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Middlemarch

George Eliot

New York and Boston

H. M. Caldwell Company Publishers

To my dear Husband, George Henry Lewes,

in this nineteenth year of our blessed union.

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FINALE.

PRELUDE.

Who that cares much to know the history of man, and how the mysterious

mixture behaves under the varying experiments of Time, has not dwelt,

at least briefly, on the life of Saint Theresa, has not smiled with

some gentleness at the thought of the little girl walking forth one

morning hand-in-hand with her still smaller brother, to go and seek

martyrdom in the country of the Moors? Out they toddled from rugged

Avila, wide-eyed and helpless-looking as two fawns, but with human

hearts, already beating to a national idea; until domestic reality met

them in the shape of uncles, and turned them back from their great

resolve. That child-pilgrimage was a fit beginning. Theresa’s

passionate, ideal nature demanded an epic life: what were many-volumed

romances of chivalry and the social conquests of a brilliant girl to

her? Her flame quickly burned up that light fuel; and, fed from within,

soared after some illimitable satisfaction, some object which would

never justify weariness, which would reconcile self-despair with the

rapturous consciousness of life beyond self. She found her epos in the

reform of a religious order.

That Spanish woman who lived three hundred years ago, was certainly not

the last of her kind. Many Theresas have been born who found for

themselves no epic life wherein there was a constant unfolding of

far-resonant action; perhaps only a life of mistakes, the offspring of

a certain spiritual grandeur ill-matched with the meanness of

opportunity; perhaps a tragic failure which found no sacred poet and

sank unwept into oblivion. With dim lights and tangled circumstance

they tried to shape their thought and deed in noble agreement; but

after all, to common eyes their struggles seemed mere inconsistency and

formlessness; for these later-born Theresas were helped by no coherent

social faith and order which could perform the function of knowledge

for the ardently willing soul. Their ardor alternated between a vague

ideal and the common yearning of womanhood; so that the one was

disapproved as extravagance, and the other condemned as a lapse.

Some have felt that these blundering lives are due to the inconvenient

indefiniteness with which the Supreme Power has fashioned the natures

of women: if there were one level of feminine incompetence as strict as

the ability to count three and no more, the social lot of women might

be treated with scientific certitude. Meanwhile the indefiniteness

remains, and the limits of variation are really much wider than any one

would imagine from the sameness of women’s coiffure and the favorite

love-stories in prose and verse. Here and there a cygnet is reared

uneasily among the ducklings in the brown pond, and never finds the

living stream in fellowship with its own oary-footed kind. Here and

there is born a Saint Theresa, foundress of nothing, whose loving

heart-beats and sobs after an unattained goodness tremble off and are

dispersed among hindrances, instead of centring in some

long-recognizable deed.

BOOK I.

MISS BROOKE.

CHAPTER I.

Since I can do no good because a woman,

Reach constantly at something that is near it.

—\_The Maid’s Tragedy:\_ BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into

relief by poor dress. Her hand and wrist were so finely formed that she

could wear sleeves not less bare of style than those in which the

Blessed Virgin appeared to Italian painters; and her profile as well as

her stature and bearing seemed to gain the more dignity from her plain

garments, which by the side of provincial fashion gave her the

impressiveness of a fine quotation from the Bible,—or from one of our

elder poets,—in a paragraph of to-day’s newspaper. She was usually

spoken of as being remarkably clever, but with the addition that her

sister Celia had more common-sense. Nevertheless, Celia wore scarcely

more trimmings; and it was only to close observers that her dress

differed from her sister’s, and had a shade of coquetry in its

arrangements; for Miss Brooke’s plain dressing was due to mixed

conditions, in most of which her sister shared. The pride of being

ladies had something to do with it: the Brooke connections, though not

exactly aristocratic, were unquestionably “good:” if you inquired

backward for a generation or two, you would not find any yard-measuring

or parcel-tying forefathers—anything lower than an admiral or a

clergyman; and there was even an ancestor discernible as a Puritan

gentleman who served under Cromwell, but afterwards conformed, and

managed to come out of all political troubles as the proprietor of a

respectable family estate. Young women of such birth, living in a quiet

country-house, and attending a village church hardly larger than a

parlor, naturally regarded frippery as the ambition of a huckster’s

daughter. Then there was well-bred economy, which in those days made

show in dress the first item to be deducted from, when any margin was

required for expenses more distinctive of rank. Such reasons would have

been enough to account for plain dress, quite apart from religious

feeling; but in Miss Brooke’s case, religion alone would have

determined it; and Celia mildly acquiesced in all her sister’s

sentiments, only infusing them with that common-sense which is able to

accept momentous doctrines without any eccentric agitation. Dorothea

knew many passages of Pascal’s Pensees and of Jeremy Taylor by heart;

and to her the destinies of mankind, seen by the light of Christianity,

made the solicitudes of feminine fashion appear an occupation for

Bedlam. She could not reconcile the anxieties of a spiritual life

involving eternal consequences, with a keen interest in gimp and

artificial protrusions of drapery. Her mind was theoretic, and yearned

by its nature after some lofty conception of the world which might

frankly include the parish of Tipton and her own rule of conduct there;

she was enamoured of intensity and greatness, and rash in embracing

whatever seemed to her to have those aspects; likely to seek martyrdom,

to make retractations, and then to incur martyrdom after all in a

quarter where she had not sought it. Certainly such elements in the

character of a marriageable girl tended to interfere with her lot, and

hinder it from being decided according to custom, by good looks,

vanity, and merely canine affection. With all this, she, the elder of

the sisters, was not yet twenty, and they had both been educated, since

they were about twelve years old and had lost their parents, on plans

at once narrow and promiscuous, first in an English family and

afterwards in a Swiss family at Lausanne, their bachelor uncle and

guardian trying in this way to remedy the disadvantages of their

orphaned condition.

It was hardly a year since they had come to live at Tipton Grange with

their uncle, a man nearly sixty, of acquiescent temper, miscellaneous

opinions, and uncertain vote. He had travelled in his younger years,

and was held in this part of the county to have contracted a too

rambling habit of mind. Mr. Brooke’s conclusions were as difficult to

predict as the weather: it was only safe to say that he would act with

benevolent intentions, and that he would spend as little money as

possible in carrying them out. For the most glutinously indefinite

minds enclose some hard grains of habit; and a man has been seen lax

about all his own interests except the retention of his snuff-box,

concerning which he was watchful, suspicious, and greedy of clutch.

In Mr. Brooke the hereditary strain of Puritan energy was clearly in

abeyance; but in his niece Dorothea it glowed alike through faults and

virtues, turning sometimes into impatience of her uncle’s talk or his

way of “letting things be” on his estate, and making her long all the

more for the time when she would be of age and have some command of

money for generous schemes. She was regarded as an heiress; for not

only had the sisters seven hundred a-year each from their parents, but

if Dorothea married and had a son, that son would inherit Mr. Brooke’s

estate, presumably worth about three thousand a-year—a rental which

seemed wealth to provincial families, still discussing Mr. Peel’s late

conduct on the Catholic question, innocent of future gold-fields, and

of that gorgeous plutocracy which has so nobly exalted the necessities

of genteel life.

And how should Dorothea not marry?—a girl so handsome and with such

prospects? Nothing could hinder it but her love of extremes, and her

insistence on regulating life according to notions which might cause a

wary man to hesitate before he made her an offer, or even might lead

her at last to refuse all offers. A young lady of some birth and

fortune, who knelt suddenly down on a brick floor by the side of a sick

laborer and prayed fervidly as if she thought herself living in the

time of the Apostles—who had strange whims of fasting like a Papist,

and of sitting up at night to read old theological books! Such a wife

might awaken you some fine morning with a new scheme for the

application of her income which would interfere with political economy

and the keeping of saddle-horses: a man would naturally think twice

before he risked himself in such fellowship. Women were expected to

have weak opinions; but the great safeguard of society and of domestic

life was, that opinions were not acted on. Sane people did what their

neighbors did, so that if any lunatics were at large, one might know

and avoid them.

The rural opinion about the new young ladies, even among the cottagers,

was generally in favor of Celia, as being so amiable and

innocent-looking, while Miss Brooke’s large eyes seemed, like her

religion, too unusual and striking. Poor Dorothea! compared with her,

the innocent-looking Celia was knowing and worldly-wise; so much

subtler is a human mind than the outside tissues which make a sort of

blazonry or clock-face for it.

Yet those who approached Dorothea, though prejudiced against her by

this alarming hearsay, found that she had a charm unaccountably

reconcilable with it. Most men thought her bewitching when she was on

horseback. She loved the fresh air and the various aspects of the

country, and when her eyes and cheeks glowed with mingled pleasure she

looked very little like a devotee. Riding was an indulgence which she

allowed herself in spite of conscientious qualms; she felt that she

enjoyed it in a pagan sensuous way, and always looked forward to

renouncing it.

She was open, ardent, and not in the least self-admiring; indeed, it

was pretty to see how her imagination adorned her sister Celia with

attractions altogether superior to her own, and if any gentleman

appeared to come to the Grange from some other motive than that of

seeing Mr. Brooke, she concluded that he must be in love with Celia:

Sir James Chettam, for example, whom she constantly considered from

Celia’s point of view, inwardly debating whether it would be good for

Celia to accept him. That he should be regarded as a suitor to herself

would have seemed to her a ridiculous irrelevance. Dorothea, with all

her eagerness to know the truths of life, retained very childlike ideas

about marriage. She felt sure that she would have accepted the

judicious Hooker, if she had been born in time to save him from that

wretched mistake he made in matrimony; or John Milton when his

blindness had come on; or any of the other great men whose odd habits

it would have been glorious piety to endure; but an amiable handsome

baronet, who said “Exactly” to her remarks even when she expressed

uncertainty,—how could he affect her as a lover? The really delightful

marriage must be that where your husband was a sort of father, and

could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it.

These peculiarities of Dorothea’s character caused Mr. Brooke to be all

the more blamed in neighboring families for not securing some

middle-aged lady as guide and companion to his nieces. But he himself

dreaded so much the sort of superior woman likely to be available for

such a position, that he allowed himself to be dissuaded by Dorothea’s

objections, and was in this case brave enough to defy the world—that is

to say, Mrs. Cadwallader the Rector’s wife, and the small group of

gentry with whom he visited in the northeast corner of Loamshire. So

Miss Brooke presided in her uncle’s household, and did not at all

dislike her new authority, with the homage that belonged to it.

Sir James Chettam was going to dine at the Grange to-day with another

gentleman whom the girls had never seen, and about whom Dorothea felt

some venerating expectation. This was the Reverend Edward Casaubon,

noted in the county as a man of profound learning, understood for many

years to be engaged on a great work concerning religious history; also

as a man of wealth enough to give lustre to his piety, and having views

of his own which were to be more clearly ascertained on the publication

of his book. His very name carried an impressiveness hardly to be

measured without a precise chronology of scholarship.

Early in the day Dorothea had returned from the infant school which she

had set going in the village, and was taking her usual place in the

pretty sitting-room which divided the bedrooms of the sisters, bent on

finishing a plan for some buildings (a kind of work which she delighted

in), when Celia, who had been watching her with a hesitating desire to

propose something, said—

“Dorothea, dear, if you don’t mind—if you are not very busy—suppose we

looked at mamma’s jewels to-day, and divided them? It is exactly six

months to-day since uncle gave them to you, and you have not looked at

them yet.”

Celia’s face had the shadow of a pouting expression in it, the full

presence of the pout being kept back by an habitual awe of Dorothea and

principle; two associated facts which might show a mysterious

electricity if you touched them incautiously. To her relief, Dorothea’s

eyes were full of laughter as she looked up.

“What a wonderful little almanac you are, Celia! Is it six calendar or

six lunar months?”

“It is the last day of September now, and it was the first of April

when uncle gave them to you. You know, he said that he had forgotten

them till then. I believe you have never thought of them since you

locked them up in the cabinet here.”

“Well, dear, we should never wear them, you know.” Dorothea spoke in a

full cordial tone, half caressing, half explanatory. She had her pencil

in her hand, and was making tiny side-plans on a margin.

Celia colored, and looked very grave. “I think, dear, we are wanting in

respect to mamma’s memory, to put them by and take no notice of them.

And,” she added, after hesitating a little, with a rising sob of

mortification, “necklaces are quite usual now; and Madame Poincon, who

was stricter in some things even than you are, used to wear ornaments.

And Christians generally—surely there are women in heaven now who wore

jewels.” Celia was conscious of some mental strength when she really

applied herself to argument.

“You would like to wear them?” exclaimed Dorothea, an air of astonished

discovery animating her whole person with a dramatic action which she

had caught from that very Madame Poincon who wore the ornaments. “Of

course, then, let us have them out. Why did you not tell me before? But

the keys, the keys!” She pressed her hands against the sides of her

head and seemed to despair of her memory.

“They are here,” said Celia, with whom this explanation had been long

meditated and prearranged.

“Pray open the large drawer of the cabinet and get out the jewel-box.”

The casket was soon open before them, and the various jewels spread

out, making a bright parterre on the table. It was no great collection,

but a few of the ornaments were really of remarkable beauty, the finest

that was obvious at first being a necklace of purple amethysts set in

exquisite gold work, and a pearl cross with five brilliants in it.

Dorothea immediately took up the necklace and fastened it round her

sister’s neck, where it fitted almost as closely as a bracelet; but the

circle suited the Henrietta-Maria style of Celia’s head and neck, and

she could see that it did, in the pier-glass opposite.

“There, Celia! you can wear that with your Indian muslin. But this

cross you must wear with your dark dresses.”

Celia was trying not to smile with pleasure. “O Dodo, you must keep the

cross yourself.”

“No, no, dear, no,” said Dorothea, putting up her hand with careless

deprecation.

“Yes, indeed you must; it would suit you—in your black dress, now,”

said Celia, insistingly. “You \_might\_ wear that.”

“Not for the world, not for the world. A cross is the last thing I

would wear as a trinket.” Dorothea shuddered slightly.

“Then you will think it wicked in me to wear it,” said Celia, uneasily.

“No, dear, no,” said Dorothea, stroking her sister’s cheek. “Souls have

complexions too: what will suit one will not suit another.”

“But you might like to keep it for mamma’s sake.”

“No, I have other things of mamma’s—her sandal-wood box which I am so

fond of—plenty of things. In fact, they are all yours, dear. We need

discuss them no longer. There—take away your property.”

Celia felt a little hurt. There was a strong assumption of superiority

in this Puritanic toleration, hardly less trying to the blond flesh of

an unenthusiastic sister than a Puritanic persecution.

“But how can I wear ornaments if you, who are the elder sister, will

never wear them?”

“Nay, Celia, that is too much to ask, that I should wear trinkets to

keep you in countenance. If I were to put on such a necklace as that, I

should feel as if I had been pirouetting. The world would go round with

me, and I should not know how to walk.”

Celia had unclasped the necklace and drawn it off. “It would be a

little tight for your neck; something to lie down and hang would suit

you better,” she said, with some satisfaction. The complete unfitness

of the necklace from all points of view for Dorothea, made Celia

happier in taking it. She was opening some ring-boxes, which disclosed

a fine emerald with diamonds, and just then the sun passing beyond a

cloud sent a bright gleam over the table.

“How very beautiful these gems are!” said Dorothea, under a new current

of feeling, as sudden as the gleam. “It is strange how deeply colors

seem to penetrate one, like scent. I suppose that is the reason why

gems are used as spiritual emblems in the Revelation of St. John. They

look like fragments of heaven. I think that emerald is more beautiful

than any of them.”

“And there is a bracelet to match it,” said Celia. “We did not notice

this at first.”

“They are lovely,” said Dorothea, slipping the ring and bracelet on her

finely turned finger and wrist, and holding them towards the window on

a level with her eyes. All the while her thought was trying to justify

her delight in the colors by merging them in her mystic religious joy.

“You \_would\_ like those, Dorothea,” said Celia, rather falteringly,

beginning to think with wonder that her sister showed some weakness,

and also that emeralds would suit her own complexion even better than

purple amethysts. “You must keep that ring and bracelet—if nothing

else. But see, these agates are very pretty and quiet.”

“Yes! I will keep these—this ring and bracelet,” said Dorothea. Then,

letting her hand fall on the table, she said in another tone—“Yet what

miserable men find such things, and work at them, and sell them!” She

paused again, and Celia thought that her sister was going to renounce

the ornaments, as in consistency she ought to do.

“Yes, dear, I will keep these,” said Dorothea, decidedly. “But take all

the rest away, and the casket.”

She took up her pencil without removing the jewels, and still looking

at them. She thought of often having them by her, to feed her eye at

these little fountains of pure color.

“Shall you wear them in company?” said Celia, who was watching her with

real curiosity as to what she would do.

Dorothea glanced quickly at her sister. Across all her imaginative

adornment of those whom she loved, there darted now and then a keen

discernment, which was not without a scorching quality. If Miss Brooke

ever attained perfect meekness, it would not be for lack of inward

fire.

“Perhaps,” she said, rather haughtily. “I cannot tell to what level I

may sink.”

Celia blushed, and was unhappy: she saw that she had offended her

sister, and dared not say even anything pretty about the gift of the

ornaments which she put back into the box and carried away. Dorothea

too was unhappy, as she went on with her plan-drawing, questioning the

purity of her own feeling and speech in the scene which had ended with

that little explosion.

Celia’s consciousness told her that she had not been at all in the

wrong: it was quite natural and justifiable that she should have asked

that question, and she repeated to herself that Dorothea was

inconsistent: either she should have taken her full share of the

jewels, or, after what she had said, she should have renounced them

altogether.

“I am sure—at least, I trust,” thought Celia, “that the wearing of a

necklace will not interfere with my prayers. And I do not see that I

should be bound by Dorothea’s opinions now we are going into society,

though of course she herself ought to be bound by them. But Dorothea is

not always consistent.”

Thus Celia, mutely bending over her tapestry, until she heard her

sister calling her.

“Here, Kitty, come and look at my plan; I shall think I am a great

architect, if I have not got incompatible stairs and fireplaces.”

As Celia bent over the paper, Dorothea put her cheek against her

sister’s arm caressingly. Celia understood the action. Dorothea saw

that she had been in the wrong, and Celia pardoned her. Since they

could remember, there had been a mixture of criticism and awe in the

attitude of Celia’s mind towards her elder sister. The younger had

always worn a yoke; but is there any yoked creature without its private

opinions?

CHAPTER II.

“‘Dime; no ves aquel caballero que hacia nosotros viene sobre un

caballo rucio rodado que trae puesto en la cabeza un yelmo de oro?’ ‘Lo

que veo y columbro,’ respondio Sancho, ‘no es sino un hombre sobre un

as no pardo como el mio, que trae sobre la cabeza una cosa que

relumbra.’ ‘Pues ese es el yelmo de Mambrino,’ dijo Don

Quijote.”—CERVANTES.

“‘Seest thou not yon cavalier who cometh toward us on a dapple-gray

steed, and weareth a golden helmet?’ ‘What I see,’ answered Sancho, ‘is

nothing but a man on a gray ass like my own, who carries something

shiny on his head.’ ‘Just so,’ answered Don Quixote: ‘and that

resplendent object is the helmet of Mambrino.’”

“Sir Humphry Davy?” said Mr. Brooke, over the soup, in his easy smiling

way, taking up Sir James Chettam’s remark that he was studying Davy’s

Agricultural Chemistry. “Well, now, Sir Humphry Davy; I dined with him

years ago at Cartwright’s, and Wordsworth was there too—the poet

Wordsworth, you know. Now there was something singular. I was at

Cambridge when Wordsworth was there, and I never met him—and I dined

with him twenty years afterwards at Cartwright’s. There’s an oddity in

things, now. But Davy was there: he was a poet too. Or, as I may say,

Wordsworth was poet one, and Davy was poet two. That was true in every

sense, you know.”

Dorothea felt a little more uneasy than usual. In the beginning of

dinner, the party being small and the room still, these motes from the

mass of a magistrate’s mind fell too noticeably. She wondered how a man

like Mr. Casaubon would support such triviality. His manners, she

thought, were very dignified; the set of his iron-gray hair and his

deep eye-sockets made him resemble the portrait of Locke. He had the

spare form and the pale complexion which became a student; as different

as possible from the blooming Englishman of the red-whiskered type

represented by Sir James Chettam.

“I am reading the Agricultural Chemistry,” said this excellent baronet,

“because I am going to take one of the farms into my own hands, and see

if something cannot be done in setting a good pattern of farming among

my tenants. Do you approve of that, Miss Brooke?”

“A great mistake, Chettam,” interposed Mr. Brooke, “going into

electrifying your land and that kind of thing, and making a parlor of

your cow-house. It won’t do. I went into science a great deal myself at

one time; but I saw it would not do. It leads to everything; you can

let nothing alone. No, no—see that your tenants don’t sell their straw,

and that kind of thing; and give them draining-tiles, you know. But

your fancy farming will not do—the most expensive sort of whistle you

can buy: you may as well keep a pack of hounds.”

“Surely,” said Dorothea, “it is better to spend money in finding out

how men can make the most of the land which supports them all, than in

keeping dogs and horses only to gallop over it. It is not a sin to make

yourself poor in performing experiments for the good of all.”

She spoke with more energy than is expected of so young a lady, but Sir

James had appealed to her. He was accustomed to do so, and she had

often thought that she could urge him to many good actions when he was

her brother-in-law.

Mr. Casaubon turned his eyes very markedly on Dorothea while she was

speaking, and seemed to observe her newly.

“Young ladies don’t understand political economy, you know,” said Mr.

Brooke, smiling towards Mr. Casaubon. “I remember when we were all

reading Adam Smith. \_There\_ is a book, now. I took in all the new ideas

at one time—human perfectibility, now. But some say, history moves in

circles; and that may be very well argued; I have argued it myself. The

fact is, human reason may carry you a little too far—over the hedge, in

fact. It carried me a good way at one time; but I saw it would not do.

I pulled up; I pulled up in time. But not too hard. I have always been

in favor of a little theory: we must have Thought; else we shall be

landed back in the dark ages. But talking of books, there is Southey’s

‘Peninsular War.’ I am reading that of a morning. You know Southey?”

“No,” said Mr. Casaubon, not keeping pace with Mr. Brooke’s impetuous

reason, and thinking of the book only. “I have little leisure for such

literature just now. I have been using up my eyesight on old characters

lately; the fact is, I want a reader for my evenings; but I am

fastidious in voices, and I cannot endure listening to an imperfect

reader. It is a misfortune, in some senses: I feed too much on the

inward sources; I live too much with the dead. My mind is something

like the ghost of an ancient, wandering about the world and trying

mentally to construct it as it used to be, in spite of ruin and

confusing changes. But I find it necessary to use the utmost caution

about my eyesight.”

This was the first time that Mr. Casaubon had spoken at any length. He

delivered himself with precision, as if he had been called upon to make

a public statement; and the balanced sing-song neatness of his speech,

occasionally corresponded to by a movement of his head, was the more

conspicuous from its contrast with good Mr. Brooke’s scrappy

slovenliness. Dorothea said to herself that Mr. Casaubon was the most

interesting man she had ever seen, not excepting even Monsieur Liret,

the Vaudois clergyman who had given conferences on the history of the

Waldenses. To reconstruct a past world, doubtless with a view to the

highest purposes of truth—what a work to be in any way present at, to

assist in, though only as a lamp-holder! This elevating thought lifted

her above her annoyance at being twitted with her ignorance of

political economy, that never-explained science which was thrust as an

extinguisher over all her lights.

“But you are fond of riding, Miss Brooke,” Sir James presently took an

opportunity of saying. “I should have thought you would enter a little

into the pleasures of hunting. I wish you would let me send over a

chestnut horse for you to try. It has been trained for a lady. I saw

you on Saturday cantering over the hill on a nag not worthy of you. My

groom shall bring Corydon for you every day, if you will only mention

the time.”

“Thank you, you are very good. I mean to give up riding. I shall not

ride any more,” said Dorothea, urged to this brusque resolution by a

little annoyance that Sir James would be soliciting her attention when

she wanted to give it all to Mr. Casaubon.

“No, that is too hard,” said Sir James, in a tone of reproach that

showed strong interest. “Your sister is given to self-mortification, is

she not?” he continued, turning to Celia, who sat at his right hand.

“I think she is,” said Celia, feeling afraid lest she should say

something that would not please her sister, and blushing as prettily as

possible above her necklace. “She likes giving up.”

“If that were true, Celia, my giving-up would be self-indulgence, not

self-mortification. But there may be good reasons for choosing not to

do what is very agreeable,” said Dorothea.

Mr. Brooke was speaking at the same time, but it was evident that Mr.

Casaubon was observing Dorothea, and she was aware of it.

“Exactly,” said Sir James. “You give up from some high, generous

motive.”

“No, indeed, not exactly. I did not say that of myself,” answered

Dorothea, reddening. Unlike Celia, she rarely blushed, and only from

high delight or anger. At this moment she felt angry with the perverse

Sir James. Why did he not pay attention to Celia, and leave her to

listen to Mr. Casaubon?—if that learned man would only talk, instead of

allowing himself to be talked to by Mr. Brooke, who was just then

informing him that the Reformation either meant something or it did

not, that he himself was a Protestant to the core, but that Catholicism

was a fact; and as to refusing an acre of your ground for a Romanist

chapel, all men needed the bridle of religion, which, properly

speaking, was the dread of a Hereafter.

“I made a great study of theology at one time,” said Mr. Brooke, as if

to explain the insight just manifested. “I know something of all

schools. I knew Wilberforce in his best days. Do you know Wilberforce?”

Mr. Casaubon said, “No.”

“Well, Wilberforce was perhaps not enough of a thinker; but if I went

into Parliament, as I have been asked to do, I should sit on the

independent bench, as Wilberforce did, and work at philanthropy.”

Mr. Casaubon bowed, and observed that it was a wide field.

“Yes,” said Mr. Brooke, with an easy smile, “but I have documents. I

began a long while ago to collect documents. They want arranging, but

when a question has struck me, I have written to somebody and got an

answer. I have documents at my back. But now, how do you arrange your

documents?”

“In pigeon-holes partly,” said Mr. Casaubon, with rather a startled air

of effort.

“Ah, pigeon-holes will not do. I have tried pigeon-holes, but

everything gets mixed in pigeon-holes: I never know whether a paper is

in A or Z.”

“I wish you would let me sort your papers for you, uncle,” said

Dorothea. “I would letter them all, and then make a list of subjects

under each letter.”

Mr. Casaubon gravely smiled approval, and said to Mr. Brooke, “You have

an excellent secretary at hand, you perceive.”

“No, no,” said Mr. Brooke, shaking his head; “I cannot let young ladies

meddle with my documents. Young ladies are too flighty.”

Dorothea felt hurt. Mr. Casaubon would think that her uncle had some

special reason for delivering this opinion, whereas the remark lay in

his mind as lightly as the broken wing of an insect among all the other

fragments there, and a chance current had sent it alighting on \_her\_.

When the two girls were in the drawing-room alone, Celia said—

“How very ugly Mr. Casaubon is!”

“Celia! He is one of the most distinguished-looking men I ever saw. He

is remarkably like the portrait of Locke. He has the same deep

eye-sockets.”

“Had Locke those two white moles with hairs on them?”

“Oh, I dare say! when people of a certain sort looked at him,” said

Dorothea, walking away a little.

“Mr. Casaubon is so sallow.”

“All the better. I suppose you admire a man with the complexion of a

\_cochon de lait\_.”

“Dodo!” exclaimed Celia, looking after her in surprise. “I never heard

you make such a comparison before.”

“Why should I make it before the occasion came? It is a good

comparison: the match is perfect.”

Miss Brooke was clearly forgetting herself, and Celia thought so.

“I wonder you show temper, Dorothea.”

“It is so painful in you, Celia, that you will look at human beings as

if they were merely animals with a toilet, and never see the great soul

in a man’s face.”

“Has Mr. Casaubon a great soul?” Celia was not without a touch of naive

malice.

“Yes, I believe he has,” said Dorothea, with the full voice of

decision. “Everything I see in him corresponds to his pamphlet on

Biblical Cosmology.”

“He talks very little,” said Celia

“There is no one for him to talk to.”

Celia thought privately, “Dorothea quite despises Sir James Chettam; I

believe she would not accept him.” Celia felt that this was a pity. She

had never been deceived as to the object of the baronet’s interest.

Sometimes, indeed, she had reflected that Dodo would perhaps not make a

husband happy who had not her way of looking at things; and stifled in

the depths of her heart was the feeling that her sister was too

religious for family comfort. Notions and scruples were like spilt

needles, making one afraid of treading, or sitting down, or even

eating.

When Miss Brooke was at the tea-table, Sir James came to sit down by

her, not having felt her mode of answering him at all offensive. Why

should he? He thought it probable that Miss Brooke liked him, and

manners must be very marked indeed before they cease to be interpreted

by preconceptions either confident or distrustful. She was thoroughly

charming to him, but of course he theorized a little about his

attachment. He was made of excellent human dough, and had the rare

merit of knowing that his talents, even if let loose, would not set the

smallest stream in the county on fire: hence he liked the prospect of a

wife to whom he could say, “What shall we do?” about this or that; who

could help her husband out with reasons, and would also have the

property qualification for doing so. As to the excessive religiousness

alleged against Miss Brooke, he had a very indefinite notion of what it

consisted in, and thought that it would die out with marriage. In

short, he felt himself to be in love in the right place, and was ready

to endure a great deal of predominance, which, after all, a man could

always put down when he liked. Sir James had no idea that he should

ever like to put down the predominance of this handsome girl, in whose

cleverness he delighted. Why not? A man’s mind—what there is of it—has

always the advantage of being masculine,—as the smallest birch-tree is

of a higher kind than the most soaring palm,—and even his ignorance is

of a sounder quality. Sir James might not have originated this

estimate; but a kind Providence furnishes the limpest personality with

a little gum or starch in the form of tradition.

“Let me hope that you will rescind that resolution about the horse,

Miss Brooke,” said the persevering admirer. “I assure you, riding is

the most healthy of exercises.”

“I am aware of it,” said Dorothea, coldly. “I think it would do Celia

good—if she would take to it.”

“But you are such a perfect horsewoman.”

“Excuse me; I have had very little practice, and I should be easily

thrown.”

“Then that is a reason for more practice. Every lady ought to be a

perfect horsewoman, that she may accompany her husband.”

“You see how widely we differ, Sir James. I have made up my mind that I

ought not to be a perfect horsewoman, and so I should never correspond

to your pattern of a lady.” Dorothea looked straight before her, and

spoke with cold brusquerie, very much with the air of a handsome boy,

in amusing contrast with the solicitous amiability of her admirer.

“I should like to know your reasons for this cruel resolution. It is

not possible that you should think horsemanship wrong.”

“It is quite possible that I should think it wrong for me.”

“Oh, why?” said Sir James, in a tender tone of remonstrance.

Mr. Casaubon had come up to the table, teacup in hand, and was

listening.

“We must not inquire too curiously into motives,” he interposed, in his

measured way. “Miss Brooke knows that they are apt to become feeble in

the utterance: the aroma is mixed with the grosser air. We must keep

the germinating grain away from the light.”

Dorothea colored with pleasure, and looked up gratefully to the

speaker. Here was a man who could understand the higher inward life,

and with whom there could be some spiritual communion; nay, who could

illuminate principle with the widest knowledge: a man whose learning

almost amounted to a proof of whatever he believed!

Dorothea’s inferences may seem large; but really life could never have

gone on at any period but for this liberal allowance of conclusions,

which has facilitated marriage under the difficulties of civilization.

Has any one ever pinched into its pilulous smallness the cobweb of

pre-matrimonial acquaintanceship?

“Certainly,” said good Sir James. “Miss Brooke shall not be urged to

tell reasons she would rather be silent upon. I am sure her reasons

would do her honor.”

He was not in the least jealous of the interest with which Dorothea had

looked up at Mr. Casaubon: it never occurred to him that a girl to whom

he was meditating an offer of marriage could care for a dried bookworm

towards fifty, except, indeed, in a religious sort of way, as for a

clergyman of some distinction.

However, since Miss Brooke had become engaged in a conversation with

Mr. Casaubon about the Vaudois clergy, Sir James betook himself to

Celia, and talked to her about her sister; spoke of a house in town,

and asked whether Miss Brooke disliked London. Away from her sister,

Celia talked quite easily, and Sir James said to himself that the

second Miss Brooke was certainly very agreeable as well as pretty,

though not, as some people pretended, more clever and sensible than the

elder sister. He felt that he had chosen the one who was in all

respects the superior; and a man naturally likes to look forward to

having the best. He would be the very Mawworm of bachelors who

pretended not to expect it.

CHAPTER III.

“Say, goddess, what ensued, when Raphael,

The affable archangel . . .

Eve

The story heard attentive, and was filled

With admiration, and deep muse, to hear

Of things so high and strange.”

—\_Paradise Lost\_, B. vii.

If it had really occurred to Mr. Casaubon to think of Miss Brooke as a

suitable wife for him, the reasons that might induce her to accept him

were already planted in her mind, and by the evening of the next day

the reasons had budded and bloomed. For they had had a long

conversation in the morning, while Celia, who did not like the company

of Mr. Casaubon’s moles and sallowness, had escaped to the vicarage to

play with the curate’s ill-shod but merry children.

Dorothea by this time had looked deep into the ungauged reservoir of

Mr. Casaubon’s mind, seeing reflected there in vague labyrinthine

extension every quality she herself brought; had opened much of her own

experience to him, and had understood from him the scope of his great

work, also of attractively labyrinthine extent. For he had been as

instructive as Milton’s “affable archangel;” and with something of the

archangelic manner he told her how he had undertaken to show (what

indeed had been attempted before, but not with that thoroughness,

justice of comparison, and effectiveness of arrangement at which Mr.

Casaubon aimed) that all the mythical systems or erratic mythical

fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally

revealed. Having once mastered the true position and taken a firm

footing there, the vast field of mythical constructions became

intelligible, nay, luminous with the reflected light of

correspondences. But to gather in this great harvest of truth was no

light or speedy work. His notes already made a formidable range of

volumes, but the crowning task would be to condense these voluminous

still-accumulating results and bring them, like the earlier vintage of

Hippocratic books, to fit a little shelf. In explaining this to

Dorothea, Mr. Casaubon expressed himself nearly as he would have done

to a fellow-student, for he had not two styles of talking at command:

it is true that when he used a Greek or Latin phrase he always gave the

English with scrupulous care, but he would probably have done this in

any case. A learned provincial clergyman is accustomed to think of his

acquaintances as of “lords, knyghtes, and other noble and worthi men,

that conne Latyn but lytille.”

Dorothea was altogether captivated by the wide embrace of this

conception. Here was something beyond the shallows of ladies’ school

literature: here was a living Bossuet, whose work would reconcile

complete knowledge with devoted piety; here was a modern Augustine who

united the glories of doctor and saint.

The sanctity seemed no less clearly marked than the learning, for when

Dorothea was impelled to open her mind on certain themes which she

could speak of to no one whom she had before seen at Tipton, especially

on the secondary importance of ecclesiastical forms and articles of

belief compared with that spiritual religion, that submergence of self

in communion with Divine perfection which seemed to her to be expressed

in the best Christian books of widely distant ages, she found in Mr.

Casaubon a listener who understood her at once, who could assure her of

his own agreement with that view when duly tempered with wise

conformity, and could mention historical examples before unknown to

her.

“He thinks with me,” said Dorothea to herself, “or rather, he thinks a

whole world of which my thought is but a poor twopenny mirror. And his

feelings too, his whole experience—what a lake compared with my little

pool!”

Miss Brooke argued from words and dispositions not less unhesitatingly

than other young ladies of her age. Signs are small measurable things,

but interpretations are illimitable, and in girls of sweet, ardent

nature, every sign is apt to conjure up wonder, hope, belief, vast as a

sky, and colored by a diffused thimbleful of matter in the shape of

knowledge. They are not always too grossly deceived; for Sinbad himself

may have fallen by good-luck on a true description, and wrong reasoning

sometimes lands poor mortals in right conclusions: starting a long way

off the true point, and proceeding by loops and zigzags, we now and

then arrive just where we ought to be. Because Miss Brooke was hasty in

her trust, it is not therefore clear that Mr. Casaubon was unworthy of

it.

He stayed a little longer than he had intended, on a slight pressure of

invitation from Mr. Brooke, who offered no bait except his own

documents on machine-breaking and rick-burning. Mr. Casaubon was called

into the library to look at these in a heap, while his host picked up

first one and then the other to read aloud from in a skipping and

uncertain way, passing from one unfinished passage to another with a

“Yes, now, but here!” and finally pushing them all aside to open the

journal of his youthful Continental travels.

“Look here—here is all about Greece. Rhamnus, the ruins of Rhamnus—you

are a great Grecian, now. I don’t know whether you have given much

study to the topography. I spent no end of time in making out these

things—Helicon, now. Here, now!—‘We started the next morning for

Parnassus, the double-peaked Parnassus.’ All this volume is about

Greece, you know,” Mr. Brooke wound up, rubbing his thumb transversely

along the edges of the leaves as he held the book forward.

Mr. Casaubon made a dignified though somewhat sad audience; bowed in

the right place, and avoided looking at anything documentary as far as

possible, without showing disregard or impatience; mindful that this

desultoriness was associated with the institutions of the country, and

that the man who took him on this severe mental scamper was not only an

amiable host, but a landholder and custos rotulorum. Was his endurance

aided also by the reflection that Mr. Brooke was the uncle of Dorothea?

Certainly he seemed more and more bent on making her talk to him, on

drawing her out, as Celia remarked to herself; and in looking at her

his face was often lit up by a smile like pale wintry sunshine. Before

he left the next morning, while taking a pleasant walk with Miss Brooke

along the gravelled terrace, he had mentioned to her that he felt the

disadvantage of loneliness, the need of that cheerful companionship

with which the presence of youth can lighten or vary the serious toils

of maturity. And he delivered this statement with as much careful

precision as if he had been a diplomatic envoy whose words would be

attended with results. Indeed, Mr. Casaubon was not used to expect that

he should have to repeat or revise his communications of a practical or

personal kind. The inclinations which he had deliberately stated on the

2d of October he would think it enough to refer to by the mention of

that date; judging by the standard of his own memory, which was a

volume where a vide supra could serve instead of repetitions, and not

the ordinary long-used blotting-book which only tells of forgotten

writing. But in this case Mr. Casaubon’s confidence was not likely to

be falsified, for Dorothea heard and retained what he said with the

eager interest of a fresh young nature to which every variety in

experience is an epoch.

It was three o’clock in the beautiful breezy autumn day when Mr.

Casaubon drove off to his Rectory at Lowick, only five miles from

Tipton; and Dorothea, who had on her bonnet and shawl, hurried along

the shrubbery and across the park that she might wander through the

bordering wood with no other visible companionship than that of Monk,

the Great St. Bernard dog, who always took care of the young ladies in

their walks. There had risen before her the girl’s vision of a possible

future for herself to which she looked forward with trembling hope, and

she wanted to wander on in that visionary future without interruption.

She walked briskly in the brisk air, the color rose in her cheeks, and

her straw bonnet (which our contemporaries might look at with

conjectural curiosity as at an obsolete form of basket) fell a little

backward. She would perhaps be hardly characterized enough if it were

omitted that she wore her brown hair flatly braided and coiled behind

so as to expose the outline of her head in a daring manner at a time

when public feeling required the meagreness of nature to be

dissimulated by tall barricades of frizzed curls and bows, never

surpassed by any great race except the Feejeean. This was a trait of

Miss Brooke’s asceticism. But there was nothing of an ascetic’s

expression in her bright full eyes, as she looked before her, not

consciously seeing, but absorbing into the intensity of her mood, the

solemn glory of the afternoon with its long swathes of light between

the far-off rows of limes, whose shadows touched each other.

All people, young or old (that is, all people in those ante-reform

times), would have thought her an interesting object if they had

referred the glow in her eyes and cheeks to the newly awakened ordinary

images of young love: the illusions of Chloe about Strephon have been

sufficiently consecrated in poetry, as the pathetic loveliness of all

spontaneous trust ought to be. Miss Pippin adoring young Pumpkin, and

dreaming along endless vistas of unwearying companionship, was a little

drama which never tired our fathers and mothers, and had been put into

all costumes. Let but Pumpkin have a figure which would sustain the

disadvantages of the shortwaisted swallow-tail, and everybody felt it

not only natural but necessary to the perfection of womanhood, that a

sweet girl should be at once convinced of his virtue, his exceptional

ability, and above all, his perfect sincerity. But perhaps no persons

then living—certainly none in the neighborhood of Tipton—would have had

a sympathetic understanding for the dreams of a girl whose notions

about marriage took their color entirely from an exalted enthusiasm

about the ends of life, an enthusiasm which was lit chiefly by its own

fire, and included neither the niceties of the trousseau, the pattern

of plate, nor even the honors and sweet joys of the blooming matron.

It had now entered Dorothea’s mind that Mr. Casaubon might wish to make

her his wife, and the idea that he would do so touched her with a sort

of reverential gratitude. How good of him—nay, it would be almost as if

a winged messenger had suddenly stood beside her path and held out his

hand towards her! For a long while she had been oppressed by the

indefiniteness which hung in her mind, like a thick summer haze, over

all her desire to make her life greatly effective. What could she do,

what ought she to do?—she, hardly more than a budding woman, but yet

with an active conscience and a great mental need, not to be satisfied

by a girlish instruction comparable to the nibblings and judgments of a

discursive mouse. With some endowment of stupidity and conceit, she

might have thought that a Christian young lady of fortune should find

her ideal of life in village charities, patronage of the humbler

clergy, the perusal of “Female Scripture Characters,” unfolding the

private experience of Sara under the Old Dispensation, and Dorcas under

the New, and the care of her soul over her embroidery in her own

boudoir—with a background of prospective marriage to a man who, if less

strict than herself, as being involved in affairs religiously

inexplicable, might be prayed for and seasonably exhorted. From such

contentment poor Dorothea was shut out. The intensity of her religious

disposition, the coercion it exercised over her life, was but one

aspect of a nature altogether ardent, theoretic, and intellectually

consequent: and with such a nature struggling in the bands of a narrow

teaching, hemmed in by a social life which seemed nothing but a

labyrinth of petty courses, a walled-in maze of small paths that led no

whither, the outcome was sure to strike others as at once exaggeration

and inconsistency. The thing which seemed to her best, she wanted to

justify by the completest knowledge; and not to live in a pretended

admission of rules which were never acted on. Into this soul-hunger as

yet all her youthful passion was poured; the union which attracted her

was one that would deliver her from her girlish subjection to her own

ignorance, and give her the freedom of voluntary submission to a guide

who would take her along the grandest path.

“I should learn everything then,” she said to herself, still walking

quickly along the bridle road through the wood. “It would be my duty to

study that I might help him the better in his great works. There would

be nothing trivial about our lives. Every-day things with us would mean

the greatest things. It would be like marrying Pascal. I should learn

to see the truth by the same light as great men have seen it by. And

then I should know what to do, when I got older: I should see how it

was possible to lead a grand life here—now—in England. I don’t feel

sure about doing good in any way now: everything seems like going on a

mission to a people whose language I don’t know;—unless it were

building good cottages—there can be no doubt about that. Oh, I hope I

should be able to get the people well housed in Lowick! I will draw

plenty of plans while I have time.”

Dorothea checked herself suddenly with self-rebuke for the presumptuous

way in which she was reckoning on uncertain events, but she was spared

any inward effort to change the direction of her thoughts by the

appearance of a cantering horseman round a turning of the road. The

well-groomed chestnut horse and two beautiful setters could leave no

doubt that the rider was Sir James Chettam. He discerned Dorothea,

jumped off his horse at once, and, having delivered it to his groom,

advanced towards her with something white on his arm, at which the two

setters were barking in an excited manner.

“How delightful to meet you, Miss Brooke,” he said, raising his hat and

showing his sleekly waving blond hair. “It has hastened the pleasure I

was looking forward to.”

Miss Brooke was annoyed at the interruption. This amiable baronet,

really a suitable husband for Celia, exaggerated the necessity of

making himself agreeable to the elder sister. Even a prospective

brother-in-law may be an oppression if he will always be presupposing

too good an understanding with you, and agreeing with you even when you

contradict him. The thought that he had made the mistake of paying his

addresses to herself could not take shape: all her mental activity was

used up in persuasions of another kind. But he was positively obtrusive

at this moment, and his dimpled hands were quite disagreeable. Her

roused temper made her color deeply, as she returned his greeting with

some haughtiness.

Sir James interpreted the heightened color in the way most gratifying

to himself, and thought he never saw Miss Brooke looking so handsome.

“I have brought a little petitioner,” he said, “or rather, I have

brought him to see if he will be approved before his petition is

offered.” He showed the white object under his arm, which was a tiny

Maltese puppy, one of nature’s most naive toys.

“It is painful to me to see these creatures that are bred merely as

pets,” said Dorothea, whose opinion was forming itself that very moment

(as opinions will) under the heat of irritation.

“Oh, why?” said Sir James, as they walked forward.

“I believe all the petting that is given them does not make them happy.

They are too helpless: their lives are too frail. A weasel or a mouse

that gets its own living is more interesting. I like to think that the

animals about us have souls something like our own, and either carry on

their own little affairs or can be companions to us, like Monk here.

Those creatures are parasitic.”

“I am so glad I know that you do not like them,” said good Sir James.

“I should never keep them for myself, but ladies usually are fond of

these Maltese dogs. Here, John, take this dog, will you?”

The objectionable puppy, whose nose and eyes were equally black and

expressive, was thus got rid of, since Miss Brooke decided that it had

better not have been born. But she felt it necessary to explain.

“You must not judge of Celia’s feeling from mine. I think she likes

these small pets. She had a tiny terrier once, which she was very fond

of. It made me unhappy, because I was afraid of treading on it. I am

rather short-sighted.”

“You have your own opinion about everything, Miss Brooke, and it is

always a good opinion.”

What answer was possible to such stupid complimenting?

“Do you know, I envy you that,” Sir James said, as they continued

walking at the rather brisk pace set by Dorothea.

“I don’t quite understand what you mean.”

“Your power of forming an opinion. I can form an opinion of persons. I

know when I like people. But about other matters, do you know, I have

often a difficulty in deciding. One hears very sensible things said on

opposite sides.”

“Or that seem sensible. Perhaps we don’t always discriminate between

sense and nonsense.”

Dorothea felt that she was rather rude.

“Exactly,” said Sir James. “But you seem to have the power of

discrimination.”

“On the contrary, I am often unable to decide. But that is from

ignorance. The right conclusion is there all the same, though I am

unable to see it.”

“I think there are few who would see it more readily. Do you know,

Lovegood was telling me yesterday that you had the best notion in the

world of a plan for cottages—quite wonderful for a young lady, he

thought. You had a real \_genus\_, to use his expression. He said you

wanted Mr. Brooke to build a new set of cottages, but he seemed to

think it hardly probable that your uncle would consent. Do you know,

that is one of the things I wish to do—I mean, on my own estate. I

should be so glad to carry out that plan of yours, if you would let me

see it. Of course, it is sinking money; that is why people object to

it. Laborers can never pay rent to make it answer. But, after all, it

is worth doing.”

“Worth doing! yes, indeed,” said Dorothea, energetically, forgetting

her previous small vexations. “I think we deserve to be beaten out of

our beautiful houses with a scourge of small cords—all of us who let

tenants live in such sties as we see round us. Life in cottages might

be happier than ours, if they were real houses fit for human beings

from whom we expect duties and affections.”

“Will you show me your plan?”

“Yes, certainly. I dare say it is very faulty. But I have been

examining all the plans for cottages in Loudon’s book, and picked out

what seem the best things. Oh what a happiness it would be to set the

pattern about here! I think instead of Lazarus at the gate, we should

put the pigsty cottages outside the park-gate.”

Dorothea was in the best temper now. Sir James, as brother in-law,

building model cottages on his estate, and then, perhaps, others being

built at Lowick, and more and more elsewhere in imitation—it would be

as if the spirit of Oberlin had passed over the parishes to make the

life of poverty beautiful!

Sir James saw all the plans, and took one away to consult upon with

Lovegood. He also took away a complacent sense that he was making great

progress in Miss Brooke’s good opinion. The Maltese puppy was not

offered to Celia; an omission which Dorothea afterwards thought of with

surprise; but she blamed herself for it. She had been engrossing Sir

James. After all, it was a relief that there was no puppy to tread

upon.

Celia was present while the plans were being examined, and observed Sir

James’s illusion. “He thinks that Dodo cares about him, and she only

cares about her plans. Yet I am not certain that she would refuse him

if she thought he would let her manage everything and carry out all her

notions. And how very uncomfortable Sir James would be! I cannot bear

notions.”

It was Celia’s private luxury to indulge in this dislike. She dared not

confess it to her sister in any direct statement, for that would be

laying herself open to a demonstration that she was somehow or other at

war with all goodness. But on safe opportunities, she had an indirect

mode of making her negative wisdom tell upon Dorothea, and calling her

down from her rhapsodic mood by reminding her that people were staring,

not listening. Celia was not impulsive: what she had to say could wait,

and came from her always with the same quiet staccato evenness. When

people talked with energy and emphasis she watched their faces and

features merely. She never could understand how well-bred persons

consented to sing and open their mouths in the ridiculous manner

requisite for that vocal exercise.

It was not many days before Mr. Casaubon paid a morning visit, on which

he was invited again for the following week to dine and stay the night.

Thus Dorothea had three more conversations with him, and was convinced

that her first impressions had been just. He was all she had at first

imagined him to be: almost everything he had said seemed like a

specimen from a mine, or the inscription on the door of a museum which

might open on the treasures of past ages; and this trust in his mental

wealth was all the deeper and more effective on her inclination because

it was now obvious that his visits were made for her sake. This

accomplished man condescended to think of a young girl, and take the

pains to talk to her, not with absurd compliment, but with an appeal to

her understanding, and sometimes with instructive correction. What

delightful companionship! Mr. Casaubon seemed even unconscious that

trivialities existed, and never handed round that small-talk of heavy

men which is as acceptable as stale bride-cake brought forth with an

odor of cupboard. He talked of what he was interested in, or else he

was silent and bowed with sad civility. To Dorothea this was adorable

genuineness, and religious abstinence from that artificiality which

uses up the soul in the efforts of pretence. For she looked as

reverently at Mr. Casaubon’s religious elevation above herself as she

did at his intellect and learning. He assented to her expressions of

devout feeling, and usually with an appropriate quotation; he allowed

himself to say that he had gone through some spiritual conflicts in his

youth; in short, Dorothea saw that here she might reckon on

understanding, sympathy, and guidance. On one—only one—of her favorite

themes she was disappointed. Mr. Casaubon apparently did not care about

building cottages, and diverted the talk to the extremely narrow

accommodation which was to be had in the dwellings of the ancient

Egyptians, as if to check a too high standard. After he was gone,

Dorothea dwelt with some agitation on this indifference of his; and her

mind was much exercised with arguments drawn from the varying

conditions of climate which modify human needs, and from the admitted

wickedness of pagan despots. Should she not urge these arguments on Mr.

Casaubon when he came again? But further reflection told her that she

was presumptuous in demanding his attention to such a subject; he would

not disapprove of her occupying herself with it in leisure moments, as

other women expected to occupy themselves with their dress and

embroidery—would not forbid it when—Dorothea felt rather ashamed as she

detected herself in these speculations. But her uncle had been invited

to go to Lowick to stay a couple of days: was it reasonable to suppose

that Mr. Casaubon delighted in Mr. Brooke’s society for its own sake,

either with or without documents?

Meanwhile that little disappointment made her delight the more in Sir

James Chettam’s readiness to set on foot the desired improvements. He

came much oftener than Mr. Casaubon, and Dorothea ceased to find him

disagreeable since he showed himself so entirely in earnest; for he had

already entered with much practical ability into Lovegood’s estimates,

and was charmingly docile. She proposed to build a couple of cottages,

and transfer two families from their old cabins, which could then be

pulled down, so that new ones could be built on the old sites. Sir

James said “Exactly,” and she bore the word remarkably well.

Certainly these men who had so few spontaneous ideas might be very

useful members of society under good feminine direction, if they were

fortunate in choosing their sisters-in-law! It is difficult to say

whether there was or was not a little wilfulness in her continuing

blind to the possibility that another sort of choice was in question in

relation to her. But her life was just now full of hope and action: she

was not only thinking of her plans, but getting down learned books from

the library and reading many things hastily (that she might be a little

less ignorant in talking to Mr. Casaubon), all the while being visited

with conscientious questionings whether she were not exalting these

poor doings above measure and contemplating them with that

self-satisfaction which was the last doom of ignorance and folly.

CHAPTER IV.

1\_st Gent\_. Our deeds are fetters that we forge ourselves.

2\_d Gent.\_ Ay, truly: but I think it is the world

That brings the iron.

“Sir James seems determined to do everything you wish,” said Celia, as

they were driving home from an inspection of the new building-site.

“He is a good creature, and more sensible than any one would imagine,”

said Dorothea, inconsiderately.

“You mean that he appears silly.”

“No, no,” said Dorothea, recollecting herself, and laying her hand on

her sister’s a moment, “but he does not talk equally well on all

subjects.”

“I should think none but disagreeable people do,” said Celia, in her

usual purring way. “They must be very dreadful to live with. Only

think! at breakfast, and always.”

Dorothea laughed. “O Kitty, you are a wonderful creature!” She pinched

Celia’s chin, being in the mood now to think her very winning and

lovely—fit hereafter to be an eternal cherub, and if it were not

doctrinally wrong to say so, hardly more in need of salvation than a

squirrel. “Of course people need not be always talking well. Only one

tells the quality of their minds when they try to talk well.”

“You mean that Sir James tries and fails.”

“I was speaking generally. Why do you catechise me about Sir James? It

is not the object of his life to please me.”

“Now, Dodo, can you really believe that?”

“Certainly. He thinks of me as a future sister—that is all.” Dorothea

had never hinted this before, waiting, from a certain shyness on such

subjects which was mutual between the sisters, until it should be

introduced by some decisive event. Celia blushed, but said at once—

“Pray do not make that mistake any longer, Dodo. When Tantripp was

brushing my hair the other day, she said that Sir James’s man knew from

Mrs. Cadwallader’s maid that Sir James was to marry the eldest Miss

Brooke.”

“How can you let Tantripp talk such gossip to you, Celia?” said

Dorothea, indignantly, not the less angry because details asleep in her

memory were now awakened to confirm the unwelcome revelation. “You must

have asked her questions. It is degrading.”

“I see no harm at all in Tantripp’s talking to me. It is better to hear

what people say. You see what mistakes you make by taking up notions. I

am quite sure that Sir James means to make you an offer; and he

believes that you will accept him, especially since you have been so

pleased with him about the plans. And uncle too—I know he expects it.

Every one can see that Sir James is very much in love with you.”

The revulsion was so strong and painful in Dorothea’s mind that the

tears welled up and flowed abundantly. All her dear plans were

embittered, and she thought with disgust of Sir James’s conceiving that

she recognized him as her lover. There was vexation too on account of

Celia.

“How could he expect it?” she burst forth in her most impetuous manner.

“I have never agreed with him about anything but the cottages: I was

barely polite to him before.”

“But you have been so pleased with him since then; he has begun to feel

quite sure that you are fond of him.”

“Fond of him, Celia! How can you choose such odious expressions?” said

Dorothea, passionately.

“Dear me, Dorothea, I suppose it would be right for you to be fond of a

man whom you accepted for a husband.”

“It is offensive to me to say that Sir James could think I was fond of

him. Besides, it is not the right word for the feeling I must have

towards the man I would accept as a husband.”

“Well, I am sorry for Sir James. I thought it right to tell you,

because you went on as you always do, never looking just where you are,

and treading in the wrong place. You always see what nobody else sees;

it is impossible to satisfy you; yet you never see what is quite plain.

That’s your way, Dodo.” Something certainly gave Celia unusual courage;

and she was not sparing the sister of whom she was occasionally in awe.

Who can tell what just criticisms Murr the Cat may be passing on us

beings of wider speculation?

“It is very painful,” said Dorothea, feeling scourged. “I can have no

more to do with the cottages. I must be uncivil to him. I must tell him

I will have nothing to do with them. It is very painful.” Her eyes

filled again with tears.

“Wait a little. Think about it. You know he is going away for a day or

two to see his sister. There will be nobody besides Lovegood.” Celia

could not help relenting. “Poor Dodo,” she went on, in an amiable

staccato. “It is very hard: it is your favorite \_fad\_ to draw plans.”

“\_Fad\_ to draw plans! Do you think I only care about my

fellow-creatures’ houses in that childish way? I may well make

mistakes. How can one ever do anything nobly Christian, living among

people with such petty thoughts?”

No more was said; Dorothea was too much jarred to recover her temper

and behave so as to show that she admitted any error in herself. She

was disposed rather to accuse the intolerable narrowness and the

purblind conscience of the society around her: and Celia was no longer

the eternal cherub, but a thorn in her spirit, a pink-and-white

nullifidian, worse than any discouraging presence in the “Pilgrim’s

Progress.” The \_fad\_ of drawing plans! What was life worth—what great

faith was possible when the whole effect of one’s actions could be

withered up into such parched rubbish as that? When she got out of the

carriage, her cheeks were pale and her eyelids red. She was an image of

sorrow, and her uncle who met her in the hall would have been alarmed,

if Celia had not been close to her looking so pretty and composed, that

he at once concluded Dorothea’s tears to have their origin in her

excessive religiousness. He had returned, during their absence, from a

journey to the county town, about a petition for the pardon of some

criminal.

“Well, my dears,” he said, kindly, as they went up to kiss him, “I hope

nothing disagreeable has happened while I have been away.”

“No, uncle,” said Celia, “we have been to Freshitt to look at the

cottages. We thought you would have been at home to lunch.”

“I came by Lowick to lunch—you didn’t know I came by Lowick. And I have

brought a couple of pamphlets for you, Dorothea—in the library, you

know; they lie on the table in the library.”

It seemed as if an electric stream went through Dorothea, thrilling her

from despair into expectation. They were pamphlets about the early

Church. The oppression of Celia, Tantripp, and Sir James was shaken

off, and she walked straight to the library. Celia went up-stairs. Mr.

Brooke was detained by a message, but when he re-entered the library,

he found Dorothea seated and already deep in one of the pamphlets which

had some marginal manuscript of Mr. Casaubon’s,—taking it in as eagerly

as she might have taken in the scent of a fresh bouquet after a dry,

hot, dreary walk.

She was getting away from Tipton and Freshitt, and her own sad

liability to tread in the wrong places on her way to the New Jerusalem.

Mr. Brooke sat down in his arm-chair, stretched his legs towards the

wood-fire, which had fallen into a wondrous mass of glowing dice

between the dogs, and rubbed his hands gently, looking very mildly

towards Dorothea, but with a neutral leisurely air, as if he had

nothing particular to say. Dorothea closed her pamphlet, as soon as she

was aware of her uncle’s presence, and rose as if to go. Usually she

would have been interested about her uncle’s merciful errand on behalf

of the criminal, but her late agitation had made her absent-minded.

“I came back by Lowick, you know,” said Mr. Brooke, not as if with any

intention to arrest her departure, but apparently from his usual

tendency to say what he had said before. This fundamental principle of

human speech was markedly exhibited in Mr. Brooke. “I lunched there and

saw Casaubon’s library, and that kind of thing. There’s a sharp air,

driving. Won’t you sit down, my dear? You look cold.”

Dorothea felt quite inclined to accept the invitation. Some times, when

her uncle’s easy way of taking things did not happen to be

exasperating, it was rather soothing. She threw off her mantle and

bonnet, and sat down opposite to him, enjoying the glow, but lifting up

her beautiful hands for a screen. They were not thin hands, or small

hands; but powerful, feminine, maternal hands. She seemed to be holding

them up in propitiation for her passionate desire to know and to think,

which in the unfriendly mediums of Tipton and Freshitt had issued in

crying and red eyelids.

She bethought herself now of the condemned criminal. “What news have

you brought about the sheep-stealer, uncle?”

“What, poor Bunch?—well, it seems we can’t get him off—he is to be

hanged.”

Dorothea’s brow took an expression of reprobation and pity.

“Hanged, you know,” said Mr. Brooke, with a quiet nod. “Poor Romilly!

he would have helped us. I knew Romilly. Casaubon didn’t know Romilly.

He is a little buried in books, you know, Casaubon is.”

“When a man has great studies and is writing a great work, he must of

course give up seeing much of the world. How can he go about making

acquaintances?”

“That’s true. But a man mopes, you know. I have always been a bachelor

too, but I have that sort of disposition that I never moped; it was my

way to go about everywhere and take in everything. I never moped: but I

can see that Casaubon does, you know. He wants a companion—a companion,

you know.”

“It would be a great honor to any one to be his companion,” said

Dorothea, energetically.

“You like him, eh?” said Mr. Brooke, without showing any surprise, or

other emotion. “Well, now, I’ve known Casaubon ten years, ever since he

came to Lowick. But I never got anything out of him—any ideas, you

know. However, he is a tiptop man and may be a bishop—that kind of

thing, you know, if Peel stays in. And he has a very high opinion of

you, my dear.”

Dorothea could not speak.

“The fact is, he has a very high opinion indeed of you. And he speaks

uncommonly well—does Casaubon. He has deferred to me, you not being of

age. In short, I have promised to speak to you, though I told him I

thought there was not much chance. I was bound to tell him that. I

said, my niece is very young, and that kind of thing. But I didn’t

think it necessary to go into everything. However, the long and the

short of it is, that he has asked my permission to make you an offer of

marriage—of marriage, you know,” said Mr. Brooke, with his explanatory

nod. “I thought it better to tell you, my dear.”

No one could have detected any anxiety in Mr. Brooke’s manner, but he

did really wish to know something of his niece’s mind, that, if there

were any need for advice, he might give it in time. What feeling he, as

a magistrate who had taken in so many ideas, could make room for, was

unmixedly kind. Since Dorothea did not speak immediately, he repeated,

“I thought it better to tell you, my dear.”

“Thank you, uncle,” said Dorothea, in a clear unwavering tone. “I am

very grateful to Mr. Casaubon. If he makes me an offer, I shall accept

him. I admire and honor him more than any man I ever saw.”

Mr. Brooke paused a little, and then said in a lingering low tone, “Ah?

… Well! He is a good match in some respects. But now, Chettam is a good

match. And our land lies together. I shall never interfere against your

wishes, my dear. People should have their own way in marriage, and that

sort of thing—up to a certain point, you know. I have always said that,

up to a certain point. I wish you to marry well; and I have good reason

to believe that Chettam wishes to marry you. I mention it, you know.”

“It is impossible that I should ever marry Sir James Chettam,” said

Dorothea. “If he thinks of marrying me, he has made a great mistake.”

“That is it, you see. One never knows. I should have thought Chettam

was just the sort of man a woman would like, now.”

“Pray do not mention him in that light again, uncle,” said Dorothea,

feeling some of her late irritation revive.

Mr. Brooke wondered, and felt that women were an inexhaustible subject

of study, since even he at his age was not in a perfect state of

scientific prediction about them. Here was a fellow like Chettam with

no chance at all.

“Well, but Casaubon, now. There is no hurry—I mean for you. It’s true,

every year will tell upon him. He is over five-and-forty, you know. I

should say a good seven-and-twenty years older than you. To be sure,—if

you like learning and standing, and that sort of thing, we can’t have

everything. And his income is good—he has a handsome property

independent of the Church—his income is good. Still he is not young,

and I must not conceal from you, my dear, that I think his health is

not over-strong. I know nothing else against him.”

“I should not wish to have a husband very near my own age,” said

Dorothea, with grave decision. “I should wish to have a husband who was

above me in judgment and in all knowledge.”

Mr. Brooke repeated his subdued, “Ah?—I thought you had more of your

own opinion than most girls. I thought you liked your own opinion—liked

it, you know.”

“I cannot imagine myself living without some opinions, but I should

wish to have good reasons for them, and a wise man could help me to see

which opinions had the best foundation, and would help me to live

according to them.”

“Very true. You couldn’t put the thing better—couldn’t put it better,

beforehand, you know. But there are oddities in things,” continued Mr.

Brooke, whose conscience was really roused to do the best he could for

his niece on this occasion. “Life isn’t cast in a mould—not cut out by

rule and line, and that sort of thing. I never married myself, and it

will be the better for you and yours. The fact is, I never loved any

one well enough to put myself into a noose for them. It \_is\_ a noose,

you know. Temper, now. There is temper. And a husband likes to be

master.”

“I know that I must expect trials, uncle. Marriage is a state of higher

duties. I never thought of it as mere personal ease,” said poor

Dorothea.

“Well, you are not fond of show, a great establishment, balls, dinners,

that kind of thing. I can see that Casaubon’s ways might suit you

better than Chettam’s. And you shall do as you like, my dear. I would

not hinder Casaubon; I said so at once; for there is no knowing how

anything may turn out. You have not the same tastes as every young

lady; and a clergyman and scholar—who may be a bishop—that kind of

thing—may suit you better than Chettam. Chettam is a good fellow, a

good sound-hearted fellow, you know; but he doesn’t go much into ideas.

I did, when I was his age. But Casaubon’s eyes, now. I think he has

hurt them a little with too much reading.”

“I should be all the happier, uncle, the more room there was for me to

help him,” said Dorothea, ardently.

“You have quite made up your mind, I see. Well, my dear, the fact is, I

have a letter for you in my pocket.” Mr. Brooke handed the letter to

Dorothea, but as she rose to go away, he added, “There is not too much

hurry, my dear. Think about it, you know.”

When Dorothea had left him, he reflected that he had certainly spoken

strongly: he had put the risks of marriage before her in a striking

manner. It was his duty to do so. But as to pretending to be wise for

young people,—no uncle, however much he had travelled in his youth,

absorbed the new ideas, and dined with celebrities now deceased, could

pretend to judge what sort of marriage would turn out well for a young

girl who preferred Casaubon to Chettam. In short, woman was a problem

which, since Mr. Brooke’s mind felt blank before it, could be hardly

less complicated than the revolutions of an irregular solid.

CHAPTER V.

“Hard students are commonly troubled with gowts, catarrhs, rheums,

cachexia, bradypepsia, bad eyes, stone, and collick, crudities,

oppilations, vertigo, winds, consumptions, and all such diseases as

come by over-much sitting: they are most part lean, dry, ill-colored …

and all through immoderate pains and extraordinary studies. If you will

not believe the truth of this, look upon great Tostatus and Thomas

Aquinas’ works; and tell me whether those men took pains.”—BURTON’S

\_Anatomy of Melancholy\_, P. I, s. 2.

This was Mr. Casaubon’s letter.

MY DEAR MISS BROOKE,—I have your guardian’s permission to address you

on a subject than which I have none more at heart. I am not, I trust,

mistaken in the recognition of some deeper correspondence than that of

date in the fact that a consciousness of need in my own life had arisen

contemporaneously with the possibility of my becoming acquainted with

you. For in the first hour of meeting you, I had an impression of your

eminent and perhaps exclusive fitness to supply that need (connected, I

may say, with such activity of the affections as even the

preoccupations of a work too special to be abdicated could not

uninterruptedly dissimulate); and each succeeding opportunity for

observation has given the impression an added depth by convincing me

more emphatically of that fitness which I had preconceived, and thus

evoking more decisively those affections to which I have but now

referred. Our conversations have, I think, made sufficiently clear to

you the tenor of my life and purposes: a tenor unsuited, I am aware, to

the commoner order of minds. But I have discerned in you an elevation

of thought and a capability of devotedness, which I had hitherto not

conceived to be compatible either with the early bloom of youth or with

those graces of sex that may be said at once to win and to confer

distinction when combined, as they notably are in you, with the mental

qualities above indicated. It was, I confess, beyond my hope to meet

with this rare combination of elements both solid and attractive,

adapted to supply aid in graver labors and to cast a charm over vacant

hours; and but for the event of my introduction to you (which, let me

again say, I trust not to be superficially coincident with

foreshadowing needs, but providentially related thereto as stages

towards the completion of a life’s plan), I should presumably have gone

on to the last without any attempt to lighten my solitariness by a

matrimonial union.

Such, my dear Miss Brooke, is the accurate statement of my

feelings; and I rely on your kind indulgence in venturing now to

ask you how far your own are of a nature to confirm my happy

presentiment. To be accepted by you as your husband and the earthly

guardian of your welfare, I should regard as the highest of

providential gifts. In return I can at least offer you an affection

hitherto unwasted, and the faithful consecration of a life which,

however short in the sequel, has no backward pages whereon, if you

choose to turn them, you will find records such as might justly

cause you either bitterness or shame. I await the expression of

your sentiments with an anxiety which it would be the part of

wisdom (were it possible) to divert by a more arduous labor than

usual. But in this order of experience I am still young, and in

looking forward to an unfavorable possibility I cannot but feel

that resignation to solitude will be more difficult after the

temporary illumination of hope.

In any case, I shall remain,

Yours with sincere devotion,

EDWARD CASAUBON.

Dorothea trembled while she read this letter; then she fell on her

knees, buried her face, and sobbed. She could not pray: under the rush

of solemn emotion in which thoughts became vague and images floated

uncertainly, she could but cast herself, with a childlike sense of

reclining, in the lap of a divine consciousness which sustained her

own. She remained in that attitude till it was time to dress for

dinner.

How could it occur to her to examine the letter, to look at it

critically as a profession of love? Her whole soul was possessed by the

fact that a fuller life was opening before her: she was a neophyte

about to enter on a higher grade of initiation. She was going to have

room for the energies which stirred uneasily under the dimness and

pressure of her own ignorance and the petty peremptoriness of the

world’s habits.

Now she would be able to devote herself to large yet definite duties;

now she would be allowed to live continually in the light of a mind

that she could reverence. This hope was not unmixed with the glow of

proud delight—the joyous maiden surprise that she was chosen by the man

whom her admiration had chosen. All Dorothea’s passion was transfused

through a mind struggling towards an ideal life; the radiance of her

transfigured girlhood fell on the first object that came within its

level. The impetus with which inclination became resolution was

heightened by those little events of the day which had roused her

discontent with the actual conditions of her life.

After dinner, when Celia was playing an “air, with variations,” a small

kind of tinkling which symbolized the aesthetic part of the young

ladies’ education, Dorothea went up to her room to answer Mr.

Casaubon’s letter. Why should she defer the answer? She wrote it over

three times, not because she wished to change the wording, but because

her hand was unusually uncertain, and she could not bear that Mr.

Casaubon should think her handwriting bad and illegible. She piqued

herself on writing a hand in which each letter was distinguishable

without any large range of conjecture, and she meant to make much use

of this accomplishment, to save Mr. Casaubon’s eyes. Three times she

wrote.

MY DEAR MR. CASAUBON,—I am very grateful to you for loving me, and

thinking me worthy to be your wife. I can look forward to no better

happiness than that which would be one with yours. If I said more, it

would only be the same thing written out at greater length, for I

cannot now dwell on any other thought than that I may be through life

Yours devotedly,

DOROTHEA BROOKE.

Later in the evening she followed her uncle into the library to give

him the letter, that he might send it in the morning. He was surprised,

but his surprise only issued in a few moments’ silence, during which he

pushed about various objects on his writing-table, and finally stood

with his back to the fire, his glasses on his nose, looking at the

address of Dorothea’s letter.

“Have you thought enough about this, my dear?” he said at last.

“There was no need to think long, uncle. I know of nothing to make me

vacillate. If I changed my mind, it must be because of something

important and entirely new to me.”

“Ah!—then you have accepted him? Then Chettam has no chance? Has

Chettam offended you—offended you, you know? What is it you don’t like

in Chettam?”

“There is nothing that I like in him,” said Dorothea, rather

impetuously.

Mr. Brooke threw his head and shoulders backward as if some one had

thrown a light missile at him. Dorothea immediately felt some

self-rebuke, and said—

“I mean in the light of a husband. He is very kind, I think—really very

good about the cottages. A well-meaning man.”

“But you must have a scholar, and that sort of thing? Well, it lies a

little in our family. I had it myself—that love of knowledge, and going

into everything—a little too much—it took me too far; though that sort

of thing doesn’t often run in the female-line; or it runs underground

like the rivers in Greece, you know—it comes out in the sons. Clever

sons, clever mothers. I went a good deal into that, at one time.

However, my dear, I have always said that people should do as they like

in these things, up to a certain point. I couldn’t, as your guardian,

have consented to a bad match. But Casaubon stands well: his position

is good. I am afraid Chettam will be hurt, though, and Mrs. Cadwallader

will blame me.”

That evening, of course, Celia knew nothing of what had happened. She

attributed Dorothea’s abstracted manner, and the evidence of further

crying since they had got home, to the temper she had been in about Sir

James Chettam and the buildings, and was careful not to give further

offence: having once said what she wanted to say, Celia had no

disposition to recur to disagreeable subjects. It had been her nature

when a child never to quarrel with any one—only to observe with wonder

that they quarrelled with her, and looked like turkey-cocks; whereupon

she was ready to play at cat’s cradle with them whenever they recovered

themselves. And as to Dorothea, it had always been her way to find

something wrong in her sister’s words, though Celia inwardly protested

that she always said just how things were, and nothing else: she never

did and never could put words together out of her own head. But the

best of Dodo was, that she did not keep angry for long together. Now,

though they had hardly spoken to each other all the evening, yet when

Celia put by her work, intending to go to bed, a proceeding in which

she was always much the earlier, Dorothea, who was seated on a low

stool, unable to occupy herself except in meditation, said, with the

musical intonation which in moments of deep but quiet feeling made her

speech like a fine bit of recitative—

“Celia, dear, come and kiss me,” holding her arms open as she spoke.

Celia knelt down to get the right level and gave her little butterfly

kiss, while Dorothea encircled her with gentle arms and pressed her

lips gravely on each cheek in turn.

“Don’t sit up, Dodo, you are so pale to-night: go to bed soon,” said

Celia, in a comfortable way, without any touch of pathos.

“No, dear, I am very, very happy,” said Dorothea, fervently.

“So much the better,” thought Celia. “But how strangely Dodo goes from

one extreme to the other.”

The next day, at luncheon, the butler, handing something to Mr. Brooke,

said, “Jonas is come back, sir, and has brought this letter.”

Mr. Brooke read the letter, and then, nodding toward Dorothea, said,

“Casaubon, my dear: he will be here to dinner; he didn’t wait to write

more—didn’t wait, you know.”

It could not seem remarkable to Celia that a dinner guest should be

announced to her sister beforehand, but, her eyes following the same

direction as her uncle’s, she was struck with the peculiar effect of

the announcement on Dorothea. It seemed as if something like the

reflection of a white sunlit wing had passed across her features,

ending in one of her rare blushes. For the first time it entered into

Celia’s mind that there might be something more between Mr. Casaubon

and her sister than his delight in bookish talk and her delight in

listening. Hitherto she had classed the admiration for this “ugly” and

learned acquaintance with the admiration for Monsieur Liret at

Lausanne, also ugly and learned. Dorothea had never been tired of

listening to old Monsieur Liret when Celia’s feet were as cold as

possible, and when it had really become dreadful to see the skin of his

bald head moving about. Why then should her enthusiasm not extend to

Mr. Casaubon simply in the same way as to Monsieur Liret? And it seemed

probable that all learned men had a sort of schoolmaster’s view of

young people.

But now Celia was really startled at the suspicion which had darted

into her mind. She was seldom taken by surprise in this way, her

marvellous quickness in observing a certain order of signs generally

preparing her to expect such outward events as she had an interest in.

Not that she now imagined Mr. Casaubon to be already an accepted lover:

she had only begun to feel disgust at the possibility that anything in

Dorothea’s mind could tend towards such an issue. Here was something

really to vex her about Dodo: it was all very well not to accept Sir

James Chettam, but the idea of marrying Mr. Casaubon! Celia felt a sort

of shame mingled with a sense of the ludicrous. But perhaps Dodo, if

she were really bordering on such an extravagance, might be turned away

from it: experience had often shown that her impressibility might be

calculated on. The day was damp, and they were not going to walk out,

so they both went up to their sitting-room; and there Celia observed

that Dorothea, instead of settling down with her usual diligent

interest to some occupation, simply leaned her elbow on an open book

and looked out of the window at the great cedar silvered with the damp.

She herself had taken up the making of a toy for the curate’s children,

and was not going to enter on any subject too precipitately.

Dorothea was in fact thinking that it was desirable for Celia to know

of the momentous change in Mr. Casaubon’s position since he had last

been in the house: it did not seem fair to leave her in ignorance of

what would necessarily affect her attitude towards him; but it was

impossible not to shrink from telling her. Dorothea accused herself of

some meanness in this timidity: it was always odious to her to have any

small fears or contrivances about her actions, but at this moment she

was seeking the highest aid possible that she might not dread the

corrosiveness of Celia’s pretty carnally minded prose. Her reverie was

broken, and the difficulty of decision banished, by Celia’s small and

rather guttural voice speaking in its usual tone, of a remark aside or

a “by the bye.”

