by any one who heard *them* speak. It may not have been music; but every note of it was God's truth.

The man laughed heartily as he paused a moment and listened to that rejoicing uproar. But he was touched, also. To them he was the answerer of prayer. Not one believed that he ever refused to succor in time of need, or turned a deaf ear to supplication. If he made poor provision for them sometimes, though they might not feel satisfied, they never turned against *him*. The barn was very old. The chemi-

cal action of the elements had first rotted away the shingles at the points where the nails pinned them to the roof; and, thus loosened, the winds of many years had dislodged and scattered them. Through these holes, rain could penetrate to the stalls of the horses, so that often they would get up mired and stiff and shivering; but they never reproached *him*. On the northern side of the barn the weather-boarding was quite gone in places, and the wind blew freely in. Of winter mornings the backs of the cows would sometimes be flecked with snow, or this being stubbornly melted by their own heat, their hides would be hung with dew-drops: they never attributed that fact to him as a cruelty. In the whole stable there was not one critic of his providence: all were of the household of faith: the members being in good standing and full fellowship.

Remembrance of this lay much in his mind whenever, as often, he contrasted his association with his poor animals, and the troublous problem of faith in his own

soul. It weighed with especial heaviness upon his heart, this nightfall in the barn, over which hung that threatening sky. Do what he could for their comfort, it must be insufficient in a rotting, wind-swept shelter like that. And here came the pinch of conscience, the wrench of remorse: the small sums of money which his father and mother had saved up at such a sacrifice on the farm, — the money which he had spent lavishly on himself in preparation, as he had supposed, for his high calling in life, — if but a small part of that had been applied to the roof and weather-boarding of the stable, the stock this night might have been housed in warmth and safety.

The feeding and bedding attended to, with a basket of cobs in his hand for his mother, he hurried away to the woodpile. This was in the yard near the negro cabin and a hundred yards or more from the house. There he began to cut and split the wood for the fires that night and for next morning. Three lengths of this:

first, for the grate in his father's and mother's room — the best to be found among the logs of the woodpile: good dry hickory for its ready blaze and rousing heat; to be mixed with seasoned oak, lest it burn out too quickly — an expensive wood; and perhaps also with some white ash from a tree he had felled in the autumn. Then sundry back-logs and knots of black walnut for the cabin of the two negro women (there being no sense of the value of this wood in the land in those days, nearly all of it going to the cabins, to the kitchens, to cord-wood, or to the fences of the farm; while the stumps were often grubbed up and burned on the spot). Then fuel of this same sort for the kitchen stove. Next, two or three big armfuls of very short sticks for the small grate in his own small room above stairs — a little more than usual, with the idea that he might wish to sit up late.

There was scarce light enough to go by. He picked his logs from the general pile

by the feel of the bark; and having set his foot on each, to hold it in place while he chopped, he struck rather by habit than by sight. Loud and rapid the strokes resounded; for he went at it with a youthful will, and with hunger gnawing him; and though his arms were stiff and tired, the axe to him was always a plaything — a plaything that he loved. At last, from under the henhouse near by he drew out and split some pieces of kindling, and then stored his axe in that dry place with fresh concern about soft weather: for more raindrops were falling and the wind was rising.

Stooping down now, he piled the fagots in the hollow of his arm, till the wood rose cold and damp against his hot neck, against his ear, and carried first some to the kitchen; and then some to the side porch of the house, where he arranged it carefully against the wall, close to the door, and conveniently for a hand reaching outward from within. As he was heaping up the last of it, having taken

three turns to the woodpile, the door was opened slowly, and a slight, slender woman peered around at him.

"What makes you so late?"

Her tone betrayed minute curiosity rather than any large concern.

"I wanted to finish a shock, mother. But it isn't much later than usual; it's the clouds. Here's some good kindling for you in the morning and a basket of cobs," he added tenderly.

She received in silence the feed basket he held out to her, and watched him as he kneeled, busily piling up the last of the fagots.

"I hope you haven't cut any more of that green oak; your father couldn't keep warm."

"This is hickory, dead hickory, with some seasoned oak. Father'll have to take his coat off and you'll have to get a fan."

There was a moment of silence.

"Supper's over," she said simply.

She held in one hand a partly eaten biscuit.

"I'll be in soon now. I've nothing to do but kindle my fire."

After another short interval she asked:

"Is it going to snow?"

"It's going to do something."

She stepped slowly back into the warm room and closed the door.

David hurried to the woodpile and carried the sticks for his own grate upstairs, making two trips of it. The stairway was dark; his room dark and damp, and filled with the smell of farm boots and working clothes left wet in the closets. Groping his way to the mantelpiece, he struck a sulphur match, lighted a half-burned candle, and kneeling down, began to kindle his fire.

As it started and spread, little by little it brought out of the cheerless darkness all the features of the rough, homely, kind face, bent over and watching it so impatiently and yet half absently. It gave definition to the shapeless black hat, around the brim of which still hung filaments of tow, in the folds of which lay

white splinters of hemp stalk. There was the dust of field and barn on the edges of the thick hair about the ears; dust around the eyes and the nostrils. He was resting on one knee; over the other his hands were crossed — enormous, powerful, coarsened hands, the skin so frayed and chapped that around the finger-nails and along the cracks here and there a little blood had oozed out and dried.

XII

When David came down to his supper, all traces of the day's labor that were removable had disappeared. He was clean; and his working clothes had been laid aside for the cheap black-cloth suit, which he had been used to wear on Sundays while he was a student. Grave, gentle, looking tired but looking happy, with his big shock head of hair and a face rugged and majestical like a youthful Beethoven. A kind mouth, most of all, and an eye of wonderfully deep intelligence.

The narrow, uncarpeted stairway down which he had noisily twisted his enormous figure, with some amusement, as always, had brought him to the dining room. This was situated between the kitchen and his father's and mother's bedroom. The door of each of these stood ajar, and some of the warmth of the stove on one side and of the grate on the other dried and tempered the atmosphere.

His mother sat in her place at the head of the table, quietly waiting for him, and still holding in one hand the partially eaten biscuit. As he took his seat, she rose, and, walking listlessly to the kitchen door, made a listless request of one of the two negro women. When the coffee had been brought in, standing, she poured out a cup, sweetened, stirred, and tasted it, and putting the spoon into it, placed it before him. Then she resumed her seat (and the biscuit) and looked on, occasionally scrutinizing his face, with an expression perhaps the most tragic that can ever be worn by maternal eyes: the expression