

set about it; but for you to attempt it would be worse than no use.'

'He meant to come back to his own,' answered Oliver slowly, as if he spoke with difficulty. 'He meant to come back and lead a different life, and we drove him away. I helped to drive him! And nothing will ever satisfy me but to look for him and bring him back.'

'That is natural enough,' said Mr. Wilmot very patiently, considering that he had said nearly the same thing half-a-dozen times already. 'It would be allright if there was the least chance of your being able to do it. But there isn't. And how could you live, even, while you were looking for him?'

'There is some money laid by that rightly belongs to my father, though it's always been reckoned mine—the rent of the farm. My uncle has laid it by in the bank ever since I was old enough to work and be no expense to him.'

'But surely you cannot take that without your uncle's leave? And he is not in favour of this mad scheme?'

'I shall make him glad to let me go, before I have done,' said Oliver, almost sullenly. 'I'm no good here to myself or anyone else now.'

Mr. Wilmot was about to make a sharp reply, but he looked at the young fellow's down-bent face and checked himself, and thought of his cousin's words—*utterly untamed*. Oliver did not look, just now, as if he would endure being remonstrated with, much less scolded; and nothing could be done by making him angry. So, after a moment, he said gently enough:

'Well! I suppose no one can keep you here against your will, though it might be a good thing for you if they could. But if you persist in going against the advice of all your friends here, you know, at any rate, how to get better guidance than theirs. I hope you will go to church once more before you really decide about this, Oliver?'

'I mean to!' he answered, but not at all in the frank, yet shy tone in which he had generally spoken to Mr. Wilmot of his

religious duties and feelings. And then he took his leave and went his way, much with the look of one who knew that he was wrong and did not intend to own it.

Oliver hardly knew himself how much his desire to go away and search for his father was due to the fact that all the village was talking about them both.

There had been talk enough long ago about Martin Haythorn, of Boskyfield. From his boyhood his wild freaks had kept the village in disapproving wonder, and even his marriage and the birth of his child did not seem to steady him. But when these doings of his culminated in an assault—meant, some said, for robbery, and nearly ending in murder—and landed him for two years in the county gaol, people found the matter almost too serious for talking of, except in guarded whispers.

And when, after the two years were over, Martin Haythorn came back no more, and seemed to have disappeared altogether from the neighbourhood that had known him, the interest in him gradually wore itself out. John Haythorn was quite respectable, and Oliver grew up to be respectable and something more, and few cared to vex them by raking up Martin's misdoings. Few remembered them nowadays, and no one guessed how Oliver had brooded over the little he had heard and the less that he remembered, and how fiercely he clung to the good name that had hardly yet been won back.

Now, everyone knew that Martin Haythorn had been home and had gone away again; that no one in the village had known him at the time, though plenty had been found to confess to an inkling afterwards; and that he and his companion had left the town in the morning before Oliver traced them to the little public-house in Netherton where they had slept that night.

Some spoke of it openly before Oliver and his uncle, and many more grew silent suddenly when they drew near, and looked at them askance, with what was in reality only shyness, but which looked like contempt.

And Oliver chafed at it all, and would