“Is any one else coming to dine besides Mr. Casaubon?”

“Not that I know of.”

“I hope there is some one else. Then I shall not hear him eat his soup

so.”

“What is there remarkable about his soup-eating?”

“Really, Dodo, can’t you hear how he scrapes his spoon? And he always

blinks before he speaks. I don’t know whether Locke blinked, but I’m

sure I am sorry for those who sat opposite to him if he did.”

“Celia,” said Dorothea, with emphatic gravity, “pray don’t make any

more observations of that kind.”

“Why not? They are quite true,” returned Celia, who had her reasons for

persevering, though she was beginning to be a little afraid.

“Many things are true which only the commonest minds observe.”

“Then I think the commonest minds must be rather useful. I think it is

a pity Mr. Casaubon’s mother had not a commoner mind: she might have

taught him better.” Celia was inwardly frightened, and ready to run

away, now she had hurled this light javelin.

Dorothea’s feelings had gathered to an avalanche, and there could be no

further preparation.

“It is right to tell you, Celia, that I am engaged to marry Mr.

Casaubon.”

Perhaps Celia had never turned so pale before. The paper man she was

making would have had his leg injured, but for her habitual care of

whatever she held in her hands. She laid the fragile figure down at

once, and sat perfectly still for a few moments. When she spoke there

was a tear gathering.

“Oh, Dodo, I hope you will be happy.” Her sisterly tenderness could not

but surmount other feelings at this moment, and her fears were the

fears of affection.

Dorothea was still hurt and agitated.

“It is quite decided, then?” said Celia, in an awed under tone. “And

uncle knows?”

“I have accepted Mr. Casaubon’s offer. My uncle brought me the letter

that contained it; he knew about it beforehand.”

“I beg your pardon, if I have said anything to hurt you, Dodo,” said

Celia, with a slight sob. She never could have thought that she should

feel as she did. There was something funereal in the whole affair, and

Mr. Casaubon seemed to be the officiating clergyman, about whom it

would be indecent to make remarks.

“Never mind, Kitty, do not grieve. We should never admire the same

people. I often offend in something of the same way; I am apt to speak

too strongly of those who don’t please me.”

In spite of this magnanimity Dorothea was still smarting: perhaps as

much from Celia’s subdued astonishment as from her small criticisms. Of

course all the world round Tipton would be out of sympathy with this

marriage. Dorothea knew of no one who thought as she did about life and

its best objects.

Nevertheless before the evening was at an end she was very happy. In an

hour’s \_tête-à-tête\_ with Mr. Casaubon she talked to him with more

freedom than she had ever felt before, even pouring out her joy at the

thought of devoting herself to him, and of learning how she might best

share and further all his great ends. Mr. Casaubon was touched with an

unknown delight (what man would not have been?) at this childlike

unrestrained ardor: he was not surprised (what lover would have been?)

that he should be the object of it.

“My dear young lady—Miss Brooke—Dorothea!” he said, pressing her hand

between his hands, “this is a happiness greater than I had ever

imagined to be in reserve for me. That I should ever meet with a mind

and person so rich in the mingled graces which could render marriage

desirable, was far indeed from my conception. You have all—nay, more

than all—those qualities which I have ever regarded as the

characteristic excellences of womanhood. The great charm of your sex is

its capability of an ardent self-sacrificing affection, and herein we

see its fitness to round and complete the existence of our own.

Hitherto I have known few pleasures save of the severer kind: my

satisfactions have been those of the solitary student. I have been

little disposed to gather flowers that would wither in my hand, but now

I shall pluck them with eagerness, to place them in your bosom.”

No speech could have been more thoroughly honest in its intention: the

frigid rhetoric at the end was as sincere as the bark of a dog, or the

cawing of an amorous rook. Would it not be rash to conclude that there

was no passion behind those sonnets to Delia which strike us as the

thin music of a mandolin?

Dorothea’s faith supplied all that Mr. Casaubon’s words seemed to leave

unsaid: what believer sees a disturbing omission or infelicity? The

text, whether of prophet or of poet, expands for whatever we can put

into it, and even his bad grammar is sublime.

“I am very ignorant—you will quite wonder at my ignorance,” said

Dorothea. “I have so many thoughts that may be quite mistaken; and now

I shall be able to tell them all to you, and ask you about them. But,”

she added, with rapid imagination of Mr. Casaubon’s probable feeling,

“I will not trouble you too much; only when you are inclined to listen

to me. You must often be weary with the pursuit of subjects in your own

track. I shall gain enough if you will take me with you there.”

“How should I be able now to persevere in any path without your

companionship?” said Mr. Casaubon, kissing her candid brow, and feeling

that heaven had vouchsafed him a blessing in every way suited to his

peculiar wants. He was being unconsciously wrought upon by the charms

of a nature which was entirely without hidden calculations either for

immediate effects or for remoter ends. It was this which made Dorothea

so childlike, and, according to some judges, so stupid, with all her

reputed cleverness; as, for example, in the present case of throwing

herself, metaphorically speaking, at Mr. Casaubon’s feet, and kissing

his unfashionable shoe-ties as if he were a Protestant Pope. She was

not in the least teaching Mr. Casaubon to ask if he were good enough

for her, but merely asking herself anxiously how she could be good

enough for Mr. Casaubon. Before he left the next day it had been

decided that the marriage should take place within six weeks. Why not?

Mr. Casaubon’s house was ready. It was not a parsonage, but a

considerable mansion, with much land attached to it. The parsonage was

inhabited by the curate, who did all the duty except preaching the

morning sermon.

CHAPTER VI.

My lady’s tongue is like the meadow blades,

That cut you stroking them with idle hand.

Nice cutting is her function: she divides

With spiritual edge the millet-seed,

And makes intangible savings.

As Mr. Casaubon’s carriage was passing out of the gateway, it arrested

the entrance of a pony phaeton driven by a lady with a servant seated

behind. It was doubtful whether the recognition had been mutual, for

Mr. Casaubon was looking absently before him; but the lady was

quick-eyed, and threw a nod and a “How do you do?” in the nick of time.

In spite of her shabby bonnet and very old Indian shawl, it was plain

that the lodge-keeper regarded her as an important personage, from the

low curtsy which was dropped on the entrance of the small phaeton.

“Well, Mrs. Fitchett, how are your fowls laying now?” said the

high-colored, dark-eyed lady, with the clearest chiselled utterance.

“Pretty well for laying, madam, but they’ve ta’en to eating their eggs:

I’ve no peace o’ mind with ’em at all.”

“Oh, the cannibals! Better sell them cheap at once. What will you sell

them a couple? One can’t eat fowls of a bad character at a high price.”

“Well, madam, half-a-crown: I couldn’t let ’em go, not under.”

“Half-a-crown, these times! Come now—for the Rector’s chicken-broth on

a Sunday. He has consumed all ours that I can spare. You are half paid

with the sermon, Mrs. Fitchett, remember that. Take a pair of

tumbler-pigeons for them—little beauties. You must come and see them.

You have no tumblers among your pigeons.”

“Well, madam, Master Fitchett shall go and see ’em after work. He’s

very hot on new sorts; to oblige you.”

“Oblige me! It will be the best bargain he ever made. A pair of church

pigeons for a couple of wicked Spanish fowls that eat their own eggs!

Don’t you and Fitchett boast too much, that is all!”

The phaeton was driven onwards with the last words, leaving Mrs.

Fitchett laughing and shaking her head slowly, with an interjectional

“Sure\_ly\_, sure\_ly\_!”—from which it might be inferred that she would

have found the country-side somewhat duller if the Rector’s lady had

been less free-spoken and less of a skinflint. Indeed, both the farmers

and laborers in the parishes of Freshitt and Tipton would have felt a

sad lack of conversation but for the stories about what Mrs.

Cadwallader said and did: a lady of immeasurably high birth, descended,

as it were, from unknown earls, dim as the crowd of heroic shades—who

pleaded poverty, pared down prices, and cut jokes in the most

companionable manner, though with a turn of tongue that let you know

who she was. Such a lady gave a neighborliness to both rank and

religion, and mitigated the bitterness of uncommuted tithe. A much more

exemplary character with an infusion of sour dignity would not have

furthered their comprehension of the Thirty-nine Articles, and would

have been less socially uniting.

Mr. Brooke, seeing Mrs. Cadwallader’s merits from a different point of

view, winced a little when her name was announced in the library, where

he was sitting alone.

“I see you have had our Lowick Cicero here,” she said, seating herself

comfortably, throwing back her wraps, and showing a thin but well-built

figure. “I suspect you and he are brewing some bad polities, else you

would not be seeing so much of the lively man. I shall inform against

you: remember you are both suspicious characters since you took Peel’s

side about the Catholic Bill. I shall tell everybody that you are going

to put up for Middlemarch on the Whig side when old Pinkerton resigns,

and that Casaubon is going to help you in an underhand manner: going to

bribe the voters with pamphlets, and throw open the public-houses to

distribute them. Come, confess!”

“Nothing of the sort,” said Mr. Brooke, smiling and rubbing his

eye-glasses, but really blushing a little at the impeachment. “Casaubon

and I don’t talk politics much. He doesn’t care much about the

philanthropic side of things; punishments, and that kind of thing. He

only cares about Church questions. That is not my line of action, you

know.”

“Ra-a-ther too much, my friend. I have heard of your doings. Who was it

that sold his bit of land to the Papists at Middlemarch? I believe you

bought it on purpose. You are a perfect Guy Faux. See if you are not

burnt in effigy this 5th of November coming. Humphrey would not come to

quarrel with you about it, so I am come.”

“Very good. I was prepared to be persecuted for not persecuting—not

persecuting, you know.”

“There you go! That is a piece of clap-trap you have got ready for the

hustings. Now, \_do not\_ let them lure you to the hustings, my dear Mr.

Brooke. A man always makes a fool of himself, speechifying: there’s no

excuse but being on the right side, so that you can ask a blessing on

your humming and hawing. You will lose yourself, I forewarn you. You

will make a Saturday pie of all parties’ opinions, and be pelted by

everybody.”

“That is what I expect, you know,” said Mr. Brooke, not wishing to

betray how little he enjoyed this prophetic sketch—“what I expect as an

independent man. As to the Whigs, a man who goes with the thinkers is

not likely to be hooked on by any party. He may go with them up to a

certain point—up to a certain point, you know. But that is what you

ladies never understand.”

“Where your certain point is? No. I should like to be told how a man

can have any certain point when he belongs to no party—leading a roving

life, and never letting his friends know his address. ‘Nobody knows

where Brooke will be—there’s no counting on Brooke’—that is what people

say of you, to be quite frank. Now, do turn respectable. How will you

like going to Sessions with everybody looking shy on you, and you with

a bad conscience and an empty pocket?”

“I don’t pretend to argue with a lady on politics,” said Mr. Brooke,

with an air of smiling indifference, but feeling rather unpleasantly

conscious that this attack of Mrs. Cadwallader’s had opened the

defensive campaign to which certain rash steps had exposed him. “Your

sex are not thinkers, you know—\_varium et mutabile semper\_—that kind of

thing. You don’t know Virgil. I knew”—Mr. Brooke reflected in time that

he had not had the personal acquaintance of the Augustan poet—“I was

going to say, poor Stoddart, you know. That was what \_he\_ said. You

ladies are always against an independent attitude—a man’s caring for

nothing but truth, and that sort of thing. And there is no part of the

county where opinion is narrower than it is here—I don’t mean to throw

stones, you know, but somebody is wanted to take the independent line;

and if I don’t take it, who will?”

“Who? Why, any upstart who has got neither blood nor position. People

of standing should consume their independent nonsense at home, not hawk

it about. And you! who are going to marry your niece, as good as your

daughter, to one of our best men. Sir James would be cruelly annoyed:

it will be too hard on him if you turn round now and make yourself a

Whig sign-board.”

Mr. Brooke again winced inwardly, for Dorothea’s engagement had no

sooner been decided, than he had thought of Mrs. Cadwallader’s

prospective taunts. It might have been easy for ignorant observers to

say, “Quarrel with Mrs. Cadwallader;” but where is a country gentleman

to go who quarrels with his oldest neighbors? Who could taste the fine

flavor in the name of Brooke if it were delivered casually, like wine

without a seal? Certainly a man can only be cosmopolitan up to a

certain point.

“I hope Chettam and I shall always be good friends; but I am sorry to

say there is no prospect of his marrying my niece,” said Mr. Brooke,

much relieved to see through the window that Celia was coming in.

“Why not?” said Mrs. Cadwallader, with a sharp note of surprise. “It is

hardly a fortnight since you and I were talking about it.”

“My niece has chosen another suitor—has chosen him, you know. I have

had nothing to do with it. I should have preferred Chettam; and I

should have said Chettam was the man any girl would have chosen. But

there is no accounting for these things. Your sex is capricious, you

know.”

“Why, whom do you mean to say that you are going to let her marry?”

Mrs. Cadwallader’s mind was rapidly surveying the possibilities of

choice for Dorothea.

But here Celia entered, blooming from a walk in the garden, and the

greeting with her delivered Mr. Brooke from the necessity of answering

immediately. He got up hastily, and saying, “By the way, I must speak

to Wright about the horses,” shuffled quickly out of the room.

“My dear child, what is this?—this about your sister’s engagement?”

said Mrs. Cadwallader.

“She is engaged to marry Mr. Casaubon,” said Celia, resorting, as

usual, to the simplest statement of fact, and enjoying this opportunity

of speaking to the Rector’s wife alone.

“This is frightful. How long has it been going on?”

“I only knew of it yesterday. They are to be married in six weeks.”

“Well, my dear, I wish you joy of your brother-in-law.”

“I am so sorry for Dorothea.”

“Sorry! It is her doing, I suppose.”

“Yes; she says Mr. Casaubon has a great soul.”

“With all my heart.”

“Oh, Mrs. Cadwallader, I don’t think it can be nice to marry a man with

a great soul.”

“Well, my dear, take warning. You know the look of one now; when the

next comes and wants to marry you, don’t you accept him.”

“I’m sure I never should.”

“No; one such in a family is enough. So your sister never cared about

Sir James Chettam? What would you have said to \_him\_ for a

brother-in-law?”

“I should have liked that very much. I am sure he would have been a

good husband. Only,” Celia added, with a slight blush (she sometimes

seemed to blush as she breathed), “I don’t think he would have suited

Dorothea.”

“Not high-flown enough?”

“Dodo is very strict. She thinks so much about everything, and is so

particular about what one says. Sir James never seemed to please her.”

“She must have encouraged him, I am sure. That is not very creditable.”

“Please don’t be angry with Dodo; she does not see things. She thought

so much about the cottages, and she was rude to Sir James sometimes;

but he is so kind, he never noticed it.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Cadwallader, putting on her shawl, and rising, as if

in haste, “I must go straight to Sir James and break this to him. He

will have brought his mother back by this time, and I must call. Your

uncle will never tell him. We are all disappointed, my dear. Young

people should think of their families in marrying. I set a bad

example—married a poor clergyman, and made myself a pitiable object

among the De Bracys—obliged to get my coals by stratagem, and pray to

heaven for my salad oil. However, Casaubon has money enough; I must do

him that justice. As to his blood, I suppose the family quarterings are

three cuttle-fish sable, and a commentator rampant. By the bye, before

I go, my dear, I must speak to your Mrs. Carter about pastry. I want to

send my young cook to learn of her. Poor people with four children,

like us, you know, can’t afford to keep a good cook. I have no doubt

Mrs. Carter will oblige me. Sir James’s cook is a perfect dragon.”

In less than an hour, Mrs. Cadwallader had circumvented Mrs. Carter and

driven to Freshitt Hall, which was not far from her own parsonage, her

husband being resident in Freshitt and keeping a curate in Tipton.

Sir James Chettam had returned from the short journey which had kept

him absent for a couple of days, and had changed his dress, intending

to ride over to Tipton Grange. His horse was standing at the door when

Mrs. Cadwallader drove up, and he immediately appeared there himself,

whip in hand. Lady Chettam had not yet returned, but Mrs. Cadwallader’s

errand could not be despatched in the presence of grooms, so she asked

to be taken into the conservatory close by, to look at the new plants;

and on coming to a contemplative stand, she said—

“I have a great shock for you; I hope you are not so far gone in love

as you pretended to be.”

It was of no use protesting against Mrs. Cadwallader’s way of putting

things. But Sir James’s countenance changed a little. He felt a vague

alarm.

“I do believe Brooke is going to expose himself after all. I accused

him of meaning to stand for Middlemarch on the Liberal side, and he

looked silly and never denied it—talked about the independent line, and

the usual nonsense.”

“Is that all?” said Sir James, much relieved.

“Why,” rejoined Mrs. Cadwallader, with a sharper note, “you don’t mean

to say that you would like him to turn public man in that way—making a

sort of political Cheap Jack of himself?”

“He might be dissuaded, I should think. He would not like the expense.”

“That is what I told him. He is vulnerable to reason there—always a few

grains of common-sense in an ounce of miserliness. Miserliness is a

capital quality to run in families; it’s the safe side for madness to

dip on. And there must be a little crack in the Brooke family, else we

should not see what we are to see.”

“What? Brooke standing for Middlemarch?”

“Worse than that. I really feel a little responsible. I always told you

Miss Brooke would be such a fine match. I knew there was a great deal

of nonsense in her—a flighty sort of Methodistical stuff. But these

things wear out of girls. However, I am taken by surprise for once.”

“What do you mean, Mrs. Cadwallader?” said Sir James. His fear lest

Miss Brooke should have run away to join the Moravian Brethren, or some

preposterous sect unknown to good society, was a little allayed by the

knowledge that Mrs. Cadwallader always made the worst of things. “What

has happened to Miss Brooke? Pray speak out.”

“Very well. She is engaged to be married.” Mrs. Cadwallader paused a

few moments, observing the deeply hurt expression in her friend’s face,

which he was trying to conceal by a nervous smile, while he whipped his

boot; but she soon added, “Engaged to Casaubon.”

Sir James let his whip fall and stooped to pick it up. Perhaps his face

had never before gathered so much concentrated disgust as when he

turned to Mrs. Cadwallader and repeated, “Casaubon?”

“Even so. You know my errand now.”

“Good God! It is horrible! He is no better than a mummy!” (The point of

view has to be allowed for, as that of a blooming and disappointed

rival.)

“She says, he is a great soul.—A great bladder for dried peas to rattle

in!” said Mrs. Cadwallader.

“What business has an old bachelor like that to marry?” said Sir James.

“He has one foot in the grave.”

“He means to draw it out again, I suppose.”

“Brooke ought not to allow it: he should insist on its being put off

till she is of age. She would think better of it then. What is a

guardian for?”

“As if you could ever squeeze a resolution out of Brooke!”

“Cadwallader might talk to him.”

“Not he! Humphrey finds everybody charming. I never can get him to

abuse Casaubon. He will even speak well of the bishop, though I tell

him it is unnatural in a beneficed clergyman; what can one do with a

husband who attends so little to the decencies? I hide it as well as I

can by abusing everybody myself. Come, come, cheer up! you are well rid

of Miss Brooke, a girl who would have been requiring you to see the

stars by daylight. Between ourselves, little Celia is worth two of her,

and likely after all to be the better match. For this marriage to

Casaubon is as good as going to a nunnery.”

“Oh, on my own account—it is for Miss Brooke’s sake I think her friends

should try to use their influence.”

“Well, Humphrey doesn’t know yet. But when I tell him, you may depend

on it he will say, ‘Why not? Casaubon is a good fellow—and young—young

enough.’ These charitable people never know vinegar from wine till they

have swallowed it and got the colic. However, if I were a man I should

prefer Celia, especially when Dorothea was gone. The truth is, you have

been courting one and have won the other. I can see that she admires

you almost as much as a man expects to be admired. If it were any one

but me who said so, you might think it exaggeration. Good-by!”

Sir James handed Mrs. Cadwallader to the phaeton, and then jumped on

his horse. He was not going to renounce his ride because of his

friend’s unpleasant news—only to ride the faster in some other

direction than that of Tipton Grange.

Now, why on earth should Mrs. Cadwallader have been at all busy about

Miss Brooke’s marriage; and why, when one match that she liked to think

she had a hand in was frustrated, should she have straightway contrived

the preliminaries of another? Was there any ingenious plot, any

hide-and-seek course of action, which might be detected by a careful

telescopic watch? Not at all: a telescope might have swept the parishes

of Tipton and Freshitt, the whole area visited by Mrs. Cadwallader in

her phaeton, without witnessing any interview that could excite

suspicion, or any scene from which she did not return with the same

unperturbed keenness of eye and the same high natural color. In fact,

if that convenient vehicle had existed in the days of the Seven Sages,

one of them would doubtless have remarked, that you can know little of

women by following them about in their pony-phaetons. Even with a

microscope directed on a water-drop we find ourselves making

interpretations which turn out to be rather coarse; for whereas under a

weak lens you may seem to see a creature exhibiting an active voracity

into which other smaller creatures actively play as if they were so

many animated tax-pennies, a stronger lens reveals to you certain

tiniest hairlets which make vortices for these victims while the

swallower waits passively at his receipt of custom. In this way,

metaphorically speaking, a strong lens applied to Mrs. Cadwallader’s

match-making will show a play of minute causes producing what may be

called thought and speech vortices to bring her the sort of food she

needed. Her life was rurally simple, quite free from secrets either

foul, dangerous, or otherwise important, and not consciously affected

by the great affairs of the world. All the more did the affairs of the

great world interest her, when communicated in the letters of high-born

relations: the way in which fascinating younger sons had gone to the

dogs by marrying their mistresses; the fine old-blooded idiocy of young

Lord Tapir, and the furious gouty humors of old Lord Megatherium; the

exact crossing of genealogies which had brought a coronet into a new

branch and widened the relations of scandal,—these were topics of which

she retained details with the utmost accuracy, and reproduced them in

an excellent pickle of epigrams, which she herself enjoyed the more

because she believed as unquestionably in birth and no-birth as she did

in game and vermin. She would never have disowned any one on the ground

of poverty: a De Bracy reduced to take his dinner in a basin would have

seemed to her an example of pathos worth exaggerating, and I fear his

aristocratic vices would not have horrified her. But her feeling

towards the vulgar rich was a sort of religious hatred: they had

probably made all their money out of high retail prices, and Mrs.

Cadwallader detested high prices for everything that was not paid in

kind at the Rectory: such people were no part of God’s design in making

the world; and their accent was an affliction to the ears. A town where

such monsters abounded was hardly more than a sort of low comedy, which

could not be taken account of in a well-bred scheme of the universe.

Let any lady who is inclined to be hard on Mrs. Cadwallader inquire

into the comprehensiveness of her own beautiful views, and be quite

sure that they afford accommodation for all the lives which have the

honor to coexist with hers.

With such a mind, active as phosphorus, biting everything that came

near into the form that suited it, how could Mrs. Cadwallader feel that

the Miss Brookes and their matrimonial prospects were alien to her?

especially as it had been the habit of years for her to scold Mr.

Brooke with the friendliest frankness, and let him know in confidence

that she thought him a poor creature. From the first arrival of the

young ladies in Tipton she had prearranged Dorothea’s marriage with Sir

James, and if it had taken place would have been quite sure that it was

her doing: that it should not take place after she had preconceived it,

caused her an irritation which every thinker will sympathize with. She

was the diplomatist of Tipton and Freshitt, and for anything to happen

in spite of her was an offensive irregularity. As to freaks like this

of Miss Brooke’s, Mrs. Cadwallader had no patience with them, and now

saw that her opinion of this girl had been infected with some of her

husband’s weak charitableness: those Methodistical whims, that air of

being more religious than the rector and curate together, came from a

deeper and more constitutional disease than she had been willing to

believe.

“However,” said Mrs. Cadwallader, first to herself and afterwards to

her husband, “I throw her over: there was a chance, if she had married

Sir James, of her becoming a sane, sensible woman. He would never have

contradicted her, and when a woman is not contradicted, she has no

motive for obstinacy in her absurdities. But now I wish her joy of her

hair shirt.”

It followed that Mrs. Cadwallader must decide on another match for Sir

James, and having made up her mind that it was to be the younger Miss

Brooke, there could not have been a more skilful move towards the

success of her plan than her hint to the baronet that he had made an

impression on Celia’s heart. For he was not one of those gentlemen who

languish after the unattainable Sappho’s apple that laughs from the

topmost bough—the charms which

“Smile like the knot of cowslips on the cliff,

Not to be come at by the willing hand.”

He had no sonnets to write, and it could not strike him agreeably that

he was not an object of preference to the woman whom he had preferred.

Already the knowledge that Dorothea had chosen Mr. Casaubon had bruised

his attachment and relaxed its hold. Although Sir James was a

sportsman, he had some other feelings towards women than towards grouse

and foxes, and did not regard his future wife in the light of prey,

valuable chiefly for the excitements of the chase. Neither was he so

well acquainted with the habits of primitive races as to feel that an

ideal combat for her, tomahawk in hand, so to speak, was necessary to

the historical continuity of the marriage-tie. On the contrary, having

the amiable vanity which knits us to those who are fond of us, and

disinclines us to those who are indifferent, and also a good grateful

nature, the mere idea that a woman had a kindness towards him spun

little threads of tenderness from out his heart towards hers.

Thus it happened, that after Sir James had ridden rather fast for half

an hour in a direction away from Tipton Grange, he slackened his pace,

and at last turned into a road which would lead him back by a shorter

cut. Various feelings wrought in him the determination after all to go

to the Grange to-day as if nothing new had happened. He could not help

rejoicing that he had never made the offer and been rejected; mere

friendly politeness required that he should call to see Dorothea about

the cottages, and now happily Mrs. Cadwallader had prepared him to

offer his congratulations, if necessary, without showing too much

awkwardness. He really did not like it: giving up Dorothea was very

painful to him; but there was something in the resolve to make this

visit forthwith and conquer all show of feeling, which was a sort of

file-biting and counter-irritant. And without his distinctly

recognizing the impulse, there certainly was present in him the sense

that Celia would be there, and that he should pay her more attention

than he had done before.

We mortals, men and women, devour many a disappointment between

breakfast and dinner-time; keep back the tears and look a little pale

about the lips, and in answer to inquiries say, “Oh, nothing!” Pride

helps us; and pride is not a bad thing when it only urges us to hide

our own hurts—not to hurt others.

CHAPTER VII.

“Piacer e popone

Vuol la sua stagione.”

—\_Italian Proverb\_.

Mr. Casaubon, as might be expected, spent a great deal of his time at

the Grange in these weeks, and the hindrance which courtship occasioned

to the progress of his great work—the Key to all Mythologies—naturally

made him look forward the more eagerly to the happy termination of

courtship. But he had deliberately incurred the hindrance, having made

up his mind that it was now time for him to adorn his life with the

graces of female companionship, to irradiate the gloom which fatigue

was apt to hang over the intervals of studious labor with the play of

female fancy, and to secure in this, his culminating age, the solace of

female tendance for his declining years. Hence he determined to abandon

himself to the stream of feeling, and perhaps was surprised to find

what an exceedingly shallow rill it was. As in droughty regions baptism

by immersion could only be performed symbolically, Mr. Casaubon found

that sprinkling was the utmost approach to a plunge which his stream

would afford him; and he concluded that the poets had much exaggerated

the force of masculine passion. Nevertheless, he observed with pleasure

that Miss Brooke showed an ardent submissive affection which promised

to fulfil his most agreeable previsions of marriage. It had once or

twice crossed his mind that possibly there was some deficiency in

Dorothea to account for the moderation of his abandonment; but he was

unable to discern the deficiency, or to figure to himself a woman who

would have pleased him better; so that there was clearly no reason to

fall back upon but the exaggerations of human tradition.

“Could I not be preparing myself now to be more useful?” said Dorothea

to him, one morning, early in the time of courtship; “could I not learn

to read Latin and Greek aloud to you, as Milton’s daughters did to

their father, without understanding what they read?”

“I fear that would be wearisome to you,” said Mr. Casaubon, smiling;

“and, indeed, if I remember rightly, the young women you have mentioned

regarded that exercise in unknown tongues as a ground for rebellion

against the poet.”

“Yes; but in the first place they were very naughty girls, else they

would have been proud to minister to such a father; and in the second

place they might have studied privately and taught themselves to

understand what they read, and then it would have been interesting. I

hope you don’t expect me to be naughty and stupid?”

“I expect you to be all that an exquisite young lady can be in every

possible relation of life. Certainly it might be a great advantage if

you were able to copy the Greek character, and to that end it were well

to begin with a little reading.”

Dorothea seized this as a precious permission. She would not have asked

Mr. Casaubon at once to teach her the languages, dreading of all things

to be tiresome instead of helpful; but it was not entirely out of

devotion to her future husband that she wished to know Latin and Greek.

Those provinces of masculine knowledge seemed to her a standing-ground

from which all truth could be seen more truly. As it was, she

constantly doubted her own conclusions, because she felt her own

ignorance: how could she be confident that one-roomed cottages were not

for the glory of God, when men who knew the classics appeared to

conciliate indifference to the cottages with zeal for the glory?

Perhaps even Hebrew might be necessary—at least the alphabet and a few

roots—in order to arrive at the core of things, and judge soundly on

the social duties of the Christian. And she had not reached that point

of renunciation at which she would have been satisfied with having a

wise husband: she wished, poor child, to be wise herself. Miss Brooke

was certainly very naive with all her alleged cleverness. Celia, whose

mind had never been thought too powerful, saw the emptiness of other

people’s pretensions much more readily. To have in general but little

feeling, seems to be the only security against feeling too much on any

particular occasion.

However, Mr. Casaubon consented to listen and teach for an hour

together, like a schoolmaster of little boys, or rather like a lover,

to whom a mistress’s elementary ignorance and difficulties have a

touching fitness. Few scholars would have disliked teaching the

alphabet under such circumstances. But Dorothea herself was a little

shocked and discouraged at her own stupidity, and the answers she got

to some timid questions about the value of the Greek accents gave her a

painful suspicion that here indeed there might be secrets not capable

of explanation to a woman’s reason.

Mr. Brooke had no doubt on that point, and expressed himself with his

usual strength upon it one day that he came into the library while the

reading was going forward.

“Well, but now, Casaubon, such deep studies, classics, mathematics,

that kind of thing, are too taxing for a woman—too taxing, you know.”

“Dorothea is learning to read the characters simply,” said Mr.

Casaubon, evading the question. “She had the very considerate thought

of saving my eyes.”

“Ah, well, without understanding, you know—that may not be so bad. But

there is a lightness about the feminine mind—a touch and go—music, the

fine arts, that kind of thing—they should study those up to a certain

point, women should; but in a light way, you know. A woman should be

able to sit down and play you or sing you a good old English tune. That

is what I like; though I have heard most things—been at the opera in

Vienna: Gluck, Mozart, everything of that sort. But I’m a conservative

in music—it’s not like ideas, you know. I stick to the good old tunes.”

“Mr. Casaubon is not fond of the piano, and I am very glad he is not,”

said Dorothea, whose slight regard for domestic music and feminine fine

art must be forgiven her, considering the small tinkling and smearing

in which they chiefly consisted at that dark period. She smiled and

looked up at her betrothed with grateful eyes. If he had always been

asking her to play the “Last Rose of Summer,” she would have required

much resignation. “He says there is only an old harpsichord at Lowick,

and it is covered with books.”

“Ah, there you are behind Celia, my dear. Celia, now, plays very

prettily, and is always ready to play. However, since Casaubon does not

like it, you are all right. But it’s a pity you should not have little

recreations of that sort, Casaubon: the bow always strung—that kind of

thing, you know—will not do.”

“I never could look on it in the light of a recreation to have my ears

teased with measured noises,” said Mr. Casaubon. “A tune much iterated

has the ridiculous effect of making the words in my mind perform a sort

of minuet to keep time—an effect hardly tolerable, I imagine, after

boyhood. As to the grander forms of music, worthy to accompany solemn

celebrations, and even to serve as an educating influence according to

the ancient conception, I say nothing, for with these we are not

immediately concerned.”

“No; but music of that sort I should enjoy,” said Dorothea. “When we

were coming home from Lausanne my uncle took us to hear the great organ

at Freiberg, and it made me sob.”

“That kind of thing is not healthy, my dear,” said Mr. Brooke.

“Casaubon, she will be in your hands now: you must teach my niece to

take things more quietly, eh, Dorothea?”

He ended with a smile, not wishing to hurt his niece, but really

thinking that it was perhaps better for her to be early married to so

sober a fellow as Casaubon, since she would not hear of Chettam.

“It is wonderful, though,” he said to himself as he shuffled out of the

room—“it is wonderful that she should have liked him. However, the

match is good. I should have been travelling out of my brief to have

hindered it, let Mrs. Cadwallader say what she will. He is pretty

certain to be a bishop, is Casaubon. That was a very seasonable

pamphlet of his on the Catholic Question:—a deanery at least. They owe

him a deanery.”

And here I must vindicate a claim to philosophical reflectiveness, by

remarking that Mr. Brooke on this occasion little thought of the

Radical speech which, at a later period, he was led to make on the

incomes of the bishops. What elegant historian would neglect a striking

opportunity for pointing out that his heroes did not foresee the

history of the world, or even their own actions?—For example, that

Henry of Navarre, when a Protestant baby, little thought of being a

Catholic monarch; or that Alfred the Great, when he measured his

laborious nights with burning candles, had no idea of future gentlemen

measuring their idle days with watches. Here is a mine of truth, which,

however vigorously it may be worked, is likely to outlast our coal.

But of Mr. Brooke I make a further remark perhaps less warranted by

precedent—namely, that if he had foreknown his speech, it might not

have made any great difference. To think with pleasure of his niece’s

husband having a large ecclesiastical income was one thing—to make a

Liberal speech was another thing; and it is a narrow mind which cannot

look at a subject from various points of view.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Oh, rescue her! I am her brother now,

And you her father. Every gentle maid

Should have a guardian in each gentleman.”

It was wonderful to Sir James Chettam how well he continued to like

going to the Grange after he had once encountered the difficulty of

seeing Dorothea for the first time in the light of a woman who was

engaged to another man. Of course the forked lightning seemed to pass

through him when he first approached her, and he remained conscious

throughout the interview of hiding uneasiness; but, good as he was, it

must be owned that his uneasiness was less than it would have been if

he had thought his rival a brilliant and desirable match. He had no

sense of being eclipsed by Mr. Casaubon; he was only shocked that

Dorothea was under a melancholy illusion, and his mortification lost

some of its bitterness by being mingled with compassion.

Nevertheless, while Sir James said to himself that he had completely

resigned her, since with the perversity of a Desdemona she had not

affected a proposed match that was clearly suitable and according to

nature; he could not yet be quite passive under the idea of her

engagement to Mr. Casaubon. On the day when he first saw them together

in the light of his present knowledge, it seemed to him that he had not

taken the affair seriously enough. Brooke was really culpable; he ought

to have hindered it. Who could speak to him? Something might be done

perhaps even now, at least to defer the marriage. On his way home he

turned into the Rectory and asked for Mr. Cadwallader. Happily, the

Rector was at home, and his visitor was shown into the study, where all

the fishing tackle hung. But he himself was in a little room adjoining,

at work with his turning apparatus, and he called to the baronet to

join him there. The two were better friends than any other landholder

and clergyman in the county—a significant fact which was in agreement

with the amiable expression of their faces.

Mr. Cadwallader was a large man, with full lips and a sweet smile; very

plain and rough in his exterior, but with that solid imperturbable ease

and good-humor which is infectious, and like great grassy hills in the

sunshine, quiets even an irritated egoism, and makes it rather ashamed

of itself. “Well, how are you?” he said, showing a hand not quite fit

to be grasped. “Sorry I missed you before. Is there anything

particular? You look vexed.”

Sir James’s brow had a little crease in it, a little depression of the

eyebrow, which he seemed purposely to exaggerate as he answered.

“It is only this conduct of Brooke’s. I really think somebody should

speak to him.”

“What? meaning to stand?” said Mr. Cadwallader, going on with the

arrangement of the reels which he had just been turning. “I hardly

think he means it. But where’s the harm, if he likes it? Any one who

objects to Whiggery should be glad when the Whigs don’t put up the

strongest fellow. They won’t overturn the Constitution with our friend

Brooke’s head for a battering ram.”

“Oh, I don’t mean that,” said Sir James, who, after putting down his

hat and throwing himself into a chair, had begun to nurse his leg and

examine the sole of his boot with much bitterness. “I mean this

marriage. I mean his letting that blooming young girl marry Casaubon.”

“What is the matter with Casaubon? I see no harm in him—if the girl

likes him.”

“She is too young to know what she likes. Her guardian ought to

interfere. He ought not to allow the thing to be done in this headlong

manner. I wonder a man like you, Cadwallader—a man with daughters, can

look at the affair with indifference: and with such a heart as yours!

Do think seriously about it.”

“I am not joking; I am as serious as possible,” said the Rector, with a

provoking little inward laugh. “You are as bad as Elinor. She has been

wanting me to go and lecture Brooke; and I have reminded her that her

friends had a very poor opinion of the match she made when she married

me.”

“But look at Casaubon,” said Sir James, indignantly. “He must be fifty,

and I don’t believe he could ever have been much more than the shadow

of a man. Look at his legs!”

“Confound you handsome young fellows! you think of having it all your

own way in the world. You don’t understand women. They don’t admire you

half so much as you admire yourselves. Elinor used to tell her sisters

that she married me for my ugliness—it was so various and amusing that

it had quite conquered her prudence.”

“You! it was easy enough for a woman to love you. But this is no

question of beauty. I don’t \_like\_ Casaubon.” This was Sir James’s

strongest way of implying that he thought ill of a man’s character.

“Why? what do you know against him?” said the Rector laying down his

reels, and putting his thumbs into his armholes with an air of

attention.

Sir James paused. He did not usually find it easy to give his reasons:

it seemed to him strange that people should not know them without being

told, since he only felt what was reasonable. At last he said—

“Now, Cadwallader, has he got any heart?”

“Well, yes. I don’t mean of the melting sort, but a sound kernel,

\_that\_ you may be sure of. He is very good to his poor relations:

pensions several of the women, and is educating a young fellow at a

good deal of expense. Casaubon acts up to his sense of justice. His

mother’s sister made a bad match—a Pole, I think—lost herself—at any

rate was disowned by her family. If it had not been for that, Casaubon

would not have had so much money by half. I believe he went himself to

find out his cousins, and see what he could do for them. Every man

would not ring so well as that, if you tried his metal. \_You\_ would,

Chettam; but not every man.”

“I don’t know,” said Sir James, coloring. “I am not so sure of myself.”

He paused a moment, and then added, “That was a right thing for

Casaubon to do. But a man may wish to do what is right, and yet be a

sort of parchment code. A woman may not be happy with him. And I think

when a girl is so young as Miss Brooke is, her friends ought to

interfere a little to hinder her from doing anything foolish. You

laugh, because you fancy I have some feeling on my own account. But

upon my honor, it is not that. I should feel just the same if I were

Miss Brooke’s brother or uncle.”

“Well, but what should you do?”

“I should say that the marriage must not be decided on until she was of

age. And depend upon it, in that case, it would never come off. I wish

you saw it as I do—I wish you would talk to Brooke about it.”

Sir James rose as he was finishing his sentence, for he saw Mrs.

Cadwallader entering from the study. She held by the hand her youngest

girl, about five years old, who immediately ran to papa, and was made

comfortable on his knee.

“I hear what you are talking about,” said the wife. “But you will make

no impression on Humphrey. As long as the fish rise to his bait,

everybody is what he ought to be. Bless you, Casaubon has got a

trout-stream, and does not care about fishing in it himself: could

there be a better fellow?”

“Well, there is something in that,” said the Rector, with his quiet,

inward laugh. “It is a very good quality in a man to have a

trout-stream.”

“But seriously,” said Sir James, whose vexation had not yet spent

itself, “don’t you think the Rector might do some good by speaking?”

“Oh, I told you beforehand what he would say,” answered Mrs.

Cadwallader, lifting up her eyebrows. “I have done what I could: I wash

my hands of the marriage.”

“In the first place,” said the Rector, looking rather grave, “it would

be nonsensical to expect that I could convince Brooke, and make him act

accordingly. Brooke is a very good fellow, but pulpy; he will run into

any mould, but he won’t keep shape.”

“He might keep shape long enough to defer the marriage,” said Sir

James.

“But, my dear Chettam, why should I use my influence to Casaubon’s

disadvantage, unless I were much surer than I am that I should be

acting for the advantage of Miss Brooke? I know no harm of Casaubon. I

don’t care about his Xisuthrus and Fee-fo-fum and the rest; but then he

doesn’t care about my fishing-tackle. As to the line he took on the

Catholic Question, that was unexpected; but he has always been civil to

me, and I don’t see why I should spoil his sport. For anything I can

tell, Miss Brooke may be happier with him than she would be with any

other man.”

“Humphrey! I have no patience with you. You know you would rather dine

under the hedge than with Casaubon alone. You have nothing to say to

each other.”

“What has that to do with Miss Brooke’s marrying him? She does not do

it for my amusement.”

“He has got no good red blood in his body,” said Sir James.

“No. Somebody put a drop under a magnifying-glass and it was all

semicolons and parentheses,” said Mrs. Cadwallader.

“Why does he not bring out his book, instead of marrying,” said Sir

James, with a disgust which he held warranted by the sound feeling of

an English layman.

“Oh, he dreams footnotes, and they run away with all his brains. They

say, when he was a little boy, he made an abstract of ‘Hop o’ my

Thumb,’ and he has been making abstracts ever since. Ugh! And that is

the man Humphrey goes on saying that a woman may be happy with.”

“Well, he is what Miss Brooke likes,” said the Rector. “I don’t profess

to understand every young lady’s taste.”

“But if she were your own daughter?” said Sir James.

“That would be a different affair. She is \_not\_ my daughter, and I

don’t feel called upon to interfere. Casaubon is as good as most of us.

He is a scholarly clergyman, and creditable to the cloth. Some Radical

fellow speechifying at Middlemarch said Casaubon was the learned

straw-chopping incumbent, and Freke was the brick-and-mortar incumbent,

and I was the angling incumbent. And upon my word, I don’t see that one

is worse or better than the other.” The Rector ended with his silent

laugh. He always saw the joke of any satire against himself. His

conscience was large and easy, like the rest of him: it did only what

it could do without any trouble.

Clearly, there would be no interference with Miss Brooke’s marriage

through Mr. Cadwallader; and Sir James felt with some sadness that she

was to have perfect liberty of misjudgment. It was a sign of his good

disposition that he did not slacken at all in his intention of carrying

out Dorothea’s design of the cottages. Doubtless this persistence was

the best course for his own dignity: but pride only helps us to be

generous; it never makes us so, any more than vanity makes us witty.

She was now enough aware of Sir James’s position with regard to her, to

appreciate the rectitude of his perseverance in a landlord’s duty, to

which he had at first been urged by a lover’s complaisance, and her

pleasure in it was great enough to count for something even in her

present happiness. Perhaps she gave to Sir James Chettam’s cottages all

the interest she could spare from Mr. Casaubon, or rather from the

symphony of hopeful dreams, admiring trust, and passionate self

devotion which that learned gentleman had set playing in her soul.

Hence it happened that in the good baronet’s succeeding visits, while

he was beginning to pay small attentions to Celia, he found himself

talking with more and more pleasure to Dorothea. She was perfectly

unconstrained and without irritation towards him now, and he was

gradually discovering the delight there is in frank kindness and

companionship between a man and a woman who have no passion to hide or

confess.

CHAPTER IX.

1\_st Gent\_. An ancient land in ancient oracles

Is called “law-thirsty”: all the struggle there

Was after order and a perfect rule.

Pray, where lie such lands now? . . .

2\_d Gent\_. Why, where they lay of old—in human souls.

Mr. Casaubon’s behavior about settlements was highly satisfactory to

Mr. Brooke, and the preliminaries of marriage rolled smoothly along,

shortening the weeks of courtship. The betrothed bride must see her

future home, and dictate any changes that she would like to have made

there. A woman dictates before marriage in order that she may have an

appetite for submission afterwards. And certainly, the mistakes that we

male and female mortals make when we have our own way might fairly

raise some wonder that we are so fond of it.

On a gray but dry November morning Dorothea drove to Lowick in company

with her uncle and Celia. Mr. Casaubon’s home was the manor-house.

Close by, visible from some parts of the garden, was the little church,

with the old parsonage opposite. In the beginning of his career, Mr.

Casaubon had only held the living, but the death of his brother had put

him in possession of the manor also. It had a small park, with a fine

old oak here and there, and an avenue of limes towards the southwest

front, with a sunk fence between park and pleasure-ground, so that from

the drawing-room windows the glance swept uninterruptedly along a slope

of greensward till the limes ended in a level of corn and pastures,

which often seemed to melt into a lake under the setting sun. This was

the happy side of the house, for the south and east looked rather

melancholy even under the brightest morning. The grounds here were more

confined, the flower-beds showed no very careful tendance, and large

clumps of trees, chiefly of sombre yews, had risen high, not ten yards

from the windows. The building, of greenish stone, was in the old

English style, not ugly, but small-windowed and melancholy-looking: the

sort of house that must have children, many flowers, open windows, and

little vistas of bright things, to make it seem a joyous home. In this

latter end of autumn, with a sparse remnant of yellow leaves falling

slowly athwart the dark evergreens in a stillness without sunshine, the

house too had an air of autumnal decline, and Mr. Casaubon, when he

presented himself, had no bloom that could be thrown into relief by

that background.

“Oh dear!” Celia said to herself, “I am sure Freshitt Hall would have

been pleasanter than this.” She thought of the white freestone, the

pillared portico, and the terrace full of flowers, Sir James smiling

above them like a prince issuing from his enchantment in a rose-bush,

with a handkerchief swiftly metamorphosed from the most delicately

odorous petals—Sir James, who talked so agreeably, always about things

which had common-sense in them, and not about learning! Celia had those

light young feminine tastes which grave and weatherworn gentlemen

sometimes prefer in a wife; but happily Mr. Casaubon’s bias had been

different, for he would have had no chance with Celia.

Dorothea, on the contrary, found the house and grounds all that she

could wish: the dark book-shelves in the long library, the carpets and

curtains with colors subdued by time, the curious old maps and

bird’s-eye views on the walls of the corridor, with here and there an

old vase below, had no oppression for her, and seemed more cheerful

than the casts and pictures at the Grange, which her uncle had long ago

brought home from his travels—they being probably among the ideas he

had taken in at one time. To poor Dorothea these severe classical

nudities and smirking Renaissance-Correggiosities were painfully

inexplicable, staring into the midst of her Puritanic conceptions: she

had never been taught how she could bring them into any sort of

relevance with her life. But the owners of Lowick apparently had not

been travellers, and Mr. Casaubon’s studies of the past were not

carried on by means of such aids.

Dorothea walked about the house with delightful emotion. Everything

seemed hallowed to her: this was to be the home of her wifehood, and

she looked up with eyes full of confidence to Mr. Casaubon when he drew

her attention specially to some actual arrangement and asked her if she

would like an alteration. All appeals to her taste she met gratefully,

but saw nothing to alter. His efforts at exact courtesy and formal

tenderness had no defect for her. She filled up all blanks with

unmanifested perfections, interpreting him as she interpreted the works

of Providence, and accounting for seeming discords by her own deafness

to the higher harmonies. And there are many blanks left in the weeks of

courtship which a loving faith fills with happy assurance.

“Now, my dear Dorothea, I wish you to favor me by pointing out which

room you would like to have as your boudoir,” said Mr. Casaubon,

showing that his views of the womanly nature were sufficiently large to

include that requirement.

“It is very kind of you to think of that,” said Dorothea, “but I assure

you I would rather have all those matters decided for me. I shall be

much happier to take everything as it is—just as you have been used to

have it, or as you will yourself choose it to be. I have no motive for

wishing anything else.”

“Oh, Dodo,” said Celia, “will you not have the bow-windowed room

up-stairs?”

Mr. Casaubon led the way thither. The bow-window looked down the avenue

of limes; the furniture was all of a faded blue, and there were

miniatures of ladies and gentlemen with powdered hair hanging in a

group. A piece of tapestry over a door also showed a blue-green world

with a pale stag in it. The chairs and tables were thin-legged and easy

to upset. It was a room where one might fancy the ghost of a

tight-laced lady revisiting the scene of her embroidery. A light

bookcase contained duodecimo volumes of polite literature in calf,

completing the furniture.

“Yes,” said Mr. Brooke, “this would be a pretty room with some new

hangings, sofas, and that sort of thing. A little bare now.”

“No, uncle,” said Dorothea, eagerly. “Pray do not speak of altering

anything. There are so many other things in the world that want

altering—I like to take these things as they are. And you like them as

they are, don’t you?” she added, looking at Mr. Casaubon. “Perhaps this

was your mother’s room when she was young.”

“It was,” he said, with his slow bend of the head.

“This is your mother,” said Dorothea, who had turned to examine the

group of miniatures. “It is like the tiny one you brought me; only, I

should think, a better portrait. And this one opposite, who is this?”

“Her elder sister. They were, like you and your sister, the only two

children of their parents, who hang above them, you see.”

“The sister is pretty,” said Celia, implying that she thought less

favorably of Mr. Casaubon’s mother. It was a new opening to Celia’s

imagination, that he came of a family who had all been young in their

time—the ladies wearing necklaces.

“It is a peculiar face,” said Dorothea, looking closely. “Those deep

gray eyes rather near together—and the delicate irregular nose with a

sort of ripple in it—and all the powdered curls hanging backward.

Altogether it seems to me peculiar rather than pretty. There is not

even a family likeness between her and your mother.”

“No. And they were not alike in their lot.”

“You did not mention her to me,” said Dorothea.

“My aunt made an unfortunate marriage. I never saw her.”

Dorothea wondered a little, but felt that it would be indelicate just

then to ask for any information which Mr. Casaubon did not proffer, and

she turned to the window to admire the view. The sun had lately pierced

the gray, and the avenue of limes cast shadows.

“Shall we not walk in the garden now?” said Dorothea.

“And you would like to see the church, you know,” said Mr. Brooke. “It

is a droll little church. And the village. It all lies in a nut-shell.

By the way, it will suit you, Dorothea; for the cottages are like a row

of alms-houses—little gardens, gilly-flowers, that sort of thing.”

“Yes, please,” said Dorothea, looking at Mr. Casaubon, “I should like

to see all that.” She had got nothing from him more graphic about the

Lowick cottages than that they were “not bad.”

They were soon on a gravel walk which led chiefly between grassy

borders and clumps of trees, this being the nearest way to the church,

Mr. Casaubon said. At the little gate leading into the churchyard there

was a pause while Mr. Casaubon went to the parsonage close by to fetch

a key. Celia, who had been hanging a little in the rear, came up

presently, when she saw that Mr. Casaubon was gone away, and said in

her easy staccato, which always seemed to contradict the suspicion of

any malicious intent—

“Do you know, Dorothea, I saw some one quite young coming up one of the

walks.”

“Is that astonishing, Celia?”

“There may be a young gardener, you know—why not?” said Mr. Brooke. “I

told Casaubon he should change his gardener.”

“No, not a gardener,” said Celia; “a gentleman with a sketch-book. He

had light-brown curls. I only saw his back. But he was quite young.”

“The curate’s son, perhaps,” said Mr. Brooke. “Ah, there is Casaubon

again, and Tucker with him. He is going to introduce Tucker. You don’t

know Tucker yet.”

Mr. Tucker was the middle-aged curate, one of the “inferior clergy,”

who are usually not wanting in sons. But after the introduction, the

conversation did not lead to any question about his family, and the

startling apparition of youthfulness was forgotten by every one but

Celia. She inwardly declined to believe that the light-brown curls and

slim figure could have any relationship to Mr. Tucker, who was just as

old and musty-looking as she would have expected Mr. Casaubon’s curate

to be; doubtless an excellent man who would go to heaven (for Celia

wished not to be unprincipled), but the corners of his mouth were so

unpleasant. Celia thought with some dismalness of the time she should

have to spend as bridesmaid at Lowick, while the curate had probably no

pretty little children whom she could like, irrespective of principle.

Mr. Tucker was invaluable in their walk; and perhaps Mr. Casaubon had

not been without foresight on this head, the curate being able to

answer all Dorothea’s questions about the villagers and the other

parishioners. Everybody, he assured her, was well off in Lowick: not a

cottager in those double cottages at a low rent but kept a pig, and the

strips of garden at the back were well tended. The small boys wore

excellent corduroy, the girls went out as tidy servants, or did a

little straw-plaiting at home: no looms here, no Dissent; and though

the public disposition was rather towards laying by money than towards

spirituality, there was not much vice. The speckled fowls were so

numerous that Mr. Brooke observed, “Your farmers leave some barley for

the women to glean, I see. The poor folks here might have a fowl in

their pot, as the good French king used to wish for all his people. The

French eat a good many fowls—skinny fowls, you know.”

“I think it was a very cheap wish of his,” said Dorothea, indignantly.

“Are kings such monsters that a wish like that must be reckoned a royal

virtue?”

“And if he wished them a skinny fowl,” said Celia, “that would not be

nice. But perhaps he wished them to have fat fowls.”

“Yes, but the word has dropped out of the text, or perhaps was

subauditum; that is, present in the king’s mind, but not uttered,” said

Mr. Casaubon, smiling and bending his head towards Celia, who

immediately dropped backward a little, because she could not bear Mr.

Casaubon to blink at her.

Dorothea sank into silence on the way back to the house. She felt some

disappointment, of which she was yet ashamed, that there was nothing

for her to do in Lowick; and in the next few minutes her mind had

glanced over the possibility, which she would have preferred, of

finding that her home would be in a parish which had a larger share of

the world’s misery, so that she might have had more active duties in

it. Then, recurring to the future actually before her, she made a

picture of more complete devotion to Mr. Casaubon’s aims in which she

would await new duties. Many such might reveal themselves to the higher

knowledge gained by her in that companionship.

Mr. Tucker soon left them, having some clerical work which would not

allow him to lunch at the Hall; and as they were re-entering the garden

through the little gate, Mr. Casaubon said—

“You seem a little sad, Dorothea. I trust you are pleased with what you

have seen.”

“I am feeling something which is perhaps foolish and wrong,” answered

Dorothea, with her usual openness—“almost wishing that the people

wanted more to be done for them here. I have known so few ways of

making my life good for anything. Of course, my notions of usefulness

must be narrow. I must learn new ways of helping people.”

“Doubtless,” said Mr. Casaubon. “Each position has its corresponding

duties. Yours, I trust, as the mistress of Lowick, will not leave any

yearning unfulfilled.”

“Indeed, I believe that,” said Dorothea, earnestly. “Do not suppose

that I am sad.”

“That is well. But, if you are not tired, we will take another way to

the house than that by which we came.”

Dorothea was not at all tired, and a little circuit was made towards a

fine yew-tree, the chief hereditary glory of the grounds on this side

of the house. As they approached it, a figure, conspicuous on a dark

background of evergreens, was seated on a bench, sketching the old

tree. Mr. Brooke, who was walking in front with Celia, turned his head,

and said—

“Who is that youngster, Casaubon?”

They had come very near when Mr. Casaubon answered—

“That is a young relative of mine, a second cousin: the grandson, in

fact,” he added, looking at Dorothea, “of the lady whose portrait you

have been noticing, my aunt Julia.”

The young man had laid down his sketch-book and risen. His bushy

light-brown curls, as well as his youthfulness, identified him at once

with Celia’s apparition.

“Dorothea, let me introduce to you my cousin, Mr. Ladislaw. Will, this

is Miss Brooke.”

The cousin was so close now, that, when he lifted his hat, Dorothea

could see a pair of gray eyes rather near together, a delicate

irregular nose with a little ripple in it, and hair falling backward;

but there was a mouth and chin of a more prominent, threatening aspect

than belonged to the type of the grandmother’s miniature. Young

Ladislaw did not feel it necessary to smile, as if he were charmed with

this introduction to his future second cousin and her relatives; but

wore rather a pouting air of discontent.

“You are an artist, I see,” said Mr. Brooke, taking up the sketch-book

and turning it over in his unceremonious fashion.

“No, I only sketch a little. There is nothing fit to be seen there,”

said young Ladislaw, coloring, perhaps with temper rather than modesty.

“Oh, come, this is a nice bit, now. I did a little in this way myself

at one time, you know. Look here, now; this is what I call a nice

thing, done with what we used to call \_brio\_.” Mr. Brooke held out

towards the two girls a large colored sketch of stony ground and trees,

with a pool.

“I am no judge of these things,” said Dorothea, not coldly, but with an

eager deprecation of the appeal to her. “You know, uncle, I never see

the beauty of those pictures which you say are so much praised. They

are a language I do not understand. I suppose there is some relation

between pictures and nature which I am too ignorant to feel—just as you

see what a Greek sentence stands for which means nothing to me.”

Dorothea looked up at Mr. Casaubon, who bowed his head towards her,

while Mr. Brooke said, smiling nonchalantly—

“Bless me, now, how different people are! But you had a bad style of

teaching, you know—else this is just the thing for girls—sketching,

fine art and so on. But you took to drawing plans; you don’t understand

\_morbidezza\_, and that kind of thing. You will come to my house, I

hope, and I will show you what I did in this way,” he continued,

turning to young Ladislaw, who had to be recalled from his

preoccupation in observing Dorothea. Ladislaw had made up his mind that

she must be an unpleasant girl, since she was going to marry Casaubon,

and what she said of her stupidity about pictures would have confirmed

that opinion even if he had believed her. As it was, he took her words

for a covert judgment, and was certain that she thought his sketch

detestable. There was too much cleverness in her apology: she was

laughing both at her uncle and himself. But what a voice! It was like

the voice of a soul that had once lived in an Aeolian harp. This must

be one of Nature’s inconsistencies. There could be no sort of passion

in a girl who would marry Casaubon. But he turned from her, and bowed

his thanks for Mr. Brooke’s invitation.

“We will turn over my Italian engravings together,” continued that

good-natured man. “I have no end of those things, that I have laid by

for years. One gets rusty in this part of the country, you know. Not

you, Casaubon; you stick to your studies; but my best ideas get

undermost—out of use, you know. You clever young men must guard against

indolence. I was too indolent, you know: else I might have been

anywhere at one time.”

“That is a seasonable admonition,” said Mr. Casaubon; “but now we will

pass on to the house, lest the young ladies should be tired of

standing.”

When their backs were turned, young Ladislaw sat down to go on with his

sketching, and as he did so his face broke into an expression of

amusement which increased as he went on drawing, till at last he threw

back his head and laughed aloud. Partly it was the reception of his own

artistic production that tickled him; partly the notion of his grave

cousin as the lover of that girl; and partly Mr. Brooke’s definition of

the place he might have held but for the impediment of indolence. Mr.

Will Ladislaw’s sense of the ludicrous lit up his features very

agreeably: it was the pure enjoyment of comicality, and had no mixture

of sneering and self-exaltation.

“What is your nephew going to do with himself, Casaubon?” said Mr.

Brooke, as they went on.

“My cousin, you mean—not my nephew.”

“Yes, yes, cousin. But in the way of a career, you know.”

“The answer to that question is painfully doubtful. On leaving Rugby he

declined to go to an English university, where I would gladly have

placed him, and chose what I must consider the anomalous course of

studying at Heidelberg. And now he wants to go abroad again, without

any special object, save the vague purpose of what he calls culture,

preparation for he knows not what. He declines to choose a profession.”

“He has no means but what you furnish, I suppose.”

“I have always given him and his friends reason to understand that I

would furnish in moderation what was necessary for providing him with a

scholarly education, and launching him respectably. I am therefore

bound to fulfil the expectation so raised,” said Mr. Casaubon, putting

his conduct in the light of mere rectitude: a trait of delicacy which

Dorothea noticed with admiration.

“He has a thirst for travelling; perhaps he may turn out a Bruce or a

Mungo Park,” said Mr. Brooke. “I had a notion of that myself at one

time.”

“No, he has no bent towards exploration, or the enlargement of our

geognosis: that would be a special purpose which I could recognize with

some approbation, though without felicitating him on a career which so

often ends in premature and violent death. But so far is he from having

any desire for a more accurate knowledge of the earth’s surface, that

he said he should prefer not to know the sources of the Nile, and that

there should be some unknown regions preserved as hunting grounds for

the poetic imagination.”

“Well, there is something in that, you know,” said Mr. Brooke, who had

certainly an impartial mind.

“It is, I fear, nothing more than a part of his general inaccuracy and

indisposition to thoroughness of all kinds, which would be a bad augury

for him in any profession, civil or sacred, even were he so far

submissive to ordinary rule as to choose one.”

“Perhaps he has conscientious scruples founded on his own unfitness,”

said Dorothea, who was interesting herself in finding a favorable

explanation. “Because the law and medicine should be very serious

professions to undertake, should they not? People’s lives and fortunes

depend on them.”

“Doubtless; but I fear that my young relative Will Ladislaw is chiefly

determined in his aversion to these callings by a dislike to steady

application, and to that kind of acquirement which is needful

instrumentally, but is not charming or immediately inviting to

self-indulgent taste. I have insisted to him on what Aristotle has

stated with admirable brevity, that for the achievement of any work

regarded as an end there must be a prior exercise of many energies or

acquired facilities of a secondary order, demanding patience. I have

pointed to my own manuscript volumes, which represent the toil of years

preparatory to a work not yet accomplished. But in vain. To careful

reasoning of this kind he replies by calling himself Pegasus, and every

form of prescribed work ‘harness.’”

Celia laughed. She was surprised to find that Mr. Casaubon could say

something quite amusing.

“Well, you know, he may turn out a Byron, a Chatterton, a

Churchill—that sort of thing—there’s no telling,” said Mr. Brooke.

“Shall you let him go to Italy, or wherever else he wants to go?”

“Yes; I have agreed to furnish him with moderate supplies for a year or

so; he asks no more. I shall let him be tried by the test of freedom.”

“That is very kind of you,” said Dorothea, looking up at Mr. Casaubon

with delight. “It is noble. After all, people may really have in them

some vocation which is not quite plain to themselves, may they not?

They may seem idle and weak because they are growing. We should be very

patient with each other, I think.”

“I suppose it is being engaged to be married that has made you think

patience good,” said Celia, as soon as she and Dorothea were alone

together, taking off their wrappings.

“You mean that I am very impatient, Celia.”

“Yes; when people don’t do and say just what you like.” Celia had

become less afraid of “saying things” to Dorothea since this

engagement: cleverness seemed to her more pitiable than ever.

CHAPTER X.

“He had catched a great cold, had he had no other clothes to wear than

the skin of a bear not yet killed.”—FULLER.

Young Ladislaw did not pay that visit to which Mr. Brooke had invited

him, and only six days afterwards Mr. Casaubon mentioned that his young

relative had started for the Continent, seeming by this cold vagueness

to waive inquiry. Indeed, Will had declined to fix on any more precise

destination than the entire area of Europe. Genius, he held, is

necessarily intolerant of fetters: on the one hand it must have the

utmost play for its spontaneity; on the other, it may confidently await

those messages from the universe which summon it to its peculiar work,

only placing itself in an attitude of receptivity towards all sublime

chances. The attitudes of receptivity are various, and Will had

sincerely tried many of them. He was not excessively fond of wine, but

he had several times taken too much, simply as an experiment in that

form of ecstasy; he had fasted till he was faint, and then supped on

lobster; he had made himself ill with doses of opium. Nothing greatly

original had resulted from these measures; and the effects of the opium

had convinced him that there was an entire dissimilarity between his

constitution and De Quincey’s. The superadded circumstance which would

evolve the genius had not yet come; the universe had not yet beckoned.

Even Caesar’s fortune at one time was but a grand presentiment. We know

what a masquerade all development is, and what effective shapes may be

disguised in helpless embryos. In fact, the world is full of hopeful

analogies and handsome dubious eggs called possibilities. Will saw

clearly enough the pitiable instances of long incubation producing no

chick, and but for gratitude would have laughed at Casaubon, whose

plodding application, rows of note-books, and small taper of learned

theory exploring the tossed ruins of the world, seemed to enforce a

moral entirely encouraging to Will’s generous reliance on the

intentions of the universe with regard to himself. He held that

reliance to be a mark of genius; and certainly it is no mark to the

contrary; genius consisting neither in self-conceit nor in humility,

but in a power to make or do, not anything in general, but something in

particular. Let him start for the Continent, then, without our

pronouncing on his future. Among all forms of mistake, prophecy is the

most gratuitous.

But at present this caution against a too hasty judgment interests me

more in relation to Mr. Casaubon than to his young cousin. If to

Dorothea Mr. Casaubon had been the mere occasion which had set alight

the fine inflammable material of her youthful illusions, does it follow

that he was fairly represented in the minds of those less impassioned

personages who have hitherto delivered their judgments concerning him?

I protest against any absolute conclusion, any prejudice derived from

Mrs. Cadwallader’s contempt for a neighboring clergyman’s alleged

greatness of soul, or Sir James Chettam’s poor opinion of his rival’s

legs,—from Mr. Brooke’s failure to elicit a companion’s ideas, or from

Celia’s criticism of a middle-aged scholar’s personal appearance. I am

not sure that the greatest man of his age, if ever that solitary

superlative existed, could escape these unfavorable reflections of

himself in various small mirrors; and even Milton, looking for his

portrait in a spoon, must submit to have the facial angle of a bumpkin.

Moreover, if Mr. Casaubon, speaking for himself, has rather a chilling

rhetoric, it is not therefore certain that there is no good work or

fine feeling in him. Did not an immortal physicist and interpreter of

hieroglyphs write detestable verses? Has the theory of the solar system

been advanced by graceful manners and conversational tact? Suppose we

turn from outside estimates of a man, to wonder, with keener interest,

what is the report of his own consciousness about his doings or

capacity: with what hindrances he is carrying on his daily labors; what

fading of hopes, or what deeper fixity of self-delusion the years are

marking off within him; and with what spirit he wrestles against

universal pressure, which will one day be too heavy for him, and bring

his heart to its final pause. Doubtless his lot is important in his own

eyes; and the chief reason that we think he asks too large a place in

our consideration must be our want of room for him, since we refer him

to the Divine regard with perfect confidence; nay, it is even held

sublime for our neighbor to expect the utmost there, however little he

may have got from us. Mr. Casaubon, too, was the centre of his own

world; if he was liable to think that others were providentially made

for him, and especially to consider them in the light of their fitness

for the author of a “Key to all Mythologies,” this trait is not quite

alien to us, and, like the other mendicant hopes of mortals, claims

some of our pity.

Certainly this affair of his marriage with Miss Brooke touched him more

nearly than it did any one of the persons who have hitherto shown their

disapproval of it, and in the present stage of things I feel more

tenderly towards his experience of success than towards the

disappointment of the amiable Sir James. For in truth, as the day fixed

for his marriage came nearer, Mr. Casaubon did not find his spirits

rising; nor did the contemplation of that matrimonial garden scene,

where, as all experience showed, the path was to be bordered with

flowers, prove persistently more enchanting to him than the accustomed

vaults where he walked taper in hand. He did not confess to himself,

still less could he have breathed to another, his surprise that though

he had won a lovely and noble-hearted girl he had not won

delight,—which he had also regarded as an object to be found by search.

It is true that he knew all the classical passages implying the

contrary; but knowing classical passages, we find, is a mode of motion,

which explains why they leave so little extra force for their personal

application.

Poor Mr. Casaubon had imagined that his long studious bachelorhood had

stored up for him a compound interest of enjoyment, and that large

drafts on his affections would not fail to be honored; for we all of

us, grave or light, get our thoughts entangled in metaphors, and act

fatally on the strength of them. And now he was in danger of being

saddened by the very conviction that his circumstances were unusually

happy: there was nothing external by which he could account for a

certain blankness of sensibility which came over him just when his

expectant gladness should have been most lively, just when he exchanged

the accustomed dulness of his Lowick library for his visits to the

Grange. Here was a weary experience in which he was as utterly

condemned to loneliness as in the despair which sometimes threatened

him while toiling in the morass of authorship without seeming nearer to

the goal. And his was that worst loneliness which would shrink from

sympathy. He could not but wish that Dorothea should think him not less

happy than the world would expect her successful suitor to be; and in

relation to his authorship he leaned on her young trust and veneration,

he liked to draw forth her fresh interest in listening, as a means of

encouragement to himself: in talking to her he presented all his

performance and intention with the reflected confidence of the

pedagogue, and rid himself for the time of that chilling ideal audience

which crowded his laborious uncreative hours with the vaporous pressure

of Tartarean shades.

For to Dorothea, after that toy-box history of the world adapted to

young ladies which had made the chief part of her education, Mr.

Casaubon’s talk about his great book was full of new vistas; and this

sense of revelation, this surprise of a nearer introduction to Stoics

and Alexandrians, as people who had ideas not totally unlike her own,

kept in abeyance for the time her usual eagerness for a binding theory

which could bring her own life and doctrine into strict connection with

that amazing past, and give the remotest sources of knowledge some

bearing on her actions. That more complete teaching would come—Mr.

Casaubon would tell her all that: she was looking forward to higher

initiation in ideas, as she was looking forward to marriage, and

blending her dim conceptions of both. It would be a great mistake to

suppose that Dorothea would have cared about any share in Mr.

Casaubon’s learning as mere accomplishment; for though opinion in the

neighborhood of Freshitt and Tipton had pronounced her clever, that

epithet would not have described her to circles in whose more precise

vocabulary cleverness implies mere aptitude for knowing and doing,

apart from character. All her eagerness for acquirement lay within that

full current of sympathetic motive in which her ideas and impulses were

habitually swept along. She did not want to deck herself with

knowledge—to wear it loose from the nerves and blood that fed her

action; and if she had written a book she must have done it as Saint

Theresa did, under the command of an authority that constrained her

conscience. But something she yearned for by which her life might be

filled with action at once rational and ardent; and since the time was

gone by for guiding visions and spiritual directors, since prayer

heightened yearning but not instruction, what lamp was there but

knowledge? Surely learned men kept the only oil; and who more learned

than Mr. Casaubon?

Thus in these brief weeks Dorothea’s joyous grateful expectation was

unbroken, and however her lover might occasionally be conscious of

flatness, he could never refer it to any slackening of her affectionate

interest.

The season was mild enough to encourage the project of extending the

wedding journey as far as Rome, and Mr. Casaubon was anxious for this

because he wished to inspect some manuscripts in the Vatican.

“I still regret that your sister is not to accompany us,” he said one

morning, some time after it had been ascertained that Celia objected to

go, and that Dorothea did not wish for her companionship. “You will

have many lonely hours, Dorothea, for I shall be constrained to make

the utmost use of my time during our stay in Rome, and I should feel

more at liberty if you had a companion.”

The words “I should feel more at liberty” grated on Dorothea. For the

first time in speaking to Mr. Casaubon she colored from annoyance.

“You must have misunderstood me very much,” she said, “if you think I

should not enter into the value of your time—if you think that I should

not willingly give up whatever interfered with your using it to the

best purpose.”

“That is very amiable in you, my dear Dorothea,” said Mr. Casaubon, not

in the least noticing that she was hurt; “but if you had a lady as your

companion, I could put you both under the care of a cicerone, and we

could thus achieve two purposes in the same space of time.”

“I beg you will not refer to this again,” said Dorothea, rather

haughtily. But immediately she feared that she was wrong, and turning

towards him she laid her hand on his, adding in a different tone, “Pray

do not be anxious about me. I shall have so much to think of when I am

alone. And Tantripp will be a sufficient companion, just to take care

of me. I could not bear to have Celia: she would be miserable.”

It was time to dress. There was to be a dinner-party that day, the last

of the parties which were held at the Grange as proper preliminaries to

the wedding, and Dorothea was glad of a reason for moving away at once

on the sound of the bell, as if she needed more than her usual amount

of preparation. She was ashamed of being irritated from some cause she

could not define even to herself; for though she had no intention to be

untruthful, her reply had not touched the real hurt within her. Mr.

Casaubon’s words had been quite reasonable, yet they had brought a

vague instantaneous sense of aloofness on his part.

“Surely I am in a strangely selfish weak state of mind,” she said to

herself. “How can I have a husband who is so much above me without

knowing that he needs me less than I need him?”

Having convinced herself that Mr. Casaubon was altogether right, she

recovered her equanimity, and was an agreeable image of serene dignity

when she came into the drawing-room in her silver-gray dress—the simple

lines of her dark-brown hair parted over her brow and coiled massively

behind, in keeping with the entire absence from her manner and

expression of all search after mere effect. Sometimes when Dorothea was

in company, there seemed to be as complete an air of repose about her

as if she had been a picture of Santa Barbara looking out from her

tower into the clear air; but these intervals of quietude made the

energy of her speech and emotion the more remarked when some outward

appeal had touched her.

She was naturally the subject of many observations this evening, for

the dinner-party was large and rather more miscellaneous as to the male

portion than any which had been held at the Grange since Mr. Brooke’s

nieces had resided with him, so that the talking was done in duos and

trios more or less inharmonious. There was the newly elected mayor of

Middlemarch, who happened to be a manufacturer; the philanthropic

banker his brother-in-law, who predominated so much in the town that

some called him a Methodist, others a hypocrite, according to the

resources of their vocabulary; and there were various professional men.

In fact, Mrs. Cadwallader said that Brooke was beginning to treat the

Middlemarchers, and that she preferred the farmers at the tithe-dinner,

who drank her health unpretentiously, and were not ashamed of their

grandfathers’ furniture. For in that part of the country, before reform

had done its notable part in developing the political consciousness,

there was a clearer distinction of ranks and a dimmer distinction of

parties; so that Mr. Brooke’s miscellaneous invitations seemed to

belong to that general laxity which came from his inordinate travel and

habit of taking too much in the form of ideas.

Already, as Miss Brooke passed out of the dining-room, opportunity was

found for some interjectional “asides.”

“A fine woman, Miss Brooke! an uncommonly fine woman, by God!” said Mr.

Standish, the old lawyer, who had been so long concerned with the

landed gentry that he had become landed himself, and used that oath in

a deep-mouthed manner as a sort of armorial bearings, stamping the

speech of a man who held a good position.

Mr. Bulstrode, the banker, seemed to be addressed, but that gentleman

disliked coarseness and profanity, and merely bowed. The remark was

taken up by Mr. Chichely, a middle-aged bachelor and coursing

celebrity, who had a complexion something like an Easter egg, a few

hairs carefully arranged, and a carriage implying the consciousness of

a distinguished appearance.

“Yes, but not my style of woman: I like a woman who lays herself out a

little more to please us. There should be a little filigree about a

woman—something of the coquette. A man likes a sort of challenge. The

more of a dead set she makes at you the better.”

“There’s some truth in that,” said Mr. Standish, disposed to be genial.

“And, by God, it’s usually the way with them. I suppose it answers some

wise ends: Providence made them so, eh, Bulstrode?”

“I should be disposed to refer coquetry to another source,” said Mr.

Bulstrode. “I should rather refer it to the devil.”

“Ay, to be sure, there should be a little devil in a woman,” said Mr.

Chichely, whose study of the fair sex seemed to have been detrimental

to his theology. “And I like them blond, with a certain gait, and a

swan neck. Between ourselves, the mayor’s daughter is more to my taste

than Miss Brooke or Miss Celia either. If I were a marrying man I

should choose Miss Vincy before either of them.”

“Well, make up, make up,” said Mr. Standish, jocosely; “you see the

middle-aged fellows carry the day.”

Mr. Chichely shook his head with much meaning: he was not going to

incur the certainty of being accepted by the woman he would choose.

The Miss Vincy who had the honor of being Mr. Chichely’s ideal was of

course not present; for Mr. Brooke, always objecting to go too far,

would not have chosen that his nieces should meet the daughter of a

Middlemarch manufacturer, unless it were on a public occasion. The

feminine part of the company included none whom Lady Chettam or Mrs.

Cadwallader could object to; for Mrs. Renfrew, the colonel’s widow, was

not only unexceptionable in point of breeding, but also interesting on

the ground of her complaint, which puzzled the doctors, and seemed

clearly a case wherein the fulness of professional knowledge might need

the supplement of quackery. Lady Chettam, who attributed her own

remarkable health to home-made bitters united with constant medical

attendance, entered with much exercise of the imagination into Mrs.

Renfrew’s account of symptoms, and into the amazing futility in her

case of all strengthening medicines.

“Where can all the strength of those medicines go, my dear?” said the

mild but stately dowager, turning to Mrs. Cadwallader reflectively,

when Mrs. Renfrew’s attention was called away.

“It strengthens the disease,” said the Rector’s wife, much too

well-born not to be an amateur in medicine. “Everything depends on the

constitution: some people make fat, some blood, and some bile—that’s my

view of the matter; and whatever they take is a sort of grist to the

mill.”

