wood was soon burnt out: only red coals in the bottom of the grate then, and these fast whitening. More than once he strode across and stood over his trunk in the shadowy corner — looking down at his books — those books that had guided him thus far, or misguided him, who can say?

When his candle gave out and later his fire, he jerked off his clothes and getting into bed, rolled himself in the bedclothes and lay listening to the mournful sublimity of the storm.

Toward three o'clock the weather grew colder, the wind died down, the booming ceased; and David, turning wearily over, with an impulse to prayer, but with no prayer, went to sleep.

XIV

When David awoke late and drowsily the next morning after the storm, he lay awhile, listening. No rending, crashing, booming in the woods now, nor rattling of his window-frames. No contemplative

twitter of winter birds about the cedars in the yard, nor caw of crow, crossing the house chimneys toward the corn shocks. All things hushed, silent, immovable.

Following so quickly upon the sublime roar and ravage of the night before, the stillness was disturbing. He sprang up and dressed quickly — admonished by the coldness of his room — before hurrying to his window to look out. When he tried the sash, it could not be raised. He thrust his hand through the broken pane and tugged at the shutters; they could not be shaken. Running downstairs to the kitchen and returning with hot water, he melted away the ice embedding the bolts and hinges.

A marvel of nature, terrible, beautiful, met his eyes: ice-rain and a great frost. Cloud, heavy still, but thinner than on the day before, enwrapped the earth. The sun, descending through this translucent roof of gray, filled the air beneath with a radiance as of molten pearl; and in this under-atmosphere of pearl all earthly things

were tipped and hung in silver. Tree, bush, and shrub in the yard below, the rose clambering the pillars of the porch under his window, the scant ivy lower down on the house wall, the stiff little junipers, every blade of grass — all encased in silver. The ruined cedars trailed from sparlike tops their sweeping sails of incrusted emerald and silver. Along the eaves, like a row of inverted spears of unequal lengths, hung the argent icicles. No; not spun silver all this, but glass; all things buried, not under a tide of liquid silver, but of flowing and then cooling glass: Nature for once turned into a glass house, fixed in a brittle mass, nowhere bending or swaying; but if handled roughly, sure to be shivered.

The ground under every tree in the yard was strewn with boughs; what must be the ruin of the woods whence the noises had reached him in the night? Looking out of his window now, he could see enough to let him understand the havoc, the wreckage.

He went at once to the stable for the feeding and found everything strangely quiet — the stilling influence of a great frost on animal life. There had been excitement and uneasiness enough during the night; now ensued the reaction, for man is but one of the many animals with nerves and moods. A catastrophe like this which covers with ice the earth — grass, winter edible twig and leaf, roots and nuts for the brute kind that turns the soil with the nose, such putting of all food whatsoever out of reach of mouth or hoof or snout — brings these creatures face to face with the possibility of starving: they know it and are silent with apprehension of their peril; know it perhaps by the survival of prehistoric memories reverberating as instinct still. And there is another possible prong of truth to this repression of their characteristic cries at such times of frost: then it was in ages past that the species which preyed on them grew most ravenous and far ranging. The silence of the modern stable in a

way takes the place of that primeval silence which was a law of safety in the bleak fastnesses, hunted over by flesh-eating prowlers. It is the prudent noiselessness of many a species to-day, as the deer and the moose.

The sheep, having enjoyed little shelter beside the hayrick, had encountered the worst of the storm. When David appeared in the stable lot, they beheld him at once; for their faces were bunched expectantly toward the yard gate through which he must emerge. But they spoke not a word to one another or to him as they hurried slipping forward. The man looked them over pityingly, yet with humor; for they wore many undesirable pendants of glass and silver dangling under their bellies and down their tails.

"You shall come into the barn this night," he vowed within himself. "I'll make a place for you this day."

Little did he foresee what awful significance to him lay wrapped in those simple words.

Breakfast was ready when, carrying his customary basket of cobs for his mother, he returned to the house. One good result at least the storm had wrought for the time: it drew the members of the household more closely together, as any unusual event — danger, disaster — generally does. So that his father, despite his outburst of anger the night previous, forgot this morning his wrongs and disappointments and relaxed his severity. During the meal he had much to recount of other sleets and their consequences. He inferred similar consequences now if snow should follow, or a cold snap set in: no work in the fields, therefore no hemp-breaking, and therefore delay in selling the crop; the difficulty of feeding and watering the stock; no hauling along the mud roads, and little travel of any sort between country and town; the making of much cord wood out of the fallen timber, with plenty of stuff for woodpiles; the stopping of mill wheels on the frozen creeks, and scarcity of flour and meal.

"The meal is nearly out now," said David's mother. "The negroes waste it."

"We might shell some corn to-day," suggested David's father, hesitatingly. It was the first time since his son's return from college that he had ever proposed their working together.

"I'll take a look at the woods first," said David; "and then I want to make a place in the stable for the sheep, father. They must come under shelter to-night. I'll fix new stalls for the horses inside where we used to have the corn crib. The cows can go where the horses have been, and the sheep can have the shed of the cows: it's better than nothing. I've been wanting to do this ever since I came home from college."