“Then she ought to take medicines that would reduce—reduce the disease,

you know, if you are right, my dear. And I think what you say is

reasonable.”

“Certainly it is reasonable. You have two sorts of potatoes, fed on the

same soil. One of them grows more and more watery—”

“Ah! like this poor Mrs. Renfrew—that is what I think. Dropsy! There is

no swelling yet—it is inward. I should say she ought to take drying

medicines, shouldn’t you?—or a dry hot-air bath. Many things might be

tried, of a drying nature.”

“Let her try a certain person’s pamphlets,” said Mrs. Cadwallader in an

undertone, seeing the gentlemen enter. “He does not want drying.”

“Who, my dear?” said Lady Chettam, a charming woman, not so quick as to

nullify the pleasure of explanation.

“The bridegroom—Casaubon. He has certainly been drying up faster since

the engagement: the flame of passion, I suppose.”

“I should think he is far from having a good constitution,” said Lady

Chettam, with a still deeper undertone. “And then his studies—so very

dry, as you say.”

“Really, by the side of Sir James, he looks like a death’s head skinned

over for the occasion. Mark my words: in a year from this time that

girl will hate him. She looks up to him as an oracle now, and by-and-by

she will be at the other extreme. All flightiness!”

“How very shocking! I fear she is headstrong. But tell me—you know all

about him—is there anything very bad? What is the truth?”

“The truth? he is as bad as the wrong physic—nasty to take, and sure to

disagree.”

“There could not be anything worse than that,” said Lady Chettam, with

so vivid a conception of the physic that she seemed to have learned

something exact about Mr. Casaubon’s disadvantages. “However, James

will hear nothing against Miss Brooke. He says she is the mirror of

women still.”

“That is a generous make-believe of his. Depend upon it, he likes

little Celia better, and she appreciates him. I hope you like my little

Celia?”

“Certainly; she is fonder of geraniums, and seems more docile, though

not so fine a figure. But we were talking of physic. Tell me about this

new young surgeon, Mr. Lydgate. I am told he is wonderfully clever: he

certainly looks it—a fine brow indeed.”

“He is a gentleman. I heard him talking to Humphrey. He talks well.”

“Yes. Mr. Brooke says he is one of the Lydgates of Northumberland,

really well connected. One does not expect it in a practitioner of that

kind. For my own part, I like a medical man more on a footing with the

servants; they are often all the cleverer. I assure you I found poor

Hicks’s judgment unfailing; I never knew him wrong. He was coarse and

butcher-like, but he knew my constitution. It was a loss to me his

going off so suddenly. Dear me, what a very animated conversation Miss

Brooke seems to be having with this Mr. Lydgate!”

“She is talking cottages and hospitals with him,” said Mrs.

Cadwallader, whose ears and power of interpretation were quick. “I

believe he is a sort of philanthropist, so Brooke is sure to take him

up.”

“James,” said Lady Chettam when her son came near, “bring Mr. Lydgate

and introduce him to me. I want to test him.”

The affable dowager declared herself delighted with this opportunity of

making Mr. Lydgate’s acquaintance, having heard of his success in

treating fever on a new plan.

Mr. Lydgate had the medical accomplishment of looking perfectly grave

whatever nonsense was talked to him, and his dark steady eyes gave him

impressiveness as a listener. He was as little as possible like the

lamented Hicks, especially in a certain careless refinement about his

toilet and utterance. Yet Lady Chettam gathered much confidence in him.

He confirmed her view of her own constitution as being peculiar, by

admitting that all constitutions might be called peculiar, and he did

not deny that hers might be more peculiar than others. He did not

approve of a too lowering system, including reckless cupping, nor, on

the other hand, of incessant port wine and bark. He said “I think so”

with an air of so much deference accompanying the insight of agreement,

that she formed the most cordial opinion of his talents.

“I am quite pleased with your protege,” she said to Mr. Brooke before

going away.

“My protege?—dear me!—who is that?” said Mr. Brooke.

“This young Lydgate, the new doctor. He seems to me to understand his

profession admirably.”

“Oh, Lydgate! he is not my protege, you know; only I knew an uncle of

his who sent me a letter about him. However, I think he is likely to be

first-rate—has studied in Paris, knew Broussais; has ideas, you

know—wants to raise the profession.”

“Lydgate has lots of ideas, quite new, about ventilation and diet, that

sort of thing,” resumed Mr. Brooke, after he had handed out Lady

Chettam, and had returned to be civil to a group of Middlemarchers.

“Hang it, do you think that is quite sound?—upsetting the old

treatment, which has made Englishmen what they are?” said Mr. Standish.

“Medical knowledge is at a low ebb among us,” said Mr. Bulstrode, who

spoke in a subdued tone, and had rather a sickly air. “I, for my part,

hail the advent of Mr. Lydgate. I hope to find good reason for

confiding the new hospital to his management.”

“That is all very fine,” replied Mr. Standish, who was not fond of Mr.

Bulstrode; “if you like him to try experiments on your hospital

patients, and kill a few people for charity I have no objection. But I

am not going to hand money out of my purse to have experiments tried on

me. I like treatment that has been tested a little.”

“Well, you know, Standish, every dose you take is an experiment-an

experiment, you know,” said Mr. Brooke, nodding towards the lawyer.

“Oh, if you talk in that sense!” said Mr. Standish, with as much

disgust at such non-legal quibbling as a man can well betray towards a

valuable client.

“I should be glad of any treatment that would cure me without reducing

me to a skeleton, like poor Grainger,” said Mr. Vincy, the mayor, a

florid man, who would have served for a study of flesh in striking

contrast with the Franciscan tints of Mr. Bulstrode. “It’s an

uncommonly dangerous thing to be left without any padding against the

shafts of disease, as somebody said,—and I think it a very good

expression myself.”

Mr. Lydgate, of course, was out of hearing. He had quitted the party

early, and would have thought it altogether tedious but for the novelty

of certain introductions, especially the introduction to Miss Brooke,

whose youthful bloom, with her approaching marriage to that faded

scholar, and her interest in matters socially useful, gave her the

piquancy of an unusual combination.

“She is a good creature—that fine girl—but a little too earnest,” he

thought. “It is troublesome to talk to such women. They are always

wanting reasons, yet they are too ignorant to understand the merits of

any question, and usually fall back on their moral sense to settle

things after their own taste.”

Evidently Miss Brooke was not Mr. Lydgate’s style of woman any more

than Mr. Chichely’s. Considered, indeed, in relation to the latter,

whose mind was matured, she was altogether a mistake, and calculated to

shock his trust in final causes, including the adaptation of fine young

women to purplefaced bachelors. But Lydgate was less ripe, and might

possibly have experience before him which would modify his opinion as

to the most excellent things in woman.

Miss Brooke, however, was not again seen by either of these gentlemen

under her maiden name. Not long after that dinner-party she had become

Mrs. Casaubon, and was on her way to Rome.

CHAPTER XI.

But deeds and language such as men do use,

And persons such as comedy would choose,

When she would show an image of the times,

And sport with human follies, not with crimes.

—BEN JONSON.

Lydgate, in fact, was already conscious of being fascinated by a woman

strikingly different from Miss Brooke: he did not in the least suppose

that he had lost his balance and fallen in love, but he had said of

that particular woman, “She is grace itself; she is perfectly lovely

and accomplished. That is what a woman ought to be: she ought to

produce the effect of exquisite music.” Plain women he regarded as he

did the other severe facts of life, to be faced with philosophy and

investigated by science. But Rosamond Vincy seemed to have the true

melodic charm; and when a man has seen the woman whom he would have

chosen if he had intended to marry speedily, his remaining a bachelor

will usually depend on her resolution rather than on his. Lydgate

believed that he should not marry for several years: not marry until he

had trodden out a good clear path for himself away from the broad road

which was quite ready made. He had seen Miss Vincy above his horizon

almost as long as it had taken Mr. Casaubon to become engaged and

married: but this learned gentleman was possessed of a fortune; he had

assembled his voluminous notes, and had made that sort of reputation

which precedes performance,—often the larger part of a man’s fame. He

took a wife, as we have seen, to adorn the remaining quadrant of his

course, and be a little moon that would cause hardly a calculable

perturbation. But Lydgate was young, poor, ambitious. He had his

half-century before him instead of behind him, and he had come to

Middlemarch bent on doing many things that were not directly fitted to

make his fortune or even secure him a good income. To a man under such

circumstances, taking a wife is something more than a question of

adornment, however highly he may rate this; and Lydgate was disposed to

give it the first place among wifely functions. To his taste, guided by

a single conversation, here was the point on which Miss Brooke would be

found wanting, notwithstanding her undeniable beauty. She did not look

at things from the proper feminine angle. The society of such women was

about as relaxing as going from your work to teach the second form,

instead of reclining in a paradise with sweet laughs for bird-notes,

and blue eyes for a heaven.

Certainly nothing at present could seem much less important to Lydgate

than the turn of Miss Brooke’s mind, or to Miss Brooke than the

qualities of the woman who had attracted this young surgeon. But any

one watching keenly the stealthy convergence of human lots, sees a slow

preparation of effects from one life on another, which tells like a

calculated irony on the indifference or the frozen stare with which we

look at our unintroduced neighbor. Destiny stands by sarcastic with our

dramatis personae folded in her hand.

Old provincial society had its share of this subtle movement: had not

only its striking downfalls, its brilliant young professional dandies

who ended by living up an entry with a drab and six children for their

establishment, but also those less marked vicissitudes which are

constantly shifting the boundaries of social intercourse, and begetting

new consciousness of interdependence. Some slipped a little downward,

some got higher footing: people denied aspirates, gained wealth, and

fastidious gentlemen stood for boroughs; some were caught in political

currents, some in ecclesiastical, and perhaps found themselves

surprisingly grouped in consequence; while a few personages or families

that stood with rocky firmness amid all this fluctuation, were slowly

presenting new aspects in spite of solidity, and altering with the

double change of self and beholder. Municipal town and rural parish

gradually made fresh threads of connection—gradually, as the old

stocking gave way to the savings-bank, and the worship of the solar

guinea became extinct; while squires and baronets, and even lords who

had once lived blamelessly afar from the civic mind, gathered the

faultiness of closer acquaintanceship. Settlers, too, came from distant

counties, some with an alarming novelty of skill, others with an

offensive advantage in cunning. In fact, much the same sort of movement

and mixture went on in old England as we find in older Herodotus, who

also, in telling what had been, thought it well to take a woman’s lot

for his starting-point; though Io, as a maiden apparently beguiled by

attractive merchandise, was the reverse of Miss Brooke, and in this

respect perhaps bore more resemblance to Rosamond Vincy, who had

excellent taste in costume, with that nymph-like figure and pure

blondness which give the largest range to choice in the flow and color

of drapery. But these things made only part of her charm. She was

admitted to be the flower of Mrs. Lemon’s school, the chief school in

the county, where the teaching included all that was demanded in the

accomplished female—even to extras, such as the getting in and out of a

carriage. Mrs. Lemon herself had always held up Miss Vincy as an

example: no pupil, she said, exceeded that young lady for mental

acquisition and propriety of speech, while her musical execution was

quite exceptional. We cannot help the way in which people speak of us,

and probably if Mrs. Lemon had undertaken to describe Juliet or Imogen,

these heroines would not have seemed poetical. The first vision of

Rosamond would have been enough with most judges to dispel any

prejudice excited by Mrs. Lemon’s praise.

Lydgate could not be long in Middlemarch without having that agreeable

vision, or even without making the acquaintance of the Vincy family;

for though Mr. Peacock, whose practice he had paid something to enter

on, had not been their doctor (Mrs. Vincy not liking the lowering

system adopted by him), he had many patients among their connections

and acquaintances. For who of any consequence in Middlemarch was not

connected or at least acquainted with the Vincys? They were old

manufacturers, and had kept a good house for three generations, in

which there had naturally been much intermarrying with neighbors more

or less decidedly genteel. Mr. Vincy’s sister had made a wealthy match

in accepting Mr. Bulstrode, who, however, as a man not born in the

town, and altogether of dimly known origin, was considered to have done

well in uniting himself with a real Middlemarch family; on the other

hand, Mr. Vincy had descended a little, having taken an innkeeper’s

daughter. But on this side too there was a cheering sense of money; for

Mrs. Vincy’s sister had been second wife to rich old Mr. Featherstone,

and had died childless years ago, so that her nephews and nieces might

be supposed to touch the affections of the widower. And it happened

that Mr. Bulstrode and Mr. Featherstone, two of Peacock’s most

important patients, had, from different causes, given an especially

good reception to his successor, who had raised some partisanship as

well as discussion. Mr. Wrench, medical attendant to the Vincy family,

very early had grounds for thinking lightly of Lydgate’s professional

discretion, and there was no report about him which was not retailed at

the Vincys’, where visitors were frequent. Mr. Vincy was more inclined

to general good-fellowship than to taking sides, but there was no need

for him to be hasty in making any new man acquaintance. Rosamond

silently wished that her father would invite Mr. Lydgate. She was tired

of the faces and figures she had always been used to—the various

irregular profiles and gaits and turns of phrase distinguishing those

Middlemarch young men whom she had known as boys. She had been at

school with girls of higher position, whose brothers, she felt sure, it

would have been possible for her to be more interested in, than in

these inevitable Middlemarch companions. But she would not have chosen

to mention her wish to her father; and he, for his part, was in no

hurry on the subject. An alderman about to be mayor must by-and-by

enlarge his dinner-parties, but at present there were plenty of guests

at his well-spread table.

That table often remained covered with the relics of the family

breakfast long after Mr. Vincy had gone with his second son to the

warehouse, and when Miss Morgan was already far on in morning lessons

with the younger girls in the schoolroom. It awaited the family

laggard, who found any sort of inconvenience (to others) less

disagreeable than getting up when he was called. This was the case one

morning of the October in which we have lately seen Mr. Casaubon

visiting the Grange; and though the room was a little overheated with

the fire, which had sent the spaniel panting to a remote corner,

Rosamond, for some reason, continued to sit at her embroidery longer

than usual, now and then giving herself a little shake, and laying her

work on her knee to contemplate it with an air of hesitating weariness.

Her mamma, who had returned from an excursion to the kitchen, sat on

the other side of the small work-table with an air of more entire

placidity, until, the clock again giving notice that it was going to

strike, she looked up from the lace-mending which was occupying her

plump fingers and rang the bell.

“Knock at Mr. Fred’s door again, Pritchard, and tell him it has struck

half-past ten.”

This was said without any change in the radiant good-humor of Mrs.

Vincy’s face, in which forty-five years had delved neither angles nor

parallels; and pushing back her pink capstrings, she let her work rest

on her lap, while she looked admiringly at her daughter.

“Mamma,” said Rosamond, “when Fred comes down I wish you would not let

him have red herrings. I cannot bear the smell of them all over the

house at this hour of the morning.”

“Oh, my dear, you are so hard on your brothers! It is the only fault I

have to find with you. You are the sweetest temper in the world, but

you are so tetchy with your brothers.”

“Not tetchy, mamma: you never hear me speak in an unladylike way.”

“Well, but you want to deny them things.”

“Brothers are so unpleasant.”

“Oh, my dear, you must allow for young men. Be thankful if they have

good hearts. A woman must learn to put up with little things. You will

be married some day.”

“Not to any one who is like Fred.”

“Don’t decry your own brother, my dear. Few young men have less against

them, although he couldn’t take his degree—I’m sure I can’t understand

why, for he seems to me most clever. And you know yourself he was

thought equal to the best society at college. So particular as you are,

my dear, I wonder you are not glad to have such a gentlemanly young man

for a brother. You are always finding fault with Bob because he is not

Fred.”

“Oh no, mamma, only because he is Bob.”

“Well, my dear, you will not find any Middlemarch young man who has not

something against him.”

“But”—here Rosamond’s face broke into a smile which suddenly revealed

two dimples. She herself thought unfavorably of these dimples and

smiled little in general society. “But I shall not marry any

Middlemarch young man.”

“So it seems, my love, for you have as good as refused the pick of

them; and if there’s better to be had, I’m sure there’s no girl better

deserves it.”

“Excuse me, mamma—I wish you would not say, ‘the pick of them.’”

“Why, what else are they?”

“I mean, mamma, it is rather a vulgar expression.”

“Very likely, my dear; I never was a good speaker. What should I say?”

“The best of them.”

“Why, that seems just as plain and common. If I had had time to think,

I should have said, ‘the most superior young men.’ But with your

education you must know.”

“What must Rosy know, mother?” said Mr. Fred, who had slid in

unobserved through the half-open door while the ladies were bending

over their work, and now going up to the fire stood with his back

towards it, warming the soles of his slippers.

“Whether it’s right to say ‘superior young men,’” said Mrs. Vincy,

ringing the bell.

“Oh, there are so many superior teas and sugars now. Superior is

getting to be shopkeepers’ slang.”

“Are you beginning to dislike slang, then?” said Rosamond, with mild

gravity.

“Only the wrong sort. All choice of words is slang. It marks a class.”

“There is correct English: that is not slang.”

“I beg your pardon: correct English is the slang of prigs who write

history and essays. And the strongest slang of all is the slang of

poets.”

“You will say anything, Fred, to gain your point.”

“Well, tell me whether it is slang or poetry to call an ox a

\_leg-plaiter\_.”

“Of course you can call it poetry if you like.”

“Aha, Miss Rosy, you don’t know Homer from slang. I shall invent a new

game; I shall write bits of slang and poetry on slips, and give them to

you to separate.”

“Dear me, how amusing it is to hear young people talk!” said Mrs.

Vincy, with cheerful admiration.

“Have you got nothing else for my breakfast, Pritchard?” said Fred, to

the servant who brought in coffee and buttered toast; while he walked

round the table surveying the ham, potted beef, and other cold

remnants, with an air of silent rejection, and polite forbearance from

signs of disgust.

“Should you like eggs, sir?”

“Eggs, no! Bring me a grilled bone.”

“Really, Fred,” said Rosamond, when the servant had left the room, “if

you must have hot things for breakfast, I wish you would come down

earlier. You can get up at six o’clock to go out hunting; I cannot

understand why you find it so difficult to get up on other mornings.”

“That is your want of understanding, Rosy. I can get up to go hunting

because I like it.”

“What would you think of me if I came down two hours after every one

else and ordered grilled bone?”

“I should think you were an uncommonly fast young lady,” said Fred,

eating his toast with the utmost composure.

“I cannot see why brothers are to make themselves disagreeable, any

more than sisters.”

“I don’t make myself disagreeable; it is you who find me so.

Disagreeable is a word that describes your feelings and not my

actions.”

“I think it describes the smell of grilled bone.”

“Not at all. It describes a sensation in your little nose associated

with certain finicking notions which are the classics of Mrs. Lemon’s

school. Look at my mother; you don’t see her objecting to everything

except what she does herself. She is my notion of a pleasant woman.”

“Bless you both, my dears, and don’t quarrel,” said Mrs. Vincy, with

motherly cordiality. “Come, Fred, tell us all about the new doctor. How

is your uncle pleased with him?”

“Pretty well, I think. He asks Lydgate all sorts of questions and then

screws up his face while he hears the answers, as if they were pinching

his toes. That’s his way. Ah, here comes my grilled bone.”

“But how came you to stay out so late, my dear? You only said you were

going to your uncle’s.”

“Oh, I dined at Plymdale’s. We had whist. Lydgate was there too.”

“And what do you think of him? He is very gentlemanly, I suppose. They

say he is of excellent family—his relations quite county people.”

“Yes,” said Fred. “There was a Lydgate at John’s who spent no end of

money. I find this man is a second cousin of his. But rich men may have

very poor devils for second cousins.”

“It always makes a difference, though, to be of good family,” said

Rosamond, with a tone of decision which showed that she had thought on

this subject. Rosamond felt that she might have been happier if she had

not been the daughter of a Middlemarch manufacturer. She disliked

anything which reminded her that her mother’s father had been an

innkeeper. Certainly any one remembering the fact might think that Mrs.

Vincy had the air of a very handsome good-humored landlady, accustomed

to the most capricious orders of gentlemen.

“I thought it was odd his name was Tertius,” said the bright-faced

matron, “but of course it’s a name in the family. But now, tell us

exactly what sort of man he is.”

“Oh, tallish, dark, clever—talks well—rather a prig, I think.”

“I never can make out what you mean by a prig,” said Rosamond.

“A fellow who wants to show that he has opinions.”

“Why, my dear, doctors must have opinions,” said Mrs. Vincy. “What are

they there for else?”

“Yes, mother, the opinions they are paid for. But a prig is a fellow

who is always making you a present of his opinions.”

“I suppose Mary Garth admires Mr. Lydgate,” said Rosamond, not without

a touch of innuendo.

“Really, I can’t say.” said Fred, rather glumly, as he left the table,

and taking up a novel which he had brought down with him, threw himself

into an arm-chair. “If you are jealous of her, go oftener to Stone

Court yourself and eclipse her.”

“I wish you would not be so vulgar, Fred. If you have finished, pray

ring the bell.”

“It is true, though—what your brother says, Rosamond,” Mrs. Vincy

began, when the servant had cleared the table. “It is a thousand pities

you haven’t patience to go and see your uncle more, so proud of you as

he is, and wanted you to live with him. There’s no knowing what he

might have done for you as well as for Fred. God knows, I’m fond of

having you at home with me, but I can part with my children for their

good. And now it stands to reason that your uncle Featherstone will do

something for Mary Garth.”

“Mary Garth can bear being at Stone Court, because she likes that

better than being a governess,” said Rosamond, folding up her work. “I

would rather not have anything left to me if I must earn it by enduring

much of my uncle’s cough and his ugly relations.”

“He can’t be long for this world, my dear; I wouldn’t hasten his end,

but what with asthma and that inward complaint, let us hope there is

something better for him in another. And I have no ill-will towards

Mary Garth, but there’s justice to be thought of. And Mr.

Featherstone’s first wife brought him no money, as my sister did. Her

nieces and nephews can’t have so much claim as my sister’s. And I must

say I think Mary Garth a dreadful plain girl—more fit for a governess.”

“Every one would not agree with you there, mother,” said Fred, who

seemed to be able to read and listen too.

“Well, my dear,” said Mrs. Vincy, wheeling skilfully, “if she \_had\_

some fortune left her,—a man marries his wife’s relations, and the

Garths are so poor, and live in such a small way. But I shall leave you

to your studies, my dear; for I must go and do some shopping.”

“Fred’s studies are not very deep,” said Rosamond, rising with her

mamma, “he is only reading a novel.”

“Well, well, by-and-by he’ll go to his Latin and things,” said Mrs.

Vincy, soothingly, stroking her son’s head. “There’s a fire in the

smoking-room on purpose. It’s your father’s wish, you know—Fred, my

dear—and I always tell him you will be good, and go to college again to

take your degree.”

Fred drew his mother’s hand down to his lips, but said nothing.

“I suppose you are not going out riding to-day?” said Rosamond,

lingering a little after her mamma was gone.

“No; why?”

“Papa says I may have the chestnut to ride now.”

“You can go with me to-morrow, if you like. Only I am going to Stone

Court, remember.”

“I want to ride so much, it is indifferent to me where we go.” Rosamond

really wished to go to Stone Court, of all other places.

“Oh, I say, Rosy,” said Fred, as she was passing out of the room, “if

you are going to the piano, let me come and play some airs with you.”

“Pray do not ask me this morning.”

“Why not this morning?”

“Really, Fred, I wish you would leave off playing the flute. A man

looks very silly playing the flute. And you play so out of tune.”

“When next any one makes love to you, Miss Rosamond, I will tell him

how obliging you are.”

“Why should you expect me to oblige you by hearing you play the flute,

any more than I should expect you to oblige me by not playing it?”

“And why should you expect me to take you out riding?”

This question led to an adjustment, for Rosamond had set her mind on

that particular ride.

So Fred was gratified with nearly an hour’s practice of “Ar hyd y nos,”

“Ye banks and braes,” and other favorite airs from his “Instructor on

the Flute;” a wheezy performance, into which he threw much ambition and

an irrepressible hopefulness.

CHAPTER XII.

He had more tow on his distaffe

Than Gerveis knew.

—CHAUCER.

The ride to Stone Court, which Fred and Rosamond took the next morning,

lay through a pretty bit of midland landscape, almost all meadows and

pastures, with hedgerows still allowed to grow in bushy beauty and to

spread out coral fruit for the birds. Little details gave each field a

particular physiognomy, dear to the eyes that have looked on them from

childhood: the pool in the corner where the grasses were dank and trees

leaned whisperingly; the great oak shadowing a bare place in

mid-pasture; the high bank where the ash-trees grew; the sudden slope

of the old marl-pit making a red background for the burdock; the

huddled roofs and ricks of the homestead without a traceable way of

approach; the gray gate and fences against the depths of the bordering

wood; and the stray hovel, its old, old thatch full of mossy hills and

valleys with wondrous modulations of light and shadow such as we travel

far to see in later life, and see larger, but not more beautiful. These

are the things that make the gamut of joy in landscape to midland-bred

souls—the things they toddled among, or perhaps learned by heart

standing between their father’s knees while he drove leisurely.

But the road, even the byroad, was excellent; for Lowick, as we have

seen, was not a parish of muddy lanes and poor tenants; and it was into

Lowick parish that Fred and Rosamond entered after a couple of miles’

riding. Another mile would bring them to Stone Court, and at the end of

the first half, the house was already visible, looking as if it had

been arrested in its growth toward a stone mansion by an unexpected

budding of farm-buildings on its left flank, which had hindered it from

becoming anything more than the substantial dwelling of a gentleman

farmer. It was not the less agreeable an object in the distance for the

cluster of pinnacled corn-ricks which balanced the fine row of walnuts

on the right.

Presently it was possible to discern something that might be a gig on

the circular drive before the front door.

“Dear me,” said Rosamond, “I hope none of my uncle’s horrible relations

are there.”

“They are, though. That is Mrs. Waule’s gig—the last yellow gig left, I

should think. When I see Mrs. Waule in it, I understand how yellow can

have been worn for mourning. That gig seems to me more funereal than a

hearse. But then Mrs. Waule always has black crape on. How does she

manage it, Rosy? Her friends can’t always be dying.”

“I don’t know at all. And she is not in the least evangelical,” said

Rosamond, reflectively, as if that religious point of view would have

fully accounted for perpetual crape. “And, not poor,” she added, after

a moment’s pause.

“No, by George! They are as rich as Jews, those Waules and

Featherstones; I mean, for people like them, who don’t want to spend

anything. And yet they hang about my uncle like vultures, and are

afraid of a farthing going away from their side of the family. But I

believe he hates them all.”

The Mrs. Waule who was so far from being admirable in the eyes of these

distant connections, had happened to say this very morning (not at all

with a defiant air, but in a low, muffled, neutral tone, as of a voice

heard through cotton wool) that she did not wish “to enjoy their good

opinion.” She was seated, as she observed, on her own brother’s hearth,

and had been Jane Featherstone five-and-twenty years before she had

been Jane Waule, which entitled her to speak when her own brother’s

name had been made free with by those who had no right to it.

“What are you driving at there?” said Mr. Featherstone, holding his

stick between his knees and settling his wig, while he gave her a

momentary sharp glance, which seemed to react on him like a draught of

cold air and set him coughing.

Mrs. Waule had to defer her answer till he was quiet again, till Mary

Garth had supplied him with fresh syrup, and he had begun to rub the

gold knob of his stick, looking bitterly at the fire. It was a bright

fire, but it made no difference to the chill-looking purplish tint of

Mrs. Waule’s face, which was as neutral as her voice; having mere

chinks for eyes, and lips that hardly moved in speaking.

“The doctors can’t master that cough, brother. It’s just like what I

have; for I’m your own sister, constitution and everything. But, as I

was saying, it’s a pity Mrs. Vincy’s family can’t be better conducted.”

“Tchah! you said nothing o’ the sort. You said somebody had made free

with my name.”

“And no more than can be proved, if what everybody says is true. My

brother Solomon tells me it’s the talk up and down in Middlemarch how

unsteady young Vincy is, and has been forever gambling at billiards

since home he came.”

“Nonsense! What’s a game at billiards? It’s a good gentlemanly game;

and young Vincy is not a clodhopper. If your son John took to

billiards, now, he’d make a fool of himself.”

“Your nephew John never took to billiards or any other game, brother,

and is far from losing hundreds of pounds, which, if what everybody

says is true, must be found somewhere else than out of Mr. Vincy the

father’s pocket. For they say he’s been losing money for years, though

nobody would think so, to see him go coursing and keeping open house as

they do. And I’ve heard say Mr. Bulstrode condemns Mrs. Vincy beyond

anything for her flightiness, and spoiling her children so.”

“What’s Bulstrode to me? I don’t bank with him.”

“Well, Mrs. Bulstrode is Mr. Vincy’s own sister, and they do say that

Mr. Vincy mostly trades on the Bank money; and you may see yourself,

brother, when a woman past forty has pink strings always flying, and

that light way of laughing at everything, it’s very unbecoming. But

indulging your children is one thing, and finding money to pay their

debts is another. And it’s openly said that young Vincy has raised

money on his expectations. I don’t say what expectations. Miss Garth

hears me, and is welcome to tell again. I know young people hang

together.”

“No, thank you, Mrs. Waule,” said Mary Garth. “I dislike hearing

scandal too much to wish to repeat it.”

Mr. Featherstone rubbed the knob of his stick and made a brief

convulsive show of laughter, which had much the same genuineness as an

old whist-player’s chuckle over a bad hand. Still looking at the fire,

he said—

“And who pretends to say Fred Vincy hasn’t got expectations? Such a

fine, spirited fellow is like enough to have ’em.”

There was a slight pause before Mrs. Waule replied, and when she did

so, her voice seemed to be slightly moistened with tears, though her

face was still dry.

“Whether or no, brother, it is naturally painful to me and my brother

Solomon to hear your name made free with, and your complaint being such

as may carry you off sudden, and people who are no more Featherstones

than the Merry-Andrew at the fair, openly reckoning on your property

coming to \_them\_. And me your own sister, and Solomon your own brother!

And if that’s to be it, what has it pleased the Almighty to make

families for?” Here Mrs. Waule’s tears fell, but with moderation.

“Come, out with it, Jane!” said Mr. Featherstone, looking at her. “You

mean to say, Fred Vincy has been getting somebody to advance him money

on what he says he knows about my will, eh?”

“I never said so, brother” (Mrs. Waule’s voice had again become dry and

unshaken). “It was told me by my brother Solomon last night when he

called coming from market to give me advice about the old wheat, me

being a widow, and my son John only three-and-twenty, though steady

beyond anything. And he had it from most undeniable authority, and not

one, but many.”

“Stuff and nonsense! I don’t believe a word of it. It’s all a got-up

story. Go to the window, missy; I thought I heard a horse. See if the

doctor’s coming.”

“Not got up by me, brother, nor yet by Solomon, who, whatever else he

may be—and I don’t deny he has oddities—has made his will and parted

his property equal between such kin as he’s friends with; though, for

my part, I think there are times when some should be considered more

than others. But Solomon makes it no secret what he means to do.”

“The more fool he!” said Mr. Featherstone, with some difficulty;

breaking into a severe fit of coughing that required Mary Garth to

stand near him, so that she did not find out whose horses they were

which presently paused stamping on the gravel before the door.

Before Mr. Featherstone’s cough was quiet, Rosamond entered, bearing up

her riding-habit with much grace. She bowed ceremoniously to Mrs.

Waule, who said stiffly, “How do you do, miss?” smiled and nodded

silently to Mary, and remained standing till the coughing should cease,

and allow her uncle to notice her.

“Heyday, miss!” he said at last, “you have a fine color. Where’s Fred?”

“Seeing about the horses. He will be in presently.”

“Sit down, sit down. Mrs. Waule, you’d better go.”

Even those neighbors who had called Peter Featherstone an old fox, had

never accused him of being insincerely polite, and his sister was quite

used to the peculiar absence of ceremony with which he marked his sense

of blood-relationship. Indeed, she herself was accustomed to think that

entire freedom from the necessity of behaving agreeably was included in

the Almighty’s intentions about families. She rose slowly without any

sign of resentment, and said in her usual muffled monotone, “Brother, I

hope the new doctor will be able to do something for you. Solomon says

there’s great talk of his cleverness. I’m sure it’s my wish you should

be spared. And there’s none more ready to nurse you than your own

sister and your own nieces, if you’d only say the word. There’s

Rebecca, and Joanna, and Elizabeth, you know.”

“Ay, ay, I remember—you’ll see I’ve remembered ’em all—all dark and

ugly. They’d need have some money, eh? There never was any beauty in

the women of our family; but the Featherstones have always had some

money, and the Waules too. Waule had money too. A warm man was Waule.

Ay, ay; money’s a good egg; and if you’ve got money to leave behind

you, lay it in a warm nest. Good-by, Mrs. Waule.” Here Mr. Featherstone

pulled at both sides of his wig as if he wanted to deafen himself, and

his sister went away ruminating on this oracular speech of his.

Notwithstanding her jealousy of the Vincys and of Mary Garth, there

remained as the nethermost sediment in her mental shallows a persuasion

that her brother Peter Featherstone could never leave his chief

property away from his blood-relations:—else, why had the Almighty

carried off his two wives both childless, after he had gained so much

by manganese and things, turning up when nobody expected it?—and why

was there a Lowick parish church, and the Waules and Powderells all

sitting in the same pew for generations, and the Featherstone pew next

to them, if, the Sunday after her brother Peter’s death, everybody was

to know that the property was gone out of the family? The human mind

has at no period accepted a moral chaos; and so preposterous a result

was not strictly conceivable. But we are frightened at much that is not

strictly conceivable.

When Fred came in the old man eyed him with a peculiar twinkle, which

the younger had often had reason to interpret as pride in the

satisfactory details of his appearance.

“You two misses go away,” said Mr. Featherstone. “I want to speak to

Fred.”

“Come into my room, Rosamond, you will not mind the cold for a little

while,” said Mary. The two girls had not only known each other in

childhood, but had been at the same provincial school together (Mary as

an articled pupil), so that they had many memories in common, and liked

very well to talk in private. Indeed, this \_tête-à-tête\_ was one of

Rosamond’s objects in coming to Stone Court.

Old Featherstone would not begin the dialogue till the door had been

closed. He continued to look at Fred with the same twinkle and with one

of his habitual grimaces, alternately screwing and widening his mouth;

and when he spoke, it was in a low tone, which might be taken for that

of an informer ready to be bought off, rather than for the tone of an

offended senior. He was not a man to feel any strong moral indignation

even on account of trespasses against himself. It was natural that

others should want to get an advantage over him, but then, he was a

little too cunning for them.

“So, sir, you’ve been paying ten per cent for money which you’ve

promised to pay off by mortgaging my land when I’m dead and gone, eh?

You put my life at a twelvemonth, say. But I can alter my will yet.”

Fred blushed. He had not borrowed money in that way, for excellent

reasons. But he was conscious of having spoken with some confidence

(perhaps with more than he exactly remembered) about his prospect of

getting Featherstone’s land as a future means of paying present debts.

“I don’t know what you refer to, sir. I have certainly never borrowed

any money on such an insecurity. Please do explain.”

“No, sir, it’s you must explain. I can alter my will yet, let me tell

you. I’m of sound mind—can reckon compound interest in my head, and

remember every fool’s name as well as I could twenty years ago. What

the deuce? I’m under eighty. I say, you must contradict this story.”

“I have contradicted it, sir,” Fred answered, with a touch of

impatience, not remembering that his uncle did not verbally

discriminate contradicting from disproving, though no one was further

from confounding the two ideas than old Featherstone, who often

wondered that so many fools took his own assertions for proofs. “But I

contradict it again. The story is a silly lie.”

“Nonsense! you must bring dockiments. It comes from authority.”

“Name the authority, and make him name the man of whom I borrowed the

money, and then I can disprove the story.”

“It’s pretty good authority, I think—a man who knows most of what goes

on in Middlemarch. It’s that fine, religious, charitable uncle o’

yours. Come now!” Here Mr. Featherstone had his peculiar inward shake

which signified merriment.

“Mr. Bulstrode?”

“Who else, eh?”

“Then the story has grown into this lie out of some sermonizing words

he may have let fall about me. Do they pretend that he named the man

who lent me the money?”

“If there is such a man, depend upon it Bulstrode knows him. But,

supposing you only tried to get the money lent, and didn’t get

it—Bulstrode ’ud know that too. You bring me a writing from Bulstrode

to say he doesn’t believe you’ve ever promised to pay your debts out o’

my land. Come now!”

Mr. Featherstone’s face required its whole scale of grimaces as a

muscular outlet to his silent triumph in the soundness of his

faculties.

Fred felt himself to be in a disgusting dilemma.

“You must be joking, sir. Mr. Bulstrode, like other men, believes

scores of things that are not true, and he has a prejudice against me.

I could easily get him to write that he knew no facts in proof of the

report you speak of, though it might lead to unpleasantness. But I

could hardly ask him to write down what he believes or does not believe

about me.” Fred paused an instant, and then added, in politic appeal to

his uncle’s vanity, “That is hardly a thing for a gentleman to ask.”

But he was disappointed in the result.

“Ay, I know what you mean. You’d sooner offend me than Bulstrode. And

what’s he?—he’s got no land hereabout that ever I heard tell of. A

speckilating fellow! He may come down any day, when the devil leaves

off backing him. And that’s what his religion means: he wants God

A’mighty to come in. That’s nonsense! There’s one thing I made out

pretty clear when I used to go to church—and it’s this: God A’mighty

sticks to the land. He promises land, and He gives land, and He makes

chaps rich with corn and cattle. But you take the other side. You like

Bulstrode and speckilation better than Featherstone and land.”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said Fred, rising, standing with his back to

the fire and beating his boot with his whip. “I like neither Bulstrode

nor speculation.” He spoke rather sulkily, feeling himself stalemated.

“Well, well, you can do without me, that’s pretty clear,” said old

Featherstone, secretly disliking the possibility that Fred would show

himself at all independent. “You neither want a bit of land to make a

squire of you instead of a starving parson, nor a lift of a hundred

pound by the way. It’s all one to me. I can make five codicils if I

like, and I shall keep my bank-notes for a nest-egg. It’s all one to

me.”

Fred colored again. Featherstone had rarely given him presents of

money, and at this moment it seemed almost harder to part with the

immediate prospect of bank-notes than with the more distant prospect of

the land.

“I am not ungrateful, sir. I never meant to show disregard for any kind

intentions you might have towards me. On the contrary.”

“Very good. Then prove it. You bring me a letter from Bulstrode saying

he doesn’t believe you’ve been cracking and promising to pay your debts

out o’ my land, and then, if there’s any scrape you’ve got into, we’ll

see if I can’t back you a bit. Come now! That’s a bargain. Here, give

me your arm. I’ll try and walk round the room.”

Fred, in spite of his irritation, had kindness enough in him to be a

little sorry for the unloved, unvenerated old man, who with his

dropsical legs looked more than usually pitiable in walking. While

giving his arm, he thought that he should not himself like to be an old

fellow with his constitution breaking up; and he waited

good-temperedly, first before the window to hear the wonted remarks

about the guinea-fowls and the weather-cock, and then before the scanty

book-shelves, of which the chief glories in dark calf were Josephus,

Culpepper, Klopstock’s “Messiah,” and several volumes of the

“Gentleman’s Magazine.”

“Read me the names o’ the books. Come now! you’re a college man.”

Fred gave him the titles.

“What did missy want with more books? What must you be bringing her

more books for?”

“They amuse her, sir. She is very fond of reading.”

“A little too fond,” said Mr. Featherstone, captiously. “She was for

reading when she sat with me. But I put a stop to that. She’s got the

newspaper to read out loud. That’s enough for one day, I should think.

I can’t abide to see her reading to herself. You mind and not bring her

any more books, do you hear?”

“Yes, sir, I hear.” Fred had received this order before, and had

secretly disobeyed it. He intended to disobey it again.

“Ring the bell,” said Mr. Featherstone; “I want missy to come down.”

Rosamond and Mary had been talking faster than their male friends. They

did not think of sitting down, but stood at the toilet-table near the

window while Rosamond took off her hat, adjusted her veil, and applied

little touches of her finger-tips to her hair—hair of infantine

fairness, neither flaxen nor yellow. Mary Garth seemed all the plainer

standing at an angle between the two nymphs—the one in the glass, and

the one out of it, who looked at each other with eyes of heavenly blue,

deep enough to hold the most exquisite meanings an ingenious beholder

could put into them, and deep enough to hide the meanings of the owner

if these should happen to be less exquisite. Only a few children in

Middlemarch looked blond by the side of Rosamond, and the slim figure

displayed by her riding-habit had delicate undulations. In fact, most

men in Middlemarch, except her brothers, held that Miss Vincy was the

best girl in the world, and some called her an angel. Mary Garth, on

the contrary, had the aspect of an ordinary sinner: she was brown; her

curly dark hair was rough and stubborn; her stature was low; and it

would not be true to declare, in satisfactory antithesis, that she had

all the virtues. Plainness has its peculiar temptations and vices quite

as much as beauty; it is apt either to feign amiability, or, not

feigning it, to show all the repulsiveness of discontent: at any rate,

to be called an ugly thing in contrast with that lovely creature your

companion, is apt to produce some effect beyond a sense of fine

veracity and fitness in the phrase. At the age of two-and-twenty Mary

had certainly not attained that perfect good sense and good principle

which are usually recommended to the less fortunate girl, as if they

were to be obtained in quantities ready mixed, with a flavor of

resignation as required. Her shrewdness had a streak of satiric

bitterness continually renewed and never carried utterly out of sight,

except by a strong current of gratitude towards those who, instead of

telling her that she ought to be contented, did something to make her

so. Advancing womanhood had tempered her plainness, which was of a good

human sort, such as the mothers of our race have very commonly worn in

all latitudes under a more or less becoming headgear. Rembrandt would

have painted her with pleasure, and would have made her broad features

look out of the canvas with intelligent honesty. For honesty,

truth-telling fairness, was Mary’s reigning virtue: she neither tried

to create illusions, nor indulged in them for her own behoof, and when

she was in a good mood she had humor enough in her to laugh at herself.

When she and Rosamond happened both to be reflected in the glass, she

said, laughingly—

“What a brown patch I am by the side of you, Rosy! You are the most

unbecoming companion.”

“Oh no! No one thinks of your appearance, you are so sensible and

useful, Mary. Beauty is of very little consequence in reality,” said

Rosamond, turning her head towards Mary, but with eyes swerving towards

the new view of her neck in the glass.

“You mean \_my\_ beauty,” said Mary, rather sardonically.

Rosamond thought, “Poor Mary, she takes the kindest things ill.” Aloud

she said, “What have you been doing lately?”

“I? Oh, minding the house—pouring out syrup—pretending to be amiable

and contented—learning to have a bad opinion of everybody.”

“It is a wretched life for you.”

“No,” said Mary, curtly, with a little toss of her head. “I think my

life is pleasanter than your Miss Morgan’s.”

“Yes; but Miss Morgan is so uninteresting, and not young.”

“She is interesting to herself, I suppose; and I am not at all sure

that everything gets easier as one gets older.”

“No,” said Rosamond, reflectively; “one wonders what such people do,

without any prospect. To be sure, there is religion as a support. But,”

she added, dimpling, “it is very different with you, Mary. You may have

an offer.”

“Has any one told you he means to make me one?”

“Of course not. I mean, there is a gentleman who may fall in love with

you, seeing you almost every day.”

A certain change in Mary’s face was chiefly determined by the resolve

not to show any change.

“Does that always make people fall in love?” she answered, carelessly;

“it seems to me quite as often a reason for detesting each other.”

“Not when they are interesting and agreeable. I hear that Mr. Lydgate

is both.”

“Oh, Mr. Lydgate!” said Mary, with an unmistakable lapse into

indifference. “You want to know something about him,” she added, not

choosing to indulge Rosamond’s indirectness.

“Merely, how you like him.”

“There is no question of liking at present. My liking always wants some

little kindness to kindle it. I am not magnanimous enough to like

people who speak to me without seeming to see me.”

“Is he so haughty?” said Rosamond, with heightened satisfaction. “You

know that he is of good family?”

“No; he did not give that as a reason.”

“Mary! you are the oddest girl. But what sort of looking man is he?

Describe him to me.”

“How can one describe a man? I can give you an inventory: heavy

eyebrows, dark eyes, a straight nose, thick dark hair, large solid

white hands—and—let me see—oh, an exquisite cambric

pocket-handkerchief. But you will see him. You know this is about the

time of his visits.”

Rosamond blushed a little, but said, meditatively, “I rather like a

haughty manner. I cannot endure a rattling young man.”

“I did not tell you that Mr. Lydgate was haughty; but \_il y en a pour

tous les goûts\_, as little Mamselle used to say, and if any girl can

choose the particular sort of conceit she would like, I should think it

is you, Rosy.”

“Haughtiness is not conceit; I call Fred conceited.”

“I wish no one said any worse of him. He should be more careful. Mrs.

Waule has been telling uncle that Fred is very unsteady.” Mary spoke

from a girlish impulse which got the better of her judgment. There was

a vague uneasiness associated with the word “unsteady” which she hoped

Rosamond might say something to dissipate. But she purposely abstained

from mentioning Mrs. Waule’s more special insinuation.

“Oh, Fred is horrid!” said Rosamond. She would not have allowed herself

so unsuitable a word to any one but Mary.

“What do you mean by horrid?”

“He is so idle, and makes papa so angry, and says he will not take

orders.”

“I think Fred is quite right.”

“How can you say he is quite right, Mary? I thought you had more sense

of religion.”

“He is not fit to be a clergyman.”

“But he ought to be fit.”—“Well, then, he is not what he ought to be. I

know some other people who are in the same case.”

“But no one approves of them. I should not like to marry a clergyman;

but there must be clergymen.”

“It does not follow that Fred must be one.”

“But when papa has been at the expense of educating him for it! And

only suppose, if he should have no fortune left him?”

“I can suppose that very well,” said Mary, dryly.

“Then I wonder you can defend Fred,” said Rosamond, inclined to push

this point.

“I don’t defend him,” said Mary, laughing; “I would defend any parish

from having him for a clergyman.”

“But of course if he were a clergyman, he must be different.”

“Yes, he would be a great hypocrite; and he is not that yet.”

“It is of no use saying anything to you, Mary. You always take Fred’s

part.”

“Why should I not take his part?” said Mary, lighting up. “He would

take mine. He is the only person who takes the least trouble to oblige

me.”

“You make me feel very uncomfortable, Mary,” said Rosamond, with her

gravest mildness; “I would not tell mamma for the world.”

“What would you not tell her?” said Mary, angrily.

“Pray do not go into a rage, Mary,” said Rosamond, mildly as ever.

“If your mamma is afraid that Fred will make me an offer, tell her that

I would not marry him if he asked me. But he is not going to do so,

that I am aware. He certainly never has asked me.”

“Mary, you are always so violent.”

“And you are always so exasperating.”

“I? What can you blame me for?”

“Oh, blameless people are always the most exasperating. There is the

bell—I think we must go down.”

“I did not mean to quarrel,” said Rosamond, putting on her hat.

“Quarrel? Nonsense; we have not quarrelled. If one is not to get into a

rage sometimes, what is the good of being friends?”

“Am I to repeat what you have said?”

“Just as you please. I never say what I am afraid of having repeated.

But let us go down.”

Mr. Lydgate was rather late this morning, but the visitors stayed long

enough to see him; for Mr. Featherstone asked Rosamond to sing to him,

and she herself was so kind as to propose a second favorite song of

his—“Flow on, thou shining river”—after she had sung “Home, sweet home”

(which she detested). This hard-headed old Overreach approved of the

sentimental song, as the suitable garnish for girls, and also as

fundamentally fine, sentiment being the right thing for a song.

Mr. Featherstone was still applauding the last performance, and

assuring missy that her voice was as clear as a blackbird’s, when Mr.

Lydgate’s horse passed the window.

His dull expectation of the usual disagreeable routine with an aged

patient—who can hardly believe that medicine would not “set him up” if

the doctor were only clever enough—added to his general disbelief in

Middlemarch charms, made a doubly effective background to this vision

of Rosamond, whom old Featherstone made haste ostentatiously to

introduce as his niece, though he had never thought it worth while to

speak of Mary Garth in that light. Nothing escaped Lydgate in

Rosamond’s graceful behavior: how delicately she waived the notice

which the old man’s want of taste had thrust upon her by a quiet

gravity, not showing her dimples on the wrong occasion, but showing

them afterwards in speaking to Mary, to whom she addressed herself with

so much good-natured interest, that Lydgate, after quickly examining

Mary more fully than he had done before, saw an adorable kindness in

Rosamond’s eyes. But Mary from some cause looked rather out of temper.

“Miss Rosy has been singing me a song—you’ve nothing to say against

that, eh, doctor?” said Mr. Featherstone. “I like it better than your

physic.”

“That has made me forget how the time was going,” said Rosamond, rising

to reach her hat, which she had laid aside before singing, so that her

flower-like head on its white stem was seen in perfection above her

riding-habit. “Fred, we must really go.”

“Very good,” said Fred, who had his own reasons for not being in the

best spirits, and wanted to get away.

“Miss Vincy is a musician?” said Lydgate, following her with his eyes.

(Every nerve and muscle in Rosamond was adjusted to the consciousness

that she was being looked at. She was by nature an actress of parts

that entered into her \_physique:\_ she even acted her own character, and

so well, that she did not know it to be precisely her own.)

“The best in Middlemarch, I’ll be bound,” said Mr. Featherstone, “let

the next be who she will. Eh, Fred? Speak up for your sister.”

“I’m afraid I’m out of court, sir. My evidence would be good for

nothing.”

“Middlemarch has not a very high standard, uncle,” said Rosamond, with

a pretty lightness, going towards her whip, which lay at a distance.

Lydgate was quick in anticipating her. He reached the whip before she

did, and turned to present it to her. She bowed and looked at him: he

of course was looking at her, and their eyes met with that peculiar

meeting which is never arrived at by effort, but seems like a sudden

divine clearance of haze. I think Lydgate turned a little paler than

usual, but Rosamond blushed deeply and felt a certain astonishment.

After that, she was really anxious to go, and did not know what sort of

stupidity her uncle was talking of when she went to shake hands with

him.

Yet this result, which she took to be a mutual impression, called

falling in love, was just what Rosamond had contemplated beforehand.

Ever since that important new arrival in Middlemarch she had woven a

little future, of which something like this scene was the necessary

beginning. Strangers, whether wrecked and clinging to a raft, or duly

escorted and accompanied by portmanteaus, have always had a

circumstantial fascination for the virgin mind, against which native

merit has urged itself in vain. And a stranger was absolutely necessary

to Rosamond’s social romance, which had always turned on a lover and

bridegroom who was not a Middlemarcher, and who had no connections at

all like her own: of late, indeed, the construction seemed to demand

that he should somehow be related to a baronet. Now that she and the

stranger had met, reality proved much more moving than anticipation,

and Rosamond could not doubt that this was the great epoch of her life.

She judged of her own symptoms as those of awakening love, and she held

it still more natural that Mr. Lydgate should have fallen in love at

first sight of her. These things happened so often at balls, and why

not by the morning light, when the complexion showed all the better for

it? Rosamond, though no older than Mary, was rather used to being

fallen in love with; but she, for her part, had remained indifferent

and fastidiously critical towards both fresh sprig and faded bachelor.

And here was Mr. Lydgate suddenly corresponding to her ideal, being

altogether foreign to Middlemarch, carrying a certain air of

distinction congruous with good family, and possessing connections

which offered vistas of that middle-class heaven, rank; a man of

talent, also, whom it would be especially delightful to enslave: in

fact, a man who had touched her nature quite newly, and brought a vivid

interest into her life which was better than any fancied “might-be”

such as she was in the habit of opposing to the actual.

Thus, in riding home, both the brother and the sister were preoccupied

and inclined to be silent. Rosamond, whose basis for her structure had

the usual airy slightness, was of remarkably detailed and realistic

imagination when the foundation had been once presupposed; and before

they had ridden a mile she was far on in the costume and introductions

of her wedded life, having determined on her house in Middlemarch, and

foreseen the visits she would pay to her husband’s high-bred relatives

at a distance, whose finished manners she could appropriate as

thoroughly as she had done her school accomplishments, preparing

herself thus for vaguer elevations which might ultimately come. There

was nothing financial, still less sordid, in her previsions: she cared

about what were considered refinements, and not about the money that

was to pay for them.

Fred’s mind, on the other hand, was busy with an anxiety which even his

ready hopefulness could not immediately quell. He saw no way of eluding

Featherstone’s stupid demand without incurring consequences which he

liked less even than the task of fulfilling it. His father was already

out of humor with him, and would be still more so if he were the

occasion of any additional coolness between his own family and the

Bulstrodes. Then, he himself hated having to go and speak to his uncle

Bulstrode, and perhaps after drinking wine he had said many foolish

things about Featherstone’s property, and these had been magnified by

report. Fred felt that he made a wretched figure as a fellow who

bragged about expectations from a queer old miser like Featherstone,

and went to beg for certificates at his bidding. But—those

expectations! He really had them, and he saw no agreeable alternative

if he gave them up; besides, he had lately made a debt which galled him

extremely, and old Featherstone had almost bargained to pay it off. The

whole affair was miserably small: his debts were small, even his

expectations were not anything so very magnificent. Fred had known men

to whom he would have been ashamed of confessing the smallness of his

scrapes. Such ruminations naturally produced a streak of misanthropic

bitterness. To be born the son of a Middlemarch manufacturer, and

inevitable heir to nothing in particular, while such men as Mainwaring

and Vyan—certainly life was a poor business, when a spirited young

fellow, with a good appetite for the best of everything, had so poor an

outlook.

It had not occurred to Fred that the introduction of Bulstrode’s name

in the matter was a fiction of old Featherstone’s; nor could this have

made any difference to his position. He saw plainly enough that the old

man wanted to exercise his power by tormenting him a little, and also

probably to get some satisfaction out of seeing him on unpleasant terms

with Bulstrode. Fred fancied that he saw to the bottom of his uncle

Featherstone’s soul, though in reality half what he saw there was no

more than the reflex of his own inclinations. The difficult task of

knowing another soul is not for young gentlemen whose consciousness is

chiefly made up of their own wishes.

Fred’s main point of debate with himself was, whether he should tell

his father, or try to get through the affair without his father’s

knowledge. It was probably Mrs. Waule who had been talking about him;

and if Mary Garth had repeated Mrs. Waule’s report to Rosamond, it

would be sure to reach his father, who would as surely question him

about it. He said to Rosamond, as they slackened their pace—

“Rosy, did Mary tell you that Mrs. Waule had said anything about me?”

“Yes, indeed, she did.”

“What?”

“That you were very unsteady.”

“Was that all?”

“I should think that was enough, Fred.”

“You are sure she said no more?”

“Mary mentioned nothing else. But really, Fred, I think you ought to be

ashamed.”

“Oh, fudge! Don’t lecture me. What did Mary say about it?”

“I am not obliged to tell you. You care so very much what Mary says,

and you are too rude to allow me to speak.”

“Of course I care what Mary says. She is the best girl I know.”

“I should never have thought she was a girl to fall in love with.”

“How do you know what men would fall in love with? Girls never know.”

“At least, Fred, let me advise \_you\_ not to fall in love with her, for

she says she would not marry you if you asked her.”

“She might have waited till I did ask her.”

“I knew it would nettle you, Fred.”

“Not at all. She would not have said so if you had not provoked her.”

Before reaching home, Fred concluded that he would tell the whole

affair as simply as possible to his father, who might perhaps take on

himself the unpleasant business of speaking to Bulstrode.

BOOK II.

OLD AND YOUNG.

CHAPTER XIII.

1\_st Gent\_. How class your man?—as better than the most,

Or, seeming better, worse beneath that cloak?

As saint or knave, pilgrim or hypocrite?

2\_d Gent\_. Nay, tell me how you class your wealth of books

The drifted relics of all time.

As well sort them at once by size and livery:

Vellum, tall copies, and the common calf

Will hardly cover more diversity

Than all your labels cunningly devised

To class your unread authors.

In consequence of what he had heard from Fred, Mr. Vincy determined to

speak with Mr. Bulstrode in his private room at the Bank at half-past

one, when he was usually free from other callers. But a visitor had

come in at one o’clock, and Mr. Bulstrode had so much to say to him,

that there was little chance of the interview being over in half an

hour. The banker’s speech was fluent, but it was also copious, and he

used up an appreciable amount of time in brief meditative pauses. Do

not imagine his sickly aspect to have been of the yellow, black-haired

sort: he had a pale blond skin, thin gray-besprinkled brown hair,

light-gray eyes, and a large forehead. Loud men called his subdued tone

an undertone, and sometimes implied that it was inconsistent with

openness; though there seems to be no reason why a loud man should not

be given to concealment of anything except his own voice, unless it can

be shown that Holy Writ has placed the seat of candor in the lungs. Mr.

Bulstrode had also a deferential bending attitude in listening, and an

apparently fixed attentiveness in his eyes which made those persons who

thought themselves worth hearing infer that he was seeking the utmost

improvement from their discourse. Others, who expected to make no great

figure, disliked this kind of moral lantern turned on them. If you are

not proud of your cellar, there is no thrill of satisfaction in seeing

your guest hold up his wine-glass to the light and look judicial. Such

joys are reserved for conscious merit. Hence Mr. Bulstrode’s close

attention was not agreeable to the publicans and sinners in

Middlemarch; it was attributed by some to his being a Pharisee, and by

others to his being Evangelical. Less superficial reasoners among them

wished to know who his father and grandfather were, observing that

five-and-twenty years ago nobody had ever heard of a Bulstrode in

Middlemarch. To his present visitor, Lydgate, the scrutinizing look was

a matter of indifference: he simply formed an unfavorable opinion of

the banker’s constitution, and concluded that he had an eager inward

life with little enjoyment of tangible things.

“I shall be exceedingly obliged if you will look in on me here

occasionally, Mr. Lydgate,” the banker observed, after a brief pause.

“If, as I dare to hope, I have the privilege of finding you a valuable

coadjutor in the interesting matter of hospital management, there will

be many questions which we shall need to discuss in private. As to the

new hospital, which is nearly finished, I shall consider what you have

said about the advantages of the special destination for fevers. The

decision will rest with me, for though Lord Medlicote has given the

land and timber for the building, he is not disposed to give his

personal attention to the object.”

“There are few things better worth the pains in a provincial town like

this,” said Lydgate. “A fine fever hospital in addition to the old

infirmary might be the nucleus of a medical school here, when once we

get our medical reforms; and what would do more for medical education

than the spread of such schools over the country? A born provincial man

who has a grain of public spirit as well as a few ideas, should do what

he can to resist the rush of everything that is a little better than

common towards London. Any valid professional aims may often find a

freer, if not a richer field, in the provinces.”

One of Lydgate’s gifts was a voice habitually deep and sonorous, yet

capable of becoming very low and gentle at the right moment. About his

ordinary bearing there was a certain fling, a fearless expectation of

success, a confidence in his own powers and integrity much fortified by

contempt for petty obstacles or seductions of which he had had no

experience. But this proud openness was made lovable by an expression

of unaffected good-will. Mr. Bulstrode perhaps liked him the better for

the difference between them in pitch and manners; he certainly liked

him the better, as Rosamond did, for being a stranger in Middlemarch.

One can begin so many things with a new person!—even begin to be a

better man.

“I shall rejoice to furnish your zeal with fuller opportunities,” Mr.

Bulstrode answered; “I mean, by confiding to you the superintendence of

my new hospital, should a maturer knowledge favor that issue, for I am

determined that so great an object shall not be shackled by our two

physicians. Indeed, I am encouraged to consider your advent to this

town as a gracious indication that a more manifest blessing is now to

be awarded to my efforts, which have hitherto been much withstood. With

regard to the old infirmary, we have gained the initial point—I mean

your election. And now I hope you will not shrink from incurring a

certain amount of jealousy and dislike from your professional brethren

by presenting yourself as a reformer.”

“I will not profess bravery,” said Lydgate, smiling, “but I acknowledge

a good deal of pleasure in fighting, and I should not care for my

profession, if I did not believe that better methods were to be found

and enforced there as well as everywhere else.”

“The standard of that profession is low in Middlemarch, my dear sir,”

said the banker. “I mean in knowledge and skill; not in social status,

for our medical men are most of them connected with respectable

townspeople here. My own imperfect health has induced me to give some

attention to those palliative resources which the divine mercy has

placed within our reach. I have consulted eminent men in the

metropolis, and I am painfully aware of the backwardness under which

medical treatment labors in our provincial districts.”

“Yes;—with our present medical rules and education, one must be

satisfied now and then to meet with a fair practitioner. As to all the

higher questions which determine the starting-point of a diagnosis—as

to the philosophy of medical evidence—any glimmering of these can only

come from a scientific culture of which country practitioners have

usually no more notion than the man in the moon.”

Mr. Bulstrode, bending and looking intently, found the form which

Lydgate had given to his agreement not quite suited to his

comprehension. Under such circumstances a judicious man changes the

topic and enters on ground where his own gifts may be more useful.

“I am aware,” he said, “that the peculiar bias of medical ability is

towards material means. Nevertheless, Mr. Lydgate, I hope we shall not

vary in sentiment as to a measure in which you are not likely to be

actively concerned, but in which your sympathetic concurrence may be an

aid to me. You recognize, I hope; the existence of spiritual interests

in your patients?”

“Certainly I do. But those words are apt to cover different meanings to

different minds.”

“Precisely. And on such subjects wrong teaching is as fatal as no

teaching. Now a point which I have much at heart to secure is a new

regulation as to clerical attendance at the old infirmary. The building

stands in Mr. Farebrother’s parish. You know Mr. Farebrother?”

“I have seen him. He gave me his vote. I must call to thank him. He

seems a very bright pleasant little fellow. And I understand he is a

naturalist.”

“Mr. Farebrother, my dear sir, is a man deeply painful to contemplate.

I suppose there is not a clergyman in this country who has greater

talents.” Mr. Bulstrode paused and looked meditative.

“I have not yet been pained by finding any excessive talent in

Middlemarch,” said Lydgate, bluntly.

“What I desire,” Mr. Bulstrode continued, looking still more serious,

“is that Mr. Farebrother’s attendance at the hospital should be

superseded by the appointment of a chaplain—of Mr. Tyke, in fact—and

that no other spiritual aid should be called in.”

“As a medical man I could have no opinion on such a point unless I knew

Mr. Tyke, and even then I should require to know the cases in which he

was applied.” Lydgate smiled, but he was bent on being circumspect.

“Of course you cannot enter fully into the merits of this measure at

present. But”—here Mr. Bulstrode began to speak with a more chiselled

emphasis—“the subject is likely to be referred to the medical board of

the infirmary, and what I trust I may ask of you is, that in virtue of

the cooperation between us which I now look forward to, you will not,

so far as you are concerned, be influenced by my opponents in this

matter.”

“I hope I shall have nothing to do with clerical disputes,” said

Lydgate. “The path I have chosen is to work well in my own profession.”

“My responsibility, Mr. Lydgate, is of a broader kind. With me, indeed,

this question is one of sacred accountableness; whereas with my

opponents, I have good reason to say that it is an occasion for

gratifying a spirit of worldly opposition. But I shall not therefore

drop one iota of my convictions, or cease to identify myself with that

truth which an evil generation hates. I have devoted myself to this

object of hospital-improvement, but I will boldly confess to you, Mr.

Lydgate, that I should have no interest in hospitals if I believed that

nothing more was concerned therein than the cure of mortal diseases. I

have another ground of action, and in the face of persecution I will

not conceal it.”

Mr. Bulstrode’s voice had become a loud and agitated whisper as he said

the last words.

“There we certainly differ,” said Lydgate. But he was not sorry that

the door was now opened, and Mr. Vincy was announced. That florid

sociable personage was become more interesting to him since he had seen

Rosamond. Not that, like her, he had been weaving any future in which

their lots were united; but a man naturally remembers a charming girl

with pleasure, and is willing to dine where he may see her again.

Before he took leave, Mr. Vincy had given that invitation which he had

been “in no hurry about,” for Rosamond at breakfast had mentioned that

she thought her uncle Featherstone had taken the new doctor into great

favor.

Mr. Bulstrode, alone with his brother-in-law, poured himself out a

glass of water, and opened a sandwich-box.

“I cannot persuade you to adopt my regimen, Vincy?”

“No, no; I’ve no opinion of that system. Life wants padding,” said Mr.

Vincy, unable to omit his portable theory. “However,” he went on,

accenting the word, as if to dismiss all irrelevance, “what I came here

to talk about was a little affair of my young scapegrace, Fred’s.”

“That is a subject on which you and I are likely to take quite as

different views as on diet, Vincy.”

“I hope not this time.” (Mr. Vincy was resolved to be good-humored.)

“The fact is, it’s about a whim of old Featherstone’s. Somebody has

been cooking up a story out of spite, and telling it to the old man, to

try to set him against Fred. He’s very fond of Fred, and is likely to

do something handsome for him; indeed he has as good as told Fred that

he means to leave him his land, and that makes other people jealous.”

“Vincy, I must repeat, that you will not get any concurrence from me as

to the course you have pursued with your eldest son. It was entirely

from worldly vanity that you destined him for the Church: with a family

of three sons and four daughters, you were not warranted in devoting

money to an expensive education which has succeeded in nothing but in

giving him extravagant idle habits. You are now reaping the

consequences.”

To point out other people’s errors was a duty that Mr. Bulstrode rarely

shrank from, but Mr. Vincy was not equally prepared to be patient. When

a man has the immediate prospect of being mayor, and is ready, in the

interests of commerce, to take up a firm attitude on politics

generally, he has naturally a sense of his importance to the framework

of things which seems to throw questions of private conduct into the

background. And this particular reproof irritated him more than any

other. It was eminently superfluous to him to be told that he was

reaping the consequences. But he felt his neck under Bulstrode’s yoke;

and though he usually enjoyed kicking, he was anxious to refrain from

that relief.

“As to that, Bulstrode, it’s no use going back. I’m not one of your

pattern men, and I don’t pretend to be. I couldn’t foresee everything

in the trade; there wasn’t a finer business in Middlemarch than ours,

and the lad was clever. My poor brother was in the Church, and would

have done well—had got preferment already, but that stomach fever took

him off: else he might have been a dean by this time. I think I was

justified in what I tried to do for Fred. If you come to religion, it

seems to me a man shouldn’t want to carve out his meat to an ounce

beforehand:—one must trust a little to Providence and be generous. It’s

a good British feeling to try and raise your family a little: in my

opinion, it’s a father’s duty to give his sons a fine chance.”

“I don’t wish to act otherwise than as your best friend, Vincy, when I

say that what you have been uttering just now is one mass of

worldliness and inconsistent folly.”

“Very well,” said Mr. Vincy, kicking in spite of resolutions, “I never

professed to be anything but worldly; and, what’s more, I don’t see

anybody else who is not worldly. I suppose you don’t conduct business

on what you call unworldly principles. The only difference I see is

that one worldliness is a little bit honester than another.”

“This kind of discussion is unfruitful, Vincy,” said Mr. Bulstrode,

who, finishing his sandwich, had thrown himself back in his chair, and

shaded his eyes as if weary. “You had some more particular business.”

“Yes, yes. The long and short of it is, somebody has told old

Featherstone, giving you as the authority, that Fred has been borrowing

or trying to borrow money on the prospect of his land. Of course you

never said any such nonsense. But the old fellow will insist on it that

Fred should bring him a denial in your handwriting; that is, just a bit

of a note saying you don’t believe a word of such stuff, either of his

having borrowed or tried to borrow in such a fool’s way. I suppose you

can have no objection to do that.”

“Pardon me. I have an objection. I am by no means sure that your son,

in his recklessness and ignorance—I will use no severer word—has not

tried to raise money by holding out his future prospects, or even that

some one may not have been foolish enough to supply him on so vague a

presumption: there is plenty of such lax money-lending as of other

folly in the world.”

“But Fred gives me his honor that he has never borrowed money on the

pretence of any understanding about his uncle’s land. He is not a liar.

I don’t want to make him better than he is. I have blown him up

well—nobody can say I wink at what he does. But he is not a liar. And I

should have thought—but I may be wrong—that there was no religion to

hinder a man from believing the best of a young fellow, when you don’t

know worse. It seems to me it would be a poor sort of religion to put a

spoke in his wheel by refusing to say you don’t believe such harm of

him as you’ve got no good reason to believe.”

“I am not at all sure that I should be befriending your son by

smoothing his way to the future possession of Featherstone’s property.

I cannot regard wealth as a blessing to those who use it simply as a

harvest for this world. You do not like to hear these things, Vincy,

but on this occasion I feel called upon to tell you that I have no

motive for furthering such a disposition of property as that which you

refer to. I do not shrink from saying that it will not tend to your

son’s eternal welfare or to the glory of God. Why then should you

expect me to pen this kind of affidavit, which has no object but to

keep up a foolish partiality and secure a foolish bequest?”

“If you mean to hinder everybody from having money but saints and

evangelists, you must give up some profitable partnerships, that’s all

I can say,” Mr. Vincy burst out very bluntly. “It may be for the glory

of God, but it is not for the glory of the Middlemarch trade, that

Plymdale’s house uses those blue and green dyes it gets from the

Brassing manufactory; they rot the silk, that’s all I know about it.

Perhaps if other people knew so much of the profit went to the glory of

God, they might like it better. But I don’t mind so much about that—I

could get up a pretty row, if I chose.”

Mr. Bulstrode paused a little before he answered. “You pain me very

much by speaking in this way, Vincy. I do not expect you to understand

my grounds of action—it is not an easy thing even to thread a path for

principles in the intricacies of the world—still less to make the

thread clear for the careless and the scoffing. You must remember, if

you please, that I stretch my tolerance towards you as my wife’s

brother, and that it little becomes you to complain of me as

withholding material help towards the worldly position of your family.

I must remind you that it is not your own prudence or judgment that has

enabled you to keep your place in the trade.”

“Very likely not; but you have been no loser by my trade yet,” said Mr.

Vincy, thoroughly nettled (a result which was seldom much retarded by

previous resolutions). “And when you married Harriet, I don’t see how

you could expect that our families should not hang by the same nail. If

you’ve changed your mind, and want my family to come down in the world,

you’d better say so. I’ve never changed; I’m a plain Churchman now,

just as I used to be before doctrines came up. I take the world as I

find it, in trade and everything else. I’m contented to be no worse

than my neighbors. But if you want us to come down in the world, say

so. I shall know better what to do then.”

“You talk unreasonably. Shall you come down in the world for want of

this letter about your son?”

“Well, whether or not, I consider it very unhandsome of you to refuse

it. Such doings may be lined with religion, but outside they have a

nasty, dog-in-the-manger look. You might as well slander Fred: it comes

pretty near to it when you refuse to say you didn’t set a slander

going. It’s this sort of thing—this tyrannical spirit, wanting to play

bishop and banker everywhere—it’s this sort of thing makes a man’s name

stink.”

“Vincy, if you insist on quarrelling with me, it will be exceedingly

painful to Harriet as well as myself,” said Mr. Bulstrode, with a

trifle more eagerness and paleness than usual.

“I don’t want to quarrel. It’s for my interest—and perhaps for yours

too—that we should be friends. I bear you no grudge; I think no worse

of you than I do of other people. A man who half starves himself, and

goes the length in family prayers, and so on, that you do, believes in

his religion whatever it may be: you could turn over your capital just

as fast with cursing and swearing:—plenty of fellows do. You like to be

master, there’s no denying that; you must be first chop in heaven, else

you won’t like it much. But you’re my sister’s husband, and we ought to

stick together; and if I know Harriet, she’ll consider it your fault if

we quarrel because you strain at a gnat in this way, and refuse to do

Fred a good turn. And I don’t mean to say I shall bear it well. I

consider it unhandsome.”

Mr. Vincy rose, began to button his great-coat, and looked steadily at

his brother-in-law, meaning to imply a demand for a decisive answer.

This was not the first time that Mr. Bulstrode had begun by admonishing

Mr. Vincy, and had ended by seeing a very unsatisfactory reflection of

himself in the coarse unflattering mirror which that manufacturer’s

mind presented to the subtler lights and shadows of his fellow-men; and

perhaps his experience ought to have warned him how the scene would

end. But a full-fed fountain will be generous with its waters even in

the rain, when they are worse than useless; and a fine fount of

admonition is apt to be equally irrepressible.

It was not in Mr. Bulstrode’s nature to comply directly in consequence

of uncomfortable suggestions. Before changing his course, he always

needed to shape his motives and bring them into accordance with his

habitual standard. He said, at last—

“I will reflect a little, Vincy. I will mention the subject to Harriet.

I shall probably send you a letter.”

“Very well. As soon as you can, please. I hope it will all be settled

before I see you to-morrow.”

CHAPTER XIV.

“Follows here the strict receipt

For that sauce to dainty meat,

Named Idleness, which many eat

By preference, and call it sweet:

\_First watch for morsels, like a hound

Mix well with buffets, stir them round

With good thick oil of flatteries, And froth with mean self-lauding

lies.

Serve warm: the vessels you must choose

To keep it in are dead men’s shoes.\_”

Mr. Bulstrode’s consultation of Harriet seemed to have had the effect

desired by Mr. Vincy, for early the next morning a letter came which

Fred could carry to Mr. Featherstone as the required testimony.

The old gentleman was staying in bed on account of the cold weather,

and as Mary Garth was not to be seen in the sitting-room, Fred went

up-stairs immediately and presented the letter to his uncle, who,

propped up comfortably on a bed-rest, was not less able than usual to

enjoy his consciousness of wisdom in distrusting and frustrating

mankind. He put on his spectacles to read the letter, pursing up his

lips and drawing down their corners.

“\_Under the circumstances I will not decline to state my

conviction\_—tchah! what fine words the fellow puts! He’s as fine as an

auctioneer—\_that your son Frederic has not obtained any advance of

money on bequests promised by Mr. Featherstone\_—promised? who said I

had ever promised? I promise nothing—I shall make codicils as long as I

like—\_and that considering the nature of such a proceeding, it is

unreasonable to presume that a young man of sense and character would

attempt it\_—ah, but the gentleman doesn’t say you are a young man of

sense and character, mark you that, sir!—\_As to my own concern with any

report of such a nature, I distinctly affirm that I never made any

statement to the effect that your son had borrowed money on any

property that might accrue to him on Mr. Featherstone’s demise\_—bless

my heart! ‘property’—accrue—demise! Lawyer Standish is nothing to him.

He couldn’t speak finer if he wanted to borrow. Well,” Mr. Featherstone

here looked over his spectacles at Fred, while he handed back the

letter to him with a contemptuous gesture, “you don’t suppose I believe

a thing because Bulstrode writes it out fine, eh?”

Fred colored. “You wished to have the letter, sir. I should think it

very likely that Mr. Bulstrode’s denial is as good as the authority

which told you what he denies.”

“Every bit. I never said I believed either one or the other. And now

what d’ you expect?” said Mr. Featherstone, curtly, keeping on his

spectacles, but withdrawing his hands under his wraps.

“I expect nothing, sir.” Fred with difficulty restrained himself from

venting his irritation. “I came to bring you the letter. If you like I

will bid you good morning.”

“Not yet, not yet. Ring the bell; I want missy to come.”

It was a servant who came in answer to the bell.

“Tell missy to come!” said Mr. Featherstone, impatiently. “What

business had she to go away?” He spoke in the same tone when Mary came.

“Why couldn’t you sit still here till I told you to go? I want my

waistcoat now. I told you always to put it on the bed.”

Mary’s eyes looked rather red, as if she had been crying. It was clear

that Mr. Featherstone was in one of his most snappish humors this

morning, and though Fred had now the prospect of receiving the

much-needed present of money, he would have preferred being free to

turn round on the old tyrant and tell him that Mary Garth was too good

to be at his beck. Though Fred had risen as she entered the room, she

had barely noticed him, and looked as if her nerves were quivering with

the expectation that something would be thrown at her. But she never

had anything worse than words to dread. When she went to reach the

waistcoat from a peg, Fred went up to her and said, “Allow me.”

“Let it alone! You bring it, missy, and lay it down here,” said Mr.

Featherstone. “Now you go away again till I call you,” he added, when

the waistcoat was laid down by him. It was usual with him to season his

pleasure in showing favor to one person by being especially

disagreeable to another, and Mary was always at hand to furnish the

condiment. When his own relatives came she was treated better. Slowly

he took out a bunch of keys from the waistcoat pocket, and slowly he

drew forth a tin box which was under the bed-clothes.

“You expect I am going to give you a little fortune, eh?” he said,

looking above his spectacles and pausing in the act of opening the lid.

“Not at all, sir. You were good enough to speak of making me a present

the other day, else, of course, I should not have thought of the

matter.” But Fred was of a hopeful disposition, and a vision had

presented itself of a sum just large enough to deliver him from a

certain anxiety. When Fred got into debt, it always seemed to him

highly probable that something or other—he did not necessarily conceive

what—would come to pass enabling him to pay in due time. And now that

the providential occurrence was apparently close at hand, it would have

been sheer absurdity to think that the supply would be short of the

need: as absurd as a faith that believed in half a miracle for want of

strength to believe in a whole one.

The deep-veined hands fingered many bank-notes one after the other,

laying them down flat again, while Fred leaned back in his chair,

scorning to look eager. He held himself to be a gentleman at heart, and

did not like courting an old fellow for his money. At last, Mr.

Featherstone eyed him again over his spectacles and presented him with

a little sheaf of notes: Fred could see distinctly that there were but

five, as the less significant edges gaped towards him. But then, each

might mean fifty pounds. He took them, saying—

“I am very much obliged to you, sir,” and was going to roll them up

without seeming to think of their value. But this did not suit Mr.

Featherstone, who was eying him intently.

“Come, don’t you think it worth your while to count ’em? You take money

like a lord; I suppose you lose it like one.”

“I thought I was not to look a gift-horse in the mouth, sir. But I

shall be very happy to count them.”

Fred was not so happy, however, after he had counted them. For they

actually presented the absurdity of being less than his hopefulness had

decided that they must be. What can the fitness of things mean, if not

their fitness to a man’s expectations? Failing this, absurdity and

atheism gape behind him. The collapse for Fred was severe when he found

that he held no more than five twenties, and his share in the higher

education of this country did not seem to help him. Nevertheless he

said, with rapid changes in his fair complexion—

“It is very handsome of you, sir.”

“I should think it is,” said Mr. Featherstone, locking his box and

replacing it, then taking off his spectacles deliberately, and at

length, as if his inward meditation had more deeply convinced him,

repeating, “I should think it handsome.”

“I assure you, sir, I am very grateful,” said Fred, who had had time to

recover his cheerful air.

“So you ought to be. You want to cut a figure in the world, and I

reckon Peter Featherstone is the only one you’ve got to trust to.” Here

the old man’s eyes gleamed with a curiously mingled satisfaction in the

consciousness that this smart young fellow relied upon him, and that

the smart young fellow was rather a fool for doing so.

“Yes, indeed: I was not born to very splendid chances. Few men have

been more cramped than I have been,” said Fred, with some sense of

surprise at his own virtue, considering how hardly he was dealt with.

“It really seems a little too bad to have to ride a broken-winded

hunter, and see men, who, are not half such good judges as yourself,

able to throw away any amount of money on buying bad bargains.”

“Well, you can buy yourself a fine hunter now. Eighty pound is enough

for that, I reckon—and you’ll have twenty pound over to get yourself

out of any little scrape,” said Mr. Featherstone, chuckling slightly.

“You are very good, sir,” said Fred, with a fine sense of contrast

between the words and his feeling.

“Ay, rather a better uncle than your fine uncle Bulstrode. You won’t

get much out of his spekilations, I think. He’s got a pretty strong

string round your father’s leg, by what I hear, eh?”

“My father never tells me anything about his affairs, sir.”

“Well, he shows some sense there. But other people find ’em out without

his telling. \_He’ll\_ never have much to leave you: he’ll most-like die

without a will—he’s the sort of man to do it—let ’em make him mayor of

Middlemarch as much as they like. But you won’t get much by his dying

without a will, though you \_are\_ the eldest son.”

Fred thought that Mr. Featherstone had never been so disagreeable

before. True, he had never before given him quite so much money at

once.

“Shall I destroy this letter of Mr. Bulstrode’s, sir?” said Fred,

rising with the letter as if he would put it in the fire.

“Ay, ay, I don’t want it. It’s worth no money to me.”

Fred carried the letter to the fire, and thrust the poker through it

with much zest. He longed to get out of the room, but he was a little

ashamed before his inner self, as well as before his uncle, to run away

immediately after pocketing the money. Presently, the farm-bailiff came

up to give his master a report, and Fred, to his unspeakable relief,

was dismissed with the injunction to come again soon.

He had longed not only to be set free from his uncle, but also to find

Mary Garth. She was now in her usual place by the fire, with sewing in

her hands and a book open on the little table by her side. Her eyelids

had lost some of their redness now, and she had her usual air of

self-command.

“Am I wanted up-stairs?” she said, half rising as Fred entered.

“No; I am only dismissed, because Simmons is gone up.”

Mary sat down again, and resumed her work. She was certainly treating

him with more indifference than usual: she did not know how

affectionately indignant he had felt on her behalf up-stairs.

“May I stay here a little, Mary, or shall I bore you?”

“Pray sit down,” said Mary; “you will not be so heavy a bore as Mr.

John Waule, who was here yesterday, and he sat down without asking my

leave.”

“Poor fellow! I think he is in love with you.”

“I am not aware of it. And to me it is one of the most odious things in

a girl’s life, that there must always be some supposition of falling in

love coming between her and any man who is kind to her, and to whom she

is grateful. I should have thought that I, at least, might have been

safe from all that. I have no ground for the nonsensical vanity of

fancying everybody who comes near me is in love with me.”

Mary did not mean to betray any feeling, but in spite of herself she

ended in a tremulous tone of vexation.

“Confound John Waule! I did not mean to make you angry. I didn’t know

you had any reason for being grateful to me. I forgot what a great

service you think it if any one snuffs a candle for you.” Fred also had

his pride, and was not going to show that he knew what had called forth

this outburst of Mary’s.

“Oh, I am not angry, except with the ways of the world. I do like to be

spoken to as if I had common-sense. I really often feel as if I could

understand a little more than I ever hear even from young gentlemen who

have been to college.” Mary had recovered, and she spoke with a

suppressed rippling under-current of laughter pleasant to hear.

“I don’t care how merry you are at my expense this morning,” said Fred,

“I thought you looked so sad when you came up-stairs. It is a shame you

should stay here to be bullied in that way.”

“Oh, I have an easy life—by comparison. I have tried being a teacher,

and I am not fit for that: my mind is too fond of wandering on its own

way. I think any hardship is better than pretending to do what one is

paid for, and never really doing it. Everything here I can do as well

as any one else could; perhaps better than some—Rosy, for example.

Though she is just the sort of beautiful creature that is imprisoned

with ogres in fairy tales.”

“\_Rosy!\_” cried Fred, in a tone of profound brotherly scepticism.

“Come, Fred!” said Mary, emphatically; “you have no right to be so

critical.”

“Do you mean anything particular—just now?”

“No, I mean something general—always.”

“Oh, that I am idle and extravagant. Well, I am not fit to be a poor

man. I should not have made a bad fellow if I had been rich.”

“You would have done your duty in that state of life to which it has

not pleased God to call you,” said Mary, laughing.

“Well, I couldn’t do my duty as a clergyman, any more than you could do

yours as a governess. You ought to have a little fellow-feeling there,

Mary.”

“I never said you ought to be a clergyman. There are other sorts of

work. It seems to me very miserable not to resolve on some course and

act accordingly.”

“So I could, if—” Fred broke off, and stood up, leaning against the

mantel-piece.

“If you were sure you should not have a fortune?”

“I did not say that. You want to quarrel with me. It is too bad of you

to be guided by what other people say about me.”

“How can I want to quarrel with you? I should be quarrelling with all

my new books,” said Mary, lifting the volume on the table. “However

naughty you may be to other people, you are good to me.”

“Because I like you better than any one else. But I know you despise

me.”

“Yes, I do—a little,” said Mary, nodding, with a smile.

“You would admire a stupendous fellow, who would have wise opinions

about everything.”

“Yes, I should.” Mary was sewing swiftly, and seemed provokingly

mistress of the situation. When a conversation has taken a wrong turn

for us, we only get farther and farther into the swamp of awkwardness.

This was what Fred Vincy felt.

“I suppose a woman is never in love with any one she has always

known—ever since she can remember; as a man often is. It is always some

new fellow who strikes a girl.”

“Let me see,” said Mary, the corners of her mouth curling archly; “I

must go back on my experience. There is Juliet—she seems an example of

what you say. But then Ophelia had probably known Hamlet a long while;

and Brenda Troil—she had known Mordaunt Merton ever since they were

children; but then he seems to have been an estimable young man; and

Minna was still more deeply in love with Cleveland, who was a stranger.

Waverley was new to Flora MacIvor; but then she did not fall in love

with him. And there are Olivia and Sophia Primrose, and Corinne—they

may be said to have fallen in love with new men. Altogether, my

experience is rather mixed.”

Mary looked up with some roguishness at Fred, and that look of hers was

very dear to him, though the eyes were nothing more than clear windows

where observation sat laughingly. He was certainly an affectionate

fellow, and as he had grown from boy to man, he had grown in love with

his old playmate, notwithstanding that share in the higher education of

the country which had exalted his views of rank and income.

“When a man is not loved, it is no use for him to say that he could be

a better fellow—could do anything—I mean, if he were sure of being

loved in return.”

“Not of the least use in the world for him to say he \_could\_ be better.

Might, could, would—they are contemptible auxiliaries.”

“I don’t see how a man is to be good for much unless he has some one

woman to love him dearly.”

“I think the goodness should come before he expects that.”

“You know better, Mary. Women don’t love men for their goodness.”

“Perhaps not. But if they love them, they never think them bad.”

“It is hardly fair to say I am bad.”

“I said nothing at all about you.”

“I never shall be good for anything, Mary, if you will not say that you

love me—if you will not promise to marry me—I mean, when I am able to

marry.”

“If I did love you, I would not marry you: I would certainly not

promise ever to marry you.”

“I think that is quite wicked, Mary. If you love me, you ought to

promise to marry me.”

“On the contrary, I think it would be wicked in me to marry you even if

I did love you.”

“You mean, just as I am, without any means of maintaining a wife. Of

course: I am but three-and-twenty.”

“In that last point you will alter. But I am not so sure of any other

alteration. My father says an idle man ought not to exist, much less,

be married.”

“Then I am to blow my brains out?”

“No; on the whole I should think you would do better to pass your

examination. I have heard Mr. Farebrother say it is disgracefully

easy.”

“That is all very fine. Anything is easy to him. Not that cleverness

has anything to do with it. I am ten times cleverer than many men who

pass.”

“Dear me!” said Mary, unable to repress her sarcasm; “that accounts for

the curates like Mr. Crowse. Divide your cleverness by ten, and the

quotient—dear me!—is able to take a degree. But that only shows you are

ten times more idle than the others.”

“Well, if I did pass, you would not want me to go into the Church?”

“That is not the question—what I want you to do. You have a conscience

of your own, I suppose. There! there is Mr. Lydgate. I must go and tell

my uncle.”

“Mary,” said Fred, seizing her hand as she rose; “if you will not give

me some encouragement, I shall get worse instead of better.”

“I will not give you any encouragement,” said Mary, reddening. “Your

friends would dislike it, and so would mine. My father would think it a

disgrace to me if I accepted a man who got into debt, and would not

work!”

Fred was stung, and released her hand. She walked to the door, but

there she turned and said: “Fred, you have always been so good, so

generous to me. I am not ungrateful. But never speak to me in that way

again.”

“Very well,” said Fred, sulkily, taking up his hat and whip. His

complexion showed patches of pale pink and dead white. Like many a

plucked idle young gentleman, he was thoroughly in love, and with a

plain girl, who had no money! But having Mr. Featherstone’s land in the

background, and a persuasion that, let Mary say what she would, she

really did care for him, Fred was not utterly in despair.

When he got home, he gave four of the twenties to his mother, asking

her to keep them for him. “I don’t want to spend that money, mother. I

want it to pay a debt with. So keep it safe away from my fingers.”

“Bless you, my dear,” said Mrs. Vincy. She doted on her eldest son and

her youngest girl (a child of six), whom others thought her two

naughtiest children. The mother’s eyes are not always deceived in their

partiality: she at least can best judge who is the tender,

filial-hearted child. And Fred was certainly very fond of his mother.

Perhaps it was his fondness for another person also that made him

particularly anxious to take some security against his own liability to

spend the hundred pounds. For the creditor to whom he owed a hundred

and sixty held a firmer security in the shape of a bill signed by

Mary’s father.

CHAPTER XV.

“Black eyes you have left, you say,

Blue eyes fail to draw you;

Yet you seem more rapt to-day,

Than of old we saw you.

“Oh, I track the fairest fair

Through new haunts of pleasure;

Footprints here and echoes there

Guide me to my treasure:

“Lo! she turns—immortal youth

Wrought to mortal stature,

Fresh as starlight’s aged truth—

Many-namèd Nature!”

A great historian, as he insisted on calling himself, who had the

happiness to be dead a hundred and twenty years ago, and so to take his

place among the colossi whose huge legs our living pettiness is

observed to walk under, glories in his copious remarks and digressions

as the least imitable part of his work, and especially in those initial

chapters to the successive books of his history, where he seems to

bring his armchair to the proscenium and chat with us in all the lusty

ease of his fine English. But Fielding lived when the days were longer

(for time, like money, is measured by our needs), when summer

afternoons were spacious, and the clock ticked slowly in the winter

evenings. We belated historians must not linger after his example; and

if we did so, it is probable that our chat would be thin and eager, as

if delivered from a campstool in a parrot-house. I at least have so

much to do in unraveling certain human lots, and seeing how they were

woven and interwoven, that all the light I can command must be

concentrated on this particular web, and not dispersed over that

tempting range of relevancies called the universe.

At present I have to make the new settler Lydgate better known to any

one interested in him than he could possibly be even to those who had

seen the most of him since his arrival in Middlemarch. For surely all

must admit that a man may be puffed and belauded, envied, ridiculed,

counted upon as a tool and fallen in love with, or at least selected as

a future husband, and yet remain virtually unknown—known merely as a

cluster of signs for his neighbors’ false suppositions. There was a

general impression, however, that Lydgate was not altogether a common

country doctor, and in Middlemarch at that time such an impression was

significant of great things being expected from him. For everybody’s

family doctor was remarkably clever, and was understood to have

immeasurable skill in the management and training of the most skittish

or vicious diseases. The evidence of his cleverness was of the higher

intuitive order, lying in his lady-patients’ immovable conviction, and

was unassailable by any objection except that their intuitions were

opposed by others equally strong; each lady who saw medical truth in

Wrench and “the strengthening treatment” regarding Toller and “the

lowering system” as medical perdition. For the heroic times of copious

bleeding and blistering had not yet departed, still less the times of

thorough-going theory, when disease in general was called by some bad

name, and treated accordingly without shilly-shally—as if, for example,

it were to be called insurrection, which must not be fired on with

blank-cartridge, but have its blood drawn at once. The strengtheners

and the lowerers were all “clever” men in somebody’s opinion, which is

really as much as can be said for any living talents. Nobody’s

imagination had gone so far as to conjecture that Mr. Lydgate could

know as much as Dr. Sprague and Dr. Minchin, the two physicians, who

alone could offer any hope when danger was extreme, and when the

smallest hope was worth a guinea. Still, I repeat, there was a general

impression that Lydgate was something rather more uncommon than any

general practitioner in Middlemarch. And this was true. He was but

seven-and-twenty, an age at which many men are not quite common—at

which they are hopeful of achievement, resolute in avoidance, thinking

that Mammon shall never put a bit in their mouths and get astride their

backs, but rather that Mammon, if they have anything to do with him,

shall draw their chariot.

He had been left an orphan when he was fresh from a public school. His

father, a military man, had made but little provision for three

children, and when the boy Tertius asked to have a medical education,

it seemed easier to his guardians to grant his request by apprenticing

him to a country practitioner than to make any objections on the score

of family dignity. He was one of the rarer lads who early get a decided

bent and make up their minds that there is something particular in life

which they would like to do for its own sake, and not because their

fathers did it. Most of us who turn to any subject with love remember

some morning or evening hour when we got on a high stool to reach down

an untried volume, or sat with parted lips listening to a new talker,

or for very lack of books began to listen to the voices within, as the

first traceable beginning of our love. Something of that sort happened

to Lydgate. He was a quick fellow, and when hot from play, would toss

himself in a corner, and in five minutes be deep in any sort of book

that he could lay his hands on: if it were Rasselas or Gulliver, so

much the better, but Bailey’s Dictionary would do, or the Bible with

the Apocrypha in it. Something he must read, when he was not riding the

pony, or running and hunting, or listening to the talk of men. All this

was true of him at ten years of age; he had then read through “Chrysal,

or the Adventures of a Guinea,” which was neither milk for babes, nor

any chalky mixture meant to pass for milk, and it had already occurred

to him that books were stuff, and that life was stupid. His school

studies had not much modified that opinion, for though he “did” his

classics and mathematics, he was not pre-eminent in them. It was said

of him, that Lydgate could do anything he liked, but he had certainly

not yet liked to do anything remarkable. He was a vigorous animal with

a ready understanding, but no spark had yet kindled in him an

intellectual passion; knowledge seemed to him a very superficial

affair, easily mastered: judging from the conversation of his elders,

he had apparently got already more than was necessary for mature life.

Probably this was not an exceptional result of expensive teaching at

that period of short-waisted coats, and other fashions which have not

yet recurred. But, one vacation, a wet day sent him to the small home

library to hunt once more for a book which might have some freshness

for him: in vain! unless, indeed, he took down a dusty row of volumes

with gray-paper backs and dingy labels—the volumes of an old

Cyclopaedia which he had never disturbed. It would at least be a

novelty to disturb them. They were on the highest shelf, and he stood

on a chair to get them down. But he opened the volume which he first

took from the shelf: somehow, one is apt to read in a makeshift

attitude, just where it might seem inconvenient to do so. The page he

opened on was under the head of Anatomy, and the first passage that

drew his eyes was on the valves of the heart. He was not much

acquainted with valves of any sort, but he knew that valvae were

folding-doors, and through this crevice came a sudden light startling

him with his first vivid notion of finely adjusted mechanism in the

human frame. A liberal education had of course left him free to read

the indecent passages in the school classics, but beyond a general

sense of secrecy and obscenity in connection with his internal

structure, had left his imagination quite unbiassed, so that for

anything he knew his brains lay in small bags at his temples, and he

had no more thought of representing to himself how his blood circulated

than how paper served instead of gold. But the moment of vocation had

come, and before he got down from his chair, the world was made new to

him by a presentiment of endless processes filling the vast spaces

planked out of his sight by that wordy ignorance which he had supposed

to be knowledge. From that hour Lydgate felt the growth of an

intellectual passion.

We are not afraid of telling over and over again how a man comes to

fall in love with a woman and be wedded to her, or else be fatally

parted from her. Is it due to excess of poetry or of stupidity that we

are never weary of describing what King James called a woman’s “makdom

and her fairnesse,” never weary of listening to the twanging of the old

Troubadour strings, and are comparatively uninterested in that other

kind of “makdom and fairnesse” which must be wooed with industrious

thought and patient renunciation of small desires? In the story of this

passion, too, the development varies: sometimes it is the glorious

marriage, sometimes frustration and final parting. And not seldom the

catastrophe is bound up with the other passion, sung by the

Troubadours. For in the multitude of middle-aged men who go about their

vocations in a daily course determined for them much in the same way as

the tie of their cravats, there is always a good number who once meant

to shape their own deeds and alter the world a little. The story of

their coming to be shapen after the average and fit to be packed by the

gross, is hardly ever told even in their consciousness; for perhaps

their ardor in generous unpaid toil cooled as imperceptibly as the

ardor of other youthful loves, till one day their earlier self walked

like a ghost in its old home and made the new furniture ghastly.

Nothing in the world more subtle than the process of their gradual

change! In the beginning they inhaled it unknowingly: you and I may

have sent some of our breath towards infecting them, when we uttered

our conforming falsities or drew our silly conclusions: or perhaps it

came with the vibrations from a woman’s glance.

Lydgate did not mean to be one of those failures, and there was the

better hope of him because his scientific interest soon took the form

of a professional enthusiasm: he had a youthful belief in his

bread-winning work, not to be stifled by that initiation in makeshift

called his ’prentice days; and he carried to his studies in London,

Edinburgh, and Paris, the conviction that the medical profession as it

might be was the finest in the world; presenting the most perfect

interchange between science and art; offering the most direct alliance

between intellectual conquest and the social good. Lydgate’s nature

demanded this combination: he was an emotional creature, with a

flesh-and-blood sense of fellowship which withstood all the

abstractions of special study. He cared not only for “cases,” but for

John and Elizabeth, especially Elizabeth.

There was another attraction in his profession: it wanted reform, and

gave a man an opportunity for some indignant resolve to reject its

venal decorations and other humbug, and to be the possessor of genuine

though undemanded qualifications. He went to study in Paris with the

determination that when he came home again he would settle in some

provincial town as a general practitioner, and resist the irrational

severance between medical and surgical knowledge in the interest of his

own scientific pursuits, as well as of the general advance: he would

keep away from the range of London intrigues, jealousies, and social

truckling, and win celebrity, however slowly, as Jenner had done, by

the independent value of his work. For it must be remembered that this

was a dark period; and in spite of venerable colleges which used great

efforts to secure purity of knowledge by making it scarce, and to

exclude error by a rigid exclusiveness in relation to fees and

appointments, it happened that very ignorant young gentlemen were

promoted in town, and many more got a legal right to practise over

large areas in the country. Also, the high standard held up to the

public mind by the College of Physicians, which gave its peculiar

sanction to the expensive and highly rarefied medical instruction

obtained by graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, did not hinder quackery

from having an excellent time of it; for since professional practice

chiefly consisted in giving a great many drugs, the public inferred

that it might be better off with more drugs still, if they could only

be got cheaply, and hence swallowed large cubic measures of physic

prescribed by unscrupulous ignorance which had taken no degrees.

Considering that statistics had not yet embraced a calculation as to

the number of ignorant or canting doctors which absolutely must exist

in the teeth of all changes, it seemed to Lydgate that a change in the

units was the most direct mode of changing the numbers. He meant to be

a unit who would make a certain amount of difference towards that

spreading change which would one day tell appreciably upon the

averages, and in the mean time have the pleasure of making an

advantageous difference to the viscera of his own patients. But he did

not simply aim at a more genuine kind of practice than was common. He

was ambitious of a wider effect: he was fired with the possibility that

he might work out the proof of an anatomical conception and make a link

in the chain of discovery.

Does it seem incongruous to you that a Middlemarch surgeon should dream

of himself as a discoverer? Most of us, indeed, know little of the

great originators until they have been lifted up among the

constellations and already rule our fates. But that Herschel, for

example, who “broke the barriers of the heavens”—did he not once play a

provincial church-organ, and give music-lessons to stumbling pianists?

Each of those Shining Ones had to walk on the earth among neighbors who

perhaps thought much more of his gait and his garments than of anything

which was to give him a title to everlasting fame: each of them had his

little local personal history sprinkled with small temptations and

sordid cares, which made the retarding friction of his course towards

final companionship with the immortals. Lydgate was not blind to the

dangers of such friction, but he had plenty of confidence in his

resolution to avoid it as far as possible: being seven-and-twenty, he

felt himself experienced. And he was not going to have his vanities

provoked by contact with the showy worldly successes of the capital,

but to live among people who could hold no rivalry with that pursuit of

a great idea which was to be a twin object with the assiduous practice

of his profession. There was fascination in the hope that the two

purposes would illuminate each other: the careful observation and

inference which was his daily work, the use of the lens to further his

judgment in special cases, would further his thought as an instrument

of larger inquiry. Was not this the typical pre-eminence of his

profession? He would be a good Middlemarch doctor, and by that very

means keep himself in the track of far-reaching investigation. On one

point he may fairly claim approval at this particular stage of his

career: he did not mean to imitate those philanthropic models who make

a profit out of poisonous pickles to support themselves while they are

exposing adulteration, or hold shares in a gambling-hell that they may

have leisure to represent the cause of public morality. He intended to

begin in his own case some particular reforms which were quite

certainly within his reach, and much less of a problem than the

demonstrating of an anatomical conception. One of these reforms was to

act stoutly on the strength of a recent legal decision, and simply

prescribe, without dispensing drugs or taking percentage from

druggists. This was an innovation for one who had chosen to adopt the

style of general practitioner in a country town, and would be felt as

offensive criticism by his professional brethren. But Lydgate meant to

innovate in his treatment also, and he was wise enough to see that the

best security for his practising honestly according to his belief was

to get rid of systematic temptations to the contrary.

Perhaps that was a more cheerful time for observers and theorizers than

the present; we are apt to think it the finest era of the world when

America was beginning to be discovered, when a bold sailor, even if he

were wrecked, might alight on a new kingdom; and about 1829 the dark

territories of Pathology were a fine America for a spirited young

adventurer. Lydgate was ambitious above all to contribute towards

enlarging the scientific, rational basis of his profession. The more he

became interested in special questions of disease, such as the nature

of fever or fevers, the more keenly he felt the need for that

fundamental knowledge of structure which just at the beginning of the

century had been illuminated by the brief and glorious career of

Bichat, who died when he was only one-and-thirty, but, like another

Alexander, left a realm large enough for many heirs. That great

Frenchman first carried out the conception that living bodies,

fundamentally considered, are not associations of organs which can be

understood by studying them first apart, and then as it were federally;

but must be regarded as consisting of certain primary webs or tissues,

out of which the various organs—brain, heart, lungs, and so on—are

compacted, as the various accommodations of a house are built up in

various proportions of wood, iron, stone, brick, zinc, and the rest,

each material having its peculiar composition and proportions. No man,

one sees, can understand and estimate the entire structure or its

parts—what are its frailties and what its repairs, without knowing the

nature of the materials. And the conception wrought out by Bichat, with

his detailed study of the different tissues, acted necessarily on

medical questions as the turning of gas-light would act on a dim,

oil-lit street, showing new connections and hitherto hidden facts of

structure which must be taken into account in considering the symptoms

of maladies and the action of medicaments. But results which depend on

human conscience and intelligence work slowly, and now at the end of

1829, most medical practice was still strutting or shambling along the

old paths, and there was still scientific work to be done which might

have seemed to be a direct sequence of Bichat’s. This great seer did

not go beyond the consideration of the tissues as ultimate facts in the

living organism, marking the limit of anatomical analysis; but it was

open to another mind to say, have not these structures some common

basis from which they have all started, as your sarsnet, gauze, net,

satin, and velvet from the raw cocoon? Here would be another light, as

of oxy-hydrogen, showing the very grain of things, and revising all

former explanations. Of this sequence to Bichat’s work, already

vibrating along many currents of the European mind, Lydgate was

enamoured; he longed to demonstrate the more intimate relations of

living structure, and help to define men’s thought more accurately

after the true order. The work had not yet been done, but only prepared

for those who knew how to use the preparation. What was the primitive

tissue? In that way Lydgate put the question—not quite in the way

required by the awaiting answer; but such missing of the right word

befalls many seekers. And he counted on quiet intervals to be

watchfully seized, for taking up the threads of investigation—on many

hints to be won from diligent application, not only of the scalpel, but

of the microscope, which research had begun to use again with new

enthusiasm of reliance. Such was Lydgate’s plan of his future: to do

good small work for Middlemarch, and great work for the world.

He was certainly a happy fellow at this time: to be seven-and-twenty,

without any fixed vices, with a generous resolution that his action

should be beneficent, and with ideas in his brain that made life

interesting quite apart from the cultus of horseflesh and other mystic

rites of costly observance, which the eight hundred pounds left him

after buying his practice would certainly not have gone far in paying

for. He was at a starting-point which makes many a man’s career a fine

subject for betting, if there were any gentlemen given to that

amusement who could appreciate the complicated probabilities of an

arduous purpose, with all the possible thwartings and furtherings of

circumstance, all the niceties of inward balance, by which a man swims

and makes his point or else is carried headlong. The risk would remain

even with close knowledge of Lydgate’s character; for character too is

a process and an unfolding. The man was still in the making, as much as

the Middlemarch doctor and immortal discoverer, and there were both

virtues and faults capable of shrinking or expanding. The faults will

not, I hope, be a reason for the withdrawal of your interest in him.

Among our valued friends is there not some one or other who is a little

too self-confident and disdainful; whose distinguished mind is a little

spotted with commonness; who is a little pinched here and protuberant

there with native prejudices; or whose better energies are liable to

lapse down the wrong channel under the influence of transient

solicitations? All these things might be alleged against Lydgate, but

then, they are the periphrases of a polite preacher, who talks of Adam,

and would not like to mention anything painful to the pew-renters. The

particular faults from which these delicate generalities are distilled

have distinguishable physiognomies, diction, accent, and grimaces;

filling up parts in very various dramas. Our vanities differ as our

noses do: all conceit is not the same conceit, but varies in

correspondence with the minutiae of mental make in which one of us

differs from another. Lydgate’s conceit was of the arrogant sort, never

simpering, never impertinent, but massive in its claims and

benevolently contemptuous. He would do a great deal for noodles, being

sorry for them, and feeling quite sure that they could have no power

over him: he had thought of joining the Saint Simonians when he was in

Paris, in order to turn them against some of their own doctrines. All

his faults were marked by kindred traits, and were those of a man who

had a fine baritone, whose clothes hung well upon him, and who even in

his ordinary gestures had an air of inbred distinction. Where then lay

the spots of commonness? says a young lady enamoured of that careless

grace. How could there be any commonness in a man so well-bred, so

ambitious of social distinction, so generous and unusual in his views

of social duty? As easily as there may be stupidity in a man of genius

if you take him unawares on the wrong subject, or as many a man who has

the best will to advance the social millennium might be ill-inspired in

imagining its lighter pleasures; unable to go beyond Offenbach’s music,

or the brilliant punning in the last burlesque. Lydgate’s spots of

commonness lay in the complexion of his prejudices, which, in spite of

noble intention and sympathy, were half of them such as are found in

ordinary men of the world: that distinction of mind which belonged to

his intellectual ardor, did not penetrate his feeling and judgment

about furniture, or women, or the desirability of its being known

(without his telling) that he was better born than other country

surgeons. He did not mean to think of furniture at present; but

whenever he did so it was to be feared that neither biology nor schemes

of reform would lift him above the vulgarity of feeling that there

would be an incompatibility in his furniture not being of the best.

As to women, he had once already been drawn headlong by impetuous

folly, which he meant to be final, since marriage at some distant

period would of course not be impetuous. For those who want to be

acquainted with Lydgate it will be good to know what was that case of

impetuous folly, for it may stand as an example of the fitful swerving

of passion to which he was prone, together with the chivalrous kindness

which helped to make him morally lovable. The story can be told without

many words. It happened when he was studying in Paris, and just at the

time when, over and above his other work, he was occupied with some

galvanic experiments. One evening, tired with his experimenting, and

not being able to elicit the facts he needed, he left his frogs and

rabbits to some repose under their trying and mysterious dispensation

of unexplained shocks, and went to finish his evening at the theatre of

the Porte Saint Martin, where there was a melodrama which he had

already seen several times; attracted, not by the ingenious work of the

collaborating authors, but by an actress whose part it was to stab her

lover, mistaking him for the evil-designing duke of the piece. Lydgate

was in love with this actress, as a man is in love with a woman whom he

never expects to speak to. She was a Provencale, with dark eyes, a

Greek profile, and rounded majestic form, having that sort of beauty

which carries a sweet matronliness even in youth, and her voice was a

soft cooing. She had but lately come to Paris, and bore a virtuous

reputation, her husband acting with her as the unfortunate lover. It

was her acting which was “no better than it should be,” but the public

was satisfied. Lydgate’s only relaxation now was to go and look at this

woman, just as he might have thrown himself under the breath of the

sweet south on a bank of violets for a while, without prejudice to his

galvanism, to which he would presently return. But this evening the old

drama had a new catastrophe. At the moment when the heroine was to act

the stabbing of her lover, and he was to fall gracefully, the wife

veritably stabbed her husband, who fell as death willed. A wild shriek

pierced the house, and the Provencale fell swooning: a shriek and a

swoon were demanded by the play, but the swooning too was real this

time. Lydgate leaped and climbed, he hardly knew how, on to the stage,

and was active in help, making the acquaintance of his heroine by

finding a contusion on her head and lifting her gently in his arms.

Paris rang with the story of this death:—was it a murder? Some of the

actress’s warmest admirers were inclined to believe in her guilt, and

liked her the better for it (such was the taste of those times); but

Lydgate was not one of these. He vehemently contended for her

innocence, and the remote impersonal passion for her beauty which he

had felt before, had passed now into personal devotion, and tender

thought of her lot. The notion of murder was absurd: no motive was

discoverable, the young couple being understood to dote on each other;

and it was not unprecedented that an accidental slip of the foot should

have brought these grave consequences. The legal investigation ended in

Madame Laure’s release. Lydgate by this time had had many interviews

with her, and found her more and more adorable. She talked little; but

that was an additional charm. She was melancholy, and seemed grateful;

her presence was enough, like that of the evening light. Lydgate was

madly anxious about her affection, and jealous lest any other man than

himself should win it and ask her to marry him. But instead of

reopening her engagement at the Porte Saint Martin, where she would

have been all the more popular for the fatal episode, she left Paris

without warning, forsaking her little court of admirers. Perhaps no one

carried inquiry far except Lydgate, who felt that all science had come

to a stand-still while he imagined the unhappy Laure, stricken by

ever-wandering sorrow, herself wandering, and finding no faithful

comforter. Hidden actresses, however, are not so difficult to find as

some other hidden facts, and it was not long before Lydgate gathered

indications that Laure had taken the route to Lyons. He found her at

last acting with great success at Avignon under the same name, looking

more majestic than ever as a forsaken wife carrying her child in her

arms. He spoke to her after the play, was received with the usual

quietude which seemed to him beautiful as clear depths of water, and

obtained leave to visit her the next day; when he was bent on telling

her that he adored her, and on asking her to marry him. He knew that

this was like the sudden impulse of a madman—incongruous even with his

habitual foibles. No matter! It was the one thing which he was resolved

to do. He had two selves within him apparently, and they must learn to

accommodate each other and bear reciprocal impediments. Strange, that

some of us, with quick alternate vision, see beyond our infatuations,

and even while we rave on the heights, behold the wide plain where our

persistent self pauses and awaits us.

To have approached Laure with any suit that was not reverentially

tender would have been simply a contradiction of his whole feeling

towards her.

“You have come all the way from Paris to find me?” she said to him the

next day, sitting before him with folded arms, and looking at him with

eyes that seemed to wonder as an untamed ruminating animal wonders.

“Are all Englishmen like that?”

“I came because I could not live without trying to see you. You are

lonely; I love you; I want you to consent to be my wife; I will wait,

but I want you to promise that you will marry me—no one else.”

Laure looked at him in silence with a melancholy radiance from under

her grand eyelids, until he was full of rapturous certainty, and knelt

close to her knees.

“I will tell you something,” she said, in her cooing way, keeping her

arms folded. “My foot really slipped.”

“I know, I know,” said Lydgate, deprecatingly. “It was a fatal

accident—a dreadful stroke of calamity that bound me to you the more.”

Again Laure paused a little and then said, slowly, “\_I meant to do

it.\_”

Lydgate, strong man as he was, turned pale and trembled: moments seemed

to pass before he rose and stood at a distance from her.

“There was a secret, then,” he said at last, even vehemently. “He was

brutal to you: you hated him.”

“No! he wearied me; he was too fond: he would live in Paris, and not in

my country; that was not agreeable to me.”

“Great God!” said Lydgate, in a groan of horror. “And you planned to

murder him?”

“I did not plan: it came to me in the play—\_I meant to do it.\_”

Lydgate stood mute, and unconsciously pressed his hat on while he

looked at her. He saw this woman—the first to whom he had given his

young adoration—amid the throng of stupid criminals.

“You are a good young man,” she said. “But I do not like husbands. I

will never have another.”

Three days afterwards Lydgate was at his galvanism again in his Paris

chambers, believing that illusions were at an end for him. He was saved

from hardening effects by the abundant kindness of his heart and his

belief that human life might be made better. But he had more reason

than ever for trusting his judgment, now that it was so experienced;

and henceforth he would take a strictly scientific view of woman,

entertaining no expectations but such as were justified beforehand.

No one in Middlemarch was likely to have such a notion of Lydgate’s

past as has here been faintly shadowed, and indeed the respectable

townsfolk there were not more given than mortals generally to any eager

attempt at exactness in the representation to themselves of what did

not come under their own senses. Not only young virgins of that town,

but gray-bearded men also, were often in haste to conjecture how a new

acquaintance might be wrought into their purposes, contented with very

vague knowledge as to the way in which life had been shaping him for

that instrumentality. Middlemarch, in fact, counted on swallowing

Lydgate and assimilating him very comfortably.

CHAPTER XVI.

“All that in woman is adored

In thy fair self I find—

For the whole sex can but afford

The handsome and the kind.”

—SIR CHARLES SEDLEY.

The question whether Mr. Tyke should be appointed as salaried chaplain

to the hospital was an exciting topic to the Middlemarchers; and

Lydgate heard it discussed in a way that threw much light on the power

exercised in the town by Mr. Bulstrode. The banker was evidently a

ruler, but there was an opposition party, and even among his supporters

there were some who allowed it to be seen that their support was a

compromise, and who frankly stated their impression that the general

scheme of things, and especially the casualties of trade, required you

to hold a candle to the devil.

Mr. Bulstrode’s power was not due simply to his being a country banker,

who knew the financial secrets of most traders in the town and could

touch the springs of their credit; it was fortified by a beneficence

that was at once ready and severe—ready to confer obligations, and

severe in watching the result. He had gathered, as an industrious man

always at his post, a chief share in administering the town charities,

and his private charities were both minute and abundant. He would take

a great deal of pains about apprenticing Tegg the shoemaker’s son, and

he would watch over Tegg’s church-going; he would defend Mrs. Strype

the washerwoman against Stubbs’s unjust exaction on the score of her

drying-ground, and he would himself scrutinize a calumny against Mrs.

Strype. His private minor loans were numerous, but he would inquire

strictly into the circumstances both before and after. In this way a

man gathers a domain in his neighbors’ hope and fear as well as

gratitude; and power, when once it has got into that subtle region,

propagates itself, spreading out of all proportion to its external

means. It was a principle with Mr. Bulstrode to gain as much power as

possible, that he might use it for the glory of God. He went through a

great deal of spiritual conflict and inward argument in order to adjust

his motives, and make clear to himself what God’s glory required. But,

as we have seen, his motives were not always rightly appreciated. There

were many crass minds in Middlemarch whose reflective scales could only

weigh things in the lump; and they had a strong suspicion that since

Mr. Bulstrode could not enjoy life in their fashion, eating and

drinking so little as he did, and worreting himself about everything,

he must have a sort of vampire’s feast in the sense of mastery.

The subject of the chaplaincy came up at Mr. Vincy’s table when Lydgate

was dining there, and the family connection with Mr. Bulstrode did not,

he observed, prevent some freedom of remark even on the part of the

host himself, though his reasons against the proposed arrangement

turned entirely on his objection to Mr. Tyke’s sermons, which were all

doctrine, and his preference for Mr. Farebrother, whose sermons were

free from that taint. Mr. Vincy liked well enough the notion of the

chaplain’s having a salary, supposing it were given to Farebrother, who

was as good a little fellow as ever breathed, and the best preacher

anywhere, and companionable too.

“What line shall you take, then?” said Mr. Chichely, the coroner, a

great coursing comrade of Mr. Vincy’s.

“Oh, I’m precious glad I’m not one of the Directors now. I shall vote

for referring the matter to the Directors and the Medical Board

together. I shall roll some of my responsibility on your shoulders,

Doctor,” said Mr. Vincy, glancing first at Dr. Sprague, the senior

physician of the town, and then at Lydgate who sat opposite. “You

medical gentlemen must consult which sort of black draught you will

prescribe, eh, Mr. Lydgate?”

“I know little of either,” said Lydgate; “but in general, appointments

are apt to be made too much a question of personal liking. The fittest

man for a particular post is not always the best fellow or the most

agreeable. Sometimes, if you wanted to get a reform, your only way

would be to pension off the good fellows whom everybody is fond of, and

put them out of the question.”

Dr. Sprague, who was considered the physician of most “weight,” though

Dr. Minchin was usually said to have more “penetration,” divested his

large heavy face of all expression, and looked at his wine-glass while

Lydgate was speaking. Whatever was not problematical and suspected

about this young man—for example, a certain showiness as to foreign

ideas, and a disposition to unsettle what had been settled and

forgotten by his elders—was positively unwelcome to a physician whose

standing had been fixed thirty years before by a treatise on

Meningitis, of which at least one copy marked “own” was bound in calf.

For my part I have some fellow-feeling with Dr. Sprague: one’s

self-satisfaction is an untaxed kind of property which it is very

unpleasant to find deprecated.

Lydgate’s remark, however, did not meet the sense of the company. Mr.

Vincy said, that if he could have \_his\_ way, he would not put

disagreeable fellows anywhere.

“Hang your reforms!” said Mr. Chichely. “There’s no greater humbug in

the world. You never hear of a reform, but it means some trick to put

in new men. I hope you are not one of the ‘Lancet’s’ men, Mr.

Lydgate—wanting to take the coronership out of the hands of the legal

profession: your words appear to point that way.”

“I disapprove of Wakley,” interposed Dr. Sprague, “no man more: he is

an ill-intentioned fellow, who would sacrifice the respectability of

the profession, which everybody knows depends on the London Colleges,

for the sake of getting some notoriety for himself. There are men who

don’t mind about being kicked blue if they can only get talked about.

But Wakley is right sometimes,” the Doctor added, judicially. “I could

mention one or two points in which Wakley is in the right.”

“Oh, well,” said Mr. Chichely, “I blame no man for standing up in favor

of his own cloth; but, coming to argument, I should like to know how a

coroner is to judge of evidence if he has not had a legal training?”

“In my opinion,” said Lydgate, “legal training only makes a man more

incompetent in questions that require knowledge of another kind. People

talk about evidence as if it could really be weighed in scales by a

blind Justice. No man can judge what is good evidence on any particular

subject, unless he knows that subject well. A lawyer is no better than

an old woman at a post-mortem examination. How is he to know the action

of a poison? You might as well say that scanning verse will teach you

to scan the potato crops.”

“You are aware, I suppose, that it is not the coroner’s business to

conduct the \_post-mortem\_, but only to take the evidence of the medical

witness?” said Mr. Chichely, with some scorn.

“Who is often almost as ignorant as the coroner himself,” said Lydgate.

“Questions of medical jurisprudence ought not to be left to the chance

of decent knowledge in a medical witness, and the coroner ought not to

be a man who will believe that strychnine will destroy the coats of the

stomach if an ignorant practitioner happens to tell him so.”

Lydgate had really lost sight of the fact that Mr. Chichely was his

Majesty’s coroner, and ended innocently with the question, “Don’t you

agree with me, Dr. Sprague?”

“To a certain extent—with regard to populous districts, and in the

metropolis,” said the Doctor. “But I hope it will be long before this

part of the country loses the services of my friend Chichely, even

though it might get the best man in our profession to succeed him. I am

sure Vincy will agree with me.”

“Yes, yes, give me a coroner who is a good coursing man,” said Mr.

Vincy, jovially. “And in my opinion, you’re safest with a lawyer.

Nobody can know everything. Most things are ‘visitation of God.’ And as

to poisoning, why, what you want to know is the law. Come, shall we

join the ladies?”

Lydgate’s private opinion was that Mr. Chichely might be the very

coroner without bias as to the coats of the stomach, but he had not

meant to be personal. This was one of the difficulties of moving in

good Middlemarch society: it was dangerous to insist on knowledge as a

qualification for any salaried office. Fred Vincy had called Lydgate a

prig, and now Mr. Chichely was inclined to call him prick-eared;

especially when, in the drawing-room, he seemed to be making himself

eminently agreeable to Rosamond, whom he had easily monopolized in a

\_tête-à-tête\_, since Mrs. Vincy herself sat at the tea-table. She

resigned no domestic function to her daughter; and the matron’s

blooming good-natured face, with the two volatile pink strings floating

from her fine throat, and her cheery manners to husband and children,

was certainly among the great attractions of the Vincy

house—attractions which made it all the easier to fall in love with the

daughter. The tinge of unpretentious, inoffensive vulgarity in Mrs.

Vincy gave more effect to Rosamond’s refinement, which was beyond what

Lydgate had expected.

Certainly, small feet and perfectly turned shoulders aid the impression

of refined manners, and the right thing said seems quite astonishingly

right when it is accompanied with exquisite curves of lip and eyelid.

And Rosamond could say the right thing; for she was clever with that

sort of cleverness which catches every tone except the humorous.

Happily she never attempted to joke, and this perhaps was the most

decisive mark of her cleverness.

She and Lydgate readily got into conversation. He regretted that he had

not heard her sing the other day at Stone Court. The only pleasure he

allowed himself during the latter part of his stay in Paris was to go

and hear music.

“You have studied music, probably?” said Rosamond.

“No, I know the notes of many birds, and I know many melodies by ear;

but the music that I don’t know at all, and have no notion about,

delights me—affects me. How stupid the world is that it does not make

more use of such a pleasure within its reach!”

“Yes, and you will find Middlemarch very tuneless. There are hardly any

good musicians. I only know two gentlemen who sing at all well.”

“I suppose it is the fashion to sing comic songs in a rhythmic way,

leaving you to fancy the tune—very much as if it were tapped on a

drum?”

“Ah, you have heard Mr. Bowyer,” said Rosamond, with one of her rare

smiles. “But we are speaking very ill of our neighbors.”

Lydgate was almost forgetting that he must carry on the conversation,

in thinking how lovely this creature was, her garment seeming to be

made out of the faintest blue sky, herself so immaculately blond, as if

the petals of some gigantic flower had just opened and disclosed her;

and yet with this infantine blondness showing so much ready,

self-possessed grace. Since he had had the memory of Laure, Lydgate had

lost all taste for large-eyed silence: the divine cow no longer

attracted him, and Rosamond was her very opposite. But he recalled

himself.

“You will let me hear some music to-night, I hope.”

“I will let you hear my attempts, if you like,” said Rosamond. “Papa is

sure to insist on my singing. But I shall tremble before you, who have

heard the best singers in Paris. I have heard very little: I have only

once been to London. But our organist at St. Peter’s is a good

musician, and I go on studying with him.”

“Tell me what you saw in London.”

“Very little.” (A more naive girl would have said, “Oh, everything!”

But Rosamond knew better.) “A few of the ordinary sights, such as raw

country girls are always taken to.”

“Do you call yourself a raw country girl?” said Lydgate, looking at her

with an involuntary emphasis of admiration, which made Rosamond blush

with pleasure. But she remained simply serious, turned her long neck a

little, and put up her hand to touch her wondrous hair-plaits—an

habitual gesture with her as pretty as any movements of a kitten’s paw.

Not that Rosamond was in the least like a kitten: she was a sylph

caught young and educated at Mrs. Lemon’s.

“I assure you my mind is raw,” she said immediately; “I pass at

Middlemarch. I am not afraid of talking to our old neighbors. But I am

really afraid of you.”

“An accomplished woman almost always knows more than we men, though her

knowledge is of a different sort. I am sure you could teach me a

thousand things—as an exquisite bird could teach a bear if there were

any common language between them. Happily, there is a common language

between women and men, and so the bears can get taught.”

“Ah, there is Fred beginning to strum! I must go and hinder him from

jarring all your nerves,” said Rosamond, moving to the other side of

the room, where Fred having opened the piano, at his father’s desire,

that Rosamond might give them some music, was parenthetically

performing “Cherry Ripe!” with one hand. Able men who have passed their

examinations will do these things sometimes, not less than the plucked

Fred.

“Fred, pray defer your practising till to-morrow; you will make Mr.

Lydgate ill,” said Rosamond. “He has an ear.”

Fred laughed, and went on with his tune to the end.

Rosamond turned to Lydgate, smiling gently, and said, “You perceive,

the bears will not always be taught.”

“Now then, Rosy!” said Fred, springing from the stool and twisting it

upward for her, with a hearty expectation of enjoyment. “Some good

rousing tunes first.”

Rosamond played admirably. Her master at Mrs. Lemon’s school (close to

a county town with a memorable history that had its relics in church

and castle) was one of those excellent musicians here and there to be

found in our provinces, worthy to compare with many a noted

Kapellmeister in a country which offers more plentiful conditions of

musical celebrity. Rosamond, with the executant’s instinct, had seized

his manner of playing, and gave forth his large rendering of noble

music with the precision of an echo. It was almost startling, heard for

the first time. A hidden soul seemed to be flowing forth from

Rosamond’s fingers; and so indeed it was, since souls live on in

perpetual echoes, and to all fine expression there goes somewhere an

originating activity, if it be only that of an interpreter. Lydgate was

taken possession of, and began to believe in her as something

exceptional. After all, he thought, one need not be surprised to find

the rare conjunctions of nature under circumstances apparently

unfavorable: come where they may, they always depend on conditions that

are not obvious. He sat looking at her, and did not rise to pay her any

compliments, leaving that to others, now that his admiration was

deepened.

Her singing was less remarkable, but also well trained, and sweet to

hear as a chime perfectly in tune. It is true she sang “Meet me by

moonlight,” and “I’ve been roaming”; for mortals must share the

fashions of their time, and none but the ancients can be always

classical. But Rosamond could also sing “Black-eyed Susan” with effect,

or Haydn’s canzonets, or “Voi, che sapete,” or “Batti, batti”—she only

wanted to know what her audience liked.

Her father looked round at the company, delighting in their admiration.

Her mother sat, like a Niobe before her troubles, with her youngest

little girl on her lap, softly beating the child’s hand up and down in

time to the music. And Fred, notwithstanding his general scepticism

about Rosy, listened to her music with perfect allegiance, wishing he

could do the same thing on his flute. It was the pleasantest family

party that Lydgate had seen since he came to Middlemarch. The Vincys

had the readiness to enjoy, the rejection of all anxiety, and the

belief in life as a merry lot, which made a house exceptional in most

county towns at that time, when Evangelicalism had cast a certain

suspicion as of plague-infection over the few amusements which survived

in the provinces. At the Vincys’ there was always whist, and the

card-tables stood ready now, making some of the company secretly

impatient of the music. Before it ceased Mr. Farebrother came in—a

handsome, broad-chested but otherwise small man, about forty, whose

black was very threadbare: the brilliancy was all in his quick gray

eyes. He came like a pleasant change in the light, arresting little

Louisa with fatherly nonsense as she was being led out of the room by

Miss Morgan, greeting everybody with some special word, and seeming to

condense more talk into ten minutes than had been held all through the

evening. He claimed from Lydgate the fulfilment of a promise to come

and see him. “I can’t let you off, you know, because I have some

beetles to show you. We collectors feel an interest in every new man

till he has seen all we have to show him.”

But soon he swerved to the whist-table, rubbing his hands and saying,

“Come now, let us be serious! Mr. Lydgate? not play? Ah! you are too

young and light for this kind of thing.”

Lydgate said to himself that the clergyman whose abilities were so

painful to Mr. Bulstrode, appeared to have found an agreeable resort in

this certainly not erudite household. He could half understand it: the

good-humor, the good looks of elder and younger, and the provision for

passing the time without any labor of intelligence, might make the

house beguiling to people who had no particular use for their odd

hours.

Everything looked blooming and joyous except Miss Morgan, who was

brown, dull, and resigned, and altogether, as Mrs. Vincy often said,

just the sort of person for a governess. Lydgate did not mean to pay

many such visits himself. They were a wretched waste of the evenings;

and now, when he had talked a little more to Rosamond, he meant to

excuse himself and go.

“You will not like us at Middlemarch, I feel sure,” she said, when the

whist-players were settled. “We are very stupid, and you have been used

to something quite different.”

“I suppose all country towns are pretty much alike,” said Lydgate. “But

I have noticed that one always believes one’s own town to be more

stupid than any other. I have made up my mind to take Middlemarch as it

comes, and shall be much obliged if the town will take me in the same

way. I have certainly found some charms in it which are much greater

than I had expected.”

“You mean the rides towards Tipton and Lowick; every one is pleased

with those,” said Rosamond, with simplicity.

“No, I mean something much nearer to me.”

Rosamond rose and reached her netting, and then said, “Do you care

about dancing at all? I am not quite sure whether clever men ever

dance.”

“I would dance with you if you would allow me.”

“Oh!” said Rosamond, with a slight deprecatory laugh. “I was only going

to say that we sometimes have dancing, and I wanted to know whether you

would feel insulted if you were asked to come.”

“Not on the condition I mentioned.”

After this chat Lydgate thought that he was going, but on moving

towards the whist-tables, he got interested in watching Mr.

Farebrother’s play, which was masterly, and also his face, which was a

striking mixture of the shrewd and the mild. At ten o’clock supper was

brought in (such were the customs of Middlemarch) and there was

punch-drinking; but Mr. Farebrother had only a glass of water. He was

winning, but there seemed to be no reason why the renewal of rubbers

should end, and Lydgate at last took his leave.

But as it was not eleven o’clock, he chose to walk in the brisk air

towards the tower of St. Botolph’s, Mr. Farebrother’s church, which

stood out dark, square, and massive against the starlight. It was the

oldest church in Middlemarch; the living, however, was but a vicarage

worth barely four hundred a-year. Lydgate had heard that, and he

wondered now whether Mr. Farebrother cared about the money he won at

cards; thinking, “He seems a very pleasant fellow, but Bulstrode may

have his good reasons.” Many things would be easier to Lydgate if it

should turn out that Mr. Bulstrode was generally justifiable. “What is

his religious doctrine to me, if he carries some good notions along

with it? One must use such brains as are to be found.”

These were actually Lydgate’s first meditations as he walked away from

Mr. Vincy’s, and on this ground I fear that many ladies will consider

him hardly worthy of their attention. He thought of Rosamond and her

music only in the second place; and though, when her turn came, he

dwelt on the image of her for the rest of his walk, he felt no

agitation, and had no sense that any new current had set into his life.

He could not marry yet; he wished not to marry for several years; and

therefore he was not ready to entertain the notion of being in love

with a girl whom he happened to admire. He did admire Rosamond

exceedingly; but that madness which had once beset him about Laure was

not, he thought, likely to recur in relation to any other woman.

Certainly, if falling in love had been at all in question, it would

have been quite safe with a creature like this Miss Vincy, who had just

the kind of intelligence one would desire in a woman—polished, refined,

docile, lending itself to finish in all the delicacies of life, and

enshrined in a body which expressed this with a force of demonstration

that excluded the need for other evidence. Lydgate felt sure that if

ever he married, his wife would have that feminine radiance, that

distinctive womanhood which must be classed with flowers and music,

that sort of beauty which by its very nature was virtuous, being

moulded only for pure and delicate joys.

But since he did not mean to marry for the next five years—his more

pressing business was to look into Louis’ new book on Fever, which he

was specially interested in, because he had known Louis in Paris, and

had followed many anatomical demonstrations in order to ascertain the

specific differences of typhus and typhoid. He went home and read far

into the smallest hour, bringing a much more testing vision of details

and relations into this pathological study than he had ever thought it

necessary to apply to the complexities of love and marriage, these

being subjects on which he felt himself amply informed by literature,

and that traditional wisdom which is handed down in the genial

conversation of men. Whereas Fever had obscure conditions, and gave him

that delightful labor of the imagination which is not mere

arbitrariness, but the exercise of disciplined power—combining and

constructing with the clearest eye for probabilities and the fullest

obedience to knowledge; and then, in yet more energetic alliance with

impartial Nature, standing aloof to invent tests by which to try its

own work.

Many men have been praised as vividly imaginative on the strength of

their profuseness in indifferent drawing or cheap narration:—reports of

very poor talk going on in distant orbs; or portraits of Lucifer coming

down on his bad errands as a large ugly man with bat’s wings and spurts

of phosphorescence; or exaggerations of wantonness that seem to reflect

life in a diseased dream. But these kinds of inspiration Lydgate

regarded as rather vulgar and vinous compared with the imagination that

reveals subtle actions inaccessible by any sort of lens, but tracked in

that outer darkness through long pathways of necessary sequence by the

inward light which is the last refinement of Energy, capable of bathing

even the ethereal atoms in its ideally illuminated space. He for his

part had tossed away all cheap inventions where ignorance finds itself

able and at ease: he was enamoured of that arduous invention which is

the very eye of research, provisionally framing its object and

correcting it to more and more exactness of relation; he wanted to

pierce the obscurity of those minute processes which prepare human

misery and joy, those invisible thoroughfares which are the first

lurking-places of anguish, mania, and crime, that delicate poise and

transition which determine the growth of happy or unhappy

consciousness.

As he threw down his book, stretched his legs towards the embers in the

grate, and clasped his hands at the back of his head, in that agreeable

afterglow of excitement when thought lapses from examination of a

specific object into a suffusive sense of its connections with all the

rest of our existence—seems, as it were, to throw itself on its back

after vigorous swimming and float with the repose of unexhausted

strength—Lydgate felt a triumphant delight in his studies, and

something like pity for those less lucky men who were not of his

profession.

“If I had not taken that turn when I was a lad,” he thought, “I might

have got into some stupid draught-horse work or other, and lived always

in blinkers. I should never have been happy in any profession that did

not call forth the highest intellectual strain, and yet keep me in good

warm contact with my neighbors. There is nothing like the medical

profession for that: one can have the exclusive scientific life that

touches the distance and befriend the old fogies in the parish too. It

is rather harder for a clergyman: Farebrother seems to be an anomaly.”

This last thought brought back the Vincys and all the pictures of the

evening. They floated in his mind agreeably enough, and as he took up

his bed-candle his lips were curled with that incipient smile which is

apt to accompany agreeable recollections. He was an ardent fellow, but

at present his ardor was absorbed in love of his work and in the

ambition of making his life recognized as a factor in the better life

of mankind—like other heroes of science who had nothing but an obscure

country practice to begin with.

Poor Lydgate! or shall I say, Poor Rosamond! Each lived in a world of

which the other knew nothing. It had not occurred to Lydgate that he

had been a subject of eager meditation to Rosamond, who had neither any

reason for throwing her marriage into distant perspective, nor any

pathological studies to divert her mind from that ruminating habit,

that inward repetition of looks, words, and phrases, which makes a

large part in the lives of most girls. He had not meant to look at her

or speak to her with more than the inevitable amount of admiration and

compliment which a man must give to a beautiful girl; indeed, it seemed

to him that his enjoyment of her music had remained almost silent, for

he feared falling into the rudeness of telling her his great surprise

at her possession of such accomplishment. But Rosamond had registered

every look and word, and estimated them as the opening incidents of a

preconceived romance—incidents which gather value from the foreseen

development and climax. In Rosamond’s romance it was not necessary to

imagine much about the inward life of the hero, or of his serious

business in the world: of course, he had a profession and was clever,

as well as sufficiently handsome; but the piquant fact about Lydgate

was his good birth, which distinguished him from all Middlemarch

admirers, and presented marriage as a prospect of rising in rank and

getting a little nearer to that celestial condition on earth in which

she would have nothing to do with vulgar people, and perhaps at last

associate with relatives quite equal to the county people who looked

down on the Middlemarchers. It was part of Rosamond’s cleverness to

discern very subtly the faintest aroma of rank, and once when she had

seen the Miss Brookes accompanying their uncle at the county assizes,

and seated among the aristocracy, she had envied them, notwithstanding

their plain dress.

If you think it incredible that to imagine Lydgate as a man of family

could cause thrills of satisfaction which had anything to do with the

sense that she was in love with him, I will ask you to use your power

of comparison a little more effectively, and consider whether red cloth

and epaulets have never had an influence of that sort. Our passions do

not live apart in locked chambers, but, dressed in their small wardrobe

of notions, bring their provisions to a common table and mess together,

feeding out of the common store according to their appetite.

Rosamond, in fact, was entirely occupied not exactly with Tertius

Lydgate as he was in himself, but with his relation to her; and it was

excusable in a girl who was accustomed to hear that all young men

might, could, would be, or actually were in love with her, to believe

at once that Lydgate could be no exception. His looks and words meant

more to her than other men’s, because she cared more for them: she

thought of them diligently, and diligently attended to that perfection

of appearance, behavior, sentiments, and all other elegancies, which

would find in Lydgate a more adequate admirer than she had yet been

conscious of.

For Rosamond, though she would never do anything that was disagreeable

to her, was industrious; and now more than ever she was active in

sketching her landscapes and market-carts and portraits of friends, in

practising her music, and in being from morning till night her own

standard of a perfect lady, having always an audience in her own

consciousness, with sometimes the not unwelcome addition of a more

variable external audience in the numerous visitors of the house. She

found time also to read the best novels, and even the second best, and

she knew much poetry by heart. Her favorite poem was “Lalla Rookh.”

“The best girl in the world! He will be a happy fellow who gets her!”

was the sentiment of the elderly gentlemen who visited the Vincys; and

the rejected young men thought of trying again, as is the fashion in

country towns where the horizon is not thick with coming rivals. But

Mrs. Plymdale thought that Rosamond had been educated to a ridiculous

pitch, for what was the use of accomplishments which would be all laid

aside as soon as she was married? While her aunt Bulstrode, who had a

sisterly faithfulness towards her brother’s family, had two sincere

wishes for Rosamond—that she might show a more serious turn of mind,

and that she might meet with a husband whose wealth corresponded to her

habits.

CHAPTER XVII.

“The clerkly person smiled and said

Promise was a pretty maid,

But being poor she died unwed.”

The Rev. Camden Farebrother, whom Lydgate went to see the next evening,

lived in an old parsonage, built of stone, venerable enough to match

the church which it looked out upon. All the furniture too in the house

was old, but with another grade of age—that of Mr. Farebrother’s father

and grandfather. There were painted white chairs, with gilding and

wreaths on them, and some lingering red silk damask with slits in it.

There were engraved portraits of Lord Chancellors and other celebrated

lawyers of the last century; and there were old pier-glasses to reflect

them, as well as the little satin-wood tables and the sofas resembling

a prolongation of uneasy chairs, all standing in relief against the

dark wainscot. This was the physiognomy of the drawing-room into which

Lydgate was shown; and there were three ladies to receive him, who were

also old-fashioned, and of a faded but genuine respectability: Mrs.

Farebrother, the Vicar’s white-haired mother, befrilled and kerchiefed

with dainty cleanliness, upright, quick-eyed, and still under seventy;

Miss Noble, her sister, a tiny old lady of meeker aspect, with frills

and kerchief decidedly more worn and mended; and Miss Winifred

Farebrother, the Vicar’s elder sister, well-looking like himself, but

nipped and subdued as single women are apt to be who spend their lives

in uninterrupted subjection to their elders. Lydgate had not expected

to see so quaint a group: knowing simply that Mr. Farebrother was a

bachelor, he had thought of being ushered into a snuggery where the

chief furniture would probably be books and collections of natural

objects. The Vicar himself seemed to wear rather a changed aspect, as

most men do when acquaintances made elsewhere see them for the first

time in their own homes; some indeed showing like an actor of genial

parts disadvantageously cast for the curmudgeon in a new piece. This

was not the case with Mr. Farebrother: he seemed a trifle milder and

more silent, the chief talker being his mother, while he only put in a

good-humored moderating remark here and there. The old lady was

evidently accustomed to tell her company what they ought to think, and

to regard no subject as quite safe without her steering. She was

afforded leisure for this function by having all her little wants

attended to by Miss Winifred. Meanwhile tiny Miss Noble carried on her

arm a small basket, into which she diverted a bit of sugar, which she

had first dropped in her saucer as if by mistake; looking round

furtively afterwards, and reverting to her teacup with a small innocent

noise as of a tiny timid quadruped. Pray think no ill of Miss Noble.

That basket held small savings from her more portable food, destined

for the children of her poor friends among whom she trotted on fine

mornings; fostering and petting all needy creatures being so

spontaneous a delight to her, that she regarded it much as if it had

been a pleasant vice that she was addicted to. Perhaps she was

conscious of being tempted to steal from those who had much that she

might give to those who had nothing, and carried in her conscience the

guilt of that repressed desire. One must be poor to know the luxury of

giving!

Mrs. Farebrother welcomed the guest with a lively formality and

precision. She presently informed him that they were not often in want

of medical aid in that house. She had brought up her children to wear

flannel and not to over-eat themselves, which last habit she considered

the chief reason why people needed doctors. Lydgate pleaded for those

whose fathers and mothers had over-eaten themselves, but Mrs.

Farebrother held that view of things dangerous: Nature was more just

than that; it would be easy for any felon to say that his ancestors

ought to have been hanged instead of him. If those who had bad fathers

and mothers were bad themselves, they were hanged for that. There was

no need to go back on what you couldn’t see.

“My mother is like old George the Third,” said the Vicar, “she objects

to metaphysics.”

“I object to what is wrong, Camden. I say, keep hold of a few plain

truths, and make everything square with them. When I was young, Mr.

Lydgate, there never was any question about right and wrong. We knew

our catechism, and that was enough; we learned our creed and our duty.

Every respectable Church person had the same opinions. But now, if you

speak out of the Prayer-book itself, you are liable to be

contradicted.”

“That makes rather a pleasant time of it for those who like to maintain

their own point,” said Lydgate.

“But my mother always gives way,” said the Vicar, slyly.

“No, no, Camden, you must not lead Mr. Lydgate into a mistake about

\_me\_. I shall never show that disrespect to my parents, to give up what

they taught me. Any one may see what comes of turning. If you change

once, why not twenty times?”

“A man might see good arguments for changing once, and not see them for

changing again,” said Lydgate, amused with the decisive old lady.

“Excuse me there. If you go upon arguments, they are never wanting,

when a man has no constancy of mind. My father never changed, and he

preached plain moral sermons without arguments, and was a good man—few

better. When you get me a good man made out of arguments, I will get

you a good dinner with reading you the cookery-book. That’s my opinion,

and I think anybody’s stomach will bear me out.”

“About the dinner certainly, mother,” said Mr. Farebrother.

“It is the same thing, the dinner or the man. I am nearly seventy, Mr.

Lydgate, and I go upon experience. I am not likely to follow new

lights, though there are plenty of them here as elsewhere. I say, they

came in with the mixed stuffs that will neither wash nor wear. It was

not so in my youth: a Churchman was a Churchman, and a clergyman, you

might be pretty sure, was a gentleman, if nothing else. But now he may

be no better than a Dissenter, and want to push aside my son on

pretence of doctrine. But whoever may wish to push him aside, I am

proud to say, Mr. Lydgate, that he will compare with any preacher in

this kingdom, not to speak of this town, which is but a low standard to

go by; at least, to my thinking, for I was born and bred at Exeter.”

“A mother is never partial,” said Mr. Farebrother, smiling. “What do

you think Tyke’s mother says about him?”

“Ah, poor creature! what indeed?” said Mrs. Farebrother, her sharpness

blunted for the moment by her confidence in maternal judgments. “She

says the truth to herself, depend upon it.”

“And what is the truth?” said Lydgate. “I am curious to know.”

“Oh, nothing bad at all,” said Mr. Farebrother. “He is a zealous

fellow: not very learned, and not very wise, I think—because I don’t

agree with him.”

“Why, Camden!” said Miss Winifred, “Griffin and his wife told me only

to-day, that Mr. Tyke said they should have no more coals if they came

to hear you preach.”

Mrs. Farebrother laid down her knitting, which she had resumed after

her small allowance of tea and toast, and looked at her son as if to

say “You hear that?” Miss Noble said, “Oh poor things! poor things!” in

reference, probably, to the double loss of preaching and coal. But the

Vicar answered quietly—

“That is because they are not my parishioners. And I don’t think my

sermons are worth a load of coals to them.”

“Mr. Lydgate,” said Mrs. Farebrother, who could not let this pass, “you

don’t know my son: he always undervalues himself. I tell him he is

undervaluing the God who made him, and made him a most excellent

preacher.”

“That must be a hint for me to take Mr. Lydgate away to my study,

mother,” said the Vicar, laughing. “I promised to show you my

collection,” he added, turning to Lydgate; “shall we go?”

All three ladies remonstrated. Mr. Lydgate ought not to be hurried away

without being allowed to accept another cup of tea: Miss Winifred had

abundance of good tea in the pot. Why was Camden in such haste to take

a visitor to his den? There was nothing but pickled vermin, and drawers

full of blue-bottles and moths, with no carpet on the floor. Mr.

Lydgate must excuse it. A game at cribbage would be far better. In

short, it was plain that a vicar might be adored by his womankind as

the king of men and preachers, and yet be held by them to stand in much

need of their direction. Lydgate, with the usual shallowness of a young

bachelor, wondered that Mr. Farebrother had not taught them better.

“My mother is not used to my having visitors who can take any interest

in my hobbies,” said the Vicar, as he opened the door of his study,

which was indeed as bare of luxuries for the body as the ladies had

implied, unless a short porcelain pipe and a tobacco-box were to be

excepted.

“Men of your profession don’t generally smoke,” he said. Lydgate smiled

and shook his head. “Nor of mine either, properly, I suppose. You will

hear that pipe alleged against me by Bulstrode and Company. They don’t

know how pleased the devil would be if I gave it up.”

“I understand. You are of an excitable temper and want a sedative. I am

heavier, and should get idle with it. I should rush into idleness, and

stagnate there with all my might.”

“And you mean to give it all to your work. I am some ten or twelve

years older than you, and have come to a compromise. I feed a weakness

or two lest they should get clamorous. See,” continued the Vicar,

opening several small drawers, “I fancy I have made an exhaustive study

of the entomology of this district. I am going on both with the fauna

and flora; but I have at least done my insects well. We are singularly

rich in orthoptera: I don’t know whether—Ah! you have got hold of that

glass jar—you are looking into that instead of my drawers. You don’t

really care about these things?”

“Not by the side of this lovely anencephalous monster. I have never had

time to give myself much to natural history. I was early bitten with an

interest in structure, and it is what lies most directly in my

profession. I have no hobby besides. I have the sea to swim in there.”

“Ah! you are a happy fellow,” said Mr. Farebrother, turning on his heel

and beginning to fill his pipe. “You don’t know what it is to want

spiritual tobacco—bad emendations of old texts, or small items about a

variety of Aphis Brassicae, with the well-known signature of

Philomicron, for the ‘Twaddler’s Magazine;’ or a learned treatise on

the entomology of the Pentateuch, including all the insects not

mentioned, but probably met with by the Israelites in their passage

through the desert; with a monograph on the Ant, as treated by Solomon,

showing the harmony of the Book of Proverbs with the results of modern

research. You don’t mind my fumigating you?”

Lydgate was more surprised at the openness of this talk than at its

implied meaning—that the Vicar felt himself not altogether in the right

vocation. The neat fitting-up of drawers and shelves, and the bookcase

filled with expensive illustrated books on Natural History, made him

think again of the winnings at cards and their destination. But he was

beginning to wish that the very best construction of everything that

Mr. Farebrother did should be the true one. The Vicar’s frankness

seemed not of the repulsive sort that comes from an uneasy

consciousness seeking to forestall the judgment of others, but simply

the relief of a desire to do with as little pretence as possible.

Apparently he was not without a sense that his freedom of speech might

seem premature, for he presently said—

“I have not yet told you that I have the advantage of you, Mr. Lydgate,

and know you better than you know me. You remember Trawley who shared

your apartment at Paris for some time? I was a correspondent of his,

and he told me a good deal about you. I was not quite sure when you

first came that you were the same man. I was very glad when I found

that you were. Only I don’t forget that you have not had the like

prologue about me.”

Lydgate divined some delicacy of feeling here, but did not half

understand it. “By the way,” he said, “what has become of Trawley? I

have quite lost sight of him. He was hot on the French social systems,

and talked of going to the Backwoods to found a sort of Pythagorean

community. Is he gone?”

“Not at all. He is practising at a German bath, and has married a rich

patient.”

“Then my notions wear the best, so far,” said Lydgate, with a short

scornful laugh. “He would have it, the medical profession was an

inevitable system of humbug. I said, the fault was in the men—men who

truckle to lies and folly. Instead of preaching against humbug outside

the walls, it might be better to set up a disinfecting apparatus

within. In short—I am reporting my own conversation—you may be sure I

had all the good sense on my side.”

“Your scheme is a good deal more difficult to carry out than the

Pythagorean community, though. You have not only got the old Adam in

yourself against you, but you have got all those descendants of the

original Adam who form the society around you. You see, I have paid

twelve or thirteen years more than you for my knowledge of

difficulties. But”—Mr. Farebrother broke off a moment, and then added,

“you are eying that glass vase again. Do you want to make an exchange?

You shall not have it without a fair barter.”

“I have some sea-mice—fine specimens—in spirits. And I will throw in

Robert Brown’s new thing—‘Microscopic Observations on the Pollen of

Plants’—if you don’t happen to have it already.”

“Why, seeing how you long for the monster, I might ask a higher price.

Suppose I ask you to look through my drawers and agree with me about

all my new species?” The Vicar, while he talked in this way,

alternately moved about with his pipe in his mouth, and returned to

hang rather fondly over his drawers. “That would be good discipline,

you know, for a young doctor who has to please his patients in

Middlemarch. You must learn to be bored, remember. However, you shall

have the monster on your own terms.”

“Don’t you think men overrate the necessity for humoring everybody’s

nonsense, till they get despised by the very fools they humor?” said

Lydgate, moving to Mr. Farebrother’s side, and looking rather absently

at the insects ranged in fine gradation, with names subscribed in

exquisite writing. “The shortest way is to make your value felt, so

that people must put up with you whether you flatter them or not.”

“With all my heart. But then you must be sure of having the value, and

you must keep yourself independent. Very few men can do that. Either

you slip out of service altogether, and become good for nothing, or you

wear the harness and draw a good deal where your yoke-fellows pull you.

But do look at these delicate orthoptera!”

Lydgate had after all to give some scrutiny to each drawer, the Vicar

laughing at himself, and yet persisting in the exhibition.

“Apropos of what you said about wearing harness,” Lydgate began, after

they had sat down, “I made up my mind some time ago to do with as

little of it as possible. That was why I determined not to try anything

in London, for a good many years at least. I didn’t like what I saw

when I was studying there—so much empty bigwiggism, and obstructive

trickery. In the country, people have less pretension to knowledge, and

are less of companions, but for that reason they affect one’s

amour-propre less: one makes less bad blood, and can follow one’s own

course more quietly.”

“Yes—well—you have got a good start; you are in the right profession,

the work you feel yourself most fit for. Some people miss that, and

repent too late. But you must not be too sure of keeping your

independence.”

“You mean of family ties?” said Lydgate, conceiving that these might

press rather tightly on Mr. Farebrother.

“Not altogether. Of course they make many things more difficult. But a

good wife—a good unworldly woman—may really help a man, and keep him

more independent. There’s a parishioner of mine—a fine fellow, but who

would hardly have pulled through as he has done without his wife. Do

you know the Garths? I think they were not Peacock’s patients.”

“No; but there is a Miss Garth at old Featherstone’s, at Lowick.”

“Their daughter: an excellent girl.”

“She is very quiet—I have hardly noticed her.”

“She has taken notice of you, though, depend upon it.”

“I don’t understand,” said Lydgate; he could hardly say “Of course.”

“Oh, she gauges everybody. I prepared her for confirmation—she is a

favorite of mine.”

Mr. Farebrother puffed a few moments in silence, Lydgate not caring to

know more about the Garths. At last the Vicar laid down his pipe,

stretched out his legs, and turned his bright eyes with a smile towards

Lydgate, saying—

“But we Middlemarchers are not so tame as you take us to be. We have

our intrigues and our parties. I am a party man, for example, and

Bulstrode is another. If you vote for me you will offend Bulstrode.”

“What is there against Bulstrode?” said Lydgate, emphatically.

“I did not say there was anything against him except that. If you vote

against him you will make him your enemy.”

“I don’t know that I need mind about that,” said Lydgate, rather

proudly; “but he seems to have good ideas about hospitals, and he

spends large sums on useful public objects. He might help me a good

deal in carrying out my ideas. As to his religious notions—why, as

Voltaire said, incantations will destroy a flock of sheep if

administered with a certain quantity of arsenic. I look for the man who

will bring the arsenic, and don’t mind about his incantations.”

“Very good. But then you must not offend your arsenic-man. You will not

offend me, you know,” said Mr. Farebrother, quite unaffectedly. “I

don’t translate my own convenience into other people’s duties. I am

opposed to Bulstrode in many ways. I don’t like the set he belongs to:

they are a narrow ignorant set, and do more to make their neighbors

uncomfortable than to make them better. Their system is a sort of

worldly-spiritual cliqueism: they really look on the rest of mankind as

a doomed carcass which is to nourish them for heaven. But,” he added,

smilingly, “I don’t say that Bulstrode’s new hospital is a bad thing;

and as to his wanting to oust me from the old one—why, if he thinks me

a mischievous fellow, he is only returning a compliment. And I am not a

model clergyman—only a decent makeshift.”

Lydgate was not at all sure that the Vicar maligned himself. A model

clergyman, like a model doctor, ought to think his own profession the

finest in the world, and take all knowledge as mere nourishment to his

moral pathology and therapeutics. He only said, “What reason does

Bulstrode give for superseding you?”