A thoughtless, unfortunate remark, as connected with that shabby, desperate idea of finding shelter for the stock — fresh reminder of the creeping, spreading poverty. His father made no rejoinder; and having finished his breakfast in silence, left the table.

His mother, looking across her coffee-cup and biscuit at David, without change of expression inquired, —

"Will you get that hen?"

"*What* hen, mother?"

"I told you last night the cook wanted one of the old hens for soup to-day. Will you get it?"

"No, mother; I will not get the hen for the cook; the cook will probably get the hen for me."

"She doesn't know the right one."

"But neither do I."

"I want the blue dorking."

"I have a bad eye for color; I might catch something gray."

"I want the dorking; she's stopped laying."

"Is that your motive for taking her life? It would be a terrible principle to apply indiscriminately!"

"The cook wants to know how she is to get the vegetables out of the holes in the garden to-day — under all this ice."

"How would she get the vegetables out

of the garden under all this ice if there were no one on the place but herself? I warrant you she'd have every variety."

"It's a pity we are not able to hire a man. If we could hire a man to help her, I wouldn't ask you. It's hard on the cook, to make her suffer for our poverty."

"A little suffering in that way will do her a world of good," said David, cheerily.

His mother did not hesitate, provocation or no provocation, to sting and reproach him in this way.

She had never thought very highly of her son; her disappointment, therefore, over his failure at college had not been keen. Besides, tragical suffering is the sublime privilege of deep natures: she escaped by smallness. Nothing would have made her very miserable but hunger and bodily pains. Against hunger she exercised ceaseless precautions; bodily pains she had none. The one other thing that could have agitated her profoundly was the idea that she would be compelled

to leave Kentucky. It was hard for her to move about her house, much less move to Missouri. Not in months perhaps did she even go upstairs to bestow care upon the closets, the bed, the comforts of her son. As might be expected, she considered herself the superior person of the family; and as often happens, she imposed this estimate of herself upon her husband. The terrifying vanity and self-sufficiency of the little-minded! Nature must set great store upon this type of human being, since it is regularly allowed to rule its betters.

But his father! David had been at home two months now, for this was the last of February, and not once during that long ordeal of daily living together had his father opened his lips either to reproach or question him.

Letters had been received from the faculty, from the pastor; of that David was aware; but any conversation as to these or as to the events of which they were the sad consummation, his father would not

have. The gulf between them had been wide before; now it was fathomless.

Yet David well foreknew that the hour of reckoning had to come, when all that was being held back would be uttered. He realized that both were silently making preparations for that crisis, and that each day brought it palpably nearer. Sometimes he could even see it threatening in his father's eye, hear it in his voice. It had reached the verge of explosion the night previous, with that prediction of coming bankruptcy, the selling of the farm of his Kentucky ancestors, the removal to Missouri in his enfeebled health. Not until his return had David realized how literally his father had begun to build life anew on the hopes of him. And now feel with him in his disappointment as deeply as he might, sympathy he could not openly offer, explanation he could not possibly give. His life-problem was not his father's problem; his father was simply not in a position to understand. Doubt anything in the Bible — doubt so-called orthodox Christianity — be expelled from the church and from college for such a reason — where could his father find patience or mercy for wilful folly and impiety like that?

Meantime he had gone to work; on the very day after his return he had gone to work. Two sentences of his father's, on the afternoon of his coming home, had rung in David's ears loud and ceaselessly ever since: "*Why have you come back here?*" And "*I always knew there was nothing in you!*" The first assured him of the new footing on which he stood: he was no longer desired under that roof. The second summed up the life-long estimate which had been formed of his character before he had gone away.

Therefore he had worked as never even in the old preparatory days. So long as he remained there, he must at least earn daily bread. More than that, he must make good, as soon as possible, the money spent at college. So he sent away the hired negro man; he undertook the work

done by him and more: the care of the stock, the wood cutting, everything that a man can be required to do on a farm in winter. Of bright days he broke hemp. Nothing had touched David so deeply as the discovery in one corner of the farm of that field of hemp: his father had secretly raised it to be a surprise to him, to help him through his ministerial studies. This David had learned from his mother; his father had avoided mention of it: it might rot in the field! In equal silence David had set about breaking it; and sometimes at night his father would show enough interest merely to ask some questions regarding the day's work.

Yet, notwithstanding this impending tragedy with his father, and distress at their reduced circumstances caused by his expenses at college, David, during these two months, had entered into much new happiness.

The doubts which had racked him for many months were ended. He had reached a decision not to enter the ministry; had

stripped his mind clean and clear of dogmas. The theologies of his day, vast, tangled thickets of thorns overspreading the simple footpath of the pious pilgrim mind, interfered with him no more. It was not now necessary for him to think or preach that any particular church with which he might identify himself was right, the rest of the human race wrong. He did not now have to believe that any soul was in danger of eternal damnation for disagreeing with *him*. Release from these things left his religious spirit more lofty and alive than ever.

For, moreover, David had set his feet a brief space on the wide plains of living knowledge; he had encountered through their works many of the great minds of his century, been reached by the sublime thought-movements of his time, heard the deep roar of the spirit's ocean. Amid coarse, daily labor once more, amid the penury and discord in that ruined farmhouse, one true secret of happiness with David was the recollection of all the noble