“That I don’t teach his opinions—which he calls spiritual religion; and

that I have no time to spare. Both statements are true. But then I

could make time, and I should be glad of the forty pounds. That is the

plain fact of the case. But let us dismiss it. I only wanted to tell

you that if you vote for your arsenic-man, you are not to cut me in

consequence. I can’t spare you. You are a sort of circumnavigator come

to settle among us, and will keep up my belief in the antipodes. Now

tell me all about them in Paris.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

“Oh, sir, the loftiest hopes on earth

Draw lots with meaner hopes: heroic breasts,

Breathing bad air, run risk of pestilence;

Or, lacking lime-juice when they cross the Line,

May languish with the scurvy.”

Some weeks passed after this conversation before the question of the

chaplaincy gathered any practical import for Lydgate, and without

telling himself the reason, he deferred the predetermination on which

side he should give his vote. It would really have been a matter of

total indifference to him—that is to say, he would have taken the more

convenient side, and given his vote for the appointment of Tyke without

any hesitation—if he had not cared personally for Mr. Farebrother.

But his liking for the Vicar of St. Botolph’s grew with growing

acquaintanceship. That, entering into Lydgate’s position as a new-comer

who had his own professional objects to secure, Mr. Farebrother should

have taken pains rather to warn off than to obtain his interest, showed

an unusual delicacy and generosity, which Lydgate’s nature was keenly

alive to. It went along with other points of conduct in Mr. Farebrother

which were exceptionally fine, and made his character resemble those

southern landscapes which seem divided between natural grandeur and

social slovenliness. Very few men could have been as filial and

chivalrous as he was to the mother, aunt, and sister, whose dependence

on him had in many ways shaped his life rather uneasily for himself;

few men who feel the pressure of small needs are so nobly resolute not

to dress up their inevitably self-interested desires in a pretext of

better motives. In these matters he was conscious that his life would

bear the closest scrutiny; and perhaps the consciousness encouraged a

little defiance towards the critical strictness of persons whose

celestial intimacies seemed not to improve their domestic manners, and

whose lofty aims were not needed to account for their actions. Then,

his preaching was ingenious and pithy, like the preaching of the

English Church in its robust age, and his sermons were delivered

without book. People outside his parish went to hear him; and, since to

fill the church was always the most difficult part of a clergyman’s

function, here was another ground for a careless sense of superiority.

Besides, he was a likable man: sweet-tempered, ready-witted, frank,

without grins of suppressed bitterness or other conversational flavors

which make half of us an affliction to our friends. Lydgate liked him

heartily, and wished for his friendship.

With this feeling uppermost, he continued to waive the question of the

chaplaincy, and to persuade himself that it was not only no proper

business of his, but likely enough never to vex him with a demand for

his vote. Lydgate, at Mr. Bulstrode’s request, was laying down plans

for the internal arrangements of the new hospital, and the two were

often in consultation. The banker was always presupposing that he could

count in general on Lydgate as a coadjutor, but made no special

recurrence to the coming decision between Tyke and Farebrother. When

the General Board of the Infirmary had met, however, and Lydgate had

notice that the question of the chaplaincy was thrown on a council of

the directors and medical men, to meet on the following Friday, he had

a vexed sense that he must make up his mind on this trivial Middlemarch

business. He could not help hearing within him the distinct declaration

that Bulstrode was prime minister, and that the Tyke affair was a

question of office or no office; and he could not help an equally

pronounced dislike to giving up the prospect of office. For his

observation was constantly confirming Mr. Farebrother’s assurance that

the banker would not overlook opposition. “Confound their petty

politics!” was one of his thoughts for three mornings in the meditative

process of shaving, when he had begun to feel that he must really hold

a court of conscience on this matter. Certainly there were valid things

to be said against the election of Mr. Farebrother: he had too much on

his hands already, especially considering how much time he spent on

non-clerical occupations. Then again it was a continually repeated

shock, disturbing Lydgate’s esteem, that the Vicar should obviously

play for the sake of money, liking the play indeed, but evidently

liking some end which it served. Mr. Farebrother contended on theory

for the desirability of all games, and said that Englishmen’s wit was

stagnant for want of them; but Lydgate felt certain that he would have

played very much less but for the money. There was a billiard-room at

the Green Dragon, which some anxious mothers and wives regarded as the

chief temptation in Middlemarch. The Vicar was a first-rate

billiard-player, and though he did not frequent the Green Dragon, there

were reports that he had sometimes been there in the daytime and had

won money. And as to the chaplaincy, he did not pretend that he cared

for it, except for the sake of the forty pounds. Lydgate was no

Puritan, but he did not care for play, and winning money at it had

always seemed a meanness to him; besides, he had an ideal of life which

made this subservience of conduct to the gaining of small sums

thoroughly hateful to him. Hitherto in his own life his wants had been

supplied without any trouble to himself, and his first impulse was

always to be liberal with half-crowns as matters of no importance to a

gentleman; it had never occurred to him to devise a plan for getting

half-crowns. He had always known in a general way that he was not rich,

but he had never felt poor, and he had no power of imagining the part

which the want of money plays in determining the actions of men. Money

had never been a motive to him. Hence he was not ready to frame excuses

for this deliberate pursuit of small gains. It was altogether repulsive

to him, and he never entered into any calculation of the ratio between

the Vicar’s income and his more or less necessary expenditure. It was

possible that he would not have made such a calculation in his own

case.

And now, when the question of voting had come, this repulsive fact told

more strongly against Mr. Farebrother than it had done before. One

would know much better what to do if men’s characters were more

consistent, and especially if one’s friends were invariably fit for any

function they desired to undertake! Lydgate was convinced that if there

had been no valid objection to Mr. Farebrother, he would have voted for

him, whatever Bulstrode might have felt on the subject: he did not

intend to be a vassal of Bulstrode’s. On the other hand, there was

Tyke, a man entirely given to his clerical office, who was simply

curate at a chapel of ease in St. Peter’s parish, and had time for

extra duty. Nobody had anything to say against Mr. Tyke, except that

they could not bear him, and suspected him of cant. Really, from his

point of view, Bulstrode was thoroughly justified.

But whichever way Lydgate began to incline, there was something to make

him wince; and being a proud man, he was a little exasperated at being

obliged to wince. He did not like frustrating his own best purposes by

getting on bad terms with Bulstrode; he did not like voting against

Farebrother, and helping to deprive him of function and salary; and the

question occurred whether the additional forty pounds might not leave

the Vicar free from that ignoble care about winning at cards. Moreover,

Lydgate did not like the consciousness that in voting for Tyke he

should be voting on the side obviously convenient for himself. But

would the end really be his own convenience? Other people would say so,

and would allege that he was currying favor with Bulstrode for the sake

of making himself important and getting on in the world. What then? He

for his own part knew that if his personal prospects simply had been

concerned, he would not have cared a rotten nut for the banker’s

friendship or enmity. What he really cared for was a medium for his

work, a vehicle for his ideas; and after all, was he not bound to

prefer the object of getting a good hospital, where he could

demonstrate the specific distinctions of fever and test therapeutic

results, before anything else connected with this chaplaincy? For the

first time Lydgate was feeling the hampering threadlike pressure of

small social conditions, and their frustrating complexity. At the end

of his inward debate, when he set out for the hospital, his hope was

really in the chance that discussion might somehow give a new aspect to

the question, and make the scale dip so as to exclude the necessity for

voting. I think he trusted a little also to the energy which is

begotten by circumstances—some feeling rushing warmly and making

resolve easy, while debate in cool blood had only made it more

difficult. However it was, he did not distinctly say to himself on

which side he would vote; and all the while he was inwardly resenting

the subjection which had been forced upon him. It would have seemed

beforehand like a ridiculous piece of bad logic that he, with his

unmixed resolutions of independence and his select purposes, would find

himself at the very outset in the grasp of petty alternatives, each of

which was repugnant to him. In his student’s chambers, he had

prearranged his social action quite differently.

Lydgate was late in setting out, but Dr. Sprague, the two other

surgeons, and several of the directors had arrived early; Mr.

Bulstrode, treasurer and chairman, being among those who were still

absent. The conversation seemed to imply that the issue was

problematical, and that a majority for Tyke was not so certain as had

been generally supposed. The two physicians, for a wonder, turned out

to be unanimous, or rather, though of different minds, they concurred

in action. Dr. Sprague, the rugged and weighty, was, as every one had

foreseen, an adherent of Mr. Farebrother. The Doctor was more than

suspected of having no religion, but somehow Middlemarch tolerated this

deficiency in him as if he had been a Lord Chancellor; indeed it is

probable that his professional weight was the more believed in, the

world-old association of cleverness with the evil principle being still

potent in the minds even of lady-patients who had the strictest ideas

of frilling and sentiment. It was perhaps this negation in the Doctor

which made his neighbors call him hard-headed and dry-witted;

conditions of texture which were also held favorable to the storing of

judgments connected with drugs. At all events, it is certain that if

any medical man had come to Middlemarch with the reputation of having

very definite religious views, of being given to prayer, and of

otherwise showing an active piety, there would have been a general

presumption against his medical skill.

On this ground it was (professionally speaking) fortunate for Dr.

Minchin that his religious sympathies were of a general kind, and such

as gave a distant medical sanction to all serious sentiment, whether of

Church or Dissent, rather than any adhesion to particular tenets. If

Mr. Bulstrode insisted, as he was apt to do, on the Lutheran doctrine

of justification, as that by which a Church must stand or fall, Dr.

Minchin in return was quite sure that man was not a mere machine or a

fortuitous conjunction of atoms; if Mrs. Wimple insisted on a

particular providence in relation to her stomach complaint, Dr. Minchin

for his part liked to keep the mental windows open and objected to

fixed limits; if the Unitarian brewer jested about the Athanasian

Creed, Dr. Minchin quoted Pope’s “Essay on Man.” He objected to the

rather free style of anecdote in which Dr. Sprague indulged, preferring

well-sanctioned quotations, and liking refinement of all kinds: it was

generally known that he had some kinship to a bishop, and sometimes

spent his holidays at “the palace.”

Dr. Minchin was soft-handed, pale-complexioned, and of rounded outline,

not to be distinguished from a mild clergyman in appearance: whereas

Dr. Sprague was superfluously tall; his trousers got creased at the

knees, and showed an excess of boot at a time when straps seemed

necessary to any dignity of bearing; you heard him go in and out, and

up and down, as if he had come to see after the roofing. In short, he

had weight, and might be expected to grapple with a disease and throw

it; while Dr. Minchin might be better able to detect it lurking and to

circumvent it. They enjoyed about equally the mysterious privilege of

medical reputation, and concealed with much etiquette their contempt

for each other’s skill. Regarding themselves as Middlemarch

institutions, they were ready to combine against all innovators, and

against non-professionals given to interference. On this ground they

were both in their hearts equally averse to Mr. Bulstrode, though Dr.

Minchin had never been in open hostility with him, and never differed

from him without elaborate explanation to Mrs. Bulstrode, who had found

that Dr. Minchin alone understood her constitution. A layman who pried

into the professional conduct of medical men, and was always obtruding

his reforms,—though he was less directly embarrassing to the two

physicians than to the surgeon-apothecaries who attended paupers by

contract, was nevertheless offensive to the professional nostril as

such; and Dr. Minchin shared fully in the new pique against Bulstrode,

excited by his apparent determination to patronize Lydgate. The

long-established practitioners, Mr. Wrench and Mr. Toller; were just

now standing apart and having a friendly colloquy, in which they agreed

that Lydgate was a jackanapes, just made to serve Bulstrode’s purpose.

To non-medical friends they had already concurred in praising the other

young practitioner, who had come into the town on Mr. Peacock’s

retirement without further recommendation than his own merits and such

argument for solid professional acquirement as might be gathered from

his having apparently wasted no time on other branches of knowledge. It

was clear that Lydgate, by not dispensing drugs, intended to cast

imputations on his equals, and also to obscure the limit between his

own rank as a general practitioner and that of the physicians, who, in

the interest of the profession, felt bound to maintain its various

grades,—especially against a man who had not been to either of the

English universities and enjoyed the absence of anatomical and bedside

study there, but came with a libellous pretension to experience in

Edinburgh and Paris, where observation might be abundant indeed, but

hardly sound.

Thus it happened that on this occasion Bulstrode became identified with

Lydgate, and Lydgate with Tyke; and owing to this variety of

interchangeable names for the chaplaincy question, diverse minds were

enabled to form the same judgment concerning it.

Dr. Sprague said at once bluntly to the group assembled when he

entered, “I go for Farebrother. A salary, with all my heart. But why

take it from the Vicar? He has none too much—has to insure his life,

besides keeping house, and doing a vicar’s charities. Put forty pounds

in his pocket and you’ll do no harm. He’s a good fellow, is

Farebrother, with as little of the parson about him as will serve to

carry orders.”

“Ho, ho! Doctor,” said old Mr. Powderell, a retired iron-monger of some

standing—his interjection being something between a laugh and a

Parliamentary disapproval; “we must let you have your say. But what we

have to consider is not anybody’s income—it’s the souls of the poor

sick people”—here Mr. Powderell’s voice and face had a sincere pathos

in them. “He is a real Gospel preacher, is Mr. Tyke. I should vote

against my conscience if I voted against Mr. Tyke—I should indeed.”

“Mr. Tyke’s opponents have not asked any one to vote against his

conscience, I believe,” said Mr. Hackbutt, a rich tanner of fluent

speech, whose glittering spectacles and erect hair were turned with

some severity towards innocent Mr. Powderell. “But in my judgment it

behoves us, as Directors, to consider whether we will regard it as our

whole business to carry out propositions emanating from a single

quarter. Will any member of the committee aver that he would have

entertained the idea of displacing the gentleman who has always

discharged the function of chaplain here, if it had not been suggested

to him by parties whose disposition it is to regard every institution

of this town as a machinery for carrying out their own views? I tax no

man’s motives: let them lie between himself and a higher Power; but I

do say, that there are influences at work here which are incompatible

with genuine independence, and that a crawling servility is usually

dictated by circumstances which gentlemen so conducting themselves

could not afford either morally or financially to avow. I myself am a

layman, but I have given no inconsiderable attention to the divisions

in the Church and—”

“Oh, damn the divisions!” burst in Mr. Frank Hawley, lawyer and

town-clerk, who rarely presented himself at the board, but now looked

in hurriedly, whip in hand. “We have nothing to do with them here.

Farebrother has been doing the work—what there was—without pay, and if

pay is to be given, it should be given to him. I call it a confounded

job to take the thing away from Farebrother.”

“I think it would be as well for gentlemen not to give their remarks a

personal bearing,” said Mr. Plymdale. “I shall vote for the appointment

of Mr. Tyke, but I should not have known, if Mr. Hackbutt hadn’t hinted

it, that I was a Servile Crawler.”

“I disclaim any personalities. I expressly said, if I may be allowed to

repeat, or even to conclude what I was about to say—”

“Ah, here’s Minchin!” said Mr. Frank Hawley; at which everybody turned

away from Mr. Hackbutt, leaving him to feel the uselessness of superior

gifts in Middlemarch. “Come, Doctor, I must have you on the right side,

eh?”

“I hope so,” said Dr. Minchin, nodding and shaking hands here and

there; “at whatever cost to my feelings.”

“If there’s any feeling here, it should be feeling for the man who is

turned out, I think,” said Mr. Frank Hawley.

“I confess I have feelings on the other side also. I have a divided

esteem,” said Dr. Minchin, rubbing his hands. “I consider Mr. Tyke an

exemplary man—none more so—and I believe him to be proposed from

unimpeachable motives. I, for my part, wish that I could give him my

vote. But I am constrained to take a view of the case which gives the

preponderance to Mr. Farebrother’s claims. He is an amiable man, an

able preacher, and has been longer among us.”

Old Mr. Powderell looked on, sad and silent. Mr. Plymdale settled his

cravat, uneasily.

“You don’t set up Farebrother as a pattern of what a clergyman ought to

be, I hope,” said Mr. Larcher, the eminent carrier, who had just come

in. “I have no ill-will towards him, but I think we owe something to

the public, not to speak of anything higher, in these appointments. In

my opinion Farebrother is too lax for a clergyman. I don’t wish to

bring up particulars against him; but he will make a little attendance

here go as far as he can.”

“And a devilish deal better than too much,” said Mr. Hawley, whose bad

language was notorious in that part of the county. “Sick people can’t

bear so much praying and preaching. And that methodistical sort of

religion is bad for the spirits—bad for the inside, eh?” he added,

turning quickly round to the four medical men who were assembled.

But any answer was dispensed with by the entrance of three gentlemen,

with whom there were greetings more or less cordial. These were the

Reverend Edward Thesiger, Rector of St. Peter’s, Mr. Bulstrode, and our

friend Mr. Brooke of Tipton, who had lately allowed himself to be put

on the board of directors in his turn, but had never before attended,

his attendance now being due to Mr. Bulstrode’s exertions. Lydgate was

the only person still expected.

Every one now sat down, Mr. Bulstrode presiding, pale and

self-restrained as usual. Mr. Thesiger, a moderate evangelical, wished

for the appointment of his friend Mr. Tyke, a zealous able man, who,

officiating at a chapel of ease, had not a cure of souls too extensive

to leave him ample time for the new duty. It was desirable that

chaplaincies of this kind should be entered on with a fervent

intention: they were peculiar opportunities for spiritual influence;

and while it was good that a salary should be allotted, there was the

more need for scrupulous watching lest the office should be perverted

into a mere question of salary. Mr. Thesiger’s manner had so much quiet

propriety that objectors could only simmer in silence.

Mr. Brooke believed that everybody meant well in the matter. He had not

himself attended to the affairs of the Infirmary, though he had a

strong interest in whatever was for the benefit of Middlemarch, and was

most happy to meet the gentlemen present on any public question—“any

public question, you know,” Mr. Brooke repeated, with his nod of

perfect understanding. “I am a good deal occupied as a magistrate, and

in the collection of documentary evidence, but I regard my time as

being at the disposal of the public—and, in short, my friends have

convinced me that a chaplain with a salary—a salary, you know—is a very

good thing, and I am happy to be able to come here and vote for the

appointment of Mr. Tyke, who, I understand, is an unexceptionable man,

apostolic and eloquent and everything of that kind—and I am the last

man to withhold my vote—under the circumstances, you know.”

“It seems to me that you have been crammed with one side of the

question, Mr. Brooke,” said Mr. Frank Hawley, who was afraid of nobody,

and was a Tory suspicious of electioneering intentions. “You don’t seem

to know that one of the worthiest men we have has been doing duty as

chaplain here for years without pay, and that Mr. Tyke is proposed to

supersede him.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Hawley,” said Mr. Bulstrode. “Mr. Brooke has been fully

informed of Mr. Farebrother’s character and position.”

“By his enemies,” flashed out Mr. Hawley.

“I trust there is no personal hostility concerned here,” said Mr.

Thesiger.

“I’ll swear there is, though,” retorted Mr. Hawley.

“Gentlemen,” said Mr. Bulstrode, in a subdued tone, “the merits of the

question may be very briefly stated, and if any one present doubts that

every gentleman who is about to give his vote has not been fully

informed, I can now recapitulate the considerations that should weigh

on either side.”

“I don’t see the good of that,” said Mr. Hawley. “I suppose we all know

whom we mean to vote for. Any man who wants to do justice does not wait

till the last minute to hear both sides of the question. I have no time

to lose, and I propose that the matter be put to the vote at once.”

A brief but still hot discussion followed before each person wrote

“Tyke” or “Farebrother” on a piece of paper and slipped it into a glass

tumbler; and in the mean time Mr. Bulstrode saw Lydgate enter.

“I perceive that the votes are equally divided at present,” said Mr.

Bulstrode, in a clear biting voice. Then, looking up at Lydgate—

“There is a casting-vote still to be given. It is yours, Mr. Lydgate:

will you be good enough to write?”

“The thing is settled now,” said Mr. Wrench, rising. “We all know how

Mr. Lydgate will vote.”

“You seem to speak with some peculiar meaning, sir,” said Lydgate,

rather defiantly, and keeping his pencil suspended.

“I merely mean that you are expected to vote with Mr. Bulstrode. Do you

regard that meaning as offensive?”

“It may be offensive to others. But I shall not desist from voting with

him on that account.” Lydgate immediately wrote down “Tyke.”

So the Rev. Walter Tyke became chaplain to the Infirmary, and Lydgate

continued to work with Mr. Bulstrode. He was really uncertain whether

Tyke were not the more suitable candidate, and yet his consciousness

told him that if he had been quite free from indirect bias he should

have voted for Mr. Farebrother. The affair of the chaplaincy remained a

sore point in his memory as a case in which this petty medium of

Middlemarch had been too strong for him. How could a man be satisfied

with a decision between such alternatives and under such circumstances?

No more than he can be satisfied with his hat, which he has chosen from

among such shapes as the resources of the age offer him, wearing it at

best with a resignation which is chiefly supported by comparison.

But Mr. Farebrother met him with the same friendliness as before. The

character of the publican and sinner is not always practically

incompatible with that of the modern Pharisee, for the majority of us

scarcely see more distinctly the faultiness of our own conduct than the

faultiness of our own arguments, or the dulness of our own jokes. But

the Vicar of St. Botolph’s had certainly escaped the slightest tincture

of the Pharisee, and by dint of admitting to himself that he was too

much as other men were, he had become remarkably unlike them in

this—that he could excuse others for thinking slightly of him, and

could judge impartially of their conduct even when it told against him.

“The world has been too strong for \_me\_, I know,” he said one day to

Lydgate. “But then I am not a mighty man—I shall never be a man of

renown. The choice of Hercules is a pretty fable; but Prodicus makes it

easy work for the hero, as if the first resolves were enough. Another

story says that he came to hold the distaff, and at last wore the

Nessus shirt. I suppose one good resolve might keep a man right if

everybody else’s resolve helped him.”

The Vicar’s talk was not always inspiriting: he had escaped being a

Pharisee, but he had not escaped that low estimate of possibilities

which we rather hastily arrive at as an inference from our own failure.

Lydgate thought that there was a pitiable infirmity of will in Mr.

Farebrother.

CHAPTER XIX.

“L’ altra vedete ch’ha fatto alla guancia

Della sua palma, sospirando, letto.”

—\_Purgatorio\_, vii.

When George the Fourth was still reigning over the privacies of

Windsor, when the Duke of Wellington was Prime Minister, and Mr. Vincy

was mayor of the old corporation in Middlemarch, Mrs. Casaubon, born

Dorothea Brooke, had taken her wedding journey to Rome. In those days

the world in general was more ignorant of good and evil by forty years

than it is at present. Travellers did not often carry full information

on Christian art either in their heads or their pockets; and even the

most brilliant English critic of the day mistook the flower-flushed

tomb of the ascended Virgin for an ornamental vase due to the painter’s

fancy. Romanticism, which has helped to fill some dull blanks with love

and knowledge, had not yet penetrated the times with its leaven and

entered into everybody’s food; it was fermenting still as a

distinguishable vigorous enthusiasm in certain long-haired German

artists at Rome, and the youth of other nations who worked or idled

near them were sometimes caught in the spreading movement.

One fine morning a young man whose hair was not immoderately long, but

abundant and curly, and who was otherwise English in his equipment, had

just turned his back on the Belvedere Torso in the Vatican and was

looking out on the magnificent view of the mountains from the adjoining

round vestibule. He was sufficiently absorbed not to notice the

approach of a dark-eyed, animated German who came up to him and placing

a hand on his shoulder, said with a strong accent, “Come here, quick!

else she will have changed her pose.”

Quickness was ready at the call, and the two figures passed lightly

along by the Meleager, towards the hall where the reclining Ariadne,

then called the Cleopatra, lies in the marble voluptuousness of her

beauty, the drapery folding around her with a petal-like ease and

tenderness. They were just in time to see another figure standing

against a pedestal near the reclining marble: a breathing blooming

girl, whose form, not shamed by the Ariadne, was clad in Quakerish gray

drapery; her long cloak, fastened at the neck, was thrown backward from

her arms, and one beautiful ungloved hand pillowed her cheek, pushing

somewhat backward the white beaver bonnet which made a sort of halo to

her face around the simply braided dark-brown hair. She was not looking

at the sculpture, probably not thinking of it: her large eyes were

fixed dreamily on a streak of sunlight which fell across the floor. But

she became conscious of the two strangers who suddenly paused as if to

contemplate the Cleopatra, and, without looking at them, immediately

turned away to join a maid-servant and courier who were loitering along

the hall at a little distance off.

“What do you think of that for a fine bit of antithesis?” said the

German, searching in his friend’s face for responding admiration, but

going on volubly without waiting for any other answer. “There lies

antique beauty, not corpse-like even in death, but arrested in the

complete contentment of its sensuous perfection: and here stands beauty

in its breathing life, with the consciousness of Christian centuries in

its bosom. But she should be dressed as a nun; I think she looks almost

what you call a Quaker; I would dress her as a nun in my picture.

However, she is married; I saw her wedding-ring on that wonderful left

hand, otherwise I should have thought the sallow \_Geistlicher\_ was her

father. I saw him parting from her a good while ago, and just now I

found her in that magnificent pose. Only think! he is perhaps rich, and

would like to have her portrait taken. Ah! it is no use looking after

her—there she goes! Let us follow her home!”

“No, no,” said his companion, with a little frown.

“You are singular, Ladislaw. You look struck together. Do you know

her?”

“I know that she is married to my cousin,” said Will Ladislaw,

sauntering down the hall with a preoccupied air, while his German

friend kept at his side and watched him eagerly.

“What! the \_Geistlicher\_? He looks more like an uncle—a more useful

sort of relation.”

“He is not my uncle. I tell you he is my second cousin,” said Ladislaw,

with some irritation.

“Schön, schön. Don’t be snappish. You are not angry with me for

thinking Mrs. Second-Cousin the most perfect young Madonna I ever saw?”

“Angry? nonsense. I have only seen her once before, for a couple of

minutes, when my cousin introduced her to me, just before I left

England. They were not married then. I didn’t know they were coming to

Rome.”

“But you will go to see them now—you will find out what they have for

an address—since you know the name. Shall we go to the post? And you

could speak about the portrait.”

“Confound you, Naumann! I don’t know what I shall do. I am not so

brazen as you.”

“Bah! that is because you are dilettantish and amateurish. If you were

an artist, you would think of Mistress Second-Cousin as antique form

animated by Christian sentiment—a sort of Christian Antigone—sensuous

force controlled by spiritual passion.”

“Yes, and that your painting her was the chief outcome of her

existence—the divinity passing into higher completeness and all but

exhausted in the act of covering your bit of canvas. I am amateurish if

you like: I do \_not\_ think that all the universe is straining towards

the obscure significance of your pictures.”

“But it is, my dear!—so far as it is straining through me, Adolf

Naumann: that stands firm,” said the good-natured painter, putting a

hand on Ladislaw’s shoulder, and not in the least disturbed by the

unaccountable touch of ill-humor in his tone. “See now! My existence

presupposes the existence of the whole universe—does it \_not?\_ and my

function is to paint—and as a painter I have a conception which is

altogether \_genialisch\_, of your great-aunt or second grandmother as a

subject for a picture; therefore, the universe is straining towards

that picture through that particular hook or claw which it puts forth

in the shape of me—not true?”

“But how if another claw in the shape of me is straining to thwart

it?—the case is a little less simple then.”

“Not at all: the result of the struggle is the same thing—picture or no

picture—logically.”

Will could not resist this imperturbable temper, and the cloud in his

face broke into sunshiny laughter.

“Come now, my friend—you will help?” said Naumann, in a hopeful tone.

“No; nonsense, Naumann! English ladies are not at everybody’s service

as models. And you want to express too much with your painting. You

would only have made a better or worse portrait with a background which

every connoisseur would give a different reason for or against. And

what is a portrait of a woman? Your painting and Plastik are poor stuff

after all. They perturb and dull conceptions instead of raising them.

Language is a finer medium.”

“Yes, for those who can’t paint,” said Naumann. “There you have perfect

right. I did not recommend you to paint, my friend.”

The amiable artist carried his sting, but Ladislaw did not choose to

appear stung. He went on as if he had not heard.

“Language gives a fuller image, which is all the better for being

vague. After all, the true seeing is within; and painting stares at you

with an insistent imperfection. I feel that especially about

representations of women. As if a woman were a mere colored

superficies! You must wait for movement and tone. There is a difference

in their very breathing: they change from moment to moment.—This woman

whom you have just seen, for example: how would you paint her voice,

pray? But her voice is much diviner than anything you have seen of

her.”

“I see, I see. You are jealous. No man must presume to think that he

can paint your ideal. This is serious, my friend! Your great-aunt! ‘Der

Neffe als Onkel’ in a tragic sense—\_ungeheuer!\_”

“You and I shall quarrel, Naumann, if you call that lady my aunt

again.”

“How is she to be called then?”

“Mrs. Casaubon.”

“Good. Suppose I get acquainted with her in spite of you, and find that

she very much wishes to be painted?”

“Yes, suppose!” said Will Ladislaw, in a contemptuous undertone,

intended to dismiss the subject. He was conscious of being irritated by

ridiculously small causes, which were half of his own creation. Why was

he making any fuss about Mrs. Casaubon? And yet he felt as if something

had happened to him with regard to her. There are characters which are

continually creating collisions and nodes for themselves in dramas

which nobody is prepared to act with them. Their susceptibilities will

clash against objects that remain innocently quiet.

CHAPTER XX.

“A child forsaken, waking suddenly,

Whose gaze afeard on all things round doth rove,

And seeth only that it cannot see

The meeting eyes of love.”

Two hours later, Dorothea was seated in an inner room or boudoir of a

handsome apartment in the Via Sistina.

I am sorry to add that she was sobbing bitterly, with such abandonment

to this relief of an oppressed heart as a woman habitually controlled

by pride on her own account and thoughtfulness for others will

sometimes allow herself when she feels securely alone. And Mr. Casaubon

was certain to remain away for some time at the Vatican.

Yet Dorothea had no distinctly shapen grievance that she could state

even to herself; and in the midst of her confused thought and passion,

the mental act that was struggling forth into clearness was a

self-accusing cry that her feeling of desolation was the fault of her

own spiritual poverty. She had married the man of her choice, and with

the advantage over most girls that she had contemplated her marriage

chiefly as the beginning of new duties: from the very first she had

thought of Mr. Casaubon as having a mind so much above her own, that he

must often be claimed by studies which she could not entirely share;

moreover, after the brief narrow experience of her girlhood she was

beholding Rome, the city of visible history, where the past of a whole

hemisphere seems moving in funeral procession with strange ancestral

images and trophies gathered from afar.

But this stupendous fragmentariness heightened the dreamlike

strangeness of her bridal life. Dorothea had now been five weeks in

Rome, and in the kindly mornings when autumn and winter seemed to go

hand in hand like a happy aged couple one of whom would presently

survive in chiller loneliness, she had driven about at first with Mr.

Casaubon, but of late chiefly with Tantripp and their experienced

courier. She had been led through the best galleries, had been taken to

the chief points of view, had been shown the grandest ruins and the

most glorious churches, and she had ended by oftenest choosing to drive

out to the Campagna where she could feel alone with the earth and sky,

away-from the oppressive masquerade of ages, in which her own life too

seemed to become a masque with enigmatical costumes.

To those who have looked at Rome with the quickening power of a

knowledge which breathes a growing soul into all historic shapes, and

traces out the suppressed transitions which unite all contrasts, Rome

may still be the spiritual centre and interpreter of the world. But let

them conceive one more historical contrast: the gigantic broken

revelations of that Imperial and Papal city thrust abruptly on the

notions of a girl who had been brought up in English and Swiss

Puritanism, fed on meagre Protestant histories and on art chiefly of

the hand-screen sort; a girl whose ardent nature turned all her small

allowance of knowledge into principles, fusing her actions into their

mould, and whose quick emotions gave the most abstract things the

quality of a pleasure or a pain; a girl who had lately become a wife,

and from the enthusiastic acceptance of untried duty found herself

plunged in tumultuous preoccupation with her personal lot. The weight

of unintelligible Rome might lie easily on bright nymphs to whom it

formed a background for the brilliant picnic of Anglo-foreign society;

but Dorothea had no such defence against deep impressions. Ruins and

basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid present,

where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in the deep

degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence; the dimmer but

yet eager Titanic life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings; the

long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the

monotonous light of an alien world: all this vast wreck of ambitious

ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of

breathing forgetfulness and degradation, at first jarred her as with an

electric shock, and then urged themselves on her with that ache

belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion.

Forms both pale and glowing took possession of her young sense, and

fixed themselves in her memory even when she was not thinking of them,

preparing strange associations which remained through her after-years.

Our moods are apt to bring with them images which succeed each other

like the magic-lantern pictures of a doze; and in certain states of

dull forlornness Dorothea all her life continued to see the vastness of

St. Peter’s, the huge bronze canopy, the excited intention in the

attitudes and garments of the prophets and evangelists in the mosaics

above, and the red drapery which was being hung for Christmas spreading

itself everywhere like a disease of the retina.

Not that this inward amazement of Dorothea’s was anything very

exceptional: many souls in their young nudity are tumbled out among

incongruities and left to “find their feet” among them, while their

elders go about their business. Nor can I suppose that when Mrs.

Casaubon is discovered in a fit of weeping six weeks after her wedding,

the situation will be regarded as tragic. Some discouragement, some

faintness of heart at the new real future which replaces the imaginary,

is not unusual, and we do not expect people to be deeply moved by what

is not unusual. That element of tragedy which lies in the very fact of

frequency, has not yet wrought itself into the coarse emotion of

mankind; and perhaps our frames could hardly bear much of it. If we had

a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like

hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die

of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the

quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.

However, Dorothea was crying, and if she had been required to state the

cause, she could only have done so in some such general words as I have

already used: to have been driven to be more particular would have been

like trying to give a history of the lights and shadows, for that new

real future which was replacing the imaginary drew its material from

the endless minutiae by which her view of Mr. Casaubon and her wifely

relation, now that she was married to him, was gradually changing with

the secret motion of a watch-hand from what it had been in her maiden

dream. It was too early yet for her fully to recognize or at least

admit the change, still more for her to have readjusted that

devotedness which was so necessary a part of her mental life that she

was almost sure sooner or later to recover it. Permanent rebellion, the

disorder of a life without some loving reverent resolve, was not

possible to her; but she was now in an interval when the very force of

her nature heightened its confusion. In this way, the early months of

marriage often are times of critical tumult—whether that of a

shrimp-pool or of deeper waters—which afterwards subsides into cheerful

peace.

But was not Mr. Casaubon just as learned as before? Had his forms of

expression changed, or his sentiments become less laudable? Oh

waywardness of womanhood! did his chronology fail him, or his ability

to state not only a theory but the names of those who held it; or his

provision for giving the heads of any subject on demand? And was not

Rome the place in all the world to give free play to such

accomplishments? Besides, had not Dorothea’s enthusiasm especially

dwelt on the prospect of relieving the weight and perhaps the sadness

with which great tasks lie on him who has to achieve them?— And that

such weight pressed on Mr. Casaubon was only plainer than before.

All these are crushing questions; but whatever else remained the same,

the light had changed, and you cannot find the pearly dawn at noonday.

The fact is unalterable, that a fellow-mortal with whose nature you are

acquainted solely through the brief entrances and exits of a few

imaginative weeks called courtship, may, when seen in the continuity of

married companionship, be disclosed as something better or worse than

what you have preconceived, but will certainly not appear altogether

the same. And it would be astonishing to find how soon the change is

felt if we had no kindred changes to compare with it. To share lodgings

with a brilliant dinner-companion, or to see your favorite politician

in the Ministry, may bring about changes quite as rapid: in these cases

too we begin by knowing little and believing much, and we sometimes end

by inverting the quantities.

Still, such comparisons might mislead, for no man was more incapable of

flashy make-believe than Mr. Casaubon: he was as genuine a character as

any ruminant animal, and he had not actively assisted in creating any

illusions about himself. How was it that in the weeks since her

marriage, Dorothea had not distinctly observed but felt with a stifling

depression, that the large vistas and wide fresh air which she had

dreamed of finding in her husband’s mind were replaced by anterooms and

winding passages which seemed to lead nowhither? I suppose it was that

in courtship everything is regarded as provisional and preliminary, and

the smallest sample of virtue or accomplishment is taken to guarantee

delightful stores which the broad leisure of marriage will reveal. But

the door-sill of marriage once crossed, expectation is concentrated on

the present. Having once embarked on your marital voyage, it is

impossible not to be aware that you make no way and that the sea is not

within sight—that, in fact, you are exploring an enclosed basin.

In their conversation before marriage, Mr. Casaubon had often dwelt on

some explanation or questionable detail of which Dorothea did not see

the bearing; but such imperfect coherence seemed due to the brokenness

of their intercourse, and, supported by her faith in their future, she

had listened with fervid patience to a recitation of possible arguments

to be brought against Mr. Casaubon’s entirely new view of the

Philistine god Dagon and other fish-deities, thinking that hereafter

she should see this subject which touched him so nearly from the same

high ground whence doubtless it had become so important to him. Again,

the matter-of-course statement and tone of dismissal with which he

treated what to her were the most stirring thoughts, was easily

accounted for as belonging to the sense of haste and preoccupation in

which she herself shared during their engagement. But now, since they

had been in Rome, with all the depths of her emotion roused to

tumultuous activity, and with life made a new problem by new elements,

she had been becoming more and more aware, with a certain terror, that

her mind was continually sliding into inward fits of anger and

repulsion, or else into forlorn weariness. How far the judicious Hooker

or any other hero of erudition would have been the same at Mr.

Casaubon’s time of life, she had no means of knowing, so that he could

not have the advantage of comparison; but her husband’s way of

commenting on the strangely impressive objects around them had begun to

affect her with a sort of mental shiver: he had perhaps the best

intention of acquitting himself worthily, but only of acquitting

himself. What was fresh to her mind was worn out to his; and such

capacity of thought and feeling as had ever been stimulated in him by

the general life of mankind had long shrunk to a sort of dried

preparation, a lifeless embalmment of knowledge.

When he said, “Does this interest you, Dorothea? Shall we stay a little

longer? I am ready to stay if you wish it,”—it seemed to her as if

going or staying were alike dreary. Or, “Should you like to go to the

Farnesina, Dorothea? It contains celebrated frescos designed or painted

by Raphael, which most persons think it worth while to visit.”

“But do you care about them?” was always Dorothea’s question.

“They are, I believe, highly esteemed. Some of them represent the fable

of Cupid and Psyche, which is probably the romantic invention of a

literary period, and cannot, I think, be reckoned as a genuine mythical

product. But if you like these wall-paintings we can easily drive

thither; and you will then, I think, have seen the chief works of

Raphael, any of which it were a pity to omit in a visit to Rome. He is

the painter who has been held to combine the most complete grace of

form with sublimity of expression. Such at least I have gathered to be

the opinion of cognoscenti.”

This kind of answer given in a measured official tone, as of a

clergyman reading according to the rubric, did not help to justify the

glories of the Eternal City, or to give her the hope that if she knew

more about them the world would be joyously illuminated for her. There

is hardly any contact more depressing to a young ardent creature than

that of a mind in which years full of knowledge seem to have issued in

a blank absence of interest or sympathy.

On other subjects indeed Mr. Casaubon showed a tenacity of occupation

and an eagerness which are usually regarded as the effect of

enthusiasm, and Dorothea was anxious to follow this spontaneous

direction of his thoughts, instead of being made to feel that she

dragged him away from it. But she was gradually ceasing to expect with

her former delightful confidence that she should see any wide opening

where she followed him. Poor Mr. Casaubon himself was lost among small

closets and winding stairs, and in an agitated dimness about the

Cabeiri, or in an exposure of other mythologists’ ill-considered

parallels, easily lost sight of any purpose which had prompted him to

these labors. With his taper stuck before him he forgot the absence of

windows, and in bitter manuscript remarks on other men’s notions about

the solar deities, he had become indifferent to the sunlight.

These characteristics, fixed and unchangeable as bone in Mr. Casaubon,

might have remained longer unfelt by Dorothea if she had been

encouraged to pour forth her girlish and womanly feeling—if he would

have held her hands between his and listened with the delight of

tenderness and understanding to all the little histories which made up

her experience, and would have given her the same sort of intimacy in

return, so that the past life of each could be included in their mutual

knowledge and affection—or if she could have fed her affection with

those childlike caresses which are the bent of every sweet woman, who

has begun by showering kisses on the hard pate of her bald doll,

creating a happy soul within that woodenness from the wealth of her own

love. That was Dorothea’s bent. With all her yearning to know what was

afar from her and to be widely benignant, she had ardor enough for what

was near, to have kissed Mr. Casaubon’s coat-sleeve, or to have

caressed his shoe-latchet, if he would have made any other sign of

acceptance than pronouncing her, with his unfailing propriety, to be of

a most affectionate and truly feminine nature, indicating at the same

time by politely reaching a chair for her that he regarded these

manifestations as rather crude and startling. Having made his clerical

toilet with due care in the morning, he was prepared only for those

amenities of life which were suited to the well-adjusted stiff cravat

of the period, and to a mind weighted with unpublished matter.

And by a sad contradiction Dorothea’s ideas and resolves seemed like

melting ice floating and lost in the warm flood of which they had been

but another form. She was humiliated to find herself a mere victim of

feeling, as if she could know nothing except through that medium: all

her strength was scattered in fits of agitation, of struggle, of

despondency, and then again in visions of more complete renunciation,

transforming all hard conditions into duty. Poor Dorothea! she was

certainly troublesome—to herself chiefly; but this morning for the

first time she had been troublesome to Mr. Casaubon.

She had begun, while they were taking coffee, with a determination to

shake off what she inwardly called her selfishness, and turned a face

all cheerful attention to her husband when he said, “My dear Dorothea,

we must now think of all that is yet left undone, as a preliminary to

our departure. I would fain have returned home earlier that we might

have been at Lowick for the Christmas; but my inquiries here have been

protracted beyond their anticipated period. I trust, however, that the

time here has not been passed unpleasantly to you. Among the sights of

Europe, that of Rome has ever been held one of the most striking and in

some respects edifying. I well remember that I considered it an epoch

in my life when I visited it for the first time; after the fall of

Napoleon, an event which opened the Continent to travellers. Indeed I

think it is one among several cities to which an extreme hyperbole has

been applied—‘See Rome and die:’ but in your case I would propose an

emendation and say, See Rome as a bride, and live henceforth as a happy

wife.”

Mr. Casaubon pronounced this little speech with the most conscientious

intention, blinking a little and swaying his head up and down, and

concluding with a smile. He had not found marriage a rapturous state,

but he had no idea of being anything else than an irreproachable

husband, who would make a charming young woman as happy as she deserved

to be.

“I hope you are thoroughly satisfied with our stay—I mean, with the

result so far as your studies are concerned,” said Dorothea, trying to

keep her mind fixed on what most affected her husband.

“Yes,” said Mr. Casaubon, with that peculiar pitch of voice which makes

the word half a negative. “I have been led farther than I had foreseen,

and various subjects for annotation have presented themselves which,

though I have no direct need of them, I could not pretermit. The task,

notwithstanding the assistance of my amanuensis, has been a somewhat

laborious one, but your society has happily prevented me from that too

continuous prosecution of thought beyond the hours of study which has

been the snare of my solitary life.”

“I am very glad that my presence has made any difference to you,” said

Dorothea, who had a vivid memory of evenings in which she had supposed

that Mr. Casaubon’s mind had gone too deep during the day to be able to

get to the surface again. I fear there was a little temper in her

reply. “I hope when we get to Lowick, I shall be more useful to you,

and be able to enter a little more into what interests you.”

“Doubtless, my dear,” said Mr. Casaubon, with a slight bow. “The notes

I have here made will want sifting, and you can, if you please, extract

them under my direction.”

“And all your notes,” said Dorothea, whose heart had already burned

within her on this subject, so that now she could not help speaking

with her tongue. “All those rows of volumes—will you not now do what

you used to speak of?—will you not make up your mind what part of them

you will use, and begin to write the book which will make your vast

knowledge useful to the world? I will write to your dictation, or I

will copy and extract what you tell me: I can be of no other use.”

Dorothea, in a most unaccountable, darkly feminine manner, ended with a

slight sob and eyes full of tears.

The excessive feeling manifested would alone have been highly

disturbing to Mr. Casaubon, but there were other reasons why Dorothea’s

words were among the most cutting and irritating to him that she could

have been impelled to use. She was as blind to his inward troubles as

he to hers: she had not yet learned those hidden conflicts in her

husband which claim our pity. She had not yet listened patiently to his

heartbeats, but only felt that her own was beating violently. In Mr.

Casaubon’s ear, Dorothea’s voice gave loud emphatic iteration to those

muffled suggestions of consciousness which it was possible to explain

as mere fancy, the illusion of exaggerated sensitiveness: always when

such suggestions are unmistakably repeated from without, they are

resisted as cruel and unjust. We are angered even by the full

acceptance of our humiliating confessions—how much more by hearing in

hard distinct syllables from the lips of a near observer, those

confused murmurs which we try to call morbid, and strive against as if

they were the oncoming of numbness! And this cruel outward accuser was

there in the shape of a wife—nay, of a young bride, who, instead of

observing his abundant pen-scratches and amplitude of paper with the

uncritical awe of an elegant-minded canary-bird, seemed to present

herself as a spy watching everything with a malign power of inference.

Here, towards this particular point of the compass, Mr. Casaubon had a

sensitiveness to match Dorothea’s, and an equal quickness to imagine

more than the fact. He had formerly observed with approbation her

capacity for worshipping the right object; he now foresaw with sudden

terror that this capacity might be replaced by presumption, this

worship by the most exasperating of all criticism,—that which sees

vaguely a great many fine ends, and has not the least notion what it

costs to reach them.

For the first time since Dorothea had known him, Mr. Casaubon’s face

had a quick angry flush upon it.

“My love,” he said, with irritation reined in by propriety, “you may

rely upon me for knowing the times and the seasons, adapted to the

different stages of a work which is not to be measured by the facile

conjectures of ignorant onlookers. It had been easy for me to gain a

temporary effect by a mirage of baseless opinion; but it is ever the

trial of the scrupulous explorer to be saluted with the impatient scorn

of chatterers who attempt only the smallest achievements, being indeed

equipped for no other. And it were well if all such could be admonished

to discriminate judgments of which the true subject-matter lies

entirely beyond their reach, from those of which the elements may be

compassed by a narrow and superficial survey.”

This speech was delivered with an energy and readiness quite unusual

with Mr. Casaubon. It was not indeed entirely an improvisation, but had

taken shape in inward colloquy, and rushed out like the round grains

from a fruit when sudden heat cracks it. Dorothea was not only his

wife: she was a personification of that shallow world which surrounds

the appreciated or desponding author.

Dorothea was indignant in her turn. Had she not been repressing

everything in herself except the desire to enter into some fellowship

with her husband’s chief interests?

“My judgment \_was\_ a very superficial one—such as I am capable of

forming,” she answered, with a prompt resentment, that needed no

rehearsal. “You showed me the rows of notebooks—you have often spoken

of them—you have often said that they wanted digesting. But I never

heard you speak of the writing that is to be published. Those were very

simple facts, and my judgment went no farther. I only begged you to let

me be of some good to you.”

Dorothea rose to leave the table and Mr. Casaubon made no reply, taking

up a letter which lay beside him as if to reperuse it. Both were

shocked at their mutual situation—that each should have betrayed anger

towards the other. If they had been at home, settled at Lowick in

ordinary life among their neighbors, the clash would have been less

embarrassing: but on a wedding journey, the express object of which is

to isolate two people on the ground that they are all the world to each

other, the sense of disagreement is, to say the least, confounding and

stultifying. To have changed your longitude extensively and placed

yourselves in a moral solitude in order to have small explosions, to

find conversation difficult and to hand a glass of water without

looking, can hardly be regarded as satisfactory fulfilment even to the

toughest minds. To Dorothea’s inexperienced sensitiveness, it seemed

like a catastrophe, changing all prospects; and to Mr. Casaubon it was

a new pain, he never having been on a wedding journey before, or found

himself in that close union which was more of a subjection than he had

been able to imagine, since this charming young bride not only obliged

him to much consideration on her behalf (which he had sedulously

given), but turned out to be capable of agitating him cruelly just

where he most needed soothing. Instead of getting a soft fence against

the cold, shadowy, unapplausive audience of his life, had he only given

it a more substantial presence?

Neither of them felt it possible to speak again at present. To have

reversed a previous arrangement and declined to go out would have been

a show of persistent anger which Dorothea’s conscience shrank from,

seeing that she already began to feel herself guilty. However just her

indignation might be, her ideal was not to claim justice, but to give

tenderness. So when the carriage came to the door, she drove with Mr.

Casaubon to the Vatican, walked with him through the stony avenue of

inscriptions, and when she parted with him at the entrance to the

Library, went on through the Museum out of mere listlessness as to what

was around her. She had not spirit to turn round and say that she would

drive anywhere. It was when Mr. Casaubon was quitting her that Naumann

had first seen her, and he had entered the long gallery of sculpture at

the same time with her; but here Naumann had to await Ladislaw with

whom he was to settle a bet of champagne about an enigmatical

mediaeval-looking figure there. After they had examined the figure, and

had walked on finishing their dispute, they had parted, Ladislaw

lingering behind while Naumann had gone into the Hall of Statues where

he again saw Dorothea, and saw her in that brooding abstraction which

made her pose remarkable. She did not really see the streak of sunlight

on the floor more than she saw the statues: she was inwardly seeing the

light of years to come in her own home and over the English fields and

elms and hedge-bordered highroads; and feeling that the way in which

they might be filled with joyful devotedness was not so clear to her as

it had been. But in Dorothea’s mind there was a current into which all

thought and feeling were apt sooner or later to flow—the reaching

forward of the whole consciousness towards the fullest truth, the least

partial good. There was clearly something better than anger and

despondency.

CHAPTER XXI.

“Hire facounde eke full womanly and plain,

No contrefeted termes had she

To semen wise.”

—CHAUCER.

It was in that way Dorothea came to be sobbing as soon as she was

securely alone. But she was presently roused by a knock at the door,

which made her hastily dry her eyes before saying, “Come in.” Tantripp

had brought a card, and said that there was a gentleman waiting in the

lobby. The courier had told him that only Mrs. Casaubon was at home,

but he said he was a relation of Mr. Casaubon’s: would she see him?

“Yes,” said Dorothea, without pause; “show him into the salon.” Her

chief impressions about young Ladislaw were that when she had seen him

at Lowick she had been made aware of Mr. Casaubon’s generosity towards

him, and also that she had been interested in his own hesitation about

his career. She was alive to anything that gave her an opportunity for

active sympathy, and at this moment it seemed as if the visit had come

to shake her out of her self-absorbed discontent—to remind her of her

husband’s goodness, and make her feel that she had now the right to be

his helpmate in all kind deeds. She waited a minute or two, but when

she passed into the next room there were just signs enough that she had

been crying to make her open face look more youthful and appealing than

usual. She met Ladislaw with that exquisite smile of good-will which is

unmixed with vanity, and held out her hand to him. He was the elder by

several years, but at that moment he looked much the younger, for his

transparent complexion flushed suddenly, and he spoke with a shyness

extremely unlike the ready indifference of his manner with his male

companion, while Dorothea became all the calmer with a wondering desire

to put him at ease.

“I was not aware that you and Mr. Casaubon were in Rome, until this

morning, when I saw you in the Vatican Museum,” he said. “I knew you at

once—but—I mean, that I concluded Mr. Casaubon’s address would be found

at the Poste Restante, and I was anxious to pay my respects to him and

you as early as possible.”

“Pray sit down. He is not here now, but he will be glad to hear of you,

I am sure,” said Dorothea, seating herself unthinkingly between the

fire and the light of the tall window, and pointing to a chair

opposite, with the quietude of a benignant matron. The signs of girlish

sorrow in her face were only the more striking. “Mr. Casaubon is much

engaged; but you will leave your address—will you not?—and he will

write to you.”

“You are very good,” said Ladislaw, beginning to lose his diffidence in

the interest with which he was observing the signs of weeping which had

altered her face. “My address is on my card. But if you will allow me I

will call again to-morrow at an hour when Mr. Casaubon is likely to be

at home.”

“He goes to read in the Library of the Vatican every day, and you can

hardly see him except by an appointment. Especially now. We are about

to leave Rome, and he is very busy. He is usually away almost from

breakfast till dinner. But I am sure he will wish you to dine with us.”

Will Ladislaw was struck mute for a few moments. He had never been fond

of Mr. Casaubon, and if it had not been for the sense of obligation,

would have laughed at him as a Bat of erudition. But the idea of this

dried-up pedant, this elaborator of small explanations about as

important as the surplus stock of false antiquities kept in a vendor’s

back chamber, having first got this adorable young creature to marry

him, and then passing his honeymoon away from her, groping after his

mouldy futilities (Will was given to hyperbole)—this sudden picture

stirred him with a sort of comic disgust: he was divided between the

impulse to laugh aloud and the equally unseasonable impulse to burst

into scornful invective.

For an instant he felt that the struggle was causing a queer contortion

of his mobile features, but with a good effort he resolved it into

nothing more offensive than a merry smile.

Dorothea wondered; but the smile was irresistible, and shone back from

her face too. Will Ladislaw’s smile was delightful, unless you were

angry with him beforehand: it was a gush of inward light illuminating

the transparent skin as well as the eyes, and playing about every curve

and line as if some Ariel were touching them with a new charm, and

banishing forever the traces of moodiness. The reflection of that smile

could not but have a little merriment in it too, even under dark

eyelashes still moist, as Dorothea said inquiringly, “Something amuses

you?”

“Yes,” said Will, quick in finding resources. “I am thinking of the

sort of figure I cut the first time I saw you, when you annihilated my

poor sketch with your criticism.”

“My criticism?” said Dorothea, wondering still more. “Surely not. I

always feel particularly ignorant about painting.”

“I suspected you of knowing so much, that you knew how to say just what

was most cutting. You said—I dare say you don’t remember it as I

do—that the relation of my sketch to nature was quite hidden from you.

At least, you implied that.” Will could laugh now as well as smile.

“That was really my ignorance,” said Dorothea, admiring Will’s

good-humor. “I must have said so only because I never could see any

beauty in the pictures which my uncle told me all judges thought very

fine. And I have gone about with just the same ignorance in Rome. There

are comparatively few paintings that I can really enjoy. At first when

I enter a room where the walls are covered with frescos, or with rare

pictures, I feel a kind of awe—like a child present at great ceremonies

where there are grand robes and processions; I feel myself in the

presence of some higher life than my own. But when I begin to examine

the pictures one by one the life goes out of them, or else is something

violent and strange to me. It must be my own dulness. I am seeing so

much all at once, and not understanding half of it. That always makes

one feel stupid. It is painful to be told that anything is very fine

and not be able to feel that it is fine—something like being blind,

while people talk of the sky.”

“Oh, there is a great deal in the feeling for art which must be

acquired,” said Will. (It was impossible now to doubt the directness of

Dorothea’s confession.) “Art is an old language with a great many

artificial affected styles, and sometimes the chief pleasure one gets

out of knowing them is the mere sense of knowing. I enjoy the art of

all sorts here immensely; but I suppose if I could pick my enjoyment to

pieces I should find it made up of many different threads. There is

something in daubing a little one’s self, and having an idea of the

process.”

“You mean perhaps to be a painter?” said Dorothea, with a new direction

of interest. “You mean to make painting your profession? Mr. Casaubon

will like to hear that you have chosen a profession.”

“No, oh no,” said Will, with some coldness. “I have quite made up my

mind against it. It is too one-sided a life. I have been seeing a great

deal of the German artists here: I travelled from Frankfort with one of

them. Some are fine, even brilliant fellows—but I should not like to

get into their way of looking at the world entirely from the studio

point of view.”

“That I can understand,” said Dorothea, cordially. “And in Rome it

seems as if there were so many things which are more wanted in the

world than pictures. But if you have a genius for painting, would it

not be right to take that as a guide? Perhaps you might do better

things than these—or different, so that there might not be so many

pictures almost all alike in the same place.”

There was no mistaking this simplicity, and Will was won by it into

frankness. “A man must have a very rare genius to make changes of that

sort. I am afraid mine would not carry me even to the pitch of doing

well what has been done already, at least not so well as to make it

worth while. And I should never succeed in anything by dint of

drudgery. If things don’t come easily to me I never get them.”

“I have heard Mr. Casaubon say that he regrets your want of patience,”

said Dorothea, gently. She was rather shocked at this mode of taking

all life as a holiday.

“Yes, I know Mr. Casaubon’s opinion. He and I differ.”

The slight streak of contempt in this hasty reply offended Dorothea.

She was all the more susceptible about Mr. Casaubon because of her

morning’s trouble.

“Certainly you differ,” she said, rather proudly. “I did not think of

comparing you: such power of persevering devoted labor as Mr.

Casaubon’s is not common.”

Will saw that she was offended, but this only gave an additional

impulse to the new irritation of his latent dislike towards Mr.

Casaubon. It was too intolerable that Dorothea should be worshipping

this husband: such weakness in a woman is pleasant to no man but the

husband in question. Mortals are easily tempted to pinch the life out

of their neighbor’s buzzing glory, and think that such killing is no

murder.

“No, indeed,” he answered, promptly. “And therefore it is a pity that

it should be thrown away, as so much English scholarship is, for want

of knowing what is being done by the rest of the world. If Mr. Casaubon

read German he would save himself a great deal of trouble.”

“I do not understand you,” said Dorothea, startled and anxious.

“I merely mean,” said Will, in an offhand way, “that the Germans have

taken the lead in historical inquiries, and they laugh at results which

are got by groping about in woods with a pocket-compass while they have

made good roads. When I was with Mr. Casaubon I saw that he deafened

himself in that direction: it was almost against his will that he read

a Latin treatise written by a German. I was very sorry.”

Will only thought of giving a good pinch that would annihilate that

vaunted laboriousness, and was unable to imagine the mode in which

Dorothea would be wounded. Young Mr. Ladislaw was not at all deep

himself in German writers; but very little achievement is required in

order to pity another man’s shortcomings.

Poor Dorothea felt a pang at the thought that the labor of her

husband’s life might be void, which left her no energy to spare for the

question whether this young relative who was so much obliged to him

ought not to have repressed his observation. She did not even speak,

but sat looking at her hands, absorbed in the piteousness of that

thought.

Will, however, having given that annihilating pinch, was rather

ashamed, imagining from Dorothea’s silence that he had offended her

still more; and having also a conscience about plucking the

tail-feathers from a benefactor.

“I regretted it especially,” he resumed, taking the usual course from

detraction to insincere eulogy, “because of my gratitude and respect

towards my cousin. It would not signify so much in a man whose talents

and character were less distinguished.”

Dorothea raised her eyes, brighter than usual with excited feeling, and

said in her saddest recitative, “How I wish I had learned German when I

was at Lausanne! There were plenty of German teachers. But now I can be

of no use.”

There was a new light, but still a mysterious light, for Will in

Dorothea’s last words. The question how she had come to accept Mr.

Casaubon—which he had dismissed when he first saw her by saying that

she must be disagreeable in spite of appearances—was not now to be

answered on any such short and easy method. Whatever else she might be,

she was not disagreeable. She was not coldly clever and indirectly

satirical, but adorably simple and full of feeling. She was an angel

beguiled. It would be a unique delight to wait and watch for the

melodious fragments in which her heart and soul came forth so directly

and ingenuously. The Aeolian harp again came into his mind.

She must have made some original romance for herself in this marriage.

And if Mr. Casaubon had been a dragon who had carried her off to his

lair with his talons simply and without legal forms, it would have been

an unavoidable feat of heroism to release her and fall at her feet. But

he was something more unmanageable than a dragon: he was a benefactor

with collective society at his back, and he was at that moment entering

the room in all the unimpeachable correctness of his demeanor, while

Dorothea was looking animated with a newly roused alarm and regret, and

Will was looking animated with his admiring speculation about her

feelings.

Mr. Casaubon felt a surprise which was quite unmixed with pleasure, but

he did not swerve from his usual politeness of greeting, when Will rose

and explained his presence. Mr. Casaubon was less happy than usual, and

this perhaps made him look all the dimmer and more faded; else, the

effect might easily have been produced by the contrast of his young

cousin’s appearance. The first impression on seeing Will was one of

sunny brightness, which added to the uncertainty of his changing

expression. Surely, his very features changed their form, his jaw

looked sometimes large and sometimes small; and the little ripple in

his nose was a preparation for metamorphosis. When he turned his head

quickly his hair seemed to shake out light, and some persons thought

they saw decided genius in this coruscation. Mr. Casaubon, on the

contrary, stood rayless.

As Dorothea’s eyes were turned anxiously on her husband she was perhaps

not insensible to the contrast, but it was only mingled with other

causes in making her more conscious of that new alarm on his behalf

which was the first stirring of a pitying tenderness fed by the

realities of his lot and not by her own dreams. Yet it was a source of

greater freedom to her that Will was there; his young equality was

agreeable, and also perhaps his openness to conviction. She felt an

immense need of some one to speak to, and she had never before seen any

one who seemed so quick and pliable, so likely to understand

everything.

Mr. Casaubon gravely hoped that Will was passing his time profitably as

well as pleasantly in Rome—had thought his intention was to remain in

South Germany—but begged him to come and dine to-morrow, when he could

converse more at large: at present he was somewhat weary. Ladislaw

understood, and accepting the invitation immediately took his leave.

Dorothea’s eyes followed her husband anxiously, while he sank down

wearily at the end of a sofa, and resting his elbow supported his head

and looked on the floor. A little flushed, and with bright eyes, she

seated herself beside him, and said—

“Forgive me for speaking so hastily to you this morning. I was wrong. I

fear I hurt you and made the day more burdensome.”

“I am glad that you feel that, my dear,” said Mr. Casaubon. He spoke

quietly and bowed his head a little, but there was still an uneasy

feeling in his eyes as he looked at her.

“But you do forgive me?” said Dorothea, with a quick sob. In her need

for some manifestation of feeling she was ready to exaggerate her own

fault. Would not love see returning penitence afar off, and fall on its

neck and kiss it?

“My dear Dorothea—‘who with repentance is not satisfied, is not of

heaven nor earth:’—you do not think me worthy to be banished by that

severe sentence,” said Mr. Casaubon, exerting himself to make a strong

statement, and also to smile faintly.

Dorothea was silent, but a tear which had come up with the sob would

insist on falling.

“You are excited, my dear. And I also am feeling some unpleasant

consequences of too much mental disturbance,” said Mr. Casaubon. In

fact, he had it in his thought to tell her that she ought not to have

received young Ladislaw in his absence: but he abstained, partly from

the sense that it would be ungracious to bring a new complaint in the

moment of her penitent acknowledgment, partly because he wanted to

avoid further agitation of himself by speech, and partly because he was

too proud to betray that jealousy of disposition which was not so

exhausted on his scholarly compeers that there was none to spare in

other directions. There is a sort of jealousy which needs very little

fire: it is hardly a passion, but a blight bred in the cloudy, damp

despondency of uneasy egoism.

“I think it is time for us to dress,” he added, looking at his watch.

They both rose, and there was never any further allusion between them

to what had passed on this day.

But Dorothea remembered it to the last with the vividness with which we

all remember epochs in our experience when some dear expectation dies,

or some new motive is born. Today she had begun to see that she had

been under a wild illusion in expecting a response to her feeling from

Mr. Casaubon, and she had felt the waking of a presentiment that there

might be a sad consciousness in his life which made as great a need on

his side as on her own.

We are all of us born in moral stupidity, taking the world as an udder

to feed our supreme selves: Dorothea had early begun to emerge from

that stupidity, but yet it had been easier to her to imagine how she

would devote herself to Mr. Casaubon, and become wise and strong in his

strength and wisdom, than to conceive with that distinctness which is

no longer reflection but feeling—an idea wrought back to the directness

of sense, like the solidity of objects—that he had an equivalent centre

of self, whence the lights and shadows must always fall with a certain

difference.

CHAPTER XXII.

“Nous câusames longtemps; elle était simple et bonne.

Ne sachant pas le mal, elle faisait le bien;

Des richesses du coeur elle me fit l’aumône,

Et tout en écoutant comme le coeur se donne,

Sans oser y penser je lui donnai le mien;

Elle emporta ma vie, et n’en sut jamais rien.”

—ALFRED DE MUSSET.

Will Ladislaw was delightfully agreeable at dinner the next day, and

gave no opportunity for Mr. Casaubon to show disapprobation. On the

contrary it seemed to Dorothea that Will had a happier way of drawing

her husband into conversation and of deferentially listening to him

than she had ever observed in any one before. To be sure, the listeners

about Tipton were not highly gifted! Will talked a good deal himself,

but what he said was thrown in with such rapidity, and with such an

unimportant air of saying something by the way, that it seemed a gay

little chime after the great bell. If Will was not always perfect, this

was certainly one of his good days. He described touches of incident

among the poor people in Rome, only to be seen by one who could move

about freely; he found himself in agreement with Mr. Casaubon as to the

unsound opinions of Middleton concerning the relations of Judaism and

Catholicism; and passed easily to a half-enthusiastic half-playful

picture of the enjoyment he got out of the very miscellaneousness of

Rome, which made the mind flexible with constant comparison, and saved

you from seeing the world’s ages as a set of box-like partitions

without vital connection. Mr. Casaubon’s studies, Will observed, had

always been of too broad a kind for that, and he had perhaps never felt

any such sudden effect, but for himself he confessed that Rome had

given him quite a new sense of history as a whole: the fragments

stimulated his imagination and made him constructive. Then

occasionally, but not too often, he appealed to Dorothea, and discussed

what she said, as if her sentiment were an item to be considered in the

final judgment even of the Madonna di Foligno or the Laocoon. A sense

of contributing to form the world’s opinion makes conversation

particularly cheerful; and Mr. Casaubon too was not without his pride

in his young wife, who spoke better than most women, as indeed he had

perceived in choosing her.

Since things were going on so pleasantly, Mr. Casaubon’s statement that

his labors in the Library would be suspended for a couple of days, and

that after a brief renewal he should have no further reason for staying

in Rome, encouraged Will to urge that Mrs. Casaubon should not go away

without seeing a studio or two. Would not Mr. Casaubon take her? That

sort of thing ought not to be missed: it was quite special: it was a

form of life that grew like a small fresh vegetation with its

population of insects on huge fossils. Will would be happy to conduct

them—not to anything wearisome, only to a few examples.

Mr. Casaubon, seeing Dorothea look earnestly towards him, could not but

ask her if she would be interested in such visits: he was now at her

service during the whole day; and it was agreed that Will should come

on the morrow and drive with them.

Will could not omit Thorwaldsen, a living celebrity about whom even Mr.

Casaubon inquired, but before the day was far advanced he led the way

to the studio of his friend Adolf Naumann, whom he mentioned as one of

the chief renovators of Christian art, one of those who had not only

revived but expanded that grand conception of supreme events as

mysteries at which the successive ages were spectators, and in relation

to which the great souls of all periods became as it were

contemporaries. Will added that he had made himself Naumann’s pupil for

the nonce.

“I have been making some oil-sketches under him,” said Will. “I hate

copying. I must put something of my own in. Naumann has been painting

the Saints drawing the Car of the Church, and I have been making a

sketch of Marlowe’s Tamburlaine Driving the Conquered Kings in his

Chariot. I am not so ecclesiastical as Naumann, and I sometimes twit

him with his excess of meaning. But this time I mean to outdo him in

breadth of intention. I take Tamburlaine in his chariot for the

tremendous course of the world’s physical history lashing on the

harnessed dynasties. In my opinion, that is a good mythical

interpretation.” Will here looked at Mr. Casaubon, who received this

offhand treatment of symbolism very uneasily, and bowed with a neutral

air.

“The sketch must be very grand, if it conveys so much,” said Dorothea.

“I should need some explanation even of the meaning you give. Do you

intend Tamburlaine to represent earthquakes and volcanoes?”

“Oh yes,” said Will, laughing, “and migrations of races and clearings

of forests—and America and the steam-engine. Everything you can

imagine!”

“What a difficult kind of shorthand!” said Dorothea, smiling towards

her husband. “It would require all your knowledge to be able to read

it.”

Mr. Casaubon blinked furtively at Will. He had a suspicion that he was

being laughed at. But it was not possible to include Dorothea in the

suspicion.

They found Naumann painting industriously, but no model was present;

his pictures were advantageously arranged, and his own plain vivacious

person set off by a dove-colored blouse and a maroon velvet cap, so

that everything was as fortunate as if he had expected the beautiful

young English lady exactly at that time.

The painter in his confident English gave little dissertations on his

finished and unfinished subjects, seeming to observe Mr. Casaubon as

much as he did Dorothea. Will burst in here and there with ardent words

of praise, marking out particular merits in his friend’s work; and

Dorothea felt that she was getting quite new notions as to the

significance of Madonnas seated under inexplicable canopied thrones

with the simple country as a background, and of saints with

architectural models in their hands, or knives accidentally wedged in

their skulls. Some things which had seemed monstrous to her were

gathering intelligibility and even a natural meaning: but all this was

apparently a branch of knowledge in which Mr. Casaubon had not

interested himself.

“I think I would rather feel that painting is beautiful than have to

read it as an enigma; but I should learn to understand these pictures

sooner than yours with the very wide meaning,” said Dorothea, speaking

to Will.

“Don’t speak of my painting before Naumann,” said Will. “He will tell

you, it is all \_pfuscherei\_, which is his most opprobrious word!”

“Is that true?” said Dorothea, turning her sincere eyes on Naumann, who

made a slight grimace and said—

“Oh, he does not mean it seriously with painting. His walk must be

\_belles-lettres\_. That is wi-ide.”

Naumann’s pronunciation of the vowel seemed to stretch the word

satirically. Will did not half like it, but managed to laugh: and Mr.

Casaubon, while he felt some disgust at the artist’s German accent,

began to entertain a little respect for his judicious severity.

The respect was not diminished when Naumann, after drawing Will aside

for a moment and looking, first at a large canvas, then at Mr.

Casaubon, came forward again and said—

“My friend Ladislaw thinks you will pardon me, sir, if I say that a

sketch of your head would be invaluable to me for the St. Thomas

Aquinas in my picture there. It is too much to ask; but I so seldom see

just what I want—the idealistic in the real.”

“You astonish me greatly, sir,” said Mr. Casaubon, his looks improved

with a glow of delight; “but if my poor physiognomy, which I have been

accustomed to regard as of the commonest order, can be of any use to

you in furnishing some traits for the angelical doctor, I shall feel

honored. That is to say, if the operation will not be a lengthy one;

and if Mrs. Casaubon will not object to the delay.”

As for Dorothea, nothing could have pleased her more, unless it had

been a miraculous voice pronouncing Mr. Casaubon the wisest and

worthiest among the sons of men. In that case her tottering faith would

have become firm again.

Naumann’s apparatus was at hand in wonderful completeness, and the

sketch went on at once as well as the conversation. Dorothea sat down

and subsided into calm silence, feeling happier than she had done for a

long while before. Every one about her seemed good, and she said to

herself that Rome, if she had only been less ignorant, would have been

full of beauty: its sadness would have been winged with hope. No nature

could be less suspicious than hers: when she was a child she believed

in the gratitude of wasps and the honorable susceptibility of sparrows,

and was proportionately indignant when their baseness was made

manifest.

The adroit artist was asking Mr. Casaubon questions about English

polities, which brought long answers, and, Will meanwhile had perched

himself on some steps in the background overlooking all.

Presently Naumann said—“Now if I could lay this by for half an hour and

take it up again—come and look, Ladislaw—I think it is perfect so far.”

Will vented those adjuring interjections which imply that admiration is

too strong for syntax; and Naumann said in a tone of piteous regret—

“Ah—now—if I could but have had more—but you have other engagements—I

could not ask it—or even to come again to-morrow.”

“Oh, let us stay!” said Dorothea. “We have nothing to do to-day except

go about, have we?” she added, looking entreatingly at Mr. Casaubon.

“It would be a pity not to make the head as good as possible.”

“I am at your service, sir, in the matter,” said Mr. Casaubon, with

polite condescension. “Having given up the interior of my head to

idleness, it is as well that the exterior should work in this way.”

“You are unspeakably good—now I am happy!” said Naumann, and then went

on in German to Will, pointing here and there to the sketch as if he

were considering that. Putting it aside for a moment, he looked round

vaguely, as if seeking some occupation for his visitors, and afterwards

turning to Mr. Casaubon, said—

“Perhaps the beautiful bride, the gracious lady, would not be unwilling

to let me fill up the time by trying to make a slight sketch of

her—not, of course, as you see, for that picture—only as a single

study.”

Mr. Casaubon, bowing, doubted not that Mrs. Casaubon would oblige him,

and Dorothea said, at once, “Where shall I put myself?”

Naumann was all apologies in asking her to stand, and allow him to

adjust her attitude, to which she submitted without any of the affected

airs and laughs frequently thought necessary on such occasions, when

the painter said, “It is as Santa Clara that I want you to

stand—leaning so, with your cheek against your hand—so—looking at that

stool, please, so!”

Will was divided between the inclination to fall at the Saint’s feet

and kiss her robe, and the temptation to knock Naumann down while he

was adjusting her arm. All this was impudence and desecration, and he

repented that he had brought her.

The artist was diligent, and Will recovering himself moved about and

occupied Mr. Casaubon as ingeniously as he could; but he did not in the

end prevent the time from seeming long to that gentleman, as was clear

from his expressing a fear that Mrs. Casaubon would be tired. Naumann

took the hint and said—

“Now, sir, if you can oblige me again; I will release the lady-wife.”

So Mr. Casaubon’s patience held out further, and when after all it

turned out that the head of Saint Thomas Aquinas would be more perfect

if another sitting could be had, it was granted for the morrow. On the

morrow Santa Clara too was retouched more than once. The result of all

was so far from displeasing to Mr. Casaubon, that he arranged for the

purchase of the picture in which Saint Thomas Aquinas sat among the

doctors of the Church in a disputation too abstract to be represented,

but listened to with more or less attention by an audience above. The

Santa Clara, which was spoken of in the second place, Naumann declared

himself to be dissatisfied with—he could not, in conscience, engage to

make a worthy picture of it; so about the Santa Clara the arrangement

was conditional.

I will not dwell on Naumann’s jokes at the expense of Mr. Casaubon that

evening, or on his dithyrambs about Dorothea’s charm, in all which Will

joined, but with a difference. No sooner did Naumann mention any detail

of Dorothea’s beauty, than Will got exasperated at his presumption:

there was grossness in his choice of the most ordinary words, and what

business had he to talk of her lips? She was not a woman to be spoken

of as other women were. Will could not say just what he thought, but he

became irritable. And yet, when after some resistance he had consented

to take the Casaubons to his friend’s studio, he had been allured by

the gratification of his pride in being the person who could grant

Naumann such an opportunity of studying her loveliness—or rather her

divineness, for the ordinary phrases which might apply to mere bodily

prettiness were not applicable to her. (Certainly all Tipton and its

neighborhood, as well as Dorothea herself, would have been surprised at

her beauty being made so much of. In that part of the world Miss Brooke

had been only a “fine young woman.”)

“Oblige me by letting the subject drop, Naumann. Mrs. Casaubon is not

to be talked of as if she were a model,” said Will. Naumann stared at

him.

“Schön! I will talk of my Aquinas. The head is not a bad type, after

all. I dare say the great scholastic himself would have been flattered

to have his portrait asked for. Nothing like these starchy doctors for

vanity! It was as I thought: he cared much less for her portrait than

his own.”

“He’s a cursed white-blooded pedantic coxcomb,” said Will, with

gnashing impetuosity. His obligations to Mr. Casaubon were not known to

his hearer, but Will himself was thinking of them, and wishing that he

could discharge them all by a check.

Naumann gave a shrug and said, “It is good they go away soon, my dear.

They are spoiling your fine temper.”

All Will’s hope and contrivance were now concentrated on seeing

Dorothea when she was alone. He only wanted her to take more emphatic

notice of him; he only wanted to be something more special in her

remembrance than he could yet believe himself likely to be. He was

rather impatient under that open ardent good-will, which he saw was her

usual state of feeling. The remote worship of a woman throned out of

their reach plays a great part in men’s lives, but in most cases the

worshipper longs for some queenly recognition, some approving sign by

which his soul’s sovereign may cheer him without descending from her

high place. That was precisely what Will wanted. But there were plenty

of contradictions in his imaginative demands. It was beautiful to see

how Dorothea’s eyes turned with wifely anxiety and beseeching to Mr.

Casaubon: she would have lost some of her halo if she had been without

that duteous preoccupation; and yet at the next moment the husband’s

sandy absorption of such nectar was too intolerable; and Will’s longing

to say damaging things about him was perhaps not the less tormenting

because he felt the strongest reasons for restraining it.

Will had not been invited to dine the next day. Hence he persuaded

himself that he was bound to call, and that the only eligible time was

the middle of the day, when Mr. Casaubon would not be at home.

Dorothea, who had not been made aware that her former reception of Will

had displeased her husband, had no hesitation about seeing him,

especially as he might be come to pay a farewell visit. When he entered

she was looking at some cameos which she had been buying for Celia. She

greeted Will as if his visit were quite a matter of course, and said at

once, having a cameo bracelet in her hand—

“I am so glad you are come. Perhaps you understand all about cameos,

and can tell me if these are really good. I wished to have you with us

in choosing them, but Mr. Casaubon objected: he thought there was not

time. He will finish his work to-morrow, and we shall go away in three

days. I have been uneasy about these cameos. Pray sit down and look at

them.”

“I am not particularly knowing, but there can be no great mistake about

these little Homeric bits: they are exquisitely neat. And the color is

fine: it will just suit you.”

“Oh, they are for my sister, who has quite a different complexion. You

saw her with me at Lowick: she is light-haired and very pretty—at least

I think so. We were never so long away from each other in our lives

before. She is a great pet and never was naughty in her life. I found

out before I came away that she wanted me to buy her some cameos, and I

should be sorry for them not to be good—after their kind.” Dorothea

added the last words with a smile.

“You seem not to care about cameos,” said Will, seating himself at some

distance from her, and observing her while she closed the cases.

“No, frankly, I don’t think them a great object in life,” said

Dorothea.

“I fear you are a heretic about art generally. How is that? I should

have expected you to be very sensitive to the beautiful everywhere.”

“I suppose I am dull about many things,” said Dorothea, simply. “I

should like to make life beautiful—I mean everybody’s life. And then

all this immense expense of art, that seems somehow to lie outside life

and make it no better for the world, pains one. It spoils my enjoyment

of anything when I am made to think that most people are shut out from

it.”

“I call that the fanaticism of sympathy,” said Will, impetuously. “You

might say the same of landscape, of poetry, of all refinement. If you

carried it out you ought to be miserable in your own goodness, and turn

evil that you might have no advantage over others. The best piety is to

enjoy—when you can. You are doing the most then to save the earth’s

character as an agreeable planet. And enjoyment radiates. It is of no

use to try and take care of all the world; that is being taken care of

when you feel delight—in art or in anything else. Would you turn all

the youth of the world into a tragic chorus, wailing and moralizing

over misery? I suspect that you have some false belief in the virtues

of misery, and want to make your life a martyrdom.” Will had gone

further than he intended, and checked himself. But Dorothea’s thought

was not taking just the same direction as his own, and she answered

without any special emotion—

“Indeed you mistake me. I am not a sad, melancholy creature. I am never

unhappy long together. I am angry and naughty—not like Celia: I have a

great outburst, and then all seems glorious again. I cannot help

believing in glorious things in a blind sort of way. I should be quite

willing to enjoy the art here, but there is so much that I don’t know

the reason of—so much that seems to me a consecration of ugliness

rather than beauty. The painting and sculpture may be wonderful, but

the feeling is often low and brutal, and sometimes even ridiculous.

Here and there I see what takes me at once as noble—something that I

might compare with the Alban Mountains or the sunset from the Pincian

Hill; but that makes it the greater pity that there is so little of the

best kind among all that mass of things over which men have toiled so.”

“Of course there is always a great deal of poor work: the rarer things

want that soil to grow in.”

“Oh dear,” said Dorothea, taking up that thought into the chief current

of her anxiety; “I see it must be very difficult to do anything good. I

have often felt since I have been in Rome that most of our lives would

look much uglier and more bungling than the pictures, if they could be

put on the wall.”

Dorothea parted her lips again as if she were going to say more, but

changed her mind and paused.

“You are too young—it is an anachronism for you to have such thoughts,”

said Will, energetically, with a quick shake of the head habitual to

him. “You talk as if you had never known any youth. It is monstrous—as

if you had had a vision of Hades in your childhood, like the boy in the

legend. You have been brought up in some of those horrible notions that

choose the sweetest women to devour—like Minotaurs. And now you will go

and be shut up in that stone prison at Lowick: you will be buried

alive. It makes me savage to think of it! I would rather never have

seen you than think of you with such a prospect.”

Will again feared that he had gone too far; but the meaning we attach

to words depends on our feeling, and his tone of angry regret had so

much kindness in it for Dorothea’s heart, which had always been giving

out ardor and had never been fed with much from the living beings

around her, that she felt a new sense of gratitude and answered with a

gentle smile—

“It is very good of you to be anxious about me. It is because you did

not like Lowick yourself: you had set your heart on another kind of

life. But Lowick is my chosen home.”

The last sentence was spoken with an almost solemn cadence, and Will

did not know what to say, since it would not be useful for him to

embrace her slippers, and tell her that he would die for her: it was

clear that she required nothing of the sort; and they were both silent

for a moment or two, when Dorothea began again with an air of saying at

last what had been in her mind beforehand.

“I wanted to ask you again about something you said the other day.

Perhaps it was half of it your lively way of speaking: I notice that

you like to put things strongly; I myself often exaggerate when I speak

hastily.”

“What was it?” said Will, observing that she spoke with a timidity

quite new in her. “I have a hyperbolical tongue: it catches fire as it

goes. I dare say I shall have to retract.”

“I mean what you said about the necessity of knowing German—I mean, for

the subjects that Mr. Casaubon is engaged in. I have been thinking

about it; and it seems to me that with Mr. Casaubon’s learning he must

have before him the same materials as German scholars—has he not?”

Dorothea’s timidity was due to an indistinct consciousness that she was

in the strange situation of consulting a third person about the

adequacy of Mr. Casaubon’s learning.

“Not exactly the same materials,” said Will, thinking that he would be

duly reserved. “He is not an Orientalist, you know. He does not profess

to have more than second-hand knowledge there.”

“But there are very valuable books about antiquities which were written

a long while ago by scholars who knew nothing about these modern

things; and they are still used. Why should Mr. Casaubon’s not be

valuable, like theirs?” said Dorothea, with more remonstrant energy.

She was impelled to have the argument aloud, which she had been having

in her own mind.

“That depends on the line of study taken,” said Will, also getting a

tone of rejoinder. “The subject Mr. Casaubon has chosen is as changing

as chemistry: new discoveries are constantly making new points of view.

Who wants a system on the basis of the four elements, or a book to

refute Paracelsus? Do you not see that it is no use now to be crawling

a little way after men of the last century—men like Bryant—and

correcting their mistakes?—living in a lumber-room and furbishing up

broken-legged theories about Chus and Mizraim?”

“How can you bear to speak so lightly?” said Dorothea, with a look

between sorrow and anger. “If it were as you say, what could be sadder

than so much ardent labor all in vain? I wonder it does not affect you

more painfully, if you really think that a man like Mr. Casaubon, of so

much goodness, power, and learning, should in any way fail in what has

been the labor of his best years.” She was beginning to be shocked that

she had got to such a point of supposition, and indignant with Will for

having led her to it.

“You questioned me about the matter of fact, not of feeling,” said

Will. “But if you wish to punish me for the fact, I submit. I am not in

a position to express my feeling toward Mr. Casaubon: it would be at

best a pensioner’s eulogy.”

“Pray excuse me,” said Dorothea, coloring deeply. “I am aware, as you

say, that I am in fault in having introduced the subject. Indeed, I am

wrong altogether. Failure after long perseverance is much grander than

never to have a striving good enough to be called a failure.”

“I quite agree with you,” said Will, determined to change the

situation—“so much so that I have made up my mind not to run that risk

of never attaining a failure. Mr. Casaubon’s generosity has perhaps

been dangerous to me, and I mean to renounce the liberty it has given

me. I mean to go back to England shortly and work my own way—depend on

nobody else than myself.”

“That is fine—I respect that feeling,” said Dorothea, with returning

kindness. “But Mr. Casaubon, I am sure, has never thought of anything

in the matter except what was most for your welfare.”

“She has obstinacy and pride enough to serve instead of love, now she

has married him,” said Will to himself. Aloud he said, rising—

“I shall not see you again.”

“Oh, stay till Mr. Casaubon comes,” said Dorothea, earnestly. “I am so

glad we met in Rome. I wanted to know you.”

“And I have made you angry,” said Will. “I have made you think ill of

me.”

“Oh no. My sister tells me I am always angry with people who do not say

just what I like. But I hope I am not given to think ill of them. In

the end I am usually obliged to think ill of myself for being so

impatient.”

“Still, you don’t like me; I have made myself an unpleasant thought to

you.”

“Not at all,” said Dorothea, with the most open kindness. “I like you

very much.”

Will was not quite contented, thinking that he would apparently have

been of more importance if he had been disliked. He said nothing, but

looked dull, not to say sulky.

“And I am quite interested to see what you will do,” Dorothea went on

cheerfully. “I believe devoutly in a natural difference of vocation. If

it were not for that belief, I suppose I should be very narrow—there

are so many things, besides painting, that I am quite ignorant of. You

would hardly believe how little I have taken in of music and

literature, which you know so much of. I wonder what your vocation will

turn out to be: perhaps you will be a poet?”

“That depends. To be a poet is to have a soul so quick to discern that

no shade of quality escapes it, and so quick to feel, that discernment

is but a hand playing with finely ordered variety on the chords of

emotion—a soul in which knowledge passes instantaneously into feeling,

and feeling flashes back as a new organ of knowledge. One may have that

condition by fits only.”

“But you leave out the poems,” said Dorothea. “I think they are wanted

to complete the poet. I understand what you mean about knowledge

passing into feeling, for that seems to be just what I experience. But

I am sure I could never produce a poem.”

“You \_are\_ a poem—and that is to be the best part of a poet—what makes

up the poet’s consciousness in his best moods,” said Will, showing such

originality as we all share with the morning and the spring-time and

other endless renewals.

“I am very glad to hear it,” said Dorothea, laughing out her words in a

bird-like modulation, and looking at Will with playful gratitude in her

eyes. “What very kind things you say to me!”

“I wish I could ever do anything that would be what you call kind—that

I could ever be of the slightest service to you. I fear I shall never

have the opportunity.” Will spoke with fervor.

“Oh yes,” said Dorothea, cordially. “It will come; and I shall remember

how well you wish me. I quite hoped that we should be friends when I

first saw you—because of your relationship to Mr. Casaubon.” There was

a certain liquid brightness in her eyes, and Will was conscious that

his own were obeying a law of nature and filling too. The allusion to

Mr. Casaubon would have spoiled all if anything at that moment could

have spoiled the subduing power, the sweet dignity, of her noble

unsuspicious inexperience.

“And there is one thing even now that you can do,” said Dorothea,

rising and walking a little way under the strength of a recurring

impulse. “Promise me that you will not again, to any one, speak of that

subject—I mean about Mr. Casaubon’s writings—I mean in that kind of

way. It was I who led to it. It was my fault. But promise me.”

She had returned from her brief pacing and stood opposite Will, looking

gravely at him.

“Certainly, I will promise you,” said Will, reddening however. If he

never said a cutting word about Mr. Casaubon again and left off

receiving favors from him, it would clearly be permissible to hate him

the more. The poet must know how to hate, says Goethe; and Will was at

least ready with that accomplishment. He said that he must go now

without waiting for Mr. Casaubon, whom he would come to take leave of

at the last moment. Dorothea gave him her hand, and they exchanged a

simple “Good-by.”

But going out of the \_porte cochere\_ he met Mr. Casaubon, and that

gentleman, expressing the best wishes for his cousin, politely waived

the pleasure of any further leave-taking on the morrow, which would be

sufficiently crowded with the preparations for departure.

“I have something to tell you about our cousin Mr. Ladislaw, which I

think will heighten your opinion of him,” said Dorothea to her husband

in the course of the evening. She had mentioned immediately on his

entering that Will had just gone away, and would come again, but Mr.

Casaubon had said, “I met him outside, and we made our final adieux, I

believe,” saying this with the air and tone by which we imply that any

subject, whether private or public, does not interest us enough to wish

for a further remark upon it. So Dorothea had waited.

“What is that, my love?” said Mr Casaubon (he always said “my love”

when his manner was the coldest).

“He has made up his mind to leave off wandering at once, and to give up

his dependence on your generosity. He means soon to go back to England,

and work his own way. I thought you would consider that a good sign,”

said Dorothea, with an appealing look into her husband’s neutral face.

“Did he mention the precise order of occupation to which he would

addict himself?”

“No. But he said that he felt the danger which lay for him in your

generosity. Of course he will write to you about it. Do you not think

better of him for his resolve?”

“I shall await his communication on the subject,” said Mr. Casaubon.

“I told him I was sure that the thing you considered in all you did for

him was his own welfare. I remembered your goodness in what you said

about him when I first saw him at Lowick,” said Dorothea, putting her

hand on her husband’s.

“I had a duty towards him,” said Mr. Casaubon, laying his other hand on

Dorothea’s in conscientious acceptance of her caress, but with a glance

which he could not hinder from being uneasy. “The young man, I confess,

is not otherwise an object of interest to me, nor need we, I think,

discuss his future course, which it is not ours to determine beyond the

limits which I have sufficiently indicated.” Dorothea did not mention

Will again.

BOOK III.

WAITING FOR DEATH.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“Your horses of the Sun,” he said,

“And first-rate whip Apollo!

Whate’er they be, I’ll eat my head,

But I will beat them hollow.”

Fred Vincy, we have seen, had a debt on his mind, and though no such

immaterial burthen could depress that buoyant-hearted young gentleman

for many hours together, there were circumstances connected with this

debt which made the thought of it unusually importunate. The creditor

was Mr. Bambridge, a horse-dealer of the neighborhood, whose company

was much sought in Middlemarch by young men understood to be “addicted

to pleasure.” During the vacations Fred had naturally required more

amusements than he had ready money for, and Mr. Bambridge had been

accommodating enough not only to trust him for the hire of horses and

the accidental expense of ruining a fine hunter, but also to make a

small advance by which he might be able to meet some losses at

billiards. The total debt was a hundred and sixty pounds. Bambridge was

in no alarm about his money, being sure that young Vincy had backers;

but he had required something to show for it, and Fred had at first

given a bill with his own signature. Three months later he had renewed

this bill with the signature of Caleb Garth. On both occasions Fred had

felt confident that he should meet the bill himself, having ample funds

at disposal in his own hopefulness. You will hardly demand that his

confidence should have a basis in external facts; such confidence, we

know, is something less coarse and materialistic: it is a comfortable

disposition leading us to expect that the wisdom of providence or the

folly of our friends, the mysteries of luck or the still greater

mystery of our high individual value in the universe, will bring about

agreeable issues, such as are consistent with our good taste in

costume, and our general preference for the best style of thing. Fred

felt sure that he should have a present from his uncle, that he should

have a run of luck, that by dint of “swapping” he should gradually

metamorphose a horse worth forty pounds into a horse that would fetch a

hundred at any moment—“judgment” being always equivalent to an

unspecified sum in hard cash. And in any case, even supposing negations

which only a morbid distrust could imagine, Fred had always (at that

time) his father’s pocket as a last resource, so that his assets of

hopefulness had a sort of gorgeous superfluity about them. Of what

might be the capacity of his father’s pocket, Fred had only a vague

notion: was not trade elastic? And would not the deficiencies of one

year be made up for by the surplus of another? The Vincys lived in an

easy profuse way, not with any new ostentation, but according to the

family habits and traditions, so that the children had no standard of

economy, and the elder ones retained some of their infantine notion

that their father might pay for anything if he would. Mr. Vincy himself

had expensive Middlemarch habits—spent money on coursing, on his

cellar, and on dinner-giving, while mamma had those running accounts

with tradespeople, which give a cheerful sense of getting everything

one wants without any question of payment. But it was in the nature of

fathers, Fred knew, to bully one about expenses: there was always a

little storm over his extravagance if he had to disclose a debt, and

Fred disliked bad weather within doors. He was too filial to be

disrespectful to his father, and he bore the thunder with the certainty

that it was transient; but in the mean time it was disagreeable to see

his mother cry, and also to be obliged to look sulky instead of having

fun; for Fred was so good-tempered that if he looked glum under

scolding, it was chiefly for propriety’s sake. The easier course

plainly, was to renew the bill with a friend’s signature. Why not? With

the superfluous securities of hope at his command, there was no reason

why he should not have increased other people’s liabilities to any

extent, but for the fact that men whose names were good for anything

were usually pessimists, indisposed to believe that the universal order

of things would necessarily be agreeable to an agreeable young

gentleman.

With a favor to ask we review our list of friends, do justice to their

more amiable qualities, forgive their little offenses, and concerning

each in turn, try to arrive at the conclusion that he will be eager to

oblige us, our own eagerness to be obliged being as communicable as

other warmth. Still there is always a certain number who are dismissed

as but moderately eager until the others have refused; and it happened

that Fred checked off all his friends but one, on the ground that

applying to them would be disagreeable; being implicitly convinced that

he at least (whatever might be maintained about mankind generally) had

a right to be free from anything disagreeable. That he should ever fall

into a thoroughly unpleasant position—wear trousers shrunk with

washing, eat cold mutton, have to walk for want of a horse, or to “duck

under” in any sort of way—was an absurdity irreconcilable with those

cheerful intuitions implanted in him by nature. And Fred winced under

the idea of being looked down upon as wanting funds for small debts.

Thus it came to pass that the friend whom he chose to apply to was at

once the poorest and the kindest—namely, Caleb Garth.

The Garths were very fond of Fred, as he was of them; for when he and

Rosamond were little ones, and the Garths were better off, the slight

connection between the two families through Mr. Featherstone’s double

marriage (the first to Mr. Garth’s sister, and the second to Mrs.

Vincy’s) had led to an acquaintance which was carried on between the

children rather than the parents: the children drank tea together out

of their toy teacups, and spent whole days together in play. Mary was a

little hoyden, and Fred at six years old thought her the nicest girl in

the world, making her his wife with a brass ring which he had cut from

an umbrella. Through all the stages of his education he had kept his

affection for the Garths, and his habit of going to their house as a

second home, though any intercourse between them and the elders of his

family had long ceased. Even when Caleb Garth was prosperous, the

Vincys were on condescending terms with him and his wife, for there

were nice distinctions of rank in Middlemarch; and though old

manufacturers could not any more than dukes be connected with none but

equals, they were conscious of an inherent social superiority which was

defined with great nicety in practice, though hardly expressible

theoretically. Since then Mr. Garth had failed in the building

business, which he had unfortunately added to his other avocations of

surveyor, valuer, and agent, had conducted that business for a time

entirely for the benefit of his assignees, and had been living

narrowly, exerting himself to the utmost that he might after all pay

twenty shillings in the pound. He had now achieved this, and from all

who did not think it a bad precedent, his honorable exertions had won

him due esteem; but in no part of the world is genteel visiting founded

on esteem, in the absence of suitable furniture and complete

dinner-service. Mrs. Vincy had never been at her ease with Mrs. Garth,

and frequently spoke of her as a woman who had had to work for her

bread—meaning that Mrs. Garth had been a teacher before her marriage;

in which case an intimacy with Lindley Murray and Mangnall’s Questions

was something like a draper’s discrimination of calico trademarks, or a

courier’s acquaintance with foreign countries: no woman who was better

off needed that sort of thing. And since Mary had been keeping Mr.

Featherstone’s house, Mrs. Vincy’s want of liking for the Garths had

been converted into something more positive, by alarm lest Fred should

engage himself to this plain girl, whose parents “lived in such a small

way.” Fred, being aware of this, never spoke at home of his visits to

Mrs. Garth, which had of late become more frequent, the increasing

ardor of his affection for Mary inclining him the more towards those

who belonged to her.

Mr. Garth had a small office in the town, and to this Fred went with

his request. He obtained it without much difficulty, for a large amount

of painful experience had not sufficed to make Caleb Garth cautious

about his own affairs, or distrustful of his fellow-men when they had

not proved themselves untrustworthy; and he had the highest opinion of

Fred, was “sure the lad would turn out well—an open affectionate

fellow, with a good bottom to his character—you might trust him for

anything.” Such was Caleb’s psychological argument. He was one of those

rare men who are rigid to themselves and indulgent to others. He had a

certain shame about his neighbors’ errors, and never spoke of them

willingly; hence he was not likely to divert his mind from the best

mode of hardening timber and other ingenious devices in order to

preconceive those errors. If he had to blame any one, it was necessary

for him to move all the papers within his reach, or describe various

diagrams with his stick, or make calculations with the odd money in his

pocket, before he could begin; and he would rather do other men’s work

than find fault with their doing. I fear he was a bad disciplinarian.

When Fred stated the circumstances of his debt, his wish to meet it

without troubling his father, and the certainty that the money would be

forthcoming so as to cause no one any inconvenience, Caleb pushed his

spectacles upward, listened, looked into his favorite’s clear young

eyes, and believed him, not distinguishing confidence about the future

from veracity about the past; but he felt that it was an occasion for a

friendly hint as to conduct, and that before giving his signature he

must give a rather strong admonition. Accordingly, he took the paper

and lowered his spectacles, measured the space at his command, reached

his pen and examined it, dipped it in the ink and examined it again,

then pushed the paper a little way from him, lifted up his spectacles

again, showed a deepened depression in the outer angle of his bushy

eyebrows, which gave his face a peculiar mildness (pardon these details

for once—you would have learned to love them if you had known Caleb

Garth), and said in a comfortable tone,—

“It was a misfortune, eh, that breaking the horse’s knees? And then,

these exchanges, they don’t answer when you have ’cute jockeys to deal

with. You’ll be wiser another time, my boy.”

Whereupon Caleb drew down his spectacles, and proceeded to write his

signature with the care which he always gave to that performance; for

whatever he did in the way of business he did well. He contemplated the

large well-proportioned letters and final flourish, with his head a

trifle on one side for an instant, then handed it to Fred, said

“Good-by,” and returned forthwith to his absorption in a plan for Sir

James Chettam’s new farm-buildings.

Either because his interest in this work thrust the incident of the

signature from his memory, or for some reason of which Caleb was more

conscious, Mrs. Garth remained ignorant of the affair.

Since it occurred, a change had come over Fred’s sky, which altered his

view of the distance, and was the reason why his uncle Featherstone’s

present of money was of importance enough to make his color come and

go, first with a too definite expectation, and afterwards with a

proportionate disappointment. His failure in passing his examination,

had made his accumulation of college debts the more unpardonable by his

father, and there had been an unprecedented storm at home. Mr. Vincy

had sworn that if he had anything more of that sort to put up with,

Fred should turn out and get his living how he could; and he had never

yet quite recovered his good-humored tone to his son, who had

especially enraged him by saying at this stage of things that he did

not want to be a clergyman, and would rather not “go on with that.”

Fred was conscious that he would have been yet more severely dealt with

if his family as well as himself had not secretly regarded him as Mr.

Featherstone’s heir; that old gentleman’s pride in him, and apparent

fondness for him, serving in the stead of more exemplary conduct—just

as when a youthful nobleman steals jewellery we call the act

kleptomania, speak of it with a philosophical smile, and never think of

his being sent to the house of correction as if he were a ragged boy

who had stolen turnips. In fact, tacit expectations of what would be

done for him by uncle Featherstone determined the angle at which most

people viewed Fred Vincy in Middlemarch; and in his own consciousness,

what uncle Featherstone would do for him in an emergency, or what he

would do simply as an incorporated luck, formed always an immeasurable

depth of aerial perspective. But that present of bank-notes, once made,

was measurable, and being applied to the amount of the debt, showed a

deficit which had still to be filled up either by Fred’s “judgment” or

by luck in some other shape. For that little episode of the alleged

borrowing, in which he had made his father the agent in getting the

Bulstrode certificate, was a new reason against going to his father for

money towards meeting his actual debt. Fred was keen enough to foresee

that anger would confuse distinctions, and that his denial of having

borrowed expressly on the strength of his uncle’s will would be taken

as a falsehood. He had gone to his father and told him one vexatious

affair, and he had left another untold: in such cases the complete

revelation always produces the impression of a previous duplicity. Now

Fred piqued himself on keeping clear of lies, and even fibs; he often

shrugged his shoulders and made a significant grimace at what he called

Rosamond’s fibs (it is only brothers who can associate such ideas with

a lovely girl); and rather than incur the accusation of falsehood he

would even incur some trouble and self-restraint. It was under strong

inward pressure of this kind that Fred had taken the wise step of

depositing the eighty pounds with his mother. It was a pity that he had

not at once given them to Mr. Garth; but he meant to make the sum

complete with another sixty, and with a view to this, he had kept

twenty pounds in his own pocket as a sort of seed-corn, which, planted

by judgment, and watered by luck, might yield more than threefold—a

very poor rate of multiplication when the field is a young gentleman’s

infinite soul, with all the numerals at command.

Fred was not a gambler: he had not that specific disease in which the

suspension of the whole nervous energy on a chance or risk becomes as

necessary as the dram to the drunkard; he had only the tendency to that

diffusive form of gambling which has no alcoholic intensity, but is

carried on with the healthiest chyle-fed blood, keeping up a joyous

imaginative activity which fashions events according to desire, and

having no fears about its own weather, only sees the advantage there

must be to others in going aboard with it. Hopefulness has a pleasure

in making a throw of any kind, because the prospect of success is

certain; and only a more generous pleasure in offering as many as

possible a share in the stake. Fred liked play, especially billiards,

as he liked hunting or riding a steeple-chase; and he only liked it the

better because he wanted money and hoped to win. But the twenty pounds’

worth of seed-corn had been planted in vain in the seductive green

plot—all of it at least which had not been dispersed by the

roadside—and Fred found himself close upon the term of payment with no

money at command beyond the eighty pounds which he had deposited with

his mother. The broken-winded horse which he rode represented a present

which had been made to him a long while ago by his uncle Featherstone:

his father always allowed him to keep a horse, Mr. Vincy’s own habits

making him regard this as a reasonable demand even for a son who was

rather exasperating. This horse, then, was Fred’s property, and in his

anxiety to meet the imminent bill he determined to sacrifice a

possession without which life would certainly be worth little. He made

the resolution with a sense of heroism—heroism forced on him by the

dread of breaking his word to Mr. Garth, by his love for Mary and awe

of her opinion. He would start for Houndsley horse-fair which was to be

held the next morning, and—simply sell his horse, bringing back the

money by coach?—Well, the horse would hardly fetch more than thirty

pounds, and there was no knowing what might happen; it would be folly

to balk himself of luck beforehand. It was a hundred to one that some

good chance would fall in his way; the longer he thought of it, the

less possible it seemed that he should not have a good chance, and the

less reasonable that he should not equip himself with the powder and

shot for bringing it down. He would ride to Houndsley with Bambridge

and with Horrock “the vet,” and without asking them anything expressly,

he should virtually get the benefit of their opinion. Before he set

out, Fred got the eighty pounds from his mother.

Most of those who saw Fred riding out of Middlemarch in company with

Bambridge and Horrock, on his way of course to Houndsley horse-fair,

thought that young Vincy was pleasure-seeking as usual; and but for an

unwonted consciousness of grave matters on hand, he himself would have

had a sense of dissipation, and of doing what might be expected of a

gay young fellow. Considering that Fred was not at all coarse, that he

rather looked down on the manners and speech of young men who had not

been to the university, and that he had written stanzas as pastoral and

unvoluptuous as his flute-playing, his attraction towards Bambridge and

Horrock was an interesting fact which even the love of horse-flesh

would not wholly account for without that mysterious influence of

Naming which determinates so much of mortal choice. Under any other

name than “pleasure” the society of Messieurs Bambridge and Horrock

must certainly have been regarded as monotonous; and to arrive with

them at Houndsley on a drizzling afternoon, to get down at the Red Lion

in a street shaded with coal-dust, and dine in a room furnished with a

dirt-enamelled map of the county, a bad portrait of an anonymous horse

in a stable, His Majesty George the Fourth with legs and cravat, and

various leaden spittoons, might have seemed a hard business, but for

the sustaining power of nomenclature which determined that the pursuit

of these things was “gay.”

In Mr. Horrock there was certainly an apparent unfathomableness which

offered play to the imagination. Costume, at a glance, gave him a

thrilling association with horses (enough to specify the hat-brim which

took the slightest upward angle just to escape the suspicion of bending

downwards), and nature had given him a face which by dint of Mongolian

eyes, and a nose, mouth, and chin seeming to follow his hat-brim in a

moderate inclination upwards, gave the effect of a subdued unchangeable

sceptical smile, of all expressions the most tyrannous over a

susceptible mind, and, when accompanied by adequate silence, likely to

create the reputation of an invincible understanding, an infinite fund

of humor—too dry to flow, and probably in a state of immovable

crust,—and a critical judgment which, if you could ever be fortunate

enough to know it, would be \_the\_ thing and no other. It is a

physiognomy seen in all vocations, but perhaps it has never been more

powerful over the youth of England than in a judge of horses.

Mr. Horrock, at a question from Fred about his horse’s fetlock, turned

sideways in his saddle, and watched the horse’s action for the space of

three minutes, then turned forward, twitched his own bridle, and

remained silent with a profile neither more nor less sceptical than it

had been.

The part thus played in dialogue by Mr. Horrock was terribly effective.

A mixture of passions was excited in Fred—a mad desire to thrash

Horrock’s opinion into utterance, restrained by anxiety to retain the

advantage of his friendship. There was always the chance that Horrock

might say something quite invaluable at the right moment.

Mr. Bambridge had more open manners, and appeared to give forth his

ideas without economy. He was loud, robust, and was sometimes spoken of

as being “given to indulgence”—chiefly in swearing, drinking, and

beating his wife. Some people who had lost by him called him a vicious

man; but he regarded horse-dealing as the finest of the arts, and might

have argued plausibly that it had nothing to do with morality. He was

undeniably a prosperous man, bore his drinking better than others bore

their moderation, and, on the whole, flourished like the green

bay-tree. But his range of conversation was limited, and like the fine

old tune, “Drops of brandy,” gave you after a while a sense of

returning upon itself in a way that might make weak heads dizzy. But a

slight infusion of Mr. Bambridge was felt to give tone and character to

several circles in Middlemarch; and he was a distinguished figure in

the bar and billiard-room at the Green Dragon. He knew some anecdotes

about the heroes of the turf, and various clever tricks of Marquesses

and Viscounts which seemed to prove that blood asserted its

pre-eminence even among black-legs; but the minute retentiveness of his

memory was chiefly shown about the horses he had himself bought and

sold; the number of miles they would trot you in no time without

turning a hair being, after the lapse of years, still a subject of

passionate asseveration, in which he would assist the imagination of

his hearers by solemnly swearing that they never saw anything like it.

In short, Mr. Bambridge was a man of pleasure and a gay companion.

Fred was subtle, and did not tell his friends that he was going to

Houndsley bent on selling his horse: he wished to get indirectly at

their genuine opinion of its value, not being aware that a genuine

opinion was the last thing likely to be extracted from such eminent

critics. It was not Mr. Bambridge’s weakness to be a gratuitous

flatterer. He had never before been so much struck with the fact that

this unfortunate bay was a roarer to a degree which required the

roundest word for perdition to give you any idea of it.

“You made a bad hand at swapping when you went to anybody but me,

Vincy! Why, you never threw your leg across a finer horse than that

chestnut, and you gave him for this brute. If you set him cantering, he

goes on like twenty sawyers. I never heard but one worse roarer in my

life, and that was a roan: it belonged to Pegwell, the corn-factor; he

used to drive him in his gig seven years ago, and he wanted me to take

him, but I said, ‘Thank you, Peg, I don’t deal in wind-instruments.’

That was what I said. It went the round of the country, that joke did.

But, what the hell! the horse was a penny trumpet to that roarer of

yours.”

“Why, you said just now his was worse than mine,” said Fred, more

irritable than usual.

“I said a lie, then,” said Mr. Bambridge, emphatically. “There wasn’t a

penny to choose between ’em.”

Fred spurred his horse, and they trotted on a little way. When they

slackened again, Mr. Bambridge said—

“Not but what the roan was a better trotter than yours.”

“I’m quite satisfied with his paces, I know,” said Fred, who required

all the consciousness of being in gay company to support him; “I say

his trot is an uncommonly clean one, eh, Horrock?”

Mr. Horrock looked before him with as complete a neutrality as if he

had been a portrait by a great master.

Fred gave up the fallacious hope of getting a genuine opinion; but on

reflection he saw that Bambridge’s depreciation and Horrock’s silence

were both virtually encouraging, and indicated that they thought better

of the horse than they chose to say.

That very evening, indeed, before the fair had set in, Fred thought he

saw a favorable opening for disposing advantageously of his horse, but

an opening which made him congratulate himself on his foresight in

bringing with him his eighty pounds. A young farmer, acquainted with

Mr. Bambridge, came into the Red Lion, and entered into conversation

about parting with a hunter, which he introduced at once as Diamond,

implying that it was a public character. For himself he only wanted a

useful hack, which would draw upon occasion; being about to marry and

to give up hunting. The hunter was in a friend’s stable at some little

distance; there was still time for gentlemen to see it before dark. The

friend’s stable had to be reached through a back street where you might

as easily have been poisoned without expense of drugs as in any grim

street of that unsanitary period. Fred was not fortified against

disgust by brandy, as his companions were, but the hope of having at

last seen the horse that would enable him to make money was

exhilarating enough to lead him over the same ground again the first

thing in the morning. He felt sure that if he did not come to a bargain

with the farmer, Bambridge would; for the stress of circumstances, Fred

felt, was sharpening his acuteness and endowing him with all the

constructive power of suspicion. Bambridge had run down Diamond in a

way that he never would have done (the horse being a friend’s) if he

had not thought of buying it; every one who looked at the animal—even

Horrock—was evidently impressed with its merit. To get all the

advantage of being with men of this sort, you must know how to draw

your inferences, and not be a spoon who takes things literally. The

color of the horse was a dappled gray, and Fred happened to know that

Lord Medlicote’s man was on the look-out for just such a horse. After

all his running down, Bambridge let it out in the course of the

evening, when the farmer was absent, that he had seen worse horses go

for eighty pounds. Of course he contradicted himself twenty times over,

but when you know what is likely to be true you can test a man’s

admissions. And Fred could not but reckon his own judgment of a horse

as worth something. The farmer had paused over Fred’s respectable

though broken-winded steed long enough to show that he thought it worth

consideration, and it seemed probable that he would take it, with

five-and-twenty pounds in addition, as the equivalent of Diamond. In

that case Fred, when he had parted with his new horse for at least

eighty pounds, would be fifty-five pounds in pocket by the transaction,

and would have a hundred and thirty-five pounds towards meeting the

bill; so that the deficit temporarily thrown on Mr. Garth would at the

utmost be twenty-five pounds. By the time he was hurrying on his

clothes in the morning, he saw so clearly the importance of not losing

this rare chance, that if Bambridge and Horrock had both dissuaded him,

he would not have been deluded into a direct interpretation of their

purpose: he would have been aware that those deep hands held something

else than a young fellow’s interest. With regard to horses, distrust

was your only clew. But scepticism, as we know, can never be thoroughly

applied, else life would come to a standstill: something we must

believe in and do, and whatever that something may be called, it is

virtually our own judgment, even when it seems like the most slavish

reliance on another. Fred believed in the excellence of his bargain,

and even before the fair had well set in, had got possession of the

dappled gray, at the price of his old horse and thirty pounds in

addition—only five pounds more than he had expected to give.

But he felt a little worried and wearied, perhaps with mental debate,

and without waiting for the further gayeties of the horse-fair, he set

out alone on his fourteen miles’ journey, meaning to take it very

quietly and keep his horse fresh.

CHAPTER XXIV.

“The offender’s sorrow brings but small relief

To him who wears the strong offence’s cross.”

—SHAKESPEARE: \_Sonnets\_.

I am sorry to say that only the third day after the propitious events

at Houndsley Fred Vincy had fallen into worse spirits than he had known

in his life before. Not that he had been disappointed as to the

possible market for his horse, but that before the bargain could be

concluded with Lord Medlicote’s man, this Diamond, in which hope to the

amount of eighty pounds had been invested, had without the slightest

warning exhibited in the stable a most vicious energy in kicking, had

just missed killing the groom, and had ended in laming himself severely

by catching his leg in a rope that overhung the stable-board. There was

no more redress for this than for the discovery of bad temper after

marriage—which of course old companions were aware of before the

ceremony. For some reason or other, Fred had none of his usual

elasticity under this stroke of ill-fortune: he was simply aware that

he had only fifty pounds, that there was no chance of his getting any

more at present, and that the bill for a hundred and sixty would be

presented in five days. Even if he had applied to his father on the

plea that Mr. Garth should be saved from loss, Fred felt smartingly

that his father would angrily refuse to rescue Mr. Garth from the

consequence of what he would call encouraging extravagance and deceit.

He was so utterly downcast that he could frame no other project than to

go straight to Mr. Garth and tell him the sad truth, carrying with him

the fifty pounds, and getting that sum at least safely out of his own

hands. His father, being at the warehouse, did not yet know of the

accident: when he did, he would storm about the vicious brute being

brought into his stable; and before meeting that lesser annoyance Fred

wanted to get away with all his courage to face the greater. He took

his father’s nag, for he had made up his mind that when he had told Mr.

Garth, he would ride to Stone Court and confess all to Mary. In fact,

it is probable that but for Mary’s existence and Fred’s love for her,

his conscience would have been much less active both in previously

urging the debt on his thought and impelling him not to spare himself

after his usual fashion by deferring an unpleasant task, but to act as

directly and simply as he could. Even much stronger mortals than Fred

Vincy hold half their rectitude in the mind of the being they love

best. “The theatre of all my actions is fallen,” said an antique

personage when his chief friend was dead; and they are fortunate who

get a theatre where the audience demands their best. Certainly it would

have made a considerable difference to Fred at that time if Mary Garth

had had no decided notions as to what was admirable in character.

Mr. Garth was not at the office, and Fred rode on to his house, which

was a little way outside the town—a homely place with an orchard in

front of it, a rambling, old-fashioned, half-timbered building, which

before the town had spread had been a farm-house, but was now

surrounded with the private gardens of the townsmen. We get the fonder

of our houses if they have a physiognomy of their own, as our friends

have. The Garth family, which was rather a large one, for Mary had four

brothers and one sister, were very fond of their old house, from which

all the best furniture had long been sold. Fred liked it too, knowing

it by heart even to the attic which smelt deliciously of apples and

quinces, and until to-day he had never come to it without pleasant

expectations; but his heart beat uneasily now with the sense that he

should probably have to make his confession before Mrs. Garth, of whom

he was rather more in awe than of her husband. Not that she was

inclined to sarcasm and to impulsive sallies, as Mary was. In her

present matronly age at least, Mrs. Garth never committed herself by

over-hasty speech; having, as she said, borne the yoke in her youth,

and learned self-control. She had that rare sense which discerns what

is unalterable, and submits to it without murmuring. Adoring her

husband’s virtues, she had very early made up her mind to his

incapacity of minding his own interests, and had met the consequences

cheerfully. She had been magnanimous enough to renounce all pride in

teapots or children’s frilling, and had never poured any pathetic

confidences into the ears of her feminine neighbors concerning Mr.

Garth’s want of prudence and the sums he might have had if he had been

like other men. Hence these fair neighbors thought her either proud or

eccentric, and sometimes spoke of her to their husbands as “your fine

Mrs. Garth.” She was not without her criticism of them in return, being

more accurately instructed than most matrons in Middlemarch, and—where

is the blameless woman?—apt to be a little severe towards her own sex,

which in her opinion was framed to be entirely subordinate. On the

other hand, she was disproportionately indulgent towards the failings

of men, and was often heard to say that these were natural. Also, it

must be admitted that Mrs. Garth was a trifle too emphatic in her

resistance to what she held to be follies: the passage from governess

into housewife had wrought itself a little too strongly into her

consciousness, and she rarely forgot that while her grammar and accent

were above the town standard, she wore a plain cap, cooked the family

dinner, and darned all the stockings. She had sometimes taken pupils in

a peripatetic fashion, making them follow her about in the kitchen with

their book or slate. She thought it good for them to see that she could

make an excellent lather while she corrected their blunders “without

looking,”—that a woman with her sleeves tucked up above her elbows

might know all about the Subjunctive Mood or the Torrid Zone—that, in

short, she might possess “education” and other good things ending in

“tion,” and worthy to be pronounced emphatically, without being a

useless doll. When she made remarks to this edifying effect, she had a

firm little frown on her brow, which yet did not hinder her face from

looking benevolent, and her words which came forth like a procession

were uttered in a fervid agreeable contralto. Certainly, the exemplary

Mrs. Garth had her droll aspects, but her character sustained her

oddities, as a very fine wine sustains a flavor of skin.

Towards Fred Vincy she had a motherly feeling, and had always been

disposed to excuse his errors, though she would probably not have

excused Mary for engaging herself to him, her daughter being included

in that more rigorous judgment which she applied to her own sex. But

this very fact of her exceptional indulgence towards him made it the

harder to Fred that he must now inevitably sink in her opinion. And the

circumstances of his visit turned out to be still more unpleasant than

he had expected; for Caleb Garth had gone out early to look at some

repairs not far off. Mrs. Garth at certain hours was always in the

kitchen, and this morning she was carrying on several occupations at

once there—making her pies at the well-scoured deal table on one side

of that airy room, observing Sally’s movements at the oven and

dough-tub through an open door, and giving lessons to her youngest boy

and girl, who were standing opposite to her at the table with their

books and slates before them. A tub and a clothes-horse at the other

end of the kitchen indicated an intermittent wash of small things also

going on.

Mrs. Garth, with her sleeves turned above her elbows, deftly handling

her pastry—applying her rolling-pin and giving ornamental pinches,

while she expounded with grammatical fervor what were the right views

about the concord of verbs and pronouns with “nouns of multitude or

signifying many,” was a sight agreeably amusing. She was of the same

curly-haired, square-faced type as Mary, but handsomer, with more

delicacy of feature, a pale skin, a solid matronly figure, and a

remarkable firmness of glance. In her snowy-frilled cap she reminded

one of that delightful Frenchwoman whom we have all seen marketing,

basket on arm. Looking at the mother, you might hope that the daughter

would become like her, which is a prospective advantage equal to a

dowry—the mother too often standing behind the daughter like a

malignant prophecy—“Such as I am, she will shortly be.”

“Now let us go through that once more,” said Mrs. Garth, pinching an

apple-puff which seemed to distract Ben, an energetic young male with a

heavy brow, from due attention to the lesson. “‘Not without regard to

the import of the word as conveying unity or plurality of idea’—tell me

again what that means, Ben.”

(Mrs. Garth, like more celebrated educators, had her favorite ancient

paths, and in a general wreck of society would have tried to hold her

“Lindley Murray” above the waves.)

“Oh—it means—you must think what you mean,” said Ben, rather peevishly.

“I hate grammar. What’s the use of it?”

“To teach you to speak and write correctly, so that you can be

understood,” said Mrs. Garth, with severe precision. “Should you like

to speak as old Job does?”

“Yes,” said Ben, stoutly; “it’s funnier. He says, ‘Yo goo’—that’s just

as good as ‘You go.’”

“But he says, ‘A ship’s in the garden,’ instead of ‘a sheep,’” said

Letty, with an air of superiority. “You might think he meant a ship off

the sea.”

“No, you mightn’t, if you weren’t silly,” said Ben. “How could a ship

off the sea come there?”

“These things belong only to pronunciation, which is the least part of

grammar,” said Mrs. Garth. “That apple-peel is to be eaten by the pigs,

Ben; if you eat it, I must give them your piece of pasty. Job has only

to speak about very plain things. How do you think you would write or

speak about anything more difficult, if you knew no more of grammar

than he does? You would use wrong words, and put words in the wrong

places, and instead of making people understand you, they would turn

away from you as a tiresome person. What would you do then?”

“I shouldn’t care, I should leave off,” said Ben, with a sense that

this was an agreeable issue where grammar was concerned.

“I see you are getting tired and stupid, Ben,” said Mrs. Garth,

accustomed to these obstructive arguments from her male offspring.

Having finished her pies, she moved towards the clothes-horse, and

said, “Come here and tell me the story I told you on Wednesday, about

Cincinnatus.”

“I know! he was a farmer,” said Ben.

“Now, Ben, he was a Roman—let \_me\_ tell,” said Letty, using her elbow

contentiously.

“You silly thing, he was a Roman farmer, and he was ploughing.”

“Yes, but before that—that didn’t come first—people wanted him,” said

Letty.

“Well, but you must say what sort of a man he was first,” insisted Ben.

“He was a wise man, like my father, and that made the people want his

advice. And he was a brave man, and could fight. And so could my

father—couldn’t he, mother?”

“Now, Ben, let me tell the story straight on, as mother told it us,”

said Letty, frowning. “Please, mother, tell Ben not to speak.”

“Letty, I am ashamed of you,” said her mother, wringing out the caps

from the tub. “When your brother began, you ought to have waited to see

if he could not tell the story. How rude you look, pushing and

frowning, as if you wanted to conquer with your elbows! Cincinnatus, I

am sure, would have been sorry to see his daughter behave so.” (Mrs.

Garth delivered this awful sentence with much majesty of enunciation,

and Letty felt that between repressed volubility and general disesteem,

that of the Romans inclusive, life was already a painful affair.) “Now,

Ben.”

“Well—oh—well—why, there was a great deal of fighting, and they were

all blockheads, and—I can’t tell it just how you told it—but they

wanted a man to be captain and king and everything—”

“Dictator, now,” said Letty, with injured looks, and not without a wish

to make her mother repent.

“Very well, dictator!” said Ben, contemptuously. “But that isn’t a good

word: he didn’t tell them to write on slates.”

“Come, come, Ben, you are not so ignorant as that,” said Mrs. Garth,

carefully serious. “Hark, there is a knock at the door! Run, Letty, and

open it.”

The knock was Fred’s; and when Letty said that her father was not in

yet, but that her mother was in the kitchen, Fred had no alternative.

He could not depart from his usual practice of going to see Mrs. Garth

in the kitchen if she happened to be at work there. He put his arm

round Letty’s neck silently, and led her into the kitchen without his

usual jokes and caresses.

Mrs. Garth was surprised to see Fred at this hour, but surprise was not

a feeling that she was given to express, and she only said, quietly

continuing her work—

“You, Fred, so early in the day? You look quite pale. Has anything

happened?”

“I want to speak to Mr. Garth,” said Fred, not yet ready to say

more—“and to you also,” he added, after a little pause, for he had no

doubt that Mrs. Garth knew everything about the bill, and he must in

the end speak of it before her, if not to her solely.

“Caleb will be in again in a few minutes,” said Mrs. Garth, who

imagined some trouble between Fred and his father. “He is sure not to

be long, because he has some work at his desk that must be done this

morning. Do you mind staying with me, while I finish my matters here?”

“But we needn’t go on about Cincinnatus, need we?” said Ben, who had

taken Fred’s whip out of his hand, and was trying its efficiency on the

cat.

“No, go out now. But put that whip down. How very mean of you to whip

poor old Tortoise! Pray take the whip from him, Fred.”

“Come, old boy, give it me,” said Fred, putting out his hand.

“Will you let me ride on your horse to-day?” said Ben, rendering up the

whip, with an air of not being obliged to do it.

“Not to-day—another time. I am not riding my own horse.”

“Shall you see Mary to-day?”

“Yes, I think so,” said Fred, with an unpleasant twinge.

“Tell her to come home soon, and play at forfeits, and make fun.”

“Enough, enough, Ben! run away,” said Mrs. Garth, seeing that Fred was

teased.

“Are Letty and Ben your only pupils now, Mrs. Garth?” said Fred, when

the children were gone and it was needful to say something that would

pass the time. He was not yet sure whether he should wait for Mr.

Garth, or use any good opportunity in conversation to confess to Mrs.

Garth herself, give her the money and ride away.

“One—only one. Fanny Hackbutt comes at half past eleven. I am not

getting a great income now,” said Mrs. Garth, smiling. “I am at a low

ebb with pupils. But I have saved my little purse for Alfred’s premium:

I have ninety-two pounds. He can go to Mr. Hanmer’s now; he is just at

the right age.”

This did not lead well towards the news that Mr. Garth was on the brink

of losing ninety-two pounds and more. Fred was silent. “Young gentlemen

who go to college are rather more costly than that,” Mrs. Garth

innocently continued, pulling out the edging on a cap-border. “And

Caleb thinks that Alfred will turn out a distinguished engineer: he

wants to give the boy a good chance. There he is! I hear him coming in.

We will go to him in the parlor, shall we?”

When they entered the parlor Caleb had thrown down his hat and was

seated at his desk.

“What! Fred, my boy!” he said, in a tone of mild surprise, holding his

pen still undipped; “you are here betimes.” But missing the usual

expression of cheerful greeting in Fred’s face, he immediately added,

“Is there anything up at home?—anything the matter?”

“Yes, Mr. Garth, I am come to tell something that I am afraid will give

you a bad opinion of me. I am come to tell you and Mrs. Garth that I

can’t keep my word. I can’t find the money to meet the bill after all.

I have been unfortunate; I have only got these fifty pounds towards the

hundred and sixty.”

While Fred was speaking, he had taken out the notes and laid them on

the desk before Mr. Garth. He had burst forth at once with the plain

fact, feeling boyishly miserable and without verbal resources. Mrs.

Garth was mutely astonished, and looked at her husband for an

explanation. Caleb blushed, and after a little pause said—

“Oh, I didn’t tell you, Susan: I put my name to a bill for Fred; it was

for a hundred and sixty pounds. He made sure he could meet it himself.”

There was an evident change in Mrs. Garth’s face, but it was like a

change below the surface of water which remains smooth. She fixed her

eyes on Fred, saying—

“I suppose you have asked your father for the rest of the money and he

has refused you.”

“No,” said Fred, biting his lip, and speaking with more difficulty;

“but I know it will be of no use to ask him; and unless it were of use,

I should not like to mention Mr. Garth’s name in the matter.”

“It has come at an unfortunate time,” said Caleb, in his hesitating

way, looking down at the notes and nervously fingering the paper,

“Christmas upon us—I’m rather hard up just now. You see, I have to cut

out everything like a tailor with short measure. What can we do, Susan?

I shall want every farthing we have in the bank. It’s a hundred and ten

pounds, the deuce take it!”

“I must give you the ninety-two pounds that I have put by for Alfred’s

premium,” said Mrs. Garth, gravely and decisively, though a nice ear

might have discerned a slight tremor in some of the words. “And I have

no doubt that Mary has twenty pounds saved from her salary by this

time. She will advance it.”

Mrs. Garth had not again looked at Fred, and was not in the least

calculating what words she should use to cut him the most effectively.

Like the eccentric woman she was, she was at present absorbed in

considering what was to be done, and did not fancy that the end could

be better achieved by bitter remarks or explosions. But she had made

Fred feel for the first time something like the tooth of remorse.

Curiously enough, his pain in the affair beforehand had consisted

almost entirely in the sense that he must seem dishonorable, and sink

in the opinion of the Garths: he had not occupied himself with the

inconvenience and possible injury that his breach might occasion them,

for this exercise of the imagination on other people’s needs is not

common with hopeful young gentlemen. Indeed we are most of us brought

up in the notion that the highest motive for not doing a wrong is

something irrespective of the beings who would suffer the wrong. But at

this moment he suddenly saw himself as a pitiful rascal who was robbing

two women of their savings.

“I shall certainly pay it all, Mrs. Garth—ultimately,” he stammered

out.

“Yes, ultimately,” said Mrs. Garth, who having a special dislike to

fine words on ugly occasions, could not now repress an epigram. “But

boys cannot well be apprenticed ultimately: they should be apprenticed

at fifteen.” She had never been so little inclined to make excuses for

Fred.

“I was the most in the wrong, Susan,” said Caleb. “Fred made sure of

finding the money. But I’d no business to be fingering bills. I suppose

you have looked all round and tried all honest means?” he added, fixing

his merciful gray eyes on Fred. Caleb was too delicate to specify Mr.

Featherstone.

“Yes, I have tried everything—I really have. I should have had a

hundred and thirty pounds ready but for a misfortune with a horse which

I was about to sell. My uncle had given me eighty pounds, and I paid

away thirty with my old horse in order to get another which I was going

to sell for eighty or more—I meant to go without a horse—but now it has

turned out vicious and lamed itself. I wish I and the horses too had

been at the devil, before I had brought this on you. There’s no one

else I care so much for: you and Mrs. Garth have always been so kind to

me. However, it’s no use saying that. You will always think me a rascal

now.”

Fred turned round and hurried out of the room, conscious that he was

getting rather womanish, and feeling confusedly that his being sorry

was not of much use to the Garths. They could see him mount, and

quickly pass through the gate.

“I am disappointed in Fred Vincy,” said Mrs. Garth. “I would not have

believed beforehand that he would have drawn you into his debts. I knew

he was extravagant, but I did not think that he would be so mean as to

hang his risks on his oldest friend, who could the least afford to

lose.”

“I was a fool, Susan.”

“That you were,” said the wife, nodding and smiling. “But I should not

have gone to publish it in the market-place. Why should you keep such

things from me? It is just so with your buttons: you let them burst off

without telling me, and go out with your wristband hanging. If I had

only known I might have been ready with some better plan.”

“You are sadly cut up, I know, Susan,” said Caleb, looking feelingly at

her. “I can’t abide your losing the money you’ve scraped together for

Alfred.”

“It is very well that I \_had\_ scraped it together; and it is you who

will have to suffer, for you must teach the boy yourself. You must give

up your bad habits. Some men take to drinking, and you have taken to

working without pay. You must indulge yourself a little less in that.

And you must ride over to Mary, and ask the child what money she has.”

Caleb had pushed his chair back, and was leaning forward, shaking his

head slowly, and fitting his finger-tips together with much nicety.

“Poor Mary!” he said. “Susan,” he went on in a lowered tone, “I’m

afraid she may be fond of Fred.”

“Oh no! She always laughs at him; and he is not likely to think of her

in any other than a brotherly way.”

Caleb made no rejoinder, but presently lowered his spectacles, drew up

his chair to the desk, and said, “Deuce take the bill—I wish it was at

Hanover! These things are a sad interruption to business!”

The first part of this speech comprised his whole store of maledictory

expression, and was uttered with a slight snarl easy to imagine. But it

would be difficult to convey to those who never heard him utter the

word “business,” the peculiar tone of fervid veneration, of religious

regard, in which he wrapped it, as a consecrated symbol is wrapped in

its gold-fringed linen.

Caleb Garth often shook his head in meditation on the value, the

indispensable might of that myriad-headed, myriad-handed labor by which

the social body is fed, clothed, and housed. It had laid hold of his

imagination in boyhood. The echoes of the great hammer where roof or

keel were a-making, the signal-shouts of the workmen, the roar of the

furnace, the thunder and plash of the engine, were a sublime music to

him; the felling and lading of timber, and the huge trunk vibrating

star-like in the distance along the highway, the crane at work on the

wharf, the piled-up produce in warehouses, the precision and variety of

muscular effort wherever exact work had to be turned out,—all these

sights of his youth had acted on him as poetry without the aid of the

poets, had made a philosophy for him without the aid of philosophers, a

religion without the aid of theology. His early ambition had been to

have as effective a share as possible in this sublime labor, which was

peculiarly dignified by him with the name of “business;” and though he

had only been a short time under a surveyor, and had been chiefly his

own teacher, he knew more of land, building, and mining than most of

the special men in the county.

His classification of human employments was rather crude, and, like the

categories of more celebrated men, would not be acceptable in these

advanced times. He divided them into “business, politics, preaching,

learning, and amusement.” He had nothing to say against the last four;

but he regarded them as a reverential pagan regarded other gods than

his own. In the same way, he thought very well of all ranks, but he

would not himself have liked to be of any rank in which he had not such

close contact with “business” as to get often honorably decorated with

marks of dust and mortar, the damp of the engine, or the sweet soil of

the woods and fields. Though he had never regarded himself as other

than an orthodox Christian, and would argue on prevenient grace if the

subject were proposed to him, I think his virtual divinities were good

practical schemes, accurate work, and the faithful completion of

undertakings: his prince of darkness was a slack workman. But there was

no spirit of denial in Caleb, and the world seemed so wondrous to him

that he was ready to accept any number of systems, like any number of

firmaments, if they did not obviously interfere with the best

land-drainage, solid building, correct measuring, and judicious boring

(for coal). In fact, he had a reverential soul with a strong practical

intelligence. But he could not manage finance: he knew values well, but

he had no keenness of imagination for monetary results in the shape of

profit and loss: and having ascertained this to his cost, he determined

to give up all forms of his beloved “business” which required that

talent. He gave himself up entirely to the many kinds of work which he

could do without handling capital, and was one of those precious men

within his own district whom everybody would choose to work for them,

because he did his work well, charged very little, and often declined

to charge at all. It is no wonder, then, that the Garths were poor, and

“lived in a small way.” However, they did not mind it.

CHAPTER XXV.

“Love seeketh not itself to please,

Nor for itself hath any care

But for another gives its ease

And builds a heaven in hell’s despair.

. . . . . . .

Love seeketh only self to please,

To bind another to its delight,

Joys in another’s loss of ease,

And builds a hell in heaven’s despite.”

—W. BLAKE: \_Songs of Experience\_.

Fred Vincy wanted to arrive at Stone Court when Mary could not expect

him, and when his uncle was not downstairs: in that case she might be

sitting alone in the wainscoted parlor. He left his horse in the yard

to avoid making a noise on the gravel in front, and entered the parlor

without other notice than the noise of the door-handle. Mary was in her

usual corner, laughing over Mrs. Piozzi’s recollections of Johnson, and

looked up with the fun still in her face. It gradually faded as she saw

Fred approach her without speaking, and stand before her with his elbow

on the mantel-piece, looking ill. She too was silent, only raising her

eyes to him inquiringly.

“Mary,” he began, “I am a good-for-nothing blackguard.”

“I should think one of those epithets would do at a time,” said Mary,

trying to smile, but feeling alarmed.

“I know you will never think well of me any more. You will think me a

liar. You will think me dishonest. You will think I didn’t care for

you, or your father and mother. You always do make the worst of me, I

know.”

“I cannot deny that I shall think all that of you, Fred, if you give me

good reasons. But please to tell me at once what you have done. I would

rather know the painful truth than imagine it.”

“I owed money—a hundred and sixty pounds. I asked your father to put

his name to a bill. I thought it would not signify to him. I made sure

of paying the money myself, and I have tried as hard as I could. And

now, I have been so unlucky—a horse has turned out badly—I can only pay

fifty pounds. And I can’t ask my father for the money: he would not

give me a farthing. And my uncle gave me a hundred a little while ago.

So what can I do? And now your father has no ready money to spare, and

your mother will have to pay away her ninety-two pounds that she has

saved, and she says your savings must go too. You see what a—”

“Oh, poor mother, poor father!” said Mary, her eyes filling with tears,

and a little sob rising which she tried to repress. She looked straight

before her and took no notice of Fred, all the consequences at home

becoming present to her. He too remained silent for some moments,

feeling more miserable than ever. “I wouldn’t have hurt you for the

world, Mary,” he said at last. “You can never forgive me.”

“What does it matter whether I forgive you?” said Mary, passionately.

“Would that make it any better for my mother to lose the money she has

been earning by lessons for four years, that she might send Alfred to

Mr. Hanmer’s? Should you think all that pleasant enough if I forgave

you?”

“Say what you like, Mary. I deserve it all.”

“I don’t want to say anything,” said Mary, more quietly, “and my anger

is of no use.” She dried her eyes, threw aside her book, rose and

fetched her sewing.

Fred followed her with his eyes, hoping that they would meet hers, and

in that way find access for his imploring penitence. But no! Mary could

easily avoid looking upward.

“I do care about your mother’s money going,” he said, when she was

seated again and sewing quickly. “I wanted to ask you, Mary—don’t you

think that Mr. Featherstone—if you were to tell him—tell him, I mean,

about apprenticing Alfred—would advance the money?”

“My family is not fond of begging, Fred. We would rather work for our

money. Besides, you say that Mr. Featherstone has lately given you a

hundred pounds. He rarely makes presents; he has never made presents to

us. I am sure my father will not ask him for anything; and even if I

chose to beg of him, it would be of no use.”

“I am so miserable, Mary—if you knew how miserable I am, you would be

sorry for me.”

“There are other things to be more sorry for than that. But selfish

people always think their own discomfort of more importance than

anything else in the world. I see enough of that every day.”

“It is hardly fair to call me selfish. If you knew what things other

young men do, you would think me a good way off the worst.”

“I know that people who spend a great deal of money on themselves

without knowing how they shall pay, must be selfish. They are always

thinking of what they can get for themselves, and not of what other

people may lose.”

“Any man may be unfortunate, Mary, and find himself unable to pay when

he meant it. There is not a better man in the world than your father,

and yet he got into trouble.”

“How dare you make any comparison between my father and you, Fred?”

said Mary, in a deep tone of indignation. “He never got into trouble by

thinking of his own idle pleasures, but because he was always thinking

of the work he was doing for other people. And he has fared hard, and

worked hard to make good everybody’s loss.”

“And you think that I shall never try to make good anything, Mary. It

is not generous to believe the worst of a man. When you have got any

power over him, I think you might try and use it to make him better;

but that is what you never do. However, I’m going,” Fred ended,

languidly. “I shall never speak to you about anything again. I’m very

sorry for all the trouble I’ve caused—that’s all.”

Mary had dropped her work out of her hand and looked up. There is often

something maternal even in a girlish love, and Mary’s hard experience

had wrought her nature to an impressibility very different from that

hard slight thing which we call girlishness. At Fred’s last words she

felt an instantaneous pang, something like what a mother feels at the

imagined sobs or cries of her naughty truant child, which may lose

itself and get harm. And when, looking up, her eyes met his dull

despairing glance, her pity for him surmounted her anger and all her

other anxieties.

“Oh, Fred, how ill you look! Sit down a moment. Don’t go yet. Let me

tell uncle that you are here. He has been wondering that he has not

seen you for a whole week.” Mary spoke hurriedly, saying the words that

came first without knowing very well what they were, but saying them in

a half-soothing half-beseeching tone, and rising as if to go away to

Mr. Featherstone. Of course Fred felt as if the clouds had parted and a

gleam had come: he moved and stood in her way.

“Say one word, Mary, and I will do anything. Say you will not think the

worst of me—will not give me up altogether.”

“As if it were any pleasure to me to think ill of you,” said Mary, in a

mournful tone. “As if it were not very painful to me to see you an idle

frivolous creature. How can you bear to be so contemptible, when others

are working and striving, and there are so many things to be done—how

can you bear to be fit for nothing in the world that is useful? And

with so much good in your disposition, Fred,—you might be worth a great

deal.”

“I will try to be anything you like, Mary, if you will say that you

love me.”

“I should be ashamed to say that I loved a man who must always be

hanging on others, and reckoning on what they would do for him. What

will you be when you are forty? Like Mr. Bowyer, I suppose—just as

idle, living in Mrs. Beck’s front parlor—fat and shabby, hoping

somebody will invite you to dinner—spending your morning in learning a

comic song—oh no! learning a tune on the flute.”

Mary’s lips had begun to curl with a smile as soon as she had asked

that question about Fred’s future (young souls are mobile), and before

she ended, her face had its full illumination of fun. To him it was

like the cessation of an ache that Mary could laugh at him, and with a

passive sort of smile he tried to reach her hand; but she slipped away

quickly towards the door and said, “I shall tell uncle. You \_must\_ see

him for a moment or two.”

Fred secretly felt that his future was guaranteed against the

fulfilment of Mary’s sarcastic prophecies, apart from that “anything”

which he was ready to do if she would define it. He never dared in

Mary’s presence to approach the subject of his expectations from Mr.

Featherstone, and she always ignored them, as if everything depended on

himself. But if ever he actually came into the property, she must

recognize the change in his position. All this passed through his mind

somewhat languidly, before he went up to see his uncle. He stayed but a

little while, excusing himself on the ground that he had a cold; and

Mary did not reappear before he left the house. But as he rode home, he

began to be more conscious of being ill, than of being melancholy.

When Caleb Garth arrived at Stone Court soon after dusk, Mary was not

surprised, although he seldom had leisure for paying her a visit, and

was not at all fond of having to talk with Mr. Featherstone. The old

man, on the other hand, felt himself ill at ease with a brother-in-law

whom he could not annoy, who did not mind about being considered poor,

had nothing to ask of him, and understood all kinds of farming and

mining business better than he did. But Mary had felt sure that her

parents would want to see her, and if her father had not come, she

would have obtained leave to go home for an hour or two the next day.

After discussing prices during tea with Mr. Featherstone, Caleb rose to

bid him good-by, and said, “I want to speak to you, Mary.”

She took a candle into another large parlor, where there was no fire,

and setting down the feeble light on the dark mahogany table, turned

round to her father, and putting her arms round his neck kissed him

with childish kisses which he delighted in,—the expression of his large

brows softening as the expression of a great beautiful dog softens when

it is caressed. Mary was his favorite child, and whatever Susan might

say, and right as she was on all other subjects, Caleb thought it

natural that Fred or any one else should think Mary more lovable than

other girls.

“I’ve got something to tell you, my dear,” said Caleb in his hesitating

way. “No very good news; but then it might be worse.”

“About money, father? I think I know what it is.”

“Ay? how can that be? You see, I’ve been a bit of a fool again, and put

my name to a bill, and now it comes to paying; and your mother has got

to part with her savings, that’s the worst of it, and even they won’t

quite make things even. We wanted a hundred and ten pounds: your mother

has ninety-two, and I have none to spare in the bank; and she thinks

that you have some savings.”

“Oh yes; I have more than four-and-twenty pounds. I thought you would

come, father, so I put it in my bag. See! beautiful white notes and

gold.”

Mary took out the folded money from her reticule and put it into her

father’s hand.

“Well, but how—we only want eighteen—here, put the rest back,

child,—but how did you know about it?” said Caleb, who, in his

unconquerable indifference to money, was beginning to be chiefly

concerned about the relation the affair might have to Mary’s

affections.

“Fred told me this morning.”

“Ah! Did he come on purpose?”

“Yes, I think so. He was a good deal distressed.”

“I’m afraid Fred is not to be trusted, Mary,” said the father, with

hesitating tenderness. “He means better than he acts, perhaps. But I

should think it a pity for any body’s happiness to be wrapped up in

him, and so would your mother.”

“And so should I, father,” said Mary, not looking up, but putting the

back of her father’s hand against her cheek.

“I don’t want to pry, my dear. But I was afraid there might be

something between you and Fred, and I wanted to caution you. You see,

Mary”—here Caleb’s voice became more tender; he had been pushing his

hat about on the table and looking at it, but finally he turned his

eyes on his daughter—“a woman, let her be as good as she may, has got

to put up with the life her husband makes for her. Your mother has had

to put up with a good deal because of me.”

Mary turned the back of her father’s hand to her lips and smiled at

him.

“Well, well, nobody’s perfect, but”—here Mr. Garth shook his head to

help out the inadequacy of words—“what I am thinking of is—what it must

be for a wife when she’s never sure of her husband, when he hasn’t got

a principle in him to make him more afraid of doing the wrong thing by

others than of getting his own toes pinched. That’s the long and the

short of it, Mary. Young folks may get fond of each other before they

know what life is, and they may think it all holiday if they can only

get together; but it soon turns into working day, my dear. However, you

have more sense than most, and you haven’t been kept in cotton-wool:

there may be no occasion for me to say this, but a father trembles for

his daughter, and you are all by yourself here.”

“Don’t fear for me, father,” said Mary, gravely meeting her father’s

eyes; “Fred has always been very good to me; he is kind-hearted and

affectionate, and not false, I think, with all his self-indulgence. But

I will never engage myself to one who has no manly independence, and

who goes on loitering away his time on the chance that others will

provide for him. You and my mother have taught me too much pride for

that.”

“That’s right—that’s right. Then I am easy,” said Mr. Garth, taking up

his hat. “But it’s hard to run away with your earnings, eh child.”

“Father!” said Mary, in her deepest tone of remonstrance. “Take

pocketfuls of love besides to them all at home,” was her last word

before he closed the outer door on himself.

“I suppose your father wanted your earnings,” said old Mr.

Featherstone, with his usual power of unpleasant surmise, when Mary

returned to him. “He makes but a tight fit, I reckon. You’re of age

now; you ought to be saving for yourself.”

“I consider my father and mother the best part of myself, sir,” said

Mary, coldly.

Mr. Featherstone grunted: he could not deny that an ordinary sort of

girl like her might be expected to be useful, so he thought of another

rejoinder, disagreeable enough to be always apropos. “If Fred Vincy

comes to-morrow, now, don’t you keep him chattering: let him come up to

me.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

He beats me and I rail at him: O worthy satisfaction! would it were

otherwise—that I could beat him while he railed at me.—\_Troilus and

Cressida\_.

But Fred did not go to Stone Court the next day, for reasons that were

quite peremptory. From those visits to unsanitary Houndsley streets in

search of Diamond, he had brought back not only a bad bargain in

horse-flesh, but the further misfortune of some ailment which for a day

or two had deemed mere depression and headache, but which got so much

worse when he returned from his visit to Stone Court that, going into

the dining-room, he threw himself on the sofa, and in answer to his

mother’s anxious question, said, “I feel very ill: I think you must

send for Wrench.”

Wrench came, but did not apprehend anything serious, spoke of a “slight

derangement,” and did not speak of coming again on the morrow. He had a

due value for the Vincys’ house, but the wariest men are apt to be

dulled by routine, and on worried mornings will sometimes go through

their business with the zest of the daily bell-ringer. Mr. Wrench was a

small, neat, bilious man, with a well-dressed wig: he had a laborious

practice, an irascible temper, a lymphatic wife and seven children; and

he was already rather late before setting out on a four-miles drive to

meet Dr. Minchin on the other side of Tipton, the decease of Hicks, a

rural practitioner, having increased Middlemarch practice in that

direction. Great statesmen err, and why not small medical men? Mr.

Wrench did not neglect sending the usual white parcels, which this time

had black and drastic contents. Their effect was not alleviating to

poor Fred, who, however, unwilling as he said to believe that he was

“in for an illness,” rose at his usual easy hour the next morning and

went down-stairs meaning to breakfast, but succeeded in nothing but in

sitting and shivering by the fire. Mr. Wrench was again sent for, but

was gone on his rounds, and Mrs. Vincy seeing her darling’s changed

looks and general misery, began to cry and said she would send for Dr.

Sprague.

“Oh, nonsense, mother! It’s nothing,” said Fred, putting out his hot

dry hand to her, “I shall soon be all right. I must have taken cold in

that nasty damp ride.”

“Mamma!” said Rosamond, who was seated near the window (the dining-room

windows looked on that highly respectable street called Lowick Gate),

“there is Mr. Lydgate, stopping to speak to some one. If I were you I

would call him in. He has cured Ellen Bulstrode. They say he cures

every one.”

Mrs. Vincy sprang to the window and opened it in an instant, thinking

only of Fred and not of medical etiquette. Lydgate was only two yards

off on the other side of some iron palisading, and turned round at the

sudden sound of the sash, before she called to him. In two minutes he

was in the room, and Rosamond went out, after waiting just long enough

to show a pretty anxiety conflicting with her sense of what was

becoming.

Lydgate had to hear a narrative in which Mrs. Vincy’s mind insisted

with remarkable instinct on every point of minor importance, especially

on what Mr. Wrench had said and had not said about coming again. That

there might be an awkward affair with Wrench, Lydgate saw at once; but

the case was serious enough to make him dismiss that consideration: he

was convinced that Fred was in the pink-skinned stage of typhoid fever,

and that he had taken just the wrong medicines. He must go to bed

immediately, must have a regular nurse, and various appliances and

precautions must be used, about which Lydgate was particular. Poor Mrs.

Vincy’s terror at these indications of danger found vent in such words

as came most easily. She thought it “very ill usage on the part of Mr.

Wrench, who had attended their house so many years in preference to Mr.

Peacock, though Mr. Peacock was equally a friend. Why Mr. Wrench should

neglect her children more than others, she could not for the life of

her understand. He had not neglected Mrs. Larcher’s when they had the

measles, nor indeed would Mrs. Vincy have wished that he should. And if

anything should happen—”

Here poor Mrs. Vincy’s spirit quite broke down, and her Niobe throat

and good-humored face were sadly convulsed. This was in the hall out of

Fred’s hearing, but Rosamond had opened the drawing-room door, and now

came forward anxiously. Lydgate apologized for Mr. Wrench, said that

the symptoms yesterday might have been disguising, and that this form

of fever was very equivocal in its beginnings: he would go immediately

to the druggist’s and have a prescription made up in order to lose no

time, but he would write to Mr. Wrench and tell him what had been done.

“But you must come again—you must go on attending Fred. I can’t have my

boy left to anybody who may come or not. I bear nobody ill-will, thank

God, and Mr. Wrench saved me in the pleurisy, but he’d better have let

me die—if—if—”

“I will meet Mr. Wrench here, then, shall I?” said Lydgate, really

believing that Wrench was not well prepared to deal wisely with a case

of this kind.

“Pray make that arrangement, Mr. Lydgate,” said Rosamond, coming to her

mother’s aid, and supporting her arm to lead her away.

When Mr. Vincy came home he was very angry with Wrench, and did not

care if he never came into his house again. Lydgate should go on now,

whether Wrench liked it or not. It was no joke to have fever in the

house. Everybody must be sent to now, not to come to dinner on

Thursday. And Pritchard needn’t get up any wine: brandy was the best

thing against infection. “I shall drink brandy,” added Mr. Vincy,

emphatically—as much as to say, this was not an occasion for firing

with blank-cartridges. “He’s an uncommonly unfortunate lad, is Fred.

He’d need have some luck by and by to make up for all this—else I don’t

know who’d have an eldest son.”

“Don’t say so, Vincy,” said the mother, with a quivering lip, “if you

don’t want him to be taken from me.”

“It will worret you to death, Lucy; \_that\_ I can see,” said Mr. Vincy,

more mildly. “However, Wrench shall know what I think of the matter.”

(What Mr. Vincy thought confusedly was, that the fever might somehow

have been hindered if Wrench had shown the proper solicitude about

his—the Mayor’s—family.) “I’m the last man to give in to the cry about

new doctors, or new parsons either—whether they’re Bulstrode’s men or

not. But Wrench shall know what I think, take it as he will.”

Wrench did not take it at all well. Lydgate was as polite as he could

be in his offhand way, but politeness in a man who has placed you at a

disadvantage is only an additional exasperation, especially if he

happens to have been an object of dislike beforehand. Country

practitioners used to be an irritable species, susceptible on the point

of honor; and Mr. Wrench was one of the most irritable among them. He

did not refuse to meet Lydgate in the evening, but his temper was

somewhat tried on the occasion. He had to hear Mrs. Vincy say—

“Oh, Mr. Wrench, what have I ever done that you should use me so?— To

go away, and never to come again! And my boy might have been stretched

a corpse!”

Mr. Vincy, who had been keeping up a sharp fire on the enemy Infection,

and was a good deal heated in consequence, started up when he heard

Wrench come in, and went into the hall to let him know what he thought.

“I’ll tell you what, Wrench, this is beyond a joke,” said the Mayor,

who of late had had to rebuke offenders with an official air, and now

broadened himself by putting his thumbs in his armholes. “To let fever

get unawares into a house like this. There are some things that ought

to be actionable, and are not so— that’s my opinion.”

But irrational reproaches were easier to bear than the sense of being

instructed, or rather the sense that a younger man, like Lydgate,

inwardly considered him in need of instruction, for “in point of fact,”

Mr. Wrench afterwards said, Lydgate paraded flighty, foreign notions,

which would not wear. He swallowed his ire for the moment, but he

afterwards wrote to decline further attendance in the case. The house

might be a good one, but Mr. Wrench was not going to truckle to anybody

on a professional matter. He reflected, with much probability on his

side, that Lydgate would by-and-by be caught tripping too, and that his

ungentlemanly attempts to discredit the sale of drugs by his

professional brethren, would by-and-by recoil on himself. He threw out

biting remarks on Lydgate’s tricks, worthy only of a quack, to get

himself a factitious reputation with credulous people. That cant about

cures was never got up by sound practitioners.

This was a point on which Lydgate smarted as much as Wrench could

desire. To be puffed by ignorance was not only humiliating, but

perilous, and not more enviable than the reputation of the

weather-prophet. He was impatient of the foolish expectations amidst

which all work must be carried on, and likely enough to damage himself

as much as Mr. Wrench could wish, by an unprofessional openness.

However, Lydgate was installed as medical attendant on the Vincys, and

the event was a subject of general conversation in Middlemarch. Some

said, that the Vincys had behaved scandalously, that Mr. Vincy had

threatened Wrench, and that Mrs. Vincy had accused him of poisoning her

son. Others were of opinion that Mr. Lydgate’s passing by was

providential, that he was wonderfully clever in fevers, and that

Bulstrode was in the right to bring him forward. Many people believed

that Lydgate’s coming to the town at all was really due to Bulstrode;

and Mrs. Taft, who was always counting stitches and gathered her

information in misleading fragments caught between the rows of her

knitting, had got it into her head that Mr. Lydgate was a natural son

of Bulstrode’s, a fact which seemed to justify her suspicions of

evangelical laymen.

She one day communicated this piece of knowledge to Mrs. Farebrother,

who did not fail to tell her son of it, observing—

“I should not be surprised at anything in Bulstrode, but I should be

sorry to think it of Mr. Lydgate.”

“Why, mother,” said Mr. Farebrother, after an explosive laugh, “you

know very well that Lydgate is of a good family in the North. He never

heard of Bulstrode before he came here.”

“That is satisfactory so far as Mr. Lydgate is concerned, Camden,” said

the old lady, with an air of precision.—“But as to Bulstrode—the report

may be true of some other son.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

Let the high Muse chant loves Olympian:

We are but mortals, and must sing of man.

An eminent philosopher among my friends, who can dignify even your ugly

furniture by lifting it into the serene light of science, has shown me

this pregnant little fact. Your pier-glass or extensive surface of

polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and

multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a

lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will

seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round

that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going

everywhere impartially and it is only your candle which produces the

flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with

an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The

scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now

absent—of Miss Vincy, for example. Rosamond had a Providence of her own

who had kindly made her more charming than other girls, and who seemed

to have arranged Fred’s illness and Mr. Wrench’s mistake in order to

bring her and Lydgate within effective proximity. It would have been to

contravene these arrangements if Rosamond had consented to go away to

Stone Court or elsewhere, as her parents wished her to do, especially

since Mr. Lydgate thought the precaution needless. Therefore, while

Miss Morgan and the children were sent away to a farmhouse the morning

after Fred’s illness had declared itself, Rosamond refused to leave

papa and mamma.

Poor mamma indeed was an object to touch any creature born of woman;

and Mr. Vincy, who doted on his wife, was more alarmed on her account

than on Fred’s. But for his insistence she would have taken no rest:

her brightness was all bedimmed; unconscious of her costume which had

always been so fresh and gay, she was like a sick bird with languid eye

and plumage ruffled, her senses dulled to the sights and sounds that

used most to interest her. Fred’s delirium, in which he seemed to be

wandering out of her reach, tore her heart. After her first outburst

against Mr. Wrench she went about very quietly: her one low cry was to

Lydgate. She would follow him out of the room and put her hand on his

arm moaning out, “Save my boy.” Once she pleaded, “He has always been

good to me, Mr. Lydgate: he never had a hard word for his mother,”—as

if poor Fred’s suffering were an accusation against him. All the

deepest fibres of the mother’s memory were stirred, and the young man

whose voice took a gentler tone when he spoke to her, was one with the

babe whom she had loved, with a love new to her, before he was born.

“I have good hope, Mrs. Vincy,” Lydgate would say. “Come down with me

and let us talk about the food.” In that way he led her to the parlor

where Rosamond was, and made a change for her, surprising her into

taking some tea or broth which had been prepared for her. There was a

constant understanding between him and Rosamond on these matters. He

almost always saw her before going to the sickroom, and she appealed to

him as to what she could do for mamma. Her presence of mind and

adroitness in carrying out his hints were admirable, and it is not

wonderful that the idea of seeing Rosamond began to mingle itself with

his interest in the case. Especially when the critical stage was

passed, and he began to feel confident of Fred’s recovery. In the more

doubtful time, he had advised calling in Dr. Sprague (who, if he could,

would rather have remained neutral on Wrench’s account); but after two

consultations, the conduct of the case was left to Lydgate, and there

was every reason to make him assiduous. Morning and evening he was at

Mr. Vincy’s, and gradually the visits became cheerful as Fred became

simply feeble, and lay not only in need of the utmost petting but

conscious of it, so that Mrs. Vincy felt as if, after all, the illness

had made a festival for her tenderness.

Both father and mother held it an added reason for good spirits, when

old Mr. Featherstone sent messages by Lydgate, saying that Fred must

make haste and get well, as he, Peter Featherstone, could not do

without him, and missed his visits sadly. The old man himself was

getting bedridden. Mrs. Vincy told these messages to Fred when he could

listen, and he turned towards her his delicate, pinched face, from

which all the thick blond hair had been cut away, and in which the eyes

seemed to have got larger, yearning for some word about Mary—wondering

what she felt about his illness. No word passed his lips; but “to hear

with eyes belongs to love’s rare wit,” and the mother in the fulness of

her heart not only divined Fred’s longing, but felt ready for any

sacrifice in order to satisfy him.

“If I can only see my boy strong again,” she said, in her loving folly;

“and who knows?—perhaps master of Stone Court! and he can marry anybody

he likes then.”

“Not if they won’t have me, mother,” said Fred. The illness had made

him childish, and tears came as he spoke.

“Oh, take a bit of jelly, my dear,” said Mrs. Vincy, secretly

incredulous of any such refusal.

She never left Fred’s side when her husband was not in the house, and

thus Rosamond was in the unusual position of being much alone. Lydgate,

naturally, never thought of staying long with her, yet it seemed that

the brief impersonal conversations they had together were creating that

peculiar intimacy which consists in shyness. They were obliged to look

at each other in speaking, and somehow the looking could not be carried

through as the matter of course which it really was. Lydgate began to

feel this sort of consciousness unpleasant and one day looked down, or

anywhere, like an ill-worked puppet. But this turned out badly: the

next day, Rosamond looked down, and the consequence was that when their

eyes met again, both were more conscious than before. There was no help

for this in science, and as Lydgate did not want to flirt, there seemed

to be no help for it in folly. It was therefore a relief when neighbors

no longer considered the house in quarantine, and when the chances of

seeing Rosamond alone were very much reduced.

But that intimacy of mutual embarrassment, in which each feels that the

other is feeling something, having once existed, its effect is not to

be done away with. Talk about the weather and other well-bred topics is

apt to seem a hollow device, and behavior can hardly become easy unless

it frankly recognizes a mutual fascination—which of course need not

mean anything deep or serious. This was the way in which Rosamond and

Lydgate slid gracefully into ease, and made their intercourse lively

again. Visitors came and went as usual, there was once more music in

the drawing-room, and all the extra hospitality of Mr. Vincy’s

mayoralty returned. Lydgate, whenever he could, took his seat by

Rosamond’s side, and lingered to hear her music, calling himself her

captive—meaning, all the while, not to be her captive. The

preposterousness of the notion that he could at once set up a

satisfactory establishment as a married man was a sufficient guarantee

against danger. This play at being a little in love was agreeable, and

did not interfere with graver pursuits. Flirtation, after all, was not

necessarily a singeing process. Rosamond, for her part, had never

enjoyed the days so much in her life before: she was sure of being

admired by some one worth captivating, and she did not distinguish

flirtation from love, either in herself or in another. She seemed to be

sailing with a fair wind just whither she would go, and her thoughts

were much occupied with a handsome house in Lowick Gate which she hoped

would by-and-by be vacant. She was quite determined, when she was

married, to rid herself adroitly of all the visitors who were not

agreeable to her at her father’s; and she imagined the drawing-room in

her favorite house with various styles of furniture.

Certainly her thoughts were much occupied with Lydgate himself; he

seemed to her almost perfect: if he had known his notes so that his

enchantment under her music had been less like an emotional elephant’s,

and if he had been able to discriminate better the refinements of her

taste in dress, she could hardly have mentioned a deficiency in him.

How different he was from young Plymdale or Mr. Caius Larcher! Those

young men had not a notion of French, and could speak on no subject

with striking knowledge, except perhaps the dyeing and carrying trades,

which of course they were ashamed to mention; they were Middlemarch

gentry, elated with their silver-headed whips and satin stocks, but

embarrassed in their manners, and timidly jocose: even Fred was above

them, having at least the accent and manner of a university man.

Whereas Lydgate was always listened to, bore himself with the careless

politeness of conscious superiority, and seemed to have the right

clothes on by a certain natural affinity, without ever having to think

about them. Rosamond was proud when he entered the room, and when he

approached her with a distinguishing smile, she had a delicious sense

that she was the object of enviable homage. If Lydgate had been aware

of all the pride he excited in that delicate bosom, he might have been

just as well pleased as any other man, even the most densely ignorant

of humoral pathology or fibrous tissue: he held it one of the prettiest

attitudes of the feminine mind to adore a man’s pre-eminence without

too precise a knowledge of what it consisted in. But Rosamond was not

one of those helpless girls who betray themselves unawares, and whose

behavior is awkwardly driven by their impulses, instead of being

steered by wary grace and propriety. Do you imagine that her rapid

forecast and rumination concerning house-furniture and society were

ever discernible in her conversation, even with her mamma? On the

contrary, she would have expressed the prettiest surprise and

disapprobation if she had heard that another young lady had been

detected in that immodest prematureness—indeed, would probably have

disbelieved in its possibility. For Rosamond never showed any

unbecoming knowledge, and was always that combination of correct

sentiments, music, dancing, drawing, elegant note-writing, private

album for extracted verse, and perfect blond loveliness, which made the

irresistible woman for the doomed man of that date. Think no unfair

evil of her, pray: she had no wicked plots, nothing sordid or

mercenary; in fact, she never thought of money except as something

necessary which other people would always provide. She was not in the

habit of devising falsehoods, and if her statements were no direct clew

to fact, why, they were not intended in that light—they were among her

elegant accomplishments, intended to please. Nature had inspired many

arts in finishing Mrs. Lemon’s favorite pupil, who by general consent

(Fred’s excepted) was a rare compound of beauty, cleverness, and

amiability.

Lydgate found it more and more agreeable to be with her, and there was

no constraint now, there was a delightful interchange of influence in

their eyes, and what they said had that superfluity of meaning for

them, which is observable with some sense of flatness by a third

person; still they had no interviews or asides from which a third

person need have been excluded. In fact, they flirted; and Lydgate was

secure in the belief that they did nothing else. If a man could not

love and be wise, surely he could flirt and be wise at the same time?

Really, the men in Middlemarch, except Mr. Farebrother, were great

bores, and Lydgate did not care about commercial politics or cards:

what was he to do for relaxation? He was often invited to the

Bulstrodes’; but the girls there were hardly out of the schoolroom; and

Mrs. Bulstrode’s \_naive\_ way of conciliating piety and worldliness, the

nothingness of this life and the desirability of cut glass, the

consciousness at once of filthy rags and the best damask, was not a

sufficient relief from the weight of her husband’s invariable

seriousness. The Vincys’ house, with all its faults, was the pleasanter

by contrast; besides, it nourished Rosamond—sweet to look at as a

half-opened blush-rose, and adorned with accomplishments for the

refined amusement of man.

But he made some enemies, other than medical, by his success with Miss

Vincy. One evening he came into the drawing-room rather late, when

several other visitors were there. The card-table had drawn off the

elders, and Mr. Ned Plymdale (one of the good matches in Middlemarch,

though not one of its leading minds) was in \_tête-à-tête\_ with

Rosamond. He had brought the last “Keepsake,” the gorgeous watered-silk

publication which marked modern progress at that time; and he

considered himself very fortunate that he could be the first to look

over it with her, dwelling on the ladies and gentlemen with shiny

copper-plate cheeks and copper-plate smiles, and pointing to comic

verses as capital and sentimental stories as interesting. Rosamond was

gracious, and Mr. Ned was satisfied that he had the very best thing in

art and literature as a medium for “paying addresses”—the very thing to

please a nice girl. He had also reasons, deep rather than ostensible,

for being satisfied with his own appearance. To superficial observers

his chin had too vanishing an aspect, looking as if it were being

gradually reabsorbed. And it did indeed cause him some difficulty about

the fit of his satin stocks, for which chins were at that time useful.

“I think the Honorable Mrs. S. is something like you,” said Mr. Ned. He

kept the book open at the bewitching portrait, and looked at it rather

languishingly.

“Her back is very large; she seems to have sat for that,” said

Rosamond, not meaning any satire, but thinking how red young Plymdale’s

hands were, and wondering why Lydgate did not come. She went on with

her tatting all the while.

“I did not say she was as beautiful as you are,” said Mr. Ned,

venturing to look from the portrait to its rival.

“I suspect you of being an adroit flatterer,” said Rosamond, feeling

sure that she should have to reject this young gentleman a second time.

But now Lydgate came in; the book was closed before he reached

Rosamond’s corner, and as he took his seat with easy confidence on the

other side of her, young Plymdale’s jaw fell like a barometer towards

the cheerless side of change. Rosamond enjoyed not only Lydgate’s

presence but its effect: she liked to excite jealousy.

“What a late comer you are!” she said, as they shook hands. “Mamma had

given you up a little while ago. How do you find Fred?”

“As usual; going on well, but slowly. I want him to go away—to Stone

Court, for example. But your mamma seems to have some objection.”

“Poor fellow!” said Rosamond, prettily. “You will see Fred so changed,”

she added, turning to the other suitor; “we have looked to Mr. Lydgate

as our guardian angel during this illness.”

Mr. Ned smiled nervously, while Lydgate, drawing the “Keepsake” towards

him and opening it, gave a short scornful laugh and tossed up his chin,

as if in wonderment at human folly.

“What are you laughing at so profanely?” said Rosamond, with bland

neutrality.

“I wonder which would turn out to be the silliest—the engravings or the

writing here,” said Lydgate, in his most convinced tone, while he

turned over the pages quickly, seeming to see all through the book in

no time, and showing his large white hands to much advantage, as

Rosamond thought. “Do look at this bridegroom coming out of church: did

you ever see such a ‘sugared invention’—as the Elizabethans used to

say? Did any haberdasher ever look so smirking? Yet I will answer for

it the story makes him one of the first gentlemen in the land.”

“You are so severe, I am frightened at you,” said Rosamond, keeping her

amusement duly moderate. Poor young Plymdale had lingered with

admiration over this very engraving, and his spirit was stirred.

“There are a great many celebrated people writing in the ‘Keepsake,’ at

all events,” he said, in a tone at once piqued and timid. “This is the

first time I have heard it called silly.”

“I think I shall turn round on you and accuse you of being a Goth,”

said Rosamond, looking at Lydgate with a smile. “I suspect you know

nothing about Lady Blessington and L. E. L.” Rosamond herself was not

without relish for these writers, but she did not readily commit

herself by admiration, and was alive to the slightest hint that

anything was not, according to Lydgate, in the very highest taste.

“But Sir Walter Scott—I suppose Mr. Lydgate knows him,” said young

Plymdale, a little cheered by this advantage.

“Oh, I read no literature now,” said Lydgate, shutting the book, and

pushing it away. “I read so much when I was a lad, that I suppose it

will last me all my life. I used to know Scott’s poems by heart.”

“I should like to know when you left off,” said Rosamond, “because then

I might be sure that I knew something which you did not know.”

“Mr. Lydgate would say that was not worth knowing,” said Mr. Ned,

purposely caustic.

“On the contrary,” said Lydgate, showing no smart; but smiling with

exasperating confidence at Rosamond. “It would be worth knowing by the

fact that Miss Vincy could tell it me.”

Young Plymdale soon went to look at the whist-playing, thinking that

Lydgate was one of the most conceited, unpleasant fellows it had ever

been his ill-fortune to meet.

“How rash you are!” said Rosamond, inwardly delighted. “Do you see that

you have given offence?”

“What! is it Mr. Plymdale’s book? I am sorry. I didn’t think about it.”

“I shall begin to admit what you said of yourself when you first came

here—that you are a bear, and want teaching by the birds.”

“Well, there is a bird who can teach me what she will. Don’t I listen

to her willingly?”

To Rosamond it seemed as if she and Lydgate were as good as engaged.

That they were some time to be engaged had long been an idea in her

mind; and ideas, we know, tend to a more solid kind of existence, the

necessary materials being at hand. It is true, Lydgate had the

counter-idea of remaining unengaged; but this was a mere negative, a

shadow cast by other resolves which themselves were capable of

shrinking. Circumstance was almost sure to be on the side of Rosamond’s

idea, which had a shaping activity and looked through watchful blue

eyes, whereas Lydgate’s lay blind and unconcerned as a jelly-fish which

gets melted without knowing it.

That evening when he went home, he looked at his phials to see how a

process of maceration was going on, with undisturbed interest; and he

wrote out his daily notes with as much precision as usual. The reveries

from which it was difficult for him to detach himself were ideal

constructions of something else than Rosamond’s virtues, and the

primitive tissue was still his fair unknown. Moreover, he was beginning

to feel some zest for the growing though half-suppressed feud between

him and the other medical men, which was likely to become more

manifest, now that Bulstrode’s method of managing the new hospital was

about to be declared; and there were various inspiriting signs that his

non-acceptance by some of Peacock’s patients might be counterbalanced

by the impression he had produced in other quarters. Only a few days

later, when he had happened to overtake Rosamond on the Lowick road and

had got down from his horse to walk by her side until he had quite

protected her from a passing drove, he had been stopped by a servant on

horseback with a message calling him in to a house of some importance

where Peacock had never attended; and it was the second instance of

this kind. The servant was Sir James Chettam’s, and the house was

Lowick Manor.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

1\_st Gent\_. All times are good to seek your wedded home

Bringing a mutual delight.

2\_d Gent\_. Why, true.

The calendar hath not an evil day

For souls made one by love, and even death

Were sweetness, if it came like rolling waves

While they two clasped each other, and foresaw

No life apart.

Mr. and Mrs. Casaubon, returning from their wedding journey, arrived at

Lowick Manor in the middle of January. A light snow was falling as they

descended at the door, and in the morning, when Dorothea passed from

her dressing-room into the blue-green boudoir that we know of, she saw

the long avenue of limes lifting their trunks from a white earth, and

spreading white branches against the dun and motionless sky. The

distant flat shrank in uniform whiteness and low-hanging uniformity of

cloud. The very furniture in the room seemed to have shrunk since she

saw it before: the stag in the tapestry looked more like a ghost in his

ghostly blue-green world; the volumes of polite literature in the

bookcase looked more like immovable imitations of books. The bright

fire of dry oak-boughs burning on the logs seemed an incongruous

renewal of life and glow—like the figure of Dorothea herself as she

entered carrying the red-leather cases containing the cameos for Celia.

She was glowing from her morning toilet as only healthful youth can

glow: there was gem-like brightness on her coiled hair and in her hazel

eyes; there was warm red life in her lips; her throat had a breathing

whiteness above the differing white of the fur which itself seemed to

wind about her neck and cling down her blue-gray pelisse with a

tenderness gathered from her own, a sentient commingled innocence which

kept its loveliness against the crystalline purity of the outdoor snow.

As she laid the cameo-cases on the table in the bow-window, she

unconsciously kept her hands on them, immediately absorbed in looking

out on the still, white enclosure which made her visible world.

Mr. Casaubon, who had risen early complaining of palpitation, was in

the library giving audience to his curate Mr. Tucker. By-and-by Celia

would come in her quality of bridesmaid as well as sister, and through

the next weeks there would be wedding visits received and given; all in

continuance of that transitional life understood to correspond with the

excitement of bridal felicity, and keeping up the sense of busy

ineffectiveness, as of a dream which the dreamer begins to suspect. The

duties of her married life, contemplated as so great beforehand, seemed

to be shrinking with the furniture and the white vapor-walled

landscape. The clear heights where she expected to walk in full

communion had become difficult to see even in her imagination; the

delicious repose of the soul on a complete superior had been shaken

into uneasy effort and alarmed with dim presentiment. When would the

days begin of that active wifely devotion which was to strengthen her

husband’s life and exalt her own? Never perhaps, as she had

preconceived them; but somehow—still somehow. In this solemnly pledged

union of her life, duty would present itself in some new form of

inspiration and give a new meaning to wifely love.

Meanwhile there was the snow and the low arch of dun vapor—there was

the stifling oppression of that gentlewoman’s world, where everything

was done for her and none asked for her aid—where the sense of

connection with a manifold pregnant existence had to be kept up

painfully as an inward vision, instead of coming from without in claims

that would have shaped her energies.— “What shall I do?” “Whatever you

please, my dear:” that had been her brief history since she had left

off learning morning lessons and practising silly rhythms on the hated

piano. Marriage, which was to bring guidance into worthy and imperative

occupation, had not yet freed her from the gentlewoman’s oppressive

liberty: it had not even filled her leisure with the ruminant joy of

unchecked tenderness. Her blooming full-pulsed youth stood there in a

moral imprisonment which made itself one with the chill, colorless,

narrowed landscape, with the shrunken furniture, the never-read books,

and the ghostly stag in a pale fantastic world that seemed to be

vanishing from the daylight.

In the first minutes when Dorothea looked out she felt nothing but the

dreary oppression; then came a keen remembrance, and turning away from

the window she walked round the room. The ideas and hopes which were

living in her mind when she first saw this room nearly three months

before were present now only as memories: she judged them as we judge

transient and departed things. All existence seemed to beat with a

lower pulse than her own, and her religious faith was a solitary cry,

the struggle out of a nightmare in which every object was withering and

shrinking away from her. Each remembered thing in the room was

disenchanted, was deadened as an unlit transparency, till her wandering

gaze came to the group of miniatures, and there at last she saw

something which had gathered new breath and meaning: it was the

miniature of Mr. Casaubon’s aunt Julia, who had made the unfortunate

marriage—of Will Ladislaw’s grandmother. Dorothea could fancy that it

was alive now—the delicate woman’s face which yet had a headstrong

look, a peculiarity difficult to interpret. Was it only her friends who

thought her marriage unfortunate? or did she herself find it out to be

a mistake, and taste the salt bitterness of her tears in the merciful

silence of the night? What breadths of experience Dorothea seemed to

have passed over since she first looked at this miniature! She felt a

new companionship with it, as if it had an ear for her and could see

how she was looking at it. Here was a woman who had known some

difficulty about marriage. Nay, the colors deepened, the lips and chin

seemed to get larger, the hair and eyes seemed to be sending out light,

the face was masculine and beamed on her with that full gaze which

tells her on whom it falls that she is too interesting for the

slightest movement of her eyelid to pass unnoticed and uninterpreted.

The vivid presentation came like a pleasant glow to Dorothea: she felt

herself smiling, and turning from the miniature sat down and looked up

as if she were again talking to a figure in front of her. But the smile

disappeared as she went on meditating, and at last she said aloud—

“Oh, it was cruel to speak so! How sad—how dreadful!”

She rose quickly and went out of the room, hurrying along the corridor,

with the irresistible impulse to go and see her husband and inquire if

she could do anything for him. Perhaps Mr. Tucker was gone and Mr.

Casaubon was alone in the library. She felt as if all her morning’s

gloom would vanish if she could see her husband glad because of her

presence.

But when she reached the head of the dark oak there was Celia coming

up, and below there was Mr. Brooke, exchanging welcomes and

congratulations with Mr. Casaubon.

“Dodo!” said Celia, in her quiet staccato; then kissed her sister,

whose arms encircled her, and said no more. I think they both cried a

little in a furtive manner, while Dorothea ran down-stairs to greet her

uncle.

“I need not ask how you are, my dear,” said Mr. Brooke, after kissing

her forehead. “Rome has agreed with you, I see—happiness, frescos, the

antique—that sort of thing. Well, it’s very pleasant to have you back

again, and you understand all about art now, eh? But Casaubon is a

little pale, I tell him—a little pale, you know. Studying hard in his

holidays is carrying it rather too far. I overdid it at one time”—Mr.

Brooke still held Dorothea’s hand, but had turned his face to Mr.

Casaubon—“about topography, ruins, temples—I thought I had a clew, but

I saw it would carry me too far, and nothing might come of it. You may

go any length in that sort of thing, and nothing may come of it, you

know.”

Dorothea’s eyes also were turned up to her husband’s face with some

anxiety at the idea that those who saw him afresh after absence might

be aware of signs which she had not noticed.

“Nothing to alarm you, my dear,” said Mr. Brooke, observing her

expression. “A little English beef and mutton will soon make a

difference. It was all very well to look pale, sitting for the portrait

of Aquinas, you know—we got your letter just in time. But Aquinas,

now—he was a little too subtle, wasn’t he? Does anybody read Aquinas?”

“He is not indeed an author adapted to superficial minds,” said Mr.

Casaubon, meeting these timely questions with dignified patience.

“You would like coffee in your own room, uncle?” said Dorothea, coming

to the rescue.

“Yes; and you must go to Celia: she has great news to tell you, you

know. I leave it all to her.”

The blue-green boudoir looked much more cheerful when Celia was seated

there in a pelisse exactly like her sister’s, surveying the cameos with

a placid satisfaction, while the conversation passed on to other

topics.

“Do you think it nice to go to Rome on a wedding journey?” said Celia,

with her ready delicate blush which Dorothea was used to on the

smallest occasions.

“It would not suit all—not you, dear, for example,” said Dorothea,

quietly. No one would ever know what she thought of a wedding journey

to Rome.

“Mrs. Cadwallader says it is nonsense, people going a long journey when

they are married. She says they get tired to death of each other, and

can’t quarrel comfortably, as they would at home. And Lady Chettam says

she went to Bath.” Celia’s color changed again and again—seemed

“To come and go with tidings from the heart,

As it a running messenger had been.”

It must mean more than Celia’s blushing usually did.

“Celia! has something happened?” said Dorothea, in a tone full of

sisterly feeling. “Have you really any great news to tell me?”

“It was because you went away, Dodo. Then there was nobody but me for

Sir James to talk to,” said Celia, with a certain roguishness in her

eyes.

“I understand. It is as I used to hope and believe,” said Dorothea,

taking her sister’s face between her hands, and looking at her half

anxiously. Celia’s marriage seemed more serious than it used to do.

“It was only three days ago,” said Celia. “And Lady Chettam is very

kind.”

“And you are very happy?”

“Yes. We are not going to be married yet. Because every thing is to be

got ready. And I don’t want to be married so very soon, because I think

it is nice to be engaged. And we shall be married all our lives after.”

“I do believe you could not marry better, Kitty. Sir James is a good,

honorable man,” said Dorothea, warmly.

“He has gone on with the cottages, Dodo. He will tell you about them

when he comes. Shall you be glad to see him?”

“Of course I shall. How can you ask me?”

“Only I was afraid you would be getting so learned,” said Celia,

regarding Mr. Casaubon’s learning as a kind of damp which might in due

time saturate a neighboring body.

CHAPTER XXIX.

I found that no genius in another could please me. My unfortunate

paradoxes had entirely dried up that source of comfort.—GOLDSMITH.

One morning, some weeks after her arrival at Lowick, Dorothea—but why

always Dorothea? Was her point of view the only possible one with

regard to this marriage? I protest against all our interest, all our

effort at understanding being given to the young skins that look

blooming in spite of trouble; for these too will get faded, and will

know the older and more eating griefs which we are helping to neglect.

In spite of the blinking eyes and white moles objectionable to Celia,

and the want of muscular curve which was morally painful to Sir James,

Mr. Casaubon had an intense consciousness within him, and was

spiritually a-hungered like the rest of us. He had done nothing

exceptional in marrying—nothing but what society sanctions, and

considers an occasion for wreaths and bouquets. It had occurred to him

that he must not any longer defer his intention of matrimony, and he

had reflected that in taking a wife, a man of good position should

expect and carefully choose a blooming young lady—the younger the

better, because more educable and submissive—of a rank equal to his

own, of religious principles, virtuous disposition, and good

understanding. On such a young lady he would make handsome settlements,

and he would neglect no arrangement for her happiness: in return, he

should receive family pleasures and leave behind him that copy of

himself which seemed so urgently required of a man—to the sonneteers of

the sixteenth century. Times had altered since then, and no sonneteer

had insisted on Mr. Casaubon’s leaving a copy of himself; moreover, he

had not yet succeeded in issuing copies of his mythological key; but he

had always intended to acquit himself by marriage, and the sense that

he was fast leaving the years behind him, that the world was getting

dimmer and that he felt lonely, was a reason to him for losing no more

time in overtaking domestic delights before they too were left behind

by the years.

And when he had seen Dorothea he believed that he had found even more

than he demanded: she might really be such a helpmate to him as would

enable him to dispense with a hired secretary, an aid which Mr.

Casaubon had never yet employed and had a suspicious dread of. (Mr.

Casaubon was nervously conscious that he was expected to manifest a

powerful mind.) Providence, in its kindness, had supplied him with the

wife he needed. A wife, a modest young lady, with the purely

appreciative, unambitious abilities of her sex, is sure to think her

husband’s mind powerful. Whether Providence had taken equal care of

Miss Brooke in presenting her with Mr. Casaubon was an idea which could

hardly occur to him. Society never made the preposterous demand that a

man should think as much about his own qualifications for making a

charming girl happy as he thinks of hers for making himself happy. As

if a man could choose not only his wife but his wife’s husband! Or as

if he were bound to provide charms for his posterity in his own

person!— When Dorothea accepted him with effusion, that was only

natural; and Mr. Casaubon believed that his happiness was going to

begin.

He had not had much foretaste of happiness in his previous life. To

know intense joy without a strong bodily frame, one must have an

enthusiastic soul. Mr. Casaubon had never had a strong bodily frame,

and his soul was sensitive without being enthusiastic: it was too

languid to thrill out of self-consciousness into passionate delight; it

went on fluttering in the swampy ground where it was hatched, thinking

of its wings and never flying. His experience was of that pitiable kind

which shrinks from pity, and fears most of all that it should be known:

it was that proud narrow sensitiveness which has not mass enough to

spare for transformation into sympathy, and quivers thread-like in

small currents of self-preoccupation or at best of an egoistic

scrupulosity. And Mr. Casaubon had many scruples: he was capable of a

severe self-restraint; he was resolute in being a man of honor

according to the code; he would be unimpeachable by any recognized

opinion. In conduct these ends had been attained; but the difficulty of

making his Key to all Mythologies unimpeachable weighed like lead upon

his mind; and the pamphlets—or “Parerga” as he called them—by which he

tested his public and deposited small monumental records of his march,

were far from having been seen in all their significance. He suspected

the Archdeacon of not having read them; he was in painful doubt as to

what was really thought of them by the leading minds of Brasenose, and

bitterly convinced that his old acquaintance Carp had been the writer

of that depreciatory recension which was kept locked in a small drawer

of Mr. Casaubon’s desk, and also in a dark closet of his verbal memory.

These were heavy impressions to struggle against, and brought that

melancholy embitterment which is the consequence of all excessive

claim: even his religious faith wavered with his wavering trust in his

own authorship, and the consolations of the Christian hope in

immortality seemed to lean on the immortality of the still unwritten

Key to all Mythologies. For my part I am very sorry for him. It is an

uneasy lot at best, to be what we call highly taught and yet not to

enjoy: to be present at this great spectacle of life and never to be

liberated from a small hungry shivering self—never to be fully

possessed by the glory we behold, never to have our consciousness

rapturously transformed into the vividness of a thought, the ardor of a

passion, the energy of an action, but always to be scholarly and

uninspired, ambitious and timid, scrupulous and dim-sighted. Becoming a

dean or even a bishop would make little difference, I fear, to Mr.

Casaubon’s uneasiness. Doubtless some ancient Greek has observed that

behind the big mask and the speaking-trumpet, there must always be our

poor little eyes peeping as usual and our timorous lips more or less

under anxious control.

To this mental estate mapped out a quarter of a century before, to

sensibilities thus fenced in, Mr. Casaubon had thought of annexing

happiness with a lovely young bride; but even before marriage, as we

have seen, he found himself under a new depression in the consciousness

that the new bliss was not blissful to him. Inclination yearned back to

its old, easier custom. And the deeper he went in domesticity the more

did the sense of acquitting himself and acting with propriety

predominate over any other satisfaction. Marriage, like religion and

erudition, nay, like authorship itself, was fated to become an outward

requirement, and Edward Casaubon was bent on fulfilling unimpeachably

all requirements. Even drawing Dorothea into use in his study,

according to his own intention before marriage, was an effort which he

was always tempted to defer, and but for her pleading insistence it

might never have begun. But she had succeeded in making it a matter of

course that she should take her place at an early hour in the library

and have work either of reading aloud or copying assigned her. The work

had been easier to define because Mr. Casaubon had adopted an immediate

intention: there was to be a new Parergon, a small monograph on some

lately traced indications concerning the Egyptian mysteries whereby

certain assertions of Warburton’s could be corrected. References were

extensive even here, but not altogether shoreless; and sentences were

actually to be written in the shape wherein they would be scanned by

Brasenose and a less formidable posterity. These minor monumental

productions were always exciting to Mr. Casaubon; digestion was made

difficult by the interference of citations, or by the rivalry of

dialectical phrases ringing against each other in his brain. And from

the first there was to be a Latin dedication about which everything was

uncertain except that it was not to be addressed to Carp: it was a

poisonous regret to Mr. Casaubon that he had once addressed a

dedication to Carp in which he had numbered that member of the animal

kingdom among the \_viros nullo ævo perituros\_, a mistake which would

infallibly lay the dedicator open to ridicule in the next age, and

might even be chuckled over by Pike and Tench in the present.

Thus Mr. Casaubon was in one of his busiest epochs, and as I began to

say a little while ago, Dorothea joined him early in the library where

he had breakfasted alone. Celia at this time was on a second visit to

Lowick, probably the last before her marriage, and was in the

drawing-room expecting Sir James.

Dorothea had learned to read the signs of her husband’s mood, and she

saw that the morning had become more foggy there during the last hour.

She was going silently to her desk when he said, in that distant tone

which implied that he was discharging a disagreeable duty—

“Dorothea, here is a letter for you, which was enclosed in one

addressed to me.”

It was a letter of two pages, and she immediately looked at the

signature.

“Mr. Ladislaw! What can he have to say to me?” she exclaimed, in a tone

of pleased surprise. “But,” she added, looking at Mr. Casaubon, “I can

imagine what he has written to you about.”

“You can, if you please, read the letter,” said Mr. Casaubon, severely

pointing to it with his pen, and not looking at her. “But I may as well

say beforehand, that I must decline the proposal it contains to pay a

visit here. I trust I may be excused for desiring an interval of

complete freedom from such distractions as have been hitherto

inevitable, and especially from guests whose desultory vivacity makes

their presence a fatigue.”

There had been no clashing of temper between Dorothea and her husband

since that little explosion in Rome, which had left such strong traces

in her mind that it had been easier ever since to quell emotion than to

incur the consequence of venting it. But this ill-tempered anticipation

that she could desire visits which might be disagreeable to her

husband, this gratuitous defence of himself against selfish complaint

on her part, was too sharp a sting to be meditated on until after it

had been resented. Dorothea had thought that she could have been

patient with John Milton, but she had never imagined him behaving in

this way; and for a moment Mr. Casaubon seemed to be stupidly

undiscerning and odiously unjust. Pity, that “new-born babe” which was

by-and-by to rule many a storm within her, did not “stride the blast”

on this occasion. With her first words, uttered in a tone that shook

him, she startled Mr. Casaubon into looking at her, and meeting the

flash of her eyes.

“Why do you attribute to me a wish for anything that would annoy you?

You speak to me as if I were something you had to contend against. Wait

at least till I appear to consult my own pleasure apart from yours.”

“Dorothea, you are hasty,” answered Mr. Casaubon, nervously.

Decidedly, this woman was too young to be on the formidable level of

wifehood—unless she had been pale and featureless and taken everything

for granted.

“I think it was you who were first hasty in your false suppositions

about my feeling,” said Dorothea, in the same tone. The fire was not

dissipated yet, and she thought it was ignoble in her husband not to

apologize to her.

“We will, if you please, say no more on this subject, Dorothea. I have

neither leisure nor energy for this kind of debate.”

Here Mr. Casaubon dipped his pen and made as if he would return to his

writing, though his hand trembled so much that the words seemed to be

written in an unknown character. There are answers which, in turning

away wrath, only send it to the other end of the room, and to have a

discussion coolly waived when you feel that justice is all on your own

side is even more exasperating in marriage than in philosophy.

Dorothea left Ladislaw’s two letters unread on her husband’s

writing-table and went to her own place, the scorn and indignation

within her rejecting the reading of these letters, just as we hurl away

any trash towards which we seem to have been suspected of mean

cupidity. She did not in the least divine the subtle sources of her

husband’s bad temper about these letters: she only knew that they had

caused him to offend her. She began to work at once, and her hand did

not tremble; on the contrary, in writing out the quotations which had

been given to her the day before, she felt that she was forming her

letters beautifully, and it seemed to her that she saw the construction

of the Latin she was copying, and which she was beginning to

understand, more clearly than usual. In her indignation there was a

sense of superiority, but it went out for the present in firmness of

stroke, and did not compress itself into an inward articulate voice

pronouncing the once “affable archangel” a poor creature.

There had been this apparent quiet for half an hour, and Dorothea had

not looked away from her own table, when she heard the loud bang of a

book on the floor, and turning quickly saw Mr. Casaubon on the library

steps clinging forward as if he were in some bodily distress. She

started up and bounded towards him in an instant: he was evidently in

great straits for breath. Jumping on a stool she got close to his elbow

and said with her whole soul melted into tender alarm—

“Can you lean on me, dear?”

He was still for two or three minutes, which seemed endless to her,

unable to speak or move, gasping for breath. When at last he descended

the three steps and fell backward in the large chair which Dorothea had

drawn close to the foot of the ladder, he no longer gasped but seemed

helpless and about to faint. Dorothea rang the bell violently, and

presently Mr. Casaubon was helped to the couch: he did not faint, and

was gradually reviving, when Sir James Chettam came in, having been met

in the hall with the news that Mr. Casaubon had “had a fit in the

library.”

“Good God! this is just what might have been expected,” was his

immediate thought. If his prophetic soul had been urged to

particularize, it seemed to him that “fits” would have been the

definite expression alighted upon. He asked his informant, the butler,

whether the doctor had been sent for. The butler never knew his master

to want the doctor before; but would it not be right to send for a

physician?

When Sir James entered the library, however, Mr. Casaubon could make

some signs of his usual politeness, and Dorothea, who in the reaction

from her first terror had been kneeling and sobbing by his side now

rose and herself proposed that some one should ride off for a medical

man.

“I recommend you to send for Lydgate,” said Sir James. “My mother has

called him in, and she has found him uncommonly clever. She has had a

poor opinion of the physicians since my father’s death.”

Dorothea appealed to her husband, and he made a silent sign of

approval. So Mr. Lydgate was sent for and he came wonderfully soon, for

the messenger, who was Sir James Chettam’s man and knew Mr. Lydgate,

met him leading his horse along the Lowick road and giving his arm to

Miss Vincy.

Celia, in the drawing-room, had known nothing of the trouble till Sir

James told her of it. After Dorothea’s account, he no longer considered

the illness a fit, but still something “of that nature.”

“Poor dear Dodo—how dreadful!” said Celia, feeling as much grieved as

her own perfect happiness would allow. Her little hands were clasped,

and enclosed by Sir James’s as a bud is enfolded by a liberal calyx.

“It is very shocking that Mr. Casaubon should be ill; but I never did

like him. And I think he is not half fond enough of Dorothea; and he

ought to be, for I am sure no one else would have had him—do you think

they would?”

“I always thought it a horrible sacrifice of your sister,” said Sir

James.

“Yes. But poor Dodo never did do what other people do, and I think she

never will.”

“She is a noble creature,” said the loyal-hearted Sir James. He had

just had a fresh impression of this kind, as he had seen Dorothea

stretching her tender arm under her husband’s neck and looking at him

with unspeakable sorrow. He did not know how much penitence there was

in the sorrow.

“Yes,” said Celia, thinking it was very well for Sir James to say so,

but \_he\_ would not have been comfortable with Dodo. “Shall I go to her?

Could I help her, do you think?”

“I think it would be well for you just to go and see her before Lydgate

comes,” said Sir James, magnanimously. “Only don’t stay long.”

While Celia was gone he walked up and down remembering what he had

originally felt about Dorothea’s engagement, and feeling a revival of

his disgust at Mr. Brooke’s indifference. If Cadwallader—if every one

else had regarded the affair as he, Sir James, had done, the marriage

might have been hindered. It was wicked to let a young girl blindly

decide her fate in that way, without any effort to save her. Sir James

had long ceased to have any regrets on his own account: his heart was

satisfied with his engagement to Celia. But he had a chivalrous nature

(was not the disinterested service of woman among the ideal glories of

old chivalry?): his disregarded love had not turned to bitterness; its

death had made sweet odors—floating memories that clung with a

consecrating effect to Dorothea. He could remain her brotherly friend,

interpreting her actions with generous trustfulness.

CHAPTER XXX.

Qui veut délasser hors de propos, lasse.—PASCAL.

Mr. Casaubon had no second attack of equal severity with the first, and

in a few days began to recover his usual condition. But Lydgate seemed

to think the case worth a great deal of attention. He not only used his

stethoscope (which had not become a matter of course in practice at

that time), but sat quietly by his patient and watched him. To Mr.

Casaubon’s questions about himself, he replied that the source of the

illness was the common error of intellectual men—a too eager and

monotonous application: the remedy was, to be satisfied with moderate

work, and to seek variety of relaxation. Mr. Brooke, who sat by on one

occasion, suggested that Mr. Casaubon should go fishing, as Cadwallader

did, and have a turning-room, make toys, table-legs, and that kind of

thing.

“In short, you recommend me to anticipate the arrival of my second

childhood,” said poor Mr. Casaubon, with some bitterness. “These

things,” he added, looking at Lydgate, “would be to me such relaxation

as tow-picking is to prisoners in a house of correction.”

“I confess,” said Lydgate, smiling, “amusement is rather an

unsatisfactory prescription. It is something like telling people to

keep up their spirits. Perhaps I had better say, that you must submit

to be mildly bored rather than to go on working.”

“Yes, yes,” said Mr. Brooke. “Get Dorothea to play backgammon with you

in the evenings. And shuttlecock, now—I don’t know a finer game than

shuttlecock for the daytime. I remember it all the fashion. To be sure,

your eyes might not stand that, Casaubon. But you must unbend, you

know. Why, you might take to some light study: conchology, now: I

always think that must be a light study. Or get Dorothea to read you

light things, Smollett—‘Roderick Random,’ ‘Humphrey Clinker:’ they are

a little broad, but she may read anything now she’s married, you know.

I remember they made me laugh uncommonly—there’s a droll bit about a

postilion’s breeches. We have no such humor now. I have gone through

all these things, but they might be rather new to you.”

“As new as eating thistles,” would have been an answer to represent Mr.

Casaubon’s feelings. But he only bowed resignedly, with due respect to

his wife’s uncle, and observed that doubtless the works he mentioned

had “served as a resource to a certain order of minds.”

“You see,” said the able magistrate to Lydgate, when they were outside

the door, “Casaubon has been a little narrow: it leaves him rather at a

loss when you forbid him his particular work, which I believe is

something very deep indeed—in the line of research, you know. I would

never give way to that; I was always versatile. But a clergyman is tied

a little tight. If they would make him a bishop, now!—he did a very

good pamphlet for Peel. He would have more movement then, more show; he

might get a little flesh. But I recommend you to talk to Mrs. Casaubon.

She is clever enough for anything, is my niece. Tell her, her husband

wants liveliness, diversion: put her on amusing tactics.”

Without Mr. Brooke’s advice, Lydgate had determined on speaking to

Dorothea. She had not been present while her uncle was throwing out his

pleasant suggestions as to the mode in which life at Lowick might be

enlivened, but she was usually by her husband’s side, and the

unaffected signs of intense anxiety in her face and voice about

whatever touched his mind or health, made a drama which Lydgate was

inclined to watch. He said to himself that he was only doing right in

telling her the truth about her husband’s probable future, but he

certainly thought also that it would be interesting to talk

confidentially with her. A medical man likes to make psychological

observations, and sometimes in the pursuit of such studies is too

easily tempted into momentous prophecy which life and death easily set

at nought. Lydgate had often been satirical on this gratuitous

prediction, and he meant now to be guarded.

He asked for Mrs. Casaubon, but being told that she was out walking, he

was going away, when Dorothea and Celia appeared, both glowing from

their struggle with the March wind. When Lydgate begged to speak with

her alone, Dorothea opened the library door which happened to be the

nearest, thinking of nothing at the moment but what he might have to

say about Mr. Casaubon. It was the first time she had entered this room

since her husband had been taken ill, and the servant had chosen not to

open the shutters. But there was light enough to read by from the

narrow upper panes of the windows.

“You will not mind this sombre light,” said Dorothea, standing in the

middle of the room. “Since you forbade books, the library has been out

of the question. But Mr. Casaubon will soon be here again, I hope. Is

he not making progress?”

“Yes, much more rapid progress than I at first expected. Indeed, he is

already nearly in his usual state of health.”

“You do not fear that the illness will return?” said Dorothea, whose

quick ear had detected some significance in Lydgate’s tone.

“Such cases are peculiarly difficult to pronounce upon,” said Lydgate.

“The only point on which I can be confident is that it will be

desirable to be very watchful on Mr. Casaubon’s account, lest he should

in any way strain his nervous power.”

“I beseech you to speak quite plainly,” said Dorothea, in an imploring

tone. “I cannot bear to think that there might be something which I did

not know, and which, if I had known it, would have made me act

differently.” The words came out like a cry: it was evident that they

were the voice of some mental experience which lay not very far off.

“Sit down,” she added, placing herself on the nearest chair, and

throwing off her bonnet and gloves, with an instinctive discarding of

formality where a great question of destiny was concerned.

“What you say now justifies my own view,” said Lydgate. “I think it is

one’s function as a medical man to hinder regrets of that sort as far

as possible. But I beg you to observe that Mr. Casaubon’s case is

precisely of the kind in which the issue is most difficult to pronounce

upon. He may possibly live for fifteen years or more, without much

worse health than he has had hitherto.”

Dorothea had turned very pale, and when Lydgate paused she said in a

low voice, “You mean if we are very careful.”

“Yes—careful against mental agitation of all kinds, and against

excessive application.”

“He would be miserable, if he had to give up his work,” said Dorothea,

with a quick prevision of that wretchedness.

“I am aware of that. The only course is to try by all means, direct and

indirect, to moderate and vary his occupations. With a happy

concurrence of circumstances, there is, as I said, no immediate danger

from that affection of the heart, which I believe to have been the

cause of his late attack. On the other hand, it is possible that the

disease may develop itself more rapidly: it is one of those cases in

which death is sometimes sudden. Nothing should be neglected which

might be affected by such an issue.”

There was silence for a few moments, while Dorothea sat as if she had

been turned to marble, though the life within her was so intense that

her mind had never before swept in brief time over an equal range of

scenes and motives.

“Help me, pray,” she said, at last, in the same low voice as before.

“Tell me what I can do.”

“What do you think of foreign travel? You have been lately in Rome, I

think.”

The memories which made this resource utterly hopeless were a new

current that shook Dorothea out of her pallid immobility.

“Oh, that would not do—that would be worse than anything,” she said

with a more childlike despondency, while the tears rolled down.

“Nothing will be of any use that he does not enjoy.”

“I wish that I could have spared you this pain,” said Lydgate, deeply

touched, yet wondering about her marriage. Women just like Dorothea had

not entered into his traditions.

“It was right of you to tell me. I thank you for telling me the truth.”

“I wish you to understand that I shall not say anything to enlighten

Mr. Casaubon himself. I think it desirable for him to know nothing more

than that he must not overwork himself, and must observe certain rules.

Anxiety of any kind would be precisely the most unfavorable condition

for him.”

Lydgate rose, and Dorothea mechanically rose at the same time,

unclasping her cloak and throwing it off as if it stifled her. He was

bowing and quitting her, when an impulse which if she had been alone

would have turned into a prayer, made her say with a sob in her voice—

“Oh, you are a wise man, are you not? You know all about life and

death. Advise me. Think what I can do. He has been laboring all his

life and looking forward. He minds about nothing else.— And I mind

about nothing else—”

For years after Lydgate remembered the impression produced in him by

this involuntary appeal—this cry from soul to soul, without other

consciousness than their moving with kindred natures in the same

embroiled medium, the same troublous fitfully illuminated life. But

what could he say now except that he should see Mr. Casaubon again

to-morrow?

When he was gone, Dorothea’s tears gushed forth, and relieved her

stifling oppression. Then she dried her eyes, reminded that her

distress must not be betrayed to her husband; and looked round the room

thinking that she must order the servant to attend to it as usual,

since Mr. Casaubon might now at any moment wish to enter. On his

writing-table there were letters which had lain untouched since the

morning when he was taken ill, and among them, as Dorothea well

remembered, there were young Ladislaw’s letters, the one addressed to

her still unopened. The associations of these letters had been made the

more painful by that sudden attack of illness which she felt that the

agitation caused by her anger might have helped to bring on: it would

be time enough to read them when they were again thrust upon her, and

she had had no inclination to fetch them from the library. But now it

occurred to her that they should be put out of her husband’s sight:

whatever might have been the sources of his annoyance about them, he

must, if possible, not be annoyed again; and she ran her eyes first

over the letter addressed to him to assure herself whether or not it

would be necessary to write in order to hinder the offensive visit.

Will wrote from Rome, and began by saying that his obligations to Mr.

Casaubon were too deep for all thanks not to seem impertinent. It was

plain that if he were not grateful, he must be the poorest-spirited

rascal who had ever found a generous friend. To expand in wordy thanks

would be like saying, “I am honest.” But Will had come to perceive that

his defects—defects which Mr. Casaubon had himself often pointed

to—needed for their correction that more strenuous position which his

relative’s generosity had hitherto prevented from being inevitable. He

trusted that he should make the best return, if return were possible,

by showing the effectiveness of the education for which he was

indebted, and by ceasing in future to need any diversion towards

himself of funds on which others might have a better claim. He was

coming to England, to try his fortune, as many other young men were

obliged to do whose only capital was in their brains. His friend

Naumann had desired him to take charge of the “Dispute”—the picture

painted for Mr. Casaubon, with whose permission, and Mrs. Casaubon’s,

Will would convey it to Lowick in person. A letter addressed to the

Poste Restante in Paris within the fortnight would hinder him, if

necessary, from arriving at an inconvenient moment. He enclosed a

letter to Mrs. Casaubon in which he continued a discussion about art,

begun with her in Rome.

Opening her own letter Dorothea saw that it was a lively continuation

of his remonstrance with her fanatical sympathy and her want of sturdy

neutral delight in things as they were—an outpouring of his young

vivacity which it was impossible to read just now. She had immediately

to consider what was to be done about the other letter: there was still

time perhaps to prevent Will from coming to Lowick. Dorothea ended by

giving the letter to her uncle, who was still in the house, and begging

him to let Will know that Mr. Casaubon had been ill, and that his

health would not allow the reception of any visitors.

No one more ready than Mr. Brooke to write a letter: his only

difficulty was to write a short one, and his ideas in this case

expanded over the three large pages and the inward foldings. He had

simply said to Dorothea—

“To be sure, I will write, my dear. He’s a very clever young

fellow—this young Ladislaw—I dare say will be a rising young man. It’s

a good letter—marks his sense of things, you know. However, I will tell

him about Casaubon.”

But the end of Mr. Brooke’s pen was a thinking organ, evolving

sentences, especially of a benevolent kind, before the rest of his mind

could well overtake them. It expressed regrets and proposed remedies,

which, when Mr. Brooke read them, seemed felicitously

worded—surprisingly the right thing, and determined a sequel which he

had never before thought of. In this case, his pen found it such a pity

young Ladislaw should not have come into the neighborhood just at that

time, in order that Mr. Brooke might make his acquaintance more fully,

and that they might go over the long-neglected Italian drawings

together—it also felt such an interest in a young man who was starting

in life with a stock of ideas—that by the end of the second page it had

persuaded Mr. Brooke to invite young Ladislaw, since he could not be

received at Lowick, to come to Tipton Grange. Why not? They could find

a great many things to do together, and this was a period of peculiar

growth—the political horizon was expanding, and—in short, Mr. Brooke’s

pen went off into a little speech which it had lately reported for that

imperfectly edited organ the “Middlemarch Pioneer.” While Mr. Brooke

was sealing this letter, he felt elated with an influx of dim

projects:—a young man capable of putting ideas into form, the “Pioneer”

purchased to clear the pathway for a new candidate, documents

utilized—who knew what might come of it all? Since Celia was going to

marry immediately, it would be very pleasant to have a young fellow at

table with him, at least for a time.

But he went away without telling Dorothea what he had put into the

letter, for she was engaged with her husband, and—in fact, these things

were of no importance to her.

CHAPTER XXXI.

How will you know the pitch of that great bell

Too large for you to stir? Let but a flute

Play ’neath the fine-mixed metal: listen close

Till the right note flows forth, a silvery rill:

Then shall the huge bell tremble—then the mass

With myriad waves concurrent shall respond

In low soft unison.

Lydgate that evening spoke to Miss Vincy of Mrs. Casaubon, and laid

some emphasis on the strong feeling she appeared to have for that

formal studious man thirty years older than herself.

“Of course she is devoted to her husband,” said Rosamond, implying a

notion of necessary sequence which the scientific man regarded as the

prettiest possible for a woman; but she was thinking at the same time

that it was not so very melancholy to be mistress of Lowick Manor with

a husband likely to die soon. “Do you think her very handsome?”

“She certainly is handsome, but I have not thought about it,” said

Lydgate.

“I suppose it would be unprofessional,” said Rosamond, dimpling. “But

how your practice is spreading! You were called in before to the

Chettams, I think; and now, the Casaubons.”

“Yes,” said Lydgate, in a tone of compulsory admission. “But I don’t

really like attending such people so well as the poor. The cases are

more monotonous, and one has to go through more fuss and listen more

deferentially to nonsense.”

“Not more than in Middlemarch,” said Rosamond. “And at least you go

through wide corridors and have the scent of rose-leaves everywhere.”

“That is true, Mademoiselle de Montmorenci,” said Lydgate, just bending

his head to the table and lifting with his fourth finger her delicate

handkerchief which lay at the mouth of her reticule, as if to enjoy its

scent, while he looked at her with a smile.

But this agreeable holiday freedom with which Lydgate hovered about the

flower of Middlemarch, could not continue indefinitely. It was not more

possible to find social isolation in that town than elsewhere, and two

people persistently flirting could by no means escape from “the various

entanglements, weights, blows, clashings, motions, by which things

severally go on.” Whatever Miss Vincy did must be remarked, and she was

perhaps the more conspicuous to admirers and critics because just now

Mrs. Vincy, after some struggle, had gone with Fred to stay a little

while at Stone Court, there being no other way of at once gratifying

old Featherstone and keeping watch against Mary Garth, who appeared a

less tolerable daughter-in-law in proportion as Fred’s illness

disappeared.

Aunt Bulstrode, for example, came a little oftener into Lowick Gate to

see Rosamond, now she was alone. For Mrs. Bulstrode had a true sisterly

feeling for her brother; always thinking that he might have married

better, but wishing well to the children. Now Mrs. Bulstrode had a

long-standing intimacy with Mrs. Plymdale. They had nearly the same

preferences in silks, patterns for underclothing, china-ware, and

clergymen; they confided their little troubles of health and household

management to each other, and various little points of superiority on

Mrs. Bulstrode’s side, namely, more decided seriousness, more

admiration for mind, and a house outside the town, sometimes served to

give color to their conversation without dividing them—well-meaning

women both, knowing very little of their own motives.

Mrs. Bulstrode, paying a morning visit to Mrs. Plymdale, happened to

say that she could not stay longer, because she was going to see poor

Rosamond.

“Why do you say ‘poor Rosamond’?” said Mrs. Plymdale, a round-eyed

sharp little woman, like a tamed falcon.

“She is so pretty, and has been brought up in such thoughtlessness. The

mother, you know, had always that levity about her, which makes me

anxious for the children.”

“Well, Harriet, if I am to speak my mind,” said Mrs. Plymdale, with

emphasis, “I must say, anybody would suppose you and Mr. Bulstrode

would be delighted with what has happened, for you have done everything

to put Mr. Lydgate forward.”

“Selina, what do you mean?” said Mrs. Bulstrode, in genuine surprise.

“Not but what I am truly thankful for Ned’s sake,” said Mrs. Plymdale.

“He could certainly better afford to keep such a wife than some people

can; but I should wish him to look elsewhere. Still a mother has

anxieties, and some young men would take to a bad life in consequence.

Besides, if I was obliged to speak, I should say I was not fond of

strangers coming into a town.”

“I don’t know, Selina,” said Mrs. Bulstrode, with a little emphasis in

her turn. “Mr. Bulstrode was a stranger here at one time. Abraham and

Moses were strangers in the land, and we are told to entertain

strangers. And especially,” she added, after a slight pause, “when they

are unexceptionable.”

“I was not speaking in a religious sense, Harriet. I spoke as a

mother.”

“Selina, I am sure you have never heard me say anything against a niece

of mine marrying your son.”

“Oh, it is pride in Miss Vincy—I am sure it is nothing else,” said Mrs.

Plymdale, who had never before given all her confidence to “Harriet” on

this subject. “No young man in Middlemarch was good enough for her: I

have heard her mother say as much. That is not a Christian spirit, I

think. But now, from all I hear, she has found a man as proud as

herself.”

“You don’t mean that there is anything between Rosamond and Mr.

Lydgate?” said Mrs. Bulstrode, rather mortified at finding out her own

ignorance.

“Is it possible you don’t know, Harriet?”

“Oh, I go about so little; and I am not fond of gossip; I really never

hear any. You see so many people that I don’t see. Your circle is

rather different from ours.”

“Well, but your own niece and Mr. Bulstrode’s great favorite—and yours

too, I am sure, Harriet! I thought, at one time, you meant him for

Kate, when she is a little older.”

“I don’t believe there can be anything serious at present,” said Mrs.

Bulstrode. “My brother would certainly have told me.”

“Well, people have different ways, but I understand that nobody can see

Miss Vincy and Mr. Lydgate together without taking them to be engaged.

However, it is not my business. Shall I put up the pattern of mittens?”

After this Mrs. Bulstrode drove to her niece with a mind newly

weighted. She was herself handsomely dressed, but she noticed with a

little more regret than usual that Rosamond, who was just come in and

met her in walking-dress, was almost as expensively equipped. Mrs.

Bulstrode was a feminine smaller edition of her brother, and had none

of her husband’s low-toned pallor. She had a good honest glance and

used no circumlocution.

“You are alone, I see, my dear,” she said, as they entered the

drawing-room together, looking round gravely. Rosamond felt sure that

her aunt had something particular to say, and they sat down near each

other. Nevertheless, the quilling inside Rosamond’s bonnet was so

charming that it was impossible not to desire the same kind of thing

for Kate, and Mrs. Bulstrode’s eyes, which were rather fine, rolled

round that ample quilled circuit, while she spoke.

“I have just heard something about you that has surprised me very much,

Rosamond.”

“What is that, aunt?” Rosamond’s eyes also were roaming over her aunt’s

large embroidered collar.

“I can hardly believe it—that you should be engaged without my knowing

it—without your father’s telling me.” Here Mrs. Bulstrode’s eyes

finally rested on Rosamond’s, who blushed deeply, and said—

“I am not engaged, aunt.”

“How is it that every one says so, then—that it is the town’s talk?”

“The town’s talk is of very little consequence, I think,” said

Rosamond, inwardly gratified.

“Oh, my dear, be more thoughtful; don’t despise your neighbors so.

Remember you are turned twenty-two now, and you will have no fortune:

your father, I am sure, will not be able to spare you anything. Mr.

Lydgate is very intellectual and clever; I know there is an attraction

in that. I like talking to such men myself; and your uncle finds him

very useful. But the profession is a poor one here. To be sure, this

life is not everything; but it is seldom a medical man has true

religious views—there is too much pride of intellect. And you are not

fit to marry a poor man.

“Mr. Lydgate is not a poor man, aunt. He has very high connections.”

“He told me himself he was poor.”

“That is because he is used to people who have a high style of living.”

“My dear Rosamond, \_you\_ must not think of living in high style.”

Rosamond looked down and played with her reticule. She was not a fiery

young lady and had no sharp answers, but she meant to live as she

pleased.

“Then it is really true?” said Mrs. Bulstrode, looking very earnestly

at her niece. “You are thinking of Mr. Lydgate—there is some

understanding between you, though your father doesn’t know. Be open, my

dear Rosamond: Mr. Lydgate has really made you an offer?”

Poor Rosamond’s feelings were very unpleasant. She had been quite easy

as to Lydgate’s feeling and intention, but now when her aunt put this

question she did not like being unable to say Yes. Her pride was hurt,

but her habitual control of manner helped her.

“Pray excuse me, aunt. I would rather not speak on the subject.”

“You would not give your heart to a man without a decided prospect, I

trust, my dear. And think of the two excellent offers I know of that

you have refused!—and one still within your reach, if you will not

throw it away. I knew a very great beauty who married badly at last, by

doing so. Mr. Ned Plymdale is a nice young man—some might think

good-looking; and an only son; and a large business of that kind is

better than a profession. Not that marrying is everything. I would have

you seek first the kingdom of God. But a girl should keep her heart

within her own power.”

“I should never give it to Mr. Ned Plymdale, if it were. I have already

refused him. If I loved, I should love at once and without change,”

said Rosamond, with a great sense of being a romantic heroine, and

playing the part prettily.

“I see how it is, my dear,” said Mrs. Bulstrode, in a melancholy voice,

rising to go. “You have allowed your affections to be engaged without

return.”

“No, indeed, aunt,” said Rosamond, with emphasis.

“Then you are quite confident that Mr. Lydgate has a serious attachment

to you?”

Rosamond’s cheeks by this time were persistently burning, and she felt

much mortification. She chose to be silent, and her aunt went away all

the more convinced.

Mr. Bulstrode in things worldly and indifferent was disposed to do what

his wife bade him, and she now, without telling her reasons, desired

him on the next opportunity to find out in conversation with Mr.

Lydgate whether he had any intention of marrying soon. The result was a

decided negative. Mr. Bulstrode, on being cross-questioned, showed that

Lydgate had spoken as no man would who had any attachment that could

issue in matrimony. Mrs. Bulstrode now felt that she had a serious duty

before her, and she soon managed to arrange a \_tête-à-tête\_ with

Lydgate, in which she passed from inquiries about Fred Vincy’s health,

and expressions of her sincere anxiety for her brother’s large family,

to general remarks on the dangers which lay before young people with

regard to their settlement in life. Young men were often wild and

disappointing, making little return for the money spent on them, and a

girl was exposed to many circumstances which might interfere with her

prospects.

“Especially when she has great attractions, and her parents see much

company,” said Mrs. Bulstrode. “Gentlemen pay her attention, and

engross her all to themselves, for the mere pleasure of the moment, and

that drives off others. I think it is a heavy responsibility, Mr.

Lydgate, to interfere with the prospects of any girl.” Here Mrs.

Bulstrode fixed her eyes on him, with an unmistakable purpose of

warning, if not of rebuke.

“Clearly,” said Lydgate, looking at her—perhaps even staring a little

in return. “On the other hand, a man must be a great coxcomb to go

about with a notion that he must not pay attention to a young lady lest

she should fall in love with him, or lest others should think she

must.”

“Oh, Mr. Lydgate, you know well what your advantages are. You know that

our young men here cannot cope with you. Where you frequent a house it

may militate very much against a girl’s making a desirable settlement

in life, and prevent her from accepting offers even if they are made.”

Lydgate was less flattered by his advantage over the Middlemarch

Orlandos than he was annoyed by the perception of Mrs. Bulstrode’s

meaning. She felt that she had spoken as impressively as it was

necessary to do, and that in using the superior word “militate” she had

thrown a noble drapery over a mass of particulars which were still

evident enough.

Lydgate was fuming a little, pushed his hair back with one hand, felt

curiously in his waistcoat-pocket with the other, and then stooped to

beckon the tiny black spaniel, which had the insight to decline his

hollow caresses. It would not have been decent to go away, because he

had been dining with other guests, and had just taken tea. But Mrs.

Bulstrode, having no doubt that she had been understood, turned the

conversation.

Solomon’s Proverbs, I think, have omitted to say, that as the sore

palate findeth grit, so an uneasy consciousness heareth innuendoes. The

next day Mr. Farebrother, parting from Lydgate in the street, supposed

that they should meet at Vincy’s in the evening. Lydgate answered

curtly, no—he had work to do—he must give up going out in the evening.

“What! you are going to get lashed to the mast, eh, and are stopping

your ears?” said the Vicar. “Well, if you don’t mean to be won by the

sirens, you are right to take precautions in time.”

A few days before, Lydgate would have taken no notice of these words as

anything more than the Vicar’s usual way of putting things. They seemed

now to convey an innuendo which confirmed the impression that he had

been making a fool of himself and behaving so as to be misunderstood:

not, he believed, by Rosamond herself; she, he felt sure, took

everything as lightly as he intended it. She had an exquisite tact and

insight in relation to all points of manners; but the people she lived

among were blunderers and busybodies. However, the mistake should go no

farther. He resolved—and kept his resolution—that he would not go to

Mr. Vincy’s except on business.

Rosamond became very unhappy. The uneasiness first stirred by her

aunt’s questions grew and grew till at the end of ten days that she had

not seen Lydgate, it grew into terror at the blank that might possibly

come—into foreboding of that ready, fatal sponge which so cheaply wipes

out the hopes of mortals. The world would have a new dreariness for

her, as a wilderness that a magician’s spells had turned for a little

while into a garden. She felt that she was beginning to know the pang

of disappointed love, and that no other man could be the occasion of

such delightful aerial building as she had been enjoying for the last

six months. Poor Rosamond lost her appetite and felt as forlorn as

Ariadne—as a charming stage Ariadne left behind with all her boxes full

of costumes and no hope of a coach.

There are many wonderful mixtures in the world which are all alike

called love, and claim the privileges of a sublime rage which is an

apology for everything (in literature and the drama). Happily Rosamond

did not think of committing any desperate act: she plaited her fair

hair as beautifully as usual, and kept herself proudly calm. Her most

cheerful supposition was that her aunt Bulstrode had interfered in some

way to hinder Lydgate’s visits: everything was better than a

spontaneous indifference in him. Any one who imagines ten days too

short a time—not for falling into leanness, lightness, or other

measurable effects of passion, but—for the whole spiritual circuit of

alarmed conjecture and disappointment, is ignorant of what can go on in

the elegant leisure of a young lady’s mind.

On the eleventh day, however, Lydgate when leaving Stone Court was

requested by Mrs. Vincy to let her husband know that there was a marked

change in Mr. Featherstone’s health, and that she wished him to come to

Stone Court on that day. Now Lydgate might have called at the

warehouse, or might have written a message on a leaf of his pocket-book

and left it at the door. Yet these simple devices apparently did not

occur to him, from which we may conclude that he had no strong

objection to calling at the house at an hour when Mr. Vincy was not at

home, and leaving the message with Miss Vincy. A man may, from various

motives, decline to give his company, but perhaps not even a sage would

be gratified that nobody missed him. It would be a graceful, easy way

of piecing on the new habits to the old, to have a few playful words

with Rosamond about his resistance to dissipation, and his firm resolve

to take long fasts even from sweet sounds. It must be confessed, also,

that momentary speculations as to all the possible grounds for Mrs.

Bulstrode’s hints had managed to get woven like slight clinging hairs

into the more substantial web of his thoughts.

Miss Vincy was alone, and blushed so deeply when Lydgate came in that

he felt a corresponding embarrassment, and instead of any playfulness,

he began at once to speak of his reason for calling, and to beg her,

almost formally, to deliver the message to her father. Rosamond, who at

the first moment felt as if her happiness were returning, was keenly

hurt by Lydgate’s manner; her blush had departed, and she assented

coldly, without adding an unnecessary word, some trivial chain-work

which she had in her hands enabling her to avoid looking at Lydgate

higher than his chin. In all failures, the beginning is certainly the

half of the whole. After sitting two long moments while he moved his

whip and could say nothing, Lydgate rose to go, and Rosamond, made

nervous by her struggle between mortification and the wish not to

betray it, dropped her chain as if startled, and rose too,

mechanically. Lydgate instantaneously stooped to pick up the chain.

When he rose he was very near to a lovely little face set on a fair

long neck which he had been used to see turning about under the most

perfect management of self-contented grace. But as he raised his eyes

now he saw a certain helpless quivering which touched him quite newly,

and made him look at Rosamond with a questioning flash. At this moment

she was as natural as she had ever been when she was five years old:

she felt that her tears had risen, and it was no use to try to do

anything else than let them stay like water on a blue flower or let

them fall over her cheeks, even as they would.

That moment of naturalness was the crystallizing feather-touch: it

shook flirtation into love. Remember that the ambitious man who was

looking at those Forget-me-nots under the water was very warm-hearted

and rash. He did not know where the chain went; an idea had thrilled

through the recesses within him which had a miraculous effect in

raising the power of passionate love lying buried there in no sealed

sepulchre, but under the lightest, easily pierced mould. His words were

quite abrupt and awkward; but the tone made them sound like an ardent,

appealing avowal.

“What is the matter? you are distressed. Tell me, pray.”

Rosamond had never been spoken to in such tones before. I am not sure

that she knew what the words were: but she looked at Lydgate and the

tears fell over her cheeks. There could have been no more complete

answer than that silence, and Lydgate, forgetting everything else,

completely mastered by the outrush of tenderness at the sudden belief

that this sweet young creature depended on him for her joy, actually

put his arms round her, folding her gently and protectingly—he was used

to being gentle with the weak and suffering—and kissed each of the two

large tears. This was a strange way of arriving at an understanding,

but it was a short way. Rosamond was not angry, but she moved backward

a little in timid happiness, and Lydgate could now sit near her and

speak less incompletely. Rosamond had to make her little confession,

and he poured out words of gratitude and tenderness with impulsive

lavishment. In half an hour he left the house an engaged man, whose

soul was not his own, but the woman’s to whom he had bound himself.

He came again in the evening to speak with Mr. Vincy, who, just

returned from Stone Court, was feeling sure that it would not be long

before he heard of Mr. Featherstone’s demise. The felicitous word

“demise,” which had seasonably occurred to him, had raised his spirits

even above their usual evening pitch. The right word is always a power,

and communicates its definiteness to our action. Considered as a

demise, old Featherstone’s death assumed a merely legal aspect, so that

Mr. Vincy could tap his snuff-box over it and be jovial, without even

an intermittent affectation of solemnity; and Mr. Vincy hated both

solemnity and affectation. Who was ever awe struck about a testator, or

sang a hymn on the title to real property? Mr. Vincy was inclined to

take a jovial view of all things that evening: he even observed to

Lydgate that Fred had got the family constitution after all, and would

soon be as fine a fellow as ever again; and when his approbation of

Rosamond’s engagement was asked for, he gave it with astonishing

facility, passing at once to general remarks on the desirableness of

matrimony for young men and maidens, and apparently deducing from the

whole the appropriateness of a little more punch.

CHAPTER XXXII.

They’ll take suggestion as a cat laps milk.

—SHAKESPEARE: \_Tempest\_.

The triumphant confidence of the Mayor founded on Mr. Featherstone’s

insistent demand that Fred and his mother should not leave him, was a

feeble emotion compared with all that was agitating the breasts of the

old man’s blood-relations, who naturally manifested more their sense of

the family tie and were more visibly numerous now that he had become

bedridden. Naturally: for when “poor Peter” had occupied his arm-chair

in the wainscoted parlor, no assiduous beetles for whom the cook

prepares boiling water could have been less welcome on a hearth which

they had reasons for preferring, than those persons whose Featherstone

blood was ill-nourished, not from penuriousness on their part, but from

poverty. Brother Solomon and Sister Jane were rich, and the family

candor and total abstinence from false politeness with which they were

always received seemed to them no argument that their brother in the

solemn act of making his will would overlook the superior claims of

wealth. Themselves at least he had never been unnatural enough to

banish from his house, and it seemed hardly eccentric that he should

have kept away Brother Jonah, Sister Martha, and the rest, who had no

shadow of such claims. They knew Peter’s maxim, that money was a good

egg, and should be laid in a warm nest.

But Brother Jonah, Sister Martha, and all the needy exiles, held a

different point of view. Probabilities are as various as the faces to

be seen at will in fretwork or paper-hangings: every form is there,

from Jupiter to Judy, if you only look with creative inclination. To

the poorer and least favored it seemed likely that since Peter had done

nothing for them in his life, he would remember them at the last. Jonah

argued that men liked to make a surprise of their wills, while Martha

said that nobody need be surprised if he left the best part of his

money to those who least expected it. Also it was not to be thought but

that an own brother “lying there” with dropsy in his legs must come to

feel that blood was thicker than water, and if he didn’t alter his

will, he might have money by him. At any rate some blood-relations

should be on the premises and on the watch against those who were

hardly relations at all. Such things had been known as forged wills and

disputed wills, which seemed to have the golden-hazy advantage of

somehow enabling non-legatees to live out of them. Again, those who

were no blood-relations might be caught making away with things—and

poor Peter “lying there” helpless! Somebody should be on the watch. But

in this conclusion they were at one with Solomon and Jane; also, some

nephews, nieces, and cousins, arguing with still greater subtilty as to

what might be done by a man able to “will away” his property and give

himself large treats of oddity, felt in a handsome sort of way that

there was a family interest to be attended to, and thought of Stone

Court as a place which it would be nothing but right for them to visit.

Sister Martha, otherwise Mrs. Cranch, living with some wheeziness in

the Chalky Flats, could not undertake the journey; but her son, as

being poor Peter’s own nephew, could represent her advantageously, and

watch lest his uncle Jonah should make an unfair use of the improbable

things which seemed likely to happen. In fact there was a general sense

running in the Featherstone blood that everybody must watch everybody

else, and that it would be well for everybody else to reflect that the

Almighty was watching him.

Thus Stone Court continually saw one or other blood-relation alighting

or departing, and Mary Garth had the unpleasant task of carrying their

messages to Mr. Featherstone, who would see none of them, and sent her

down with the still more unpleasant task of telling them so. As manager

of the household she felt bound to ask them in good provincial fashion

to stay and eat; but she chose to consult Mrs. Vincy on the point of

extra down-stairs consumption now that Mr. Featherstone was laid up.

“Oh, my dear, you must do things handsomely where there’s last illness

and a property. God knows, I don’t grudge them every ham in the

house—only, save the best for the funeral. Have some stuffed veal

always, and a fine cheese in cut. You must expect to keep open house in

these last illnesses,” said liberal Mrs. Vincy, once more of cheerful

note and bright plumage.

But some of the visitors alighted and did not depart after the handsome

treating to veal and ham. Brother Jonah, for example (there are such

unpleasant people in most families; perhaps even in the highest

aristocracy there are Brobdingnag specimens, gigantically in debt and

bloated at greater expense)—Brother Jonah, I say, having come down in

the world, was mainly supported by a calling which he was modest enough

not to boast of, though it was much better than swindling either on

exchange or turf, but which did not require his presence at Brassing so

long as he had a good corner to sit in and a supply of food. He chose

the kitchen-corner, partly because he liked it best, and partly because

he did not want to sit with Solomon, concerning whom he had a strong

brotherly opinion. Seated in a famous arm-chair and in his best suit,

constantly within sight of good cheer, he had a comfortable

consciousness of being on the premises, mingled with fleeting

suggestions of Sunday and the bar at the Green Man; and he informed

Mary Garth that he should not go out of reach of his brother Peter

while that poor fellow was above ground. The troublesome ones in a

family are usually either the wits or the idiots. Jonah was the wit

among the Featherstones, and joked with the maid-servants when they

came about the hearth, but seemed to consider Miss Garth a suspicious

character, and followed her with cold eyes.

Mary would have borne this one pair of eyes with comparative ease, but

unfortunately there was young Cranch, who, having come all the way from

the Chalky Flats to represent his mother and watch his uncle Jonah,

also felt it his duty to stay and to sit chiefly in the kitchen to give

his uncle company. Young Cranch was not exactly the balancing point

between the wit and the idiot,—verging slightly towards the latter

type, and squinting so as to leave everything in doubt about his

sentiments except that they were not of a forcible character. When Mary

Garth entered the kitchen and Mr. Jonah Featherstone began to follow

her with his cold detective eyes, young Cranch turning his head in the

same direction seemed to insist on it that she should remark how he was

squinting, as if he did it with design, like the gypsies when Borrow

read the New Testament to them. This was rather too much for poor Mary;

sometimes it made her bilious, sometimes it upset her gravity. One day

that she had an opportunity she could not resist describing the kitchen

scene to Fred, who would not be hindered from immediately going to see

it, affecting simply to pass through. But no sooner did he face the

four eyes than he had to rush through the nearest door which happened

to lead to the dairy, and there under the high roof and among the pans

he gave way to laughter which made a hollow resonance perfectly audible

in the kitchen. He fled by another doorway, but Mr. Jonah, who had not

before seen Fred’s white complexion, long legs, and pinched delicacy of

face, prepared many sarcasms in which these points of appearance were

wittily combined with the lowest moral attributes.

“Why, Tom, \_you\_ don’t wear such gentlemanly trousers—you haven’t got

half such fine long legs,” said Jonah to his nephew, winking at the

same time, to imply that there was something more in these statements

than their undeniableness. Tom looked at his legs, but left it

uncertain whether he preferred his moral advantages to a more vicious

length of limb and reprehensible gentility of trouser.

In the large wainscoted parlor too there were constantly pairs of eyes

on the watch, and own relatives eager to be “sitters-up.” Many came,

lunched, and departed, but Brother Solomon and the lady who had been

Jane Featherstone for twenty-five years before she was Mrs. Waule found

it good to be there every day for hours, without other calculable

occupation than that of observing the cunning Mary Garth (who was so

deep that she could be found out in nothing) and giving occasional dry

wrinkly indications of crying—as if capable of torrents in a wetter

season—at the thought that they were not allowed to go into Mr.

Featherstone’s room. For the old man’s dislike of his own family seemed

to get stronger as he got less able to amuse himself by saying biting

things to them. Too languid to sting, he had the more venom refluent in

his blood.

Not fully believing the message sent through Mary Garth, they had

presented themselves together within the door of the bedroom, both in

black—Mrs. Waule having a white handkerchief partially unfolded in her

hand—and both with faces in a sort of half-mourning purple; while Mrs.

Vincy with her pink cheeks and pink ribbons flying was actually

administering a cordial to their own brother, and the

light-complexioned Fred, his short hair curling as might be expected in

a gambler’s, was lolling at his ease in a large chair.

Old Featherstone no sooner caught sight of these funereal figures

appearing in spite of his orders than rage came to strengthen him more

successfully than the cordial. He was propped up on a bed-rest, and

always had his gold-headed stick lying by him. He seized it now and

swept it backwards and forwards in as large an area as he could,

apparently to ban these ugly spectres, crying in a hoarse sort of

screech—

“Back, back, Mrs. Waule! Back, Solomon!”

“Oh, Brother. Peter,” Mrs. Waule began—but Solomon put his hand before

her repressingly. He was a large-cheeked man, nearly seventy, with

small furtive eyes, and was not only of much blander temper but thought

himself much deeper than his brother Peter; indeed not likely to be

deceived in any of his fellow-men, inasmuch as they could not well be

more greedy and deceitful than he suspected them of being. Even the

invisible powers, he thought, were likely to be soothed by a bland

parenthesis here and there—coming from a man of property, who might

have been as impious as others.

“Brother Peter,” he said, in a wheedling yet gravely official tone,

“It’s nothing but right I should speak to you about the Three Crofts

and the Manganese. The Almighty knows what I’ve got on my mind—”

“Then he knows more than I want to know,” said Peter, laying down his

stick with a show of truce which had a threat in it too, for he

reversed the stick so as to make the gold handle a club in case of

closer fighting, and looked hard at Solomon’s bald head.

“There’s things you might repent of, Brother, for want of speaking to

me,” said Solomon, not advancing, however. “I could sit up with you

to-night, and Jane with me, willingly, and you might take your own time

to speak, or let me speak.”

“Yes, I shall take my own time—you needn’t offer me yours,” said Peter.

“But you can’t take your own time to die in, Brother,” began Mrs.

Waule, with her usual woolly tone. “And when you lie speechless you may

be tired of having strangers about you, and you may think of me and my

children”—but here her voice broke under the touching thought which she

was attributing to her speechless brother; the mention of ourselves

being naturally affecting.

“No, I shan’t,” said old Featherstone, contradictiously. “I shan’t

think of any of you. I’ve made my will, I tell you, I’ve made my will.”

Here he turned his head towards Mrs. Vincy, and swallowed some more of

his cordial.

“Some people would be ashamed to fill up a place belonging by rights to

others,” said Mrs. Waule, turning her narrow eyes in the same

direction.

“Oh, sister,” said Solomon, with ironical softness, “you and me are not

fine, and handsome, and clever enough: we must be humble and let smart

people push themselves before us.”

Fred’s spirit could not bear this: rising and looking at Mr.

Featherstone, he said, “Shall my mother and I leave the room, sir, that

you may be alone with your friends?”

“Sit down, I tell you,” said old Featherstone, snappishly. “Stop where

you are. Good-by, Solomon,” he added, trying to wield his stick again,

but failing now that he had reversed the handle. “Good-by, Mrs. Waule.

Don’t you come again.”

“I shall be down-stairs, Brother, whether or no,” said Solomon. “I

shall do my duty, and it remains to be seen what the Almighty will

allow.”

“Yes, in property going out of families,” said Mrs. Waule, in

continuation,—“and where there’s steady young men to carry on. But I

pity them who are not such, and I pity their mothers. Good-by, Brother

Peter.”

“Remember, I’m the eldest after you, Brother, and prospered from the

first, just as you did, and have got land already by the name of

Featherstone,” said Solomon, relying much on that reflection, as one

which might be suggested in the watches of the night. “But I bid you

good-by for the present.”

Their exit was hastened by their seeing old Mr. Featherstone pull his

wig on each side and shut his eyes with his mouth-widening grimace, as

if he were determined to be deaf and blind.

None the less they came to Stone Court daily and sat below at the post

of duty, sometimes carrying on a slow dialogue in an undertone in which

the observation and response were so far apart, that any one hearing

them might have imagined himself listening to speaking automata, in

some doubt whether the ingenious mechanism would really work, or wind

itself up for a long time in order to stick and be silent. Solomon and

Jane would have been sorry to be quick: what that led to might be seen

on the other side of the wall in the person of Brother Jonah.

But their watch in the wainscoted parlor was sometimes varied by the

presence of other guests from far or near. Now that Peter Featherstone

was up-stairs, his property could be discussed with all that local

enlightenment to be found on the spot: some rural and Middlemarch

neighbors expressed much agreement with the family and sympathy with

their interest against the Vincys, and feminine visitors were even

moved to tears, in conversation with Mrs. Waule, when they recalled the

fact that they themselves had been disappointed in times past by

codicils and marriages for spite on the part of ungrateful elderly

gentlemen, who, it might have been supposed, had been spared for

something better. Such conversation paused suddenly, like an organ when

the bellows are let drop, if Mary Garth came into the room; and all

eyes were turned on her as a possible legatee, or one who might get

access to iron chests.

But the younger men who were relatives or connections of the family,

were disposed to admire her in this problematic light, as a girl who

showed much conduct, and who among all the chances that were flying

might turn out to be at least a moderate prize. Hence she had her share

of compliments and polite attentions.

Especially from Mr. Borthrop Trumbull, a distinguished bachelor and

auctioneer of those parts, much concerned in the sale of land and

cattle: a public character, indeed, whose name was seen on widely

distributed placards, and who might reasonably be sorry for those who

did not know of him. He was second cousin to Peter Featherstone, and

had been treated by him with more amenity than any other relative,

being useful in matters of business; and in that programme of his

funeral which the old man had himself dictated, he had been named as a

Bearer. There was no odious cupidity in Mr. Borthrop Trumbull—nothing

more than a sincere sense of his own merit, which, he was aware, in

case of rivalry might tell against competitors; so that if Peter

Featherstone, who so far as he, Trumbull, was concerned, had behaved

like as good a soul as ever breathed, should have done anything

handsome by him, all he could say was, that he had never fished and

fawned, but had advised him to the best of his experience, which now

extended over twenty years from the time of his apprenticeship at

fifteen, and was likely to yield a knowledge of no surreptitious kind.

His admiration was far from being confined to himself, but was

accustomed professionally as well as privately to delight in estimating

things at a high rate. He was an amateur of superior phrases, and never

used poor language without immediately correcting himself—which was

fortunate, as he was rather loud, and given to predominate, standing or

walking about frequently, pulling down his waistcoat with the air of a

man who is very much of his own opinion, trimming himself rapidly with

his fore-finger, and marking each new series in these movements by a

busy play with his large seals. There was occasionally a little

fierceness in his demeanor, but it was directed chiefly against false

opinion, of which there is so much to correct in the world that a man

of some reading and experience necessarily has his patience tried. He

felt that the Featherstone family generally was of limited

understanding, but being a man of the world and a public character,

took everything as a matter of course, and even went to converse with

Mr. Jonah and young Cranch in the kitchen, not doubting that he had

impressed the latter greatly by his leading questions concerning the

Chalky Flats. If anybody had observed that Mr. Borthrop Trumbull, being

an auctioneer, was bound to know the nature of everything, he would

have smiled and trimmed himself silently with the sense that he came

pretty near that. On the whole, in an auctioneering way, he was an

honorable man, not ashamed of his business, and feeling that “the

celebrated Peel, now Sir Robert,” if introduced to him, would not fail

to recognize his importance.

“I don’t mind if I have a slice of that ham, and a glass of that ale,

Miss Garth, if you will allow me,” he said, coming into the parlor at

half-past eleven, after having had the exceptional privilege of seeing

old Featherstone, and standing with his back to the fire between Mrs.

Waule and Solomon.

“It’s not necessary for you to go out;—let me ring the bell.”

“Thank you,” said Mary, “I have an errand.”

“Well, Mr. Trumbull, you’re highly favored,” said Mrs. Waule.

“What! seeing the old man?” said the auctioneer, playing with his seals

dispassionately. “Ah, you see he has relied on me considerably.” Here

he pressed his lips together, and frowned meditatively.

“Might anybody ask what their brother has been saying?” said Solomon,

in a soft tone of humility, in which he had a sense of luxurious

cunning, he being a rich man and not in need of it.

“Oh yes, anybody may ask,” said Mr. Trumbull, with loud and

good-humored though cutting sarcasm. “Anybody may interrogate. Any one

may give their remarks an interrogative turn,” he continued, his

sonorousness rising with his style. “This is constantly done by good

speakers, even when they anticipate no answer. It is what we call a

figure of speech—speech at a high figure, as one may say.” The eloquent

auctioneer smiled at his own ingenuity.

“I shouldn’t be sorry to hear he’d remembered you, Mr. Trumbull,” said

Solomon. “I never was against the deserving. It’s the undeserving I’m

against.”

“Ah, there it is, you see, there it is,” said Mr. Trumbull,

significantly. “It can’t be denied that undeserving people have been

legatees, and even residuary legatees. It is so, with testamentary

dispositions.” Again he pursed up his lips and frowned a little.

“Do you mean to say for certain, Mr. Trumbull, that my brother has left

his land away from our family?” said Mrs. Waule, on whom, as an

unhopeful woman, those long words had a depressing effect.

“A man might as well turn his land into charity land at once as leave

it to some people,” observed Solomon, his sister’s question having

drawn no answer.

“What, Blue-Coat land?” said Mrs. Waule, again. “Oh, Mr. Trumbull, you

never can mean to say that. It would be flying in the face of the

Almighty that’s prospered him.”

While Mrs. Waule was speaking, Mr. Borthrop Trumbull walked away from

the fireplace towards the window, patrolling with his fore-finger round

the inside of his stock, then along his whiskers and the curves of his

hair. He now walked to Miss Garth’s work-table, opened a book which lay

there and read the title aloud with pompous emphasis as if he were

offering it for sale:

“‘Anne of Geierstein’ (pronounced Jeersteen) or the ‘Maiden of the

Mist, by the author of Waverley.’” Then turning the page, he began

sonorously—“The course of four centuries has well-nigh elapsed since

the series of events which are related in the following chapters took

place on the Continent.” He pronounced the last truly admirable word

with the accent on the last syllable, not as unaware of vulgar usage,

but feeling that this novel delivery enhanced the sonorous beauty which

his reading had given to the whole.

And now the servant came in with the tray, so that the moments for

answering Mrs. Waule’s question had gone by safely, while she and

Solomon, watching Mr. Trumbull’s movements, were thinking that high

learning interfered sadly with serious affairs. Mr. Borthrop Trumbull

really knew nothing about old Featherstone’s will; but he could hardly

have been brought to declare any ignorance unless he had been arrested

for misprision of treason.

“I shall take a mere mouthful of ham and a glass of ale,” he said,

reassuringly. “As a man with public business, I take a snack when I

can. I will back this ham,” he added, after swallowing some morsels

with alarming haste, “against any ham in the three kingdoms. In my

opinion it is better than the hams at Freshitt Hall—and I think I am a

tolerable judge.”

“Some don’t like so much sugar in their hams,” said Mrs. Waule. “But my

poor brother would always have sugar.”

“If any person demands better, he is at liberty to do so; but, God

bless me, what an aroma! I should be glad to buy in that quality, I

know. There is some gratification to a gentleman”—here Mr. Trumbull’s

voice conveyed an emotional remonstrance—“in having this kind of ham

set on his table.”

He pushed aside his plate, poured out his glass of ale and drew his

chair a little forward, profiting by the occasion to look at the inner

side of his legs, which he stroked approvingly—Mr. Trumbull having all

those less frivolous airs and gestures which distinguish the

predominant races of the north.

“You have an interesting work there, I see, Miss Garth,” he observed,

when Mary re-entered. “It is by the author of ‘Waverley’: that is Sir

Walter Scott. I have bought one of his works myself—a very nice thing,

a very superior publication, entitled ‘Ivanhoe.’ You will not get any

writer to beat him in a hurry, I think—he will not, in my opinion, be

speedily surpassed. I have just been reading a portion at the

commencement of ‘Anne of Jeersteen.’ It commences well.” (Things never

began with Mr. Borthrop Trumbull: they always commenced, both in

private life and on his handbills.) “You are a reader, I see. Do you

subscribe to our Middlemarch library?”

“No,” said Mary. “Mr. Fred Vincy brought this book.”

“I am a great bookman myself,” returned Mr. Trumbull. “I have no less

than two hundred volumes in calf, and I flatter myself they are well

selected. Also pictures by Murillo, Rubens, Teniers, Titian, Vandyck,

and others. I shall be happy to lend you any work you like to mention,

Miss Garth.”

“I am much obliged,” said Mary, hastening away again, “but I have

little time for reading.”

“I should say my brother has done something for \_her\_ in his will,”

said Mr. Solomon, in a very low undertone, when she had shut the door

behind her, pointing with his head towards the absent Mary.

“His first wife was a poor match for him, though,” said Mrs. Waule.

“She brought him nothing: and this young woman is only her niece,—and

very proud. And my brother has always paid her wage.”

“A sensible girl though, in my opinion,” said Mr. Trumbull, finishing

his ale and starting up with an emphatic adjustment of his waistcoat.

“I have observed her when she has been mixing medicine in drops. She

minds what she is doing, sir. That is a great point in a woman, and a

great point for our friend up-stairs, poor dear old soul. A man whose

life is of any value should think of his wife as a nurse: that is what

I should do, if I married; and I believe I have lived single long

enough not to make a mistake in that line. Some men must marry to

elevate themselves a little, but when I am in need of that, I hope some

one will tell me so—I hope some individual will apprise me of the fact.

I wish you good morning, Mrs. Waule. Good morning, Mr. Solomon. I trust

we shall meet under less melancholy auspices.”

When Mr. Trumbull had departed with a fine bow, Solomon, leaning

forward, observed to his sister, “You may depend, Jane, my brother has

left that girl a lumping sum.”

“Anybody would think so, from the way Mr. Trumbull talks,” said Jane.

Then, after a pause, “He talks as if my daughters wasn’t to be trusted

to give drops.”

“Auctioneers talk wild,” said Solomon. “Not but what Trumbull has made

money.”

CHAPTER XXXIII.

“Close up his eyes and draw the curtain close;

And let us all to meditation.”

—2 \_Henry VI\_.

That night after twelve o’clock Mary Garth relieved the watch in Mr.

Featherstone’s room, and sat there alone through the small hours. She

often chose this task, in which she found some pleasure,

notwithstanding the old man’s testiness whenever he demanded her

attentions. There were intervals in which she could sit perfectly

still, enjoying the outer stillness and the subdued light. The red fire

with its gently audible movement seemed like a solemn existence calmly

independent of the petty passions, the imbecile desires, the straining

after worthless uncertainties, which were daily moving her contempt.

Mary was fond of her own thoughts, and could amuse herself well sitting

in twilight with her hands in her lap; for, having early had strong

reason to believe that things were not likely to be arranged for her

peculiar satisfaction, she wasted no time in astonishment and annoyance

at that fact. And she had already come to take life very much as a

comedy in which she had a proud, nay, a generous resolution not to act

the mean or treacherous part. Mary might have become cynical if she had

not had parents whom she honored, and a well of affectionate gratitude

within her, which was all the fuller because she had learned to make no

unreasonable claims.

She sat to-night revolving, as she was wont, the scenes of the day, her

lips often curling with amusement at the oddities to which her fancy

added fresh drollery: people were so ridiculous with their illusions,

carrying their fool’s caps unawares, thinking their own lies opaque

while everybody else’s were transparent, making themselves exceptions

to everything, as if when all the world looked yellow under a lamp they

alone were rosy. Yet there were some illusions under Mary’s eyes which

were not quite comic to her. She was secretly convinced, though she had

no other grounds than her close observation of old Featherstone’s

nature, that in spite of his fondness for having the Vincys about him,

they were as likely to be disappointed as any of the relations whom he

kept at a distance. She had a good deal of disdain for Mrs. Vincy’s

evident alarm lest she and Fred should be alone together, but it did

not hinder her from thinking anxiously of the way in which Fred would

be affected, if it should turn out that his uncle had left him as poor

as ever. She could make a butt of Fred when he was present, but she did

not enjoy his follies when he was absent.

Yet she liked her thoughts: a vigorous young mind not overbalanced by

passion, finds a good in making acquaintance with life, and watches its

own powers with interest. Mary had plenty of merriment within.

Her thought was not veined by any solemnity or pathos about the old man

on the bed: such sentiments are easier to affect than to feel about an

aged creature whose life is not visibly anything but a remnant of

vices. She had always seen the most disagreeable side of Mr.

Featherstone: he was not proud of her, and she was only useful to him.

To be anxious about a soul that is always snapping at you must be left

to the saints of the earth; and Mary was not one of them. She had never

returned him a harsh word, and had waited on him faithfully: that was

her utmost. Old Featherstone himself was not in the least anxious about

his soul, and had declined to see Mr. Tucker on the subject.

To-night he had not snapped, and for the first hour or two he lay

remarkably still, until at last Mary heard him rattling his bunch of

keys against the tin box which he always kept in the bed beside him.

About three o’clock he said, with remarkable distinctness, “Missy, come

here!”

Mary obeyed, and found that he had already drawn the tin box from under

the clothes, though he usually asked to have this done for him; and he

had selected the key. He now unlocked the box, and, drawing from it

another key, looked straight at her with eyes that seemed to have

recovered all their sharpness and said, “How many of ’em are in the

house?”

“You mean of your own relations, sir,” said Mary, well used to the old

man’s way of speech. He nodded slightly and she went on.

“Mr. Jonah Featherstone and young Cranch are sleeping here.”

“Oh ay, they stick, do they? and the rest—they come every day, I’ll

warrant—Solomon and Jane, and all the young uns? They come peeping, and

counting and casting up?”

“Not all of them every day. Mr. Solomon and Mrs. Waule are here every

day, and the others come often.”

The old man listened with a grimace while she spoke, and then said,

relaxing his face, “The more fools they. You hearken, missy. It’s three

o’clock in the morning, and I’ve got all my faculties as well as ever I

had in my life. I know all my property, and where the money’s put out,

and everything. And I’ve made everything ready to change my mind, and

do as I like at the last. Do you hear, missy? I’ve got my faculties.”

“Well, sir?” said Mary, quietly.

He now lowered his tone with an air of deeper cunning. “I’ve made two

wills, and I’m going to burn one. Now you do as I tell you. This is the

key of my iron chest, in the closet there. You push well at the side of

the brass plate at the top, till it goes like a bolt: then you can put

the key in the front lock and turn it. See and do that; and take out

the topmost paper—Last Will and Testament—big printed.”

“No, sir,” said Mary, in a firm voice, “I cannot do that.”

“Not do it? I tell you, you must,” said the old man, his voice

beginning to shake under the shock of this resistance.

“I cannot touch your iron chest or your will. I must refuse to do

anything that might lay me open to suspicion.”

“I tell you, I’m in my right mind. Shan’t I do as I like at the last? I

made two wills on purpose. Take the key, I say.”

“No, sir, I will not,” said Mary, more resolutely still. Her repulsion

was getting stronger.

“I tell you, there’s no time to lose.”

“I cannot help that, sir. I will not let the close of your life soil

the beginning of mine. I will not touch your iron chest or your will.”

She moved to a little distance from the bedside.

The old man paused with a blank stare for a little while, holding the

one key erect on the ring; then with an agitated jerk he began to work

with his bony left hand at emptying the tin box before him.

“Missy,” he began to say, hurriedly, “look here! take the money—the

notes and gold—look here—take it—you shall have it all—do as I tell

you.”

He made an effort to stretch out the key towards her as far as

possible, and Mary again retreated.

“I will not touch your key or your money, sir. Pray don’t ask me to do

it again. If you do, I must go and call your brother.”

He let his hand fall, and for the first time in her life Mary saw old

Peter Featherstone begin to cry childishly. She said, in as gentle a

tone as she could command, “Pray put up your money, sir;” and then went

away to her seat by the fire, hoping this would help to convince him

that it was useless to say more. Presently he rallied and said eagerly—

“Look here, then. Call the young chap. Call Fred Vincy.”

Mary’s heart began to beat more quickly. Various ideas rushed through

her mind as to what the burning of a second will might imply. She had

to make a difficult decision in a hurry.

“I will call him, if you will let me call Mr. Jonah and others with

him.”

“Nobody else, I say. The young chap. I shall do as I like.”

“Wait till broad daylight, sir, when every one is stirring. Or let me

call Simmons now, to go and fetch the lawyer? He can be here in less

than two hours.”

“Lawyer? What do I want with the lawyer? Nobody shall know—I say,

nobody shall know. I shall do as I like.”

“Let me call some one else, sir,” said Mary, persuasively. She did not

like her position—alone with the old man, who seemed to show a strange

flaring of nervous energy which enabled him to speak again and again

without falling into his usual cough; yet she desired not to push

unnecessarily the contradiction which agitated him. “Let me, pray, call

some one else.”

“You let me alone, I say. Look here, missy. Take the money. You’ll

never have the chance again. It’s pretty nigh two hundred—there’s more

in the box, and nobody knows how much there was. Take it and do as I

tell you.”

Mary, standing by the fire, saw its red light falling on the old man,

propped up on his pillows and bed-rest, with his bony hand holding out

the key, and the money lying on the quilt before him. She never forgot

that vision of a man wanting to do as he liked at the last. But the way

in which he had put the offer of the money urged her to speak with

harder resolution than ever.

“It is of no use, sir. I will not do it. Put up your money. I will not

touch your money. I will do anything else I can to comfort you; but I

will not touch your keys or your money.”

“Anything else—anything else!” said old Featherstone, with hoarse rage,

which, as if in a nightmare, tried to be loud, and yet was only just

audible. “I want nothing else. You come here—you come here.”

Mary approached him cautiously, knowing him too well. She saw him

dropping his keys and trying to grasp his stick, while he looked at her

like an aged hyena, the muscles of his face getting distorted with the

effort of his hand. She paused at a safe distance.

“Let me give you some cordial,” she said, quietly, “and try to compose

yourself. You will perhaps go to sleep. And to-morrow by daylight you

can do as you like.”

He lifted the stick, in spite of her being beyond his reach, and threw

it with a hard effort which was but impotence. It fell, slipping over

the foot of the bed. Mary let it lie, and retreated to her chair by the

fire. By-and-by she would go to him with the cordial. Fatigue would

make him passive. It was getting towards the chillest moment of the

morning, the fire had got low, and she could see through the chink

between the moreen window-curtains the light whitened by the blind.

Having put some wood on the fire and thrown a shawl over her, she sat

down, hoping that Mr. Featherstone might now fall asleep. If she went

near him the irritation might be kept up. He had said nothing after

throwing the stick, but she had seen him taking his keys again and

laying his right hand on the money. He did not put it up, however, and

she thought that he was dropping off to sleep.

But Mary herself began to be more agitated by the remembrance of what

she had gone through, than she had been by the reality—questioning

those acts of hers which had come imperatively and excluded all

question in the critical moment.

Presently the dry wood sent out a flame which illuminated every

crevice, and Mary saw that the old man was lying quietly with his head

turned a little on one side. She went towards him with inaudible steps,

and thought that his face looked strangely motionless; but the next

moment the movement of the flame communicating itself to all objects

made her uncertain. The violent beating of her heart rendered her

perceptions so doubtful that even when she touched him and listened for

his breathing, she could not trust her conclusions. She went to the

window and gently propped aside the curtain and blind, so that the

still light of the sky fell on the bed.

The next moment she ran to the bell and rang it energetically. In a

very little while there was no longer any doubt that Peter Featherstone

was dead, with his right hand clasping the keys, and his left hand

lying on the heap of notes and gold.

BOOK IV.

THREE LOVE PROBLEMS.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

“1\_st Gent\_. Such men as this are feathers, chips, and straws,

Carry no weight, no force.

2\_d Gent\_. But levity

Is causal too, and makes the sum of weight.

For power finds its place in lack of power;

Advance is cession, and the driven ship

May run aground because the helmsman’s thought

Lacked force to balance opposites.”

It was on a morning of May that Peter Featherstone was buried. In the

prosaic neighborhood of Middlemarch, May was not always warm and sunny,

and on this particular morning a chill wind was blowing the blossoms

from the surrounding gardens on to the green mounds of Lowick

churchyard. Swiftly moving clouds only now and then allowed a gleam to

light up any object, whether ugly or beautiful, that happened to stand

within its golden shower. In the churchyard the objects were remarkably

various, for there was a little country crowd waiting to see the

funeral. The news had spread that it was to be a “big burying;” the old

gentleman had left written directions about everything and meant to

have a funeral “beyond his betters.” This was true; for old

Featherstone had not been a Harpagon whose passions had all been

devoured by the ever-lean and ever-hungry passion of saving, and who

would drive a bargain with his undertaker beforehand. He loved money,

but he also loved to spend it in gratifying his peculiar tastes, and

perhaps he loved it best of all as a means of making others feel his

power more or less uncomfortably. If any one will here contend that

there must have been traits of goodness in old Featherstone, I will not

presume to deny this; but I must observe that goodness is of a modest

nature, easily discouraged, and when much privacy, elbowed in early

life by unabashed vices, is apt to retire into extreme privacy, so that

it is more easily believed in by those who construct a selfish old

gentleman theoretically, than by those who form the narrower judgments

based on his personal acquaintance. In any case, he had been bent on

having a handsome funeral, and on having persons “bid” to it who would

rather have stayed at home. He had even desired that female relatives

should follow him to the grave, and poor sister Martha had taken a

difficult journey for this purpose from the Chalky Flats. She and Jane

would have been altogether cheered (in a tearful manner) by this sign

that a brother who disliked seeing them while he was living had been

prospectively fond of their presence when he should have become a

testator, if the sign had not been made equivocal by being extended to

Mrs. Vincy, whose expense in handsome crape seemed to imply the most

presumptuous hopes, aggravated by a bloom of complexion which told

pretty plainly that she was not a blood-relation, but of that generally

objectionable class called wife’s kin.

We are all of us imaginative in some form or other, for images are the

brood of desire; and poor old Featherstone, who laughed much at the way

in which others cajoled themselves, did not escape the fellowship of

illusion. In writing the programme for his burial he certainly did not

make clear to himself that his pleasure in the little drama of which it

formed a part was confined to anticipation. In chuckling over the

vexations he could inflict by the rigid clutch of his dead hand, he

inevitably mingled his consciousness with that livid stagnant presence,

and so far as he was preoccupied with a future life, it was with one of

gratification inside his coffin. Thus old Featherstone was imaginative,

after his fashion.

However, the three mourning-coaches were filled according to the

written orders of the deceased. There were pall-bearers on horseback,

with the richest scarfs and hatbands, and even the under-bearers had

trappings of woe which were of a good well-priced quality. The black

procession, when dismounted, looked the larger for the smallness of the

churchyard; the heavy human faces and the black draperies shivering in

the wind seemed to tell of a world strangely incongruous with the

lightly dropping blossoms and the gleams of sunshine on the daisies.

The clergyman who met the procession was Mr. Cadwallader—also according

to the request of Peter Featherstone, prompted as usual by peculiar

reasons. Having a contempt for curates, whom he always called

understrappers, he was resolved to be buried by a beneficed clergyman.

Mr. Casaubon was out of the question, not merely because he declined

duty of this sort, but because Featherstone had an especial dislike to

him as the rector of his own parish, who had a lien on the land in the

shape of tithe, also as the deliverer of morning sermons, which the old

man, being in his pew and not at all sleepy, had been obliged to sit

through with an inward snarl. He had an objection to a parson stuck up

above his head preaching to him. But his relations with Mr. Cadwallader

had been of a different kind: the trout-stream which ran through Mr.

Casaubon’s land took its course through Featherstone’s also, so that

Mr. Cadwallader was a parson who had had to ask a favor instead of

preaching. Moreover, he was one of the high gentry living four miles

away from Lowick, and was thus exalted to an equal sky with the sheriff

of the county and other dignities vaguely regarded as necessary to the

system of things. There would be a satisfaction in being buried by Mr.

Cadwallader, whose very name offered a fine opportunity for pronouncing

wrongly if you liked.

This distinction conferred on the Rector of Tipton and Freshitt was the

reason why Mrs. Cadwallader made one of the group that watched old

Featherstone’s funeral from an upper window of the manor. She was not

fond of visiting that house, but she liked, as she said, to see

collections of strange animals such as there would be at this funeral;

and she had persuaded Sir James and the young Lady Chettam to drive the

Rector and herself to Lowick in order that the visit might be

altogether pleasant.

“I will go anywhere with you, Mrs. Cadwallader,” Celia had said; “but I

don’t like funerals.”

“Oh, my dear, when you have a clergyman in your family you must

accommodate your tastes: I did that very early. When I married Humphrey

I made up my mind to like sermons, and I set out by liking the end very

much. That soon spread to the middle and the beginning, because I

couldn’t have the end without them.”

“No, to be sure not,” said the Dowager Lady Chettam, with stately

emphasis.

The upper window from which the funeral could be well seen was in the

room occupied by Mr. Casaubon when he had been forbidden to work; but

he had resumed nearly his habitual style of life now in spite of

warnings and prescriptions, and after politely welcoming Mrs.

Cadwallader had slipped again into the library to chew a cud of erudite

mistake about Cush and Mizraim.

But for her visitors Dorothea too might have been shut up in the

library, and would not have witnessed this scene of old Featherstone’s

funeral, which, aloof as it seemed to be from the tenor of her life,

always afterwards came back to her at the touch of certain sensitive

points in memory, just as the vision of St. Peter’s at Rome was inwoven

with moods of despondency. Scenes which make vital changes in our

neighbors’ lot are but the background of our own, yet, like a

particular aspect of the fields and trees, they become associated for

us with the epochs of our own history, and make a part of that unity

which lies in the selection of our keenest consciousness.

The dream-like association of something alien and ill-understood with

the deepest secrets of her experience seemed to mirror that sense of

loneliness which was due to the very ardor of Dorothea’s nature. The

country gentry of old time lived in a rarefied social air: dotted apart

on their stations up the mountain they looked down with imperfect

discrimination on the belts of thicker life below. And Dorothea was not

at ease in the perspective and chilliness of that height.

“I shall not look any more,” said Celia, after the train had entered

the church, placing herself a little behind her husband’s elbow so that

she could slyly touch his coat with her cheek. “I dare say Dodo likes

it: she is fond of melancholy things and ugly people.”

“I am fond of knowing something about the people I live among,” said

Dorothea, who had been watching everything with the interest of a monk

on his holiday tour. “It seems to me we know nothing of our neighbors,

unless they are cottagers. One is constantly wondering what sort of

lives other people lead, and how they take things. I am quite obliged

to Mrs. Cadwallader for coming and calling me out of the library.”

“Quite right to feel obliged to me,” said Mrs. Cadwallader. “Your rich

Lowick farmers are as curious as any buffaloes or bisons, and I dare

say you don’t half see them at church. They are quite different from

your uncle’s tenants or Sir James’s—monsters—farmers without

landlords—one can’t tell how to class them.”

“Most of these followers are not Lowick people,” said Sir James; “I

suppose they are legatees from a distance, or from Middlemarch.

Lovegood tells me the old fellow has left a good deal of money as well

as land.”

“Think of that now! when so many younger sons can’t dine at their own

expense,” said Mrs. Cadwallader. “Ah,” turning round at the sound of

the opening door, “here is Mr. Brooke. I felt that we were incomplete

before, and here is the explanation. You are come to see this odd

funeral, of course?”

“No, I came to look after Casaubon—to see how he goes on, you know. And

to bring a little news—a little news, my dear,” said Mr. Brooke,

nodding at Dorothea as she came towards him. “I looked into the

library, and I saw Casaubon over his books. I told him it wouldn’t do:

I said, ‘This will never do, you know: think of your wife, Casaubon.’

And he promised me to come up. I didn’t tell him my news: I said, he

must come up.”

“Ah, now they are coming out of church,” Mrs. Cadwallader exclaimed.

“Dear me, what a wonderfully mixed set! Mr. Lydgate as doctor, I

suppose. But that is really a good looking woman, and the fair young

man must be her son. Who are they, Sir James, do you know?”

“I see Vincy, the Mayor of Middlemarch; they are probably his wife and

son,” said Sir James, looking interrogatively at Mr. Brooke, who nodded

and said—

“Yes, a very decent family—a very good fellow is Vincy; a credit to the

manufacturing interest. You have seen him at my house, you know.”

“Ah, yes: one of your secret committee,” said Mrs. Cadwallader,

provokingly.

“A coursing fellow, though,” said Sir James, with a fox-hunter’s

disgust.

“And one of those who suck the life out of the wretched handloom

weavers in Tipton and Freshitt. That is how his family look so fair and

sleek,” said Mrs. Cadwallader. “Those dark, purple-faced people are an

excellent foil. Dear me, they are like a set of jugs! Do look at

Humphrey: one might fancy him an ugly archangel towering above them in

his white surplice.”

“It’s a solemn thing, though, a funeral,” said Mr. Brooke, “if you take

it in that light, you know.”

“But I am not taking it in that light. I can’t wear my solemnity too

often, else it will go to rags. It was time the old man died, and none

of these people are sorry.”

“How piteous!” said Dorothea. “This funeral seems to me the most dismal

thing I ever saw. It is a blot on the morning. I cannot bear to think

that any one should die and leave no love behind.”

She was going to say more, but she saw her husband enter and seat

himself a little in the background. The difference his presence made to

her was not always a happy one: she felt that he often inwardly

objected to her speech.

“Positively,” exclaimed Mrs. Cadwallader, “there is a new face come out

from behind that broad man queerer than any of them: a little round

head with bulging eyes—a sort of frog-face—do look. He must be of

another blood, I think.”

“Let me see!” said Celia, with awakened curiosity, standing behind Mrs.

Cadwallader and leaning forward over her head. “Oh, what an odd face!”

Then with a quick change to another sort of surprised expression, she

added, “Why, Dodo, you never told me that Mr. Ladislaw was come again!”

Dorothea felt a shock of alarm: every one noticed her sudden paleness

as she looked up immediately at her uncle, while Mr. Casaubon looked at

her.

“He came with me, you know; he is my guest—puts up with me at the

Grange,” said Mr. Brooke, in his easiest tone, nodding at Dorothea, as

if the announcement were just what she might have expected. “And we

have brought the picture at the top of the carriage. I knew you would

be pleased with the surprise, Casaubon. There you are to the very

life—as Aquinas, you know. Quite the right sort of thing. And you will

hear young Ladislaw talk about it. He talks uncommonly well—points out

this, that, and the other—knows art and everything of that

kind—companionable, you know—is up with you in any track—what I’ve been

wanting a long while.”

Mr. Casaubon bowed with cold politeness, mastering his irritation, but

only so far as to be silent. He remembered Will’s letter quite as well

as Dorothea did; he had noticed that it was not among the letters which

had been reserved for him on his recovery, and secretly concluding that

Dorothea had sent word to Will not to come to Lowick, he had shrunk

with proud sensitiveness from ever recurring to the subject. He now

inferred that she had asked her uncle to invite Will to the Grange; and

she felt it impossible at that moment to enter into any explanation.

Mrs. Cadwallader’s eyes, diverted from the churchyard, saw a good deal

of dumb show which was not so intelligible to her as she could have

desired, and could not repress the question, “Who is Mr. Ladislaw?”

“A young relative of Mr. Casaubon’s,” said Sir James, promptly. His

good-nature often made him quick and clear-seeing in personal matters,

and he had divined from Dorothea’s glance at her husband that there was

some alarm in her mind.

“A very nice young fellow—Casaubon has done everything for him,”

explained Mr. Brooke. “He repays your expense in him, Casaubon,” he

went on, nodding encouragingly. “I hope he will stay with me a long

while and we shall make something of my documents. I have plenty of

ideas and facts, you know, and I can see he is just the man to put them

into shape—remembers what the right quotations are, \_omne tulit

punctum\_, and that sort of thing—gives subjects a kind of turn. I

invited him some time ago when you were ill, Casaubon; Dorothea said

you couldn’t have anybody in the house, you know, and she asked me to

write.”

Poor Dorothea felt that every word of her uncle’s was about as pleasant

as a grain of sand in the eye to Mr. Casaubon. It would be altogether

unfitting now to explain that she had not wished her uncle to invite

Will Ladislaw. She could not in the least make clear to herself the

reasons for her husband’s dislike to his presence—a dislike painfully

impressed on her by the scene in the library; but she felt the

unbecomingness of saying anything that might convey a notion of it to

others. Mr. Casaubon, indeed, had not thoroughly represented those

mixed reasons to himself; irritated feeling with him, as with all of

us, seeking rather for justification than for self-knowledge. But he

wished to repress outward signs, and only Dorothea could discern the

changes in her husband’s face before he observed with more of dignified

bending and sing-song than usual—

“You are exceedingly hospitable, my dear sir; and I owe you

acknowledgments for exercising your hospitality towards a relative of

mine.”

The funeral was ended now, and the churchyard was being cleared.

“Now you can see him, Mrs. Cadwallader,” said Celia. “He is just like a

miniature of Mr. Casaubon’s aunt that hangs in Dorothea’s boudoir—quite

nice-looking.”

“A very pretty sprig,” said Mrs. Cadwallader, dryly. “What is your

nephew to be, Mr. Casaubon?”

“Pardon me, he is not my nephew. He is my cousin.”

“Well, you know,” interposed Mr. Brooke, “he is trying his wings. He is

just the sort of young fellow to rise. I should be glad to give him an

opportunity. He would make a good secretary, now, like Hobbes, Milton,

Swift—that sort of man.”

“I understand,” said Mrs. Cadwallader. “One who can write speeches.”

“I’ll fetch him in now, eh, Casaubon?” said Mr. Brooke. “He wouldn’t

come in till I had announced him, you know. And we’ll go down and look

at the picture. There you are to the life: a deep subtle sort of

thinker with his fore-finger on the page, while Saint Bonaventure or

somebody else, rather fat and florid, is looking up at the Trinity.

Everything is symbolical, you know—the higher style of art: I like that

up to a certain point, but not too far—it’s rather straining to keep up

with, you know. But you are at home in that, Casaubon. And your

painter’s flesh is good—solidity, transparency, everything of that

sort. I went into that a great deal at one time. However, I’ll go and

fetch Ladislaw.”

CHAPTER XXXV.

“Non, je ne comprends pas de plus charmant plaisir

Que de voir d’héritiers une troupe affligée

Le maintien interdit, et la mine allongée,

Lire un long testament où pales, étonnés

On leur laisse un bonsoir avec un pied de nez.

Pour voir au naturel leur tristesse profonde

Je reviendrais, je crois, exprès de l’autre monde.”

—REGNARD: \_Le Légataire Universel\_.

When the animals entered the Ark in pairs, one may imagine that allied

species made much private remark on each other, and were tempted to

think that so many forms feeding on the same store of fodder were

eminently superfluous, as tending to diminish the rations. (I fear the

part played by the vultures on that occasion would be too painful for

art to represent, those birds being disadvantageously naked about the

gullet, and apparently without rites and ceremonies.)

The same sort of temptation befell the Christian Carnivora who formed

Peter Featherstone’s funeral procession; most of them having their

minds bent on a limited store which each would have liked to get the

most of. The long-recognized blood-relations and connections by

marriage made already a goodly number, which, multiplied by

possibilities, presented a fine range for jealous conjecture and

pathetic hopefulness. Jealousy of the Vincys had created a fellowship

in hostility among all persons of the Featherstone blood, so that in

the absence of any decided indication that one of themselves was to

have more than the rest, the dread lest that long-legged Fred Vincy

should have the land was necessarily dominant, though it left abundant

feeling and leisure for vaguer jealousies, such as were entertained

towards Mary Garth. Solomon found time to reflect that Jonah was

undeserving, and Jonah to abuse Solomon as greedy; Jane, the elder

sister, held that Martha’s children ought not to expect so much as the

young Waules; and Martha, more lax on the subject of primogeniture, was

sorry to think that Jane was so “having.” These nearest of kin were

naturally impressed with the unreasonableness of expectations in

cousins and second cousins, and used their arithmetic in reckoning the

large sums that small legacies might mount to, if there were too many

of them. Two cousins were present to hear the will, and a second cousin

besides Mr. Trumbull. This second cousin was a Middlemarch mercer of

polite manners and superfluous aspirates. The two cousins were elderly

men from Brassing, one of them conscious of claims on the score of

inconvenient expense sustained by him in presents of oysters and other

eatables to his rich cousin Peter; the other entirely saturnine,

leaning his hands and chin on a stick, and conscious of claims based on

no narrow performance but on merit generally: both blameless citizens

of Brassing, who wished that Jonah Featherstone did not live there. The

wit of a family is usually best received among strangers.

“Why, Trumbull himself is pretty sure of five hundred—\_that\_ you may

depend,—I shouldn’t wonder if my brother promised him,” said Solomon,

musing aloud with his sisters, the evening before the funeral.

“Dear, dear!” said poor sister Martha, whose imagination of hundreds

had been habitually narrowed to the amount of her unpaid rent.

But in the morning all the ordinary currents of conjecture were

disturbed by the presence of a strange mourner who had plashed among

them as if from the moon. This was the stranger described by Mrs.

Cadwallader as frog-faced: a man perhaps about two or three and thirty,

whose prominent eyes, thin-lipped, downward-curved mouth, and hair

sleekly brushed away from a forehead that sank suddenly above the ridge

of the eyebrows, certainly gave his face a batrachian unchangeableness

of expression. Here, clearly, was a new legatee; else why was he bidden

as a mourner? Here were new possibilities, raising a new uncertainty,

which almost checked remark in the mourning-coaches. We are all

humiliated by the sudden discovery of a fact which has existed very

comfortably and perhaps been staring at us in private while we have

been making up our world entirely without it. No one had seen this

questionable stranger before except Mary Garth, and she knew nothing

more of him than that he had twice been to Stone Court when Mr.

Featherstone was down-stairs, and had sat alone with him for several

hours. She had found an opportunity of mentioning this to her father,

and perhaps Caleb’s were the only eyes, except the lawyer’s, which

examined the stranger with more of inquiry than of disgust or

suspicion. Caleb Garth, having little expectation and less cupidity,

was interested in the verification of his own guesses, and the calmness

with which he half smilingly rubbed his chin and shot intelligent

glances much as if he were valuing a tree, made a fine contrast with

the alarm or scorn visible in other faces when the unknown mourner,

whose name was understood to be Rigg, entered the wainscoted parlor and

took his seat near the door to make part of the audience when the will

should be read. Just then Mr. Solomon and Mr. Jonah were gone up-stairs

with the lawyer to search for the will; and Mrs. Waule, seeing two

vacant seats between herself and Mr. Borthrop Trumbull, had the spirit

to move next to that great authority, who was handling his watch-seals

and trimming his outlines with a determination not to show anything so

compromising to a man of ability as wonder or surprise.

“I suppose you know everything about what my poor brother’s done, Mr.

Trumbull,” said Mrs. Waule, in the lowest of her woolly tones, while

she turned her crape-shadowed bonnet towards Mr. Trumbull’s ear.

“My good lady, whatever was told me was told in confidence,” said the

auctioneer, putting his hand up to screen that secret.

“Them who’ve made sure of their good-luck may be disappointed yet,”

Mrs. Waule continued, finding some relief in this communication.

“Hopes are often delusive,” said Mr. Trumbull, still in confidence.

“Ah!” said Mrs. Waule, looking across at the Vincys, and then moving

back to the side of her sister Martha.

“It’s wonderful how close poor Peter was,” she said, in the same

undertones. “We none of us know what he might have had on his mind. I

only hope and trust he wasn’t a worse liver than we think of, Martha.”

Poor Mrs. Cranch was bulky, and, breathing asthmatically, had the

additional motive for making her remarks unexceptionable and giving

them a general bearing, that even her whispers were loud and liable to

sudden bursts like those of a deranged barrel-organ.

“I never \_was\_ covetous, Jane,” she replied; “but I have six children

and have buried three, and I didn’t marry into money. The eldest, that

sits there, is but nineteen—so I leave you to guess. And stock always

short, and land most awkward. But if ever I’ve begged and prayed; it’s

been to God above; though where there’s one brother a bachelor and the

other childless after twice marrying—anybody might think!”

Meanwhile, Mr. Vincy had glanced at the passive face of Mr. Rigg, and

had taken out his snuff-box and tapped it, but had put it again

unopened as an indulgence which, however clarifying to the judgment,

was unsuited to the occasion. “I shouldn’t wonder if Featherstone had

better feelings than any of us gave him credit for,” he observed, in

the ear of his wife. “This funeral shows a thought about everybody: it

looks well when a man wants to be followed by his friends, and if they

are humble, not to be ashamed of them. I should be all the better

pleased if he’d left lots of small legacies. They may be uncommonly

useful to fellows in a small way.”

“Everything is as handsome as could be, crape and silk and everything,”

said Mrs. Vincy, contentedly.

But I am sorry to say that Fred was under some difficulty in repressing

a laugh, which would have been more unsuitable than his father’s

snuff-box. Fred had overheard Mr. Jonah suggesting something about a

“love-child,” and with this thought in his mind, the stranger’s face,

which happened to be opposite him, affected him too ludicrously. Mary

Garth, discerning his distress in the twitchings of his mouth, and his

recourse to a cough, came cleverly to his rescue by asking him to

change seats with her, so that he got into a shadowy corner. Fred was

feeling as good-naturedly as possible towards everybody, including

Rigg; and having some relenting towards all these people who were less

lucky than he was aware of being himself, he would not for the world

have behaved amiss; still, it was particularly easy to laugh.

But the entrance of the lawyer and the two brothers drew every one’s

attention. The lawyer was Mr. Standish, and he had come to Stone Court

this morning believing that he knew thoroughly well who would be

pleased and who disappointed before the day was over. The will he

expected to read was the last of three which he had drawn up for Mr.

Featherstone. Mr. Standish was not a man who varied his manners: he

behaved with the same deep-voiced, off-hand civility to everybody, as

if he saw no difference in them, and talked chiefly of the hay-crop,

which would be “very fine, by God!” of the last bulletins concerning

the King, and of the Duke of Clarence, who was a sailor every inch of

him, and just the man to rule over an island like Britain.

Old Featherstone had often reflected as he sat looking at the fire that

Standish would be surprised some day: it is true that if he had done as

he liked at the last, and burnt the will drawn up by another lawyer, he

would not have secured that minor end; still he had had his pleasure in

ruminating on it. And certainly Mr. Standish was surprised, but not at

all sorry; on the contrary, he rather enjoyed the zest of a little

curiosity in his own mind, which the discovery of a second will added

to the prospective amazement on the part of the Featherstone family.

As to the sentiments of Solomon and Jonah, they were held in utter

suspense: it seemed to them that the old will would have a certain

validity, and that there might be such an interlacement of poor Peter’s

former and latter intentions as to create endless “lawing” before

anybody came by their own—an inconvenience which would have at least

the advantage of going all round. Hence the brothers showed a

thoroughly neutral gravity as they re-entered with Mr. Standish; but

Solomon took out his white handkerchief again with a sense that in any

case there would be affecting passages, and crying at funerals, however

dry, was customarily served up in lawn.

Perhaps the person who felt the most throbbing excitement at this

moment was Mary Garth, in the consciousness that it was she who had

virtually determined the production of this second will, which might

have momentous effects on the lot of some persons present. No soul

except herself knew what had passed on that final night.

“The will I hold in my hand,” said Mr. Standish, who, seated at the

table in the middle of the room, took his time about everything,

including the coughs with which he showed a disposition to clear his

voice, “was drawn up by myself and executed by our deceased friend on

the 9th of August, 1825. But I find that there is a subsequent

instrument hitherto unknown to me, bearing date the 20th of July, 1826,

hardly a year later than the previous one. And there is farther, I

see”—Mr. Standish was cautiously travelling over the document with his

spectacles—“a codicil to this latter will, bearing date March 1, 1828.”

“Dear, dear!” said sister Martha, not meaning to be audible, but driven

to some articulation under this pressure of dates.

“I shall begin by reading the earlier will,” continued Mr. Standish,

“since such, as appears by his not having destroyed the document, was

the intention of the deceased.”

The preamble was felt to be rather long, and several besides Solomon

shook their heads pathetically, looking on the ground: all eyes avoided

meeting other eyes, and were chiefly fixed either on the spots in the

table-cloth or on Mr. Standish’s bald head; excepting Mary Garth’s.

When all the rest were trying to look nowhere in particular, it was

safe for her to look at them. And at the sound of the first “give and

bequeath” she could see all complexions changing subtly, as if some

faint vibration were passing through them, save that of Mr. Rigg. He

sat in unaltered calm, and, in fact, the company, preoccupied with more

important problems, and with the complication of listening to bequests

which might or might not be revoked, had ceased to think of him. Fred

blushed, and Mr. Vincy found it impossible to do without his snuff-box

in his hand, though he kept it closed.

The small bequests came first, and even the recollection that there was

another will and that poor Peter might have thought better of it, could

not quell the rising disgust and indignation. One likes to be done well

by in every tense, past, present, and future. And here was Peter

capable five years ago of leaving only two hundred apiece to his own

brothers and sisters, and only a hundred apiece to his own nephews and

nieces: the Garths were not mentioned, but Mrs. Vincy and Rosamond were

each to have a hundred. Mr. Trumbull was to have the gold-headed cane

and fifty pounds; the other second cousins and the cousins present were

each to have the like handsome sum, which, as the saturnine cousin

observed, was a sort of legacy that left a man nowhere; and there was

much more of such offensive dribbling in favor of persons not

present—problematical, and, it was to be feared, low connections.

Altogether, reckoning hastily, here were about three thousand disposed

of. Where then had Peter meant the rest of the money to go—and where

the land? and what was revoked and what not revoked—and was the

revocation for better or for worse? All emotion must be conditional,

and might turn out to be the wrong thing. The men were strong enough to

bear up and keep quiet under this confused suspense; some letting their

lower lip fall, others pursing it up, according to the habit of their

muscles. But Jane and Martha sank under the rush of questions, and

began to cry; poor Mrs. Cranch being half moved with the consolation of

getting any hundreds at all without working for them, and half aware

that her share was scanty; whereas Mrs. Waule’s mind was entirely

flooded with the sense of being an own sister and getting little, while

somebody else was to have much. The general expectation now was that

the “much” would fall to Fred Vincy, but the Vincys themselves were

surprised when ten thousand pounds in specified investments were

declared to be bequeathed to him:—was the land coming too? Fred bit his

lips: it was difficult to help smiling, and Mrs. Vincy felt herself the

happiest of women—possible revocation shrinking out of sight in this

dazzling vision.

There was still a residue of personal property as well as the land, but

the whole was left to one person, and that person was—O possibilities!

O expectations founded on the favor of “close” old gentlemen! O endless

vocatives that would still leave expression slipping helpless from the

measurement of mortal folly!—that residuary legatee was Joshua Rigg,

who was also sole executor, and who was to take thenceforth the name of

Featherstone.

There was a rustling which seemed like a shudder running round the

room. Every one stared afresh at Mr. Rigg, who apparently experienced

no surprise.

“A most singular testamentary disposition!” exclaimed Mr. Trumbull,

preferring for once that he should be considered ignorant in the past.

“But there is a second will—there is a further document. We have not

yet heard the final wishes of the deceased.”

Mary Garth was feeling that what they had yet to hear were not the

final wishes. The second will revoked everything except the legacies to

the low persons before mentioned (some alterations in these being the

occasion of the codicil), and the bequest of all the land lying in

Lowick parish with all the stock and household furniture, to Joshua

Rigg. The residue of the property was to be devoted to the erection and

endowment of almshouses for old men, to be called Featherstone’s

Alms-Houses, and to be built on a piece of land near Middlemarch

already bought for the purpose by the testator, he wishing—so the

document declared—to please God Almighty. Nobody present had a

farthing; but Mr. Trumbull had the gold-headed cane. It took some time

for the company to recover the power of expression. Mary dared not look

at Fred.

Mr. Vincy was the first to speak—after using his snuff-box

energetically—and he spoke with loud indignation. “The most

unaccountable will I ever heard! I should say he was not in his right

mind when he made it. I should say this last will was void,” added Mr.

Vincy, feeling that this expression put the thing in the true light.

“Eh Standish?”

“Our deceased friend always knew what he was about, I think,” said Mr.

Standish. “Everything is quite regular. Here is a letter from Clemmens

of Brassing tied with the will. He drew it up. A very respectable

solicitor.”

“I never noticed any alienation of mind—any aberration of intellect in

the late Mr. Featherstone,” said Borthrop Trumbull, “but I call this

will eccentric. I was always willingly of service to the old soul; and

he intimated pretty plainly a sense of obligation which would show

itself in his will. The gold-headed cane is farcical considered as an

acknowledgment to me; but happily I am above mercenary considerations.”

“There’s nothing very surprising in the matter that I can see,” said

Caleb Garth. “Anybody might have had more reason for wondering if the

will had been what you might expect from an open-minded straightforward

man. For my part, I wish there was no such thing as a will.”

“That’s a strange sentiment to come from a Christian man, by God!” said

the lawyer. “I should like to know how you will back that up, Garth!”

“Oh,” said Caleb, leaning forward, adjusting his finger-tips with

nicety and looking meditatively on the ground. It always seemed to him

that words were the hardest part of “business.”

But here Mr. Jonah Featherstone made himself heard. “Well, he always

was a fine hypocrite, was my brother Peter. But this will cuts out

everything. If I’d known, a wagon and six horses shouldn’t have drawn

me from Brassing. I’ll put a white hat and drab coat on to-morrow.”

“Dear, dear,” wept Mrs. Cranch, “and we’ve been at the expense of

travelling, and that poor lad sitting idle here so long! It’s the first

time I ever heard my brother Peter was so wishful to please God

Almighty; but if I was to be struck helpless I must say it’s hard—I can

think no other.”

“It’ll do him no good where he’s gone, that’s my belief,” said Solomon,

with a bitterness which was remarkably genuine, though his tone could

not help being sly. “Peter was a bad liver, and almshouses won’t cover

it, when he’s had the impudence to show it at the last.”

“And all the while had got his own lawful family—brothers and sisters

and nephews and nieces—and has sat in church with ’em whenever he

thought well to come,” said Mrs. Waule. “And might have left his

property so respectable, to them that’s never been used to extravagance

or unsteadiness in no manner of way—and not so poor but what they could

have saved every penny and made more of it. And me—the trouble I’ve

been at, times and times, to come here and be sisterly—and him with

things on his mind all the while that might make anybody’s flesh creep.

But if the Almighty’s allowed it, he means to punish him for it.

Brother Solomon, I shall be going, if you’ll drive me.”

“I’ve no desire to put my foot on the premises again,” said Solomon.

“I’ve got land of my own and property of my own to will away.”

“It’s a poor tale how luck goes in the world,” said Jonah. “It never

answers to have a bit of spirit in you. You’d better be a dog in the

manger. But those above ground might learn a lesson. One fool’s will is

enough in a family.”

“There’s more ways than one of being a fool,” said Solomon. “I shan’t

leave my money to be poured down the sink, and I shan’t leave it to

foundlings from Africay. I like Featherstones that were brewed such,

and not turned Featherstones with sticking the name on ’em.”

Solomon addressed these remarks in a loud aside to Mrs. Waule as he

rose to accompany her. Brother Jonah felt himself capable of much more

stinging wit than this, but he reflected that there was no use in

offending the new proprietor of Stone Court, until you were certain

that he was quite without intentions of hospitality towards witty men

whose name he was about to bear.

Mr. Joshua Rigg, in fact, appeared to trouble himself little about any

innuendoes, but showed a notable change of manner, walking coolly up to

Mr. Standish and putting business questions with much coolness. He had

a high chirping voice and a vile accent. Fred, whom he no longer moved

to laughter, thought him the lowest monster he had ever seen. But Fred

was feeling rather sick. The Middlemarch mercer waited for an

opportunity of engaging Mr. Rigg in conversation: there was no knowing

how many pairs of legs the new proprietor might require hose for, and

profits were more to be relied on than legacies. Also, the mercer, as a

second cousin, was dispassionate enough to feel curiosity.

Mr. Vincy, after his one outburst, had remained proudly silent, though

too much preoccupied with unpleasant feelings to think of moving, till

he observed that his wife had gone to Fred’s side and was crying

silently while she held her darling’s hand. He rose immediately, and

turning his back on the company while he said to her in an

undertone,—“Don’t give way, Lucy; don’t make a fool of yourself, my

dear, before these people,” he added in his usual loud voice—“Go and

order the phaeton, Fred; I have no time to waste.”

Mary Garth had before this been getting ready to go home with her

father. She met Fred in the hall, and now for the first time had the

courage to look at him. He had that withered sort of paleness which

will sometimes come on young faces, and his hand was very cold when she

shook it. Mary too was agitated; she was conscious that fatally,

without will of her own, she had perhaps made a great difference to

Fred’s lot.

“Good-by,” she said, with affectionate sadness. “Be brave, Fred. I do

believe you are better without the money. What was the good of it to

Mr. Featherstone?”

“That’s all very fine,” said Fred, pettishly. “What is a fellow to do?

I must go into the Church now.” (He knew that this would vex Mary: very

well; then she must tell him what else he could do.) “And I thought I

should be able to pay your father at once and make everything right.

And you have not even a hundred pounds left you. What shall you do now,

Mary?”

“Take another situation, of course, as soon as I can get one. My father

has enough to do to keep the rest, without me. Good-by.”

In a very short time Stone Court was cleared of well-brewed

Featherstones and other long-accustomed visitors. Another stranger had

been brought to settle in the neighborhood of Middlemarch, but in the

case of Mr. Rigg Featherstone there was more discontent with immediate

visible consequences than speculation as to the effect which his

presence might have in the future. No soul was prophetic enough to have

any foreboding as to what might appear on the trial of Joshua Rigg.

And here I am naturally led to reflect on the means of elevating a low

subject. Historical parallels are remarkably efficient in this way. The

chief objection to them is, that the diligent narrator may lack space,

or (what is often the same thing) may not be able to think of them with

any degree of particularity, though he may have a philosophical

confidence that if known they would be illustrative. It seems an easier

and shorter way to dignity, to observe that—since there never was a

true story which could not be told in parables, where you might put a

monkey for a margrave, and vice versa—whatever has been or is to be

narrated by me about low people, may be ennobled by being considered a

parable; so that if any bad habits and ugly consequences are brought

into view, the reader may have the relief of regarding them as not more

than figuratively ungenteel, and may feel himself virtually in company

with persons of some style. Thus while I tell the truth about loobies,

my reader’s imagination need not be entirely excluded from an

occupation with lords; and the petty sums which any bankrupt of high

standing would be sorry to retire upon, may be lifted to the level of

high commercial transactions by the inexpensive addition of

proportional ciphers.

As to any provincial history in which the agents are all of high moral

rank, that must be of a date long posterior to the first Reform Bill,

and Peter Featherstone, you perceive, was dead and buried some months

before Lord Grey came into office.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

’T is strange to see the humors of these men,

These great aspiring spirits, that should be wise:

. . . . . . . .

For being the nature of great spirits to love

To be where they may be most eminent;

They, rating of themselves so farre above

Us in conceit, with whom they do frequent,

Imagine how we wonder and esteeme

All that they do or say; which makes them strive

To make our admiration more extreme,

Which they suppose they cannot, ’less they give

Notice of their extreme and highest thoughts.

—DANIEL: \_Tragedy of Philotas\_.

Mr. Vincy went home from the reading of the will with his point of view

considerably changed in relation to many subjects. He was an

open-minded man, but given to indirect modes of expressing himself:

when he was disappointed in a market for his silk braids, he swore at

the groom; when his brother-in-law Bulstrode had vexed him, he made

cutting remarks on Methodism; and it was now apparent that he regarded

Fred’s idleness with a sudden increase of severity, by his throwing an

embroidered cap out of the smoking-room on to the hall-floor.

“Well, sir,” he observed, when that young gentleman was moving off to

bed, “I hope you’ve made up your mind now to go up next term and pass

your examination. I’ve taken my resolution, so I advise you to lose no

time in taking yours.”

Fred made no answer: he was too utterly depressed. Twenty-four hours

ago he had thought that instead of needing to know what he should do,

he should by this time know that he needed to do nothing: that he

should hunt in pink, have a first-rate hunter, ride to cover on a fine

hack, and be generally respected for doing so; moreover, that he should

be able at once to pay Mr. Garth, and that Mary could no longer have

any reason for not marrying him. And all this was to have come without

study or other inconvenience, purely by the favor of providence in the

shape of an old gentleman’s caprice. But now, at the end of the

twenty-four hours, all those firm expectations were upset. It was

“rather hard lines” that while he was smarting under this

disappointment he should be treated as if he could have helped it. But

he went away silently and his mother pleaded for him.

“Don’t be hard on the poor boy, Vincy. He’ll turn out well yet, though

that wicked man has deceived him. I feel as sure as I sit here, Fred

will turn out well—else why was he brought back from the brink of the

grave? And I call it a robbery: it was like giving him the land, to

promise it; and what is promising, if making everybody believe is not

promising? And you see he did leave him ten thousand pounds, and then

took it away again.”

“Took it away again!” said Mr. Vincy, pettishly. “I tell you the lad’s

an unlucky lad, Lucy. And you’ve always spoiled him.”

“Well, Vincy, he was my first, and you made a fine fuss with him when

he came. You were as proud as proud,” said Mrs. Vincy, easily

recovering her cheerful smile.

“Who knows what babies will turn to? I was fool enough, I dare say,”

said the husband—more mildly, however.

“But who has handsomer, better children than ours? Fred is far beyond

other people’s sons: you may hear it in his speech, that he has kept

college company. And Rosamond—where is there a girl like her? She might

stand beside any lady in the land, and only look the better for it. You

see—Mr. Lydgate has kept the highest company and been everywhere, and

he fell in love with her at once. Not but what I could have wished

Rosamond had not engaged herself. She might have met somebody on a

visit who would have been a far better match; I mean at her

schoolfellow Miss Willoughby’s. There are relations in that family

quite as high as Mr. Lydgate’s.”

“Damn relations!” said Mr. Vincy; “I’ve had enough of them. I don’t

want a son-in-law who has got nothing but his relations to recommend

him.”

“Why, my dear,” said Mrs. Vincy, “you seemed as pleased as could be

about it. It’s true, I wasn’t at home; but Rosamond told me you hadn’t

a word to say against the engagement. And she has begun to buy in the

best linen and cambric for her underclothing.”

“Not by my will,” said Mr. Vincy. “I shall have enough to do this year,

with an idle scamp of a son, without paying for wedding-clothes. The

times are as tight as can be; everybody is being ruined; and I don’t

believe Lydgate has got a farthing. I shan’t give my consent to their

marrying. Let ’em wait, as their elders have done before ’em.”

“Rosamond will take it hard, Vincy, and you know you never could bear

to cross her.”

“Yes, I could. The sooner the engagement’s off, the better. I don’t

believe he’ll ever make an income, the way he goes on. He makes

enemies; that’s all I hear of his making.”

“But he stands very high with Mr. Bulstrode, my dear. The marriage

would please \_him\_, I should think.”

“Please the deuce!” said Mr. Vincy. “Bulstrode won’t pay for their

keep. And if Lydgate thinks I’m going to give money for them to set up

housekeeping, he’s mistaken, that’s all. I expect I shall have to put

down my horses soon. You’d better tell Rosy what I say.”

This was a not infrequent procedure with Mr. Vincy—to be rash in jovial

assent, and on becoming subsequently conscious that he had been rash,

to employ others in making the offensive retractation. However, Mrs.

Vincy, who never willingly opposed her husband, lost no time the next

morning in letting Rosamond know what he had said. Rosamond, examining

some muslin-work, listened in silence, and at the end gave a certain

turn of her graceful neck, of which only long experience could teach

you that it meant perfect obstinacy.

“What do you say, my dear?” said her mother, with affectionate

deference.

“Papa does not mean anything of the kind,” said Rosamond, quite calmly.

“He has always said that he wished me to marry the man I loved. And I

shall marry Mr. Lydgate. It is seven weeks now since papa gave his

consent. And I hope we shall have Mrs. Bretton’s house.”

“Well, my dear, I shall leave you to manage your papa. You always do

manage everybody. But if we ever do go and get damask, Sadler’s is the

place—far better than Hopkins’s. Mrs. Bretton’s is very large, though:

I should love you to have such a house; but it will take a great deal

of furniture—carpeting and everything, besides plate and glass. And you

hear, your papa says he will give no money. Do you think Mr. Lydgate

expects it?”

“You cannot imagine that I should ask him, mamma. Of course he

understands his own affairs.”

“But he may have been looking for money, my dear, and we all thought of

your having a pretty legacy as well as Fred;—and now everything is so

dreadful—there’s no pleasure in thinking of anything, with that poor

boy disappointed as he is.”

“That has nothing to do with my marriage, mamma. Fred must leave off

being idle. I am going up-stairs to take this work to Miss Morgan: she

does the open hemming very well. Mary Garth might do some work for me

now, I should think. Her sewing is exquisite; it is the nicest thing I

know about Mary. I should so like to have all my cambric frilling

double-hemmed. And it takes a long time.”

Mrs. Vincy’s belief that Rosamond could manage her papa was well

founded. Apart from his dinners and his coursing, Mr. Vincy, blustering

as he was, had as little of his own way as if he had been a prime

minister: the force of circumstances was easily too much for him, as it

is for most pleasure-loving florid men; and the circumstance called

Rosamond was particularly forcible by means of that mild persistence

which, as we know, enables a white soft living substance to make its

way in spite of opposing rock. Papa was not a rock: he had no other

fixity than that fixity of alternating impulses sometimes called habit,

and this was altogether unfavorable to his taking the only decisive

line of conduct in relation to his daughter’s engagement—namely, to

inquire thoroughly into Lydgate’s circumstances, declare his own

inability to furnish money, and forbid alike either a speedy marriage

or an engagement which must be too lengthy. That seems very simple and

easy in the statement; but a disagreeable resolve formed in the chill

hours of the morning had as many conditions against it as the early

frost, and rarely persisted under the warming influences of the day.

The indirect though emphatic expression of opinion to which Mr. Vincy

was prone suffered much restraint in this case: Lydgate was a proud man

towards whom innuendoes were obviously unsafe, and throwing his hat on

the floor was out of the question. Mr. Vincy was a little in awe of

him, a little vain that he wanted to marry Rosamond, a little

indisposed to raise a question of money in which his own position was

not advantageous, a little afraid of being worsted in dialogue with a

man better educated and more highly bred than himself, and a little

afraid of doing what his daughter would not like. The part Mr. Vincy

preferred playing was that of the generous host whom nobody criticises.

In the earlier half of the day there was business to hinder any formal

communication of an adverse resolve; in the later there was dinner,

wine, whist, and general satisfaction. And in the mean while the hours

were each leaving their little deposit and gradually forming the final

reason for inaction, namely, that action was too late. The accepted

lover spent most of his evenings in Lowick Gate, and a love-making not

at all dependent on money-advances from fathers-in-law, or prospective

income from a profession, went on flourishingly under Mr. Vincy’s own

eyes. Young love-making—that gossamer web! Even the points it clings

to—the things whence its subtle interlacings are swung—are scarcely

perceptible: momentary touches of fingertips, meetings of rays from

blue and dark orbs, unfinished phrases, lightest changes of cheek and

lip, faintest tremors. The web itself is made of spontaneous beliefs

and indefinable joys, yearnings of one life towards another, visions of

completeness, indefinite trust. And Lydgate fell to spinning that web

from his inward self with wonderful rapidity, in spite of experience

supposed to be finished off with the drama of Laure—in spite too of

medicine and biology; for the inspection of macerated muscle or of eyes

presented in a dish (like Santa Lucia’s), and other incidents of

scientific inquiry, are observed to be less incompatible with poetic

love than a native dulness or a lively addiction to the lowest prose.

As for Rosamond, she was in the water-lily’s expanding wonderment at

its own fuller life, and she too was spinning industriously at the

mutual web. All this went on in the corner of the drawing-room where

the piano stood, and subtle as it was, the light made it a sort of

rainbow visible to many observers besides Mr. Farebrother. The

certainty that Miss Vincy and Mr. Lydgate were engaged became general

in Middlemarch without the aid of formal announcement.

Aunt Bulstrode was again stirred to anxiety; but this time she

addressed herself to her brother, going to the warehouse expressly to

avoid Mrs. Vincy’s volatility. His replies were not satisfactory.

“Walter, you never mean to tell me that you have allowed all this to go

on without inquiry into Mr. Lydgate’s prospects?” said Mrs. Bulstrode,

opening her eyes with wider gravity at her brother, who was in his

peevish warehouse humor. “Think of this girl brought up in luxury—in

too worldly a way, I am sorry to say—what will she do on a small

income?”

“Oh, confound it, Harriet! What can I do when men come into the town

without any asking of mine? Did you shut your house up against Lydgate?

Bulstrode has pushed him forward more than anybody. I never made any

fuss about the young fellow. You should go and talk to your husband

about it, not me.”

“Well, really, Walter, how can Mr. Bulstrode be to blame? I am sure he

did not wish for the engagement.”

“Oh, if Bulstrode had not taken him by the hand, I should never have

invited him.”

“But you called him in to attend on Fred, and I am sure that was a

mercy,” said Mrs. Bulstrode, losing her clew in the intricacies of the

subject.

“I don’t know about mercy,” said Mr. Vincy, testily. “I know I am

worried more than I like with my family. I was a good brother to you,

Harriet, before you married Bulstrode, and I must say he doesn’t always

show that friendly spirit towards your family that might have been

expected of him.” Mr. Vincy was very little like a Jesuit, but no

accomplished Jesuit could have turned a question more adroitly. Harriet

had to defend her husband instead of blaming her brother, and the

conversation ended at a point as far from the beginning as some recent

sparring between the brothers-in-law at a vestry meeting.

Mrs. Bulstrode did not repeat her brother’s complaints to her husband,

but in the evening she spoke to him of Lydgate and Rosamond. He did not

share her warm interest, however; and only spoke with resignation of

the risks attendant on the beginning of medical practice and the

desirability of prudence.

“I am sure we are bound to pray for that thoughtless girl—brought up as

she has been,” said Mrs. Bulstrode, wishing to rouse her husband’s

feelings.

“Truly, my dear,” said Mr. Bulstrode, assentingly. “Those who are not

of this world can do little else to arrest the errors of the

obstinately worldly. That is what we must accustom ourselves to

recognize with regard to your brother’s family. I could have wished

that Mr. Lydgate had not entered into such a union; but my relations

with him are limited to that use of his gifts for God’s purposes which

is taught us by the divine government under each dispensation.”

Mrs. Bulstrode said no more, attributing some dissatisfaction which she

felt to her own want of spirituality. She believed that her husband was

one of those men whose memoirs should be written when they died.

As to Lydgate himself, having been accepted, he was prepared to accept

all the consequences which he believed himself to foresee with perfect

clearness. Of course he must be married in a year—perhaps even in half

a year. This was not what he had intended; but other schemes would not

be hindered: they would simply adjust themselves anew. Marriage, of

course, must be prepared for in the usual way. A house must be taken

instead of the rooms he at present occupied; and Lydgate, having heard

Rosamond speak with admiration of old Mrs. Bretton’s house (situated in

Lowick Gate), took notice when it fell vacant after the old lady’s

death, and immediately entered into treaty for it.

He did this in an episodic way, very much as he gave orders to his

tailor for every requisite of perfect dress, without any notion of

being extravagant. On the contrary, he would have despised any

ostentation of expense; his profession had familiarized him with all

grades of poverty, and he cared much for those who suffered hardships.

He would have behaved perfectly at a table where the sauce was served

in a jug with the handle off, and he would have remembered nothing

about a grand dinner except that a man was there who talked well. But

it had never occurred to him that he should live in any other than what

he would have called an ordinary way, with green glasses for hock, and

excellent waiting at table. In warming himself at French social

theories he had brought away no smell of scorching. We may handle even

extreme opinions with impunity while our furniture, our dinner-giving,

and preference for armorial bearings in our own case, link us

indissolubly with the established order. And Lydgate’s tendency was not

towards extreme opinions: he would have liked no barefooted doctrines,

being particular about his boots: he was no radical in relation to

anything but medical reform and the prosecution of discovery. In the

rest of practical life he walked by hereditary habit; half from that

personal pride and unreflecting egoism which I have already called

commonness, and half from that naivete which belonged to preoccupation

with favorite ideas.

Any inward debate Lydgate had as to the consequences of this engagement

which had stolen upon him, turned on the paucity of time rather than of

money. Certainly, being in love and being expected continually by some

one who always turned out to be prettier than memory could represent

her to be, did interfere with the diligent use of spare hours which

might serve some “plodding fellow of a German” to make the great,

imminent discovery. This was really an argument for not deferring the

marriage too long, as he implied to Mr. Farebrother, one day that the

Vicar came to his room with some pond-products which he wanted to

examine under a better microscope than his own, and, finding Lydgate’s

tableful of apparatus and specimens in confusion, said sarcastically—

“Eros has degenerated; he began by introducing order and harmony, and

now he brings back chaos.”

“Yes, at some stages,” said Lydgate, lifting his brows and smiling,

while he began to arrange his microscope. “But a better order will

begin after.”

“Soon?” said the Vicar.

“I hope so, really. This unsettled state of affairs uses up the time,

and when one has notions in science, every moment is an opportunity. I

feel sure that marriage must be the best thing for a man who wants to

work steadily. He has everything at home then—no teasing with personal

speculations—he can get calmness and freedom.”

“You are an enviable dog,” said the Vicar, “to have such a

prospect—Rosamond, calmness and freedom, all to your share. Here am I

with nothing but my pipe and pond-animalcules. Now, are you ready?”

Lydgate did not mention to the Vicar another reason he had for wishing

to shorten the period of courtship. It was rather irritating to him,

even with the wine of love in his veins, to be obliged to mingle so

often with the family party at the Vincys’, and to enter so much into

Middlemarch gossip, protracted good cheer, whist-playing, and general

futility. He had to be deferential when Mr. Vincy decided questions

with trenchant ignorance, especially as to those liquors which were the

best inward pickle, preserving you from the effects of bad air. Mrs.

Vincy’s openness and simplicity were quite unstreaked with suspicion as

to the subtle offence she might give to the taste of her intended

son-in-law; and altogether Lydgate had to confess to himself that he

was descending a little in relation to Rosamond’s family. But that

exquisite creature herself suffered in the same sort of way:—it was at

least one delightful thought that in marrying her, he could give her a

much-needed transplantation.

“Dear!” he said to her one evening, in his gentlest tone, as he sat

down by her and looked closely at her face—

But I must first say that he had found her alone in the drawing-room,

where the great old-fashioned window, almost as large as the side of

the room, was opened to the summer scents of the garden at the back of

the house. Her father and mother were gone to a party, and the rest

were all out with the butterflies.

“Dear! your eyelids are red.”

“Are they?” said Rosamond. “I wonder why.” It was not in her nature to

pour forth wishes or grievances. They only came forth gracefully on

solicitation.

“As if you could hide it from me!” said Lydgate, laying his hand

tenderly on both of hers. “Don’t I see a tiny drop on one of the

lashes? Things trouble you, and you don’t tell me. That is unloving.”

“Why should I tell you what you cannot alter? They are every-day

things:—perhaps they have been a little worse lately.”

“Family annoyances. Don’t fear speaking. I guess them.”

“Papa has been more irritable lately. Fred makes him angry, and this

morning there was a fresh quarrel because Fred threatens to throw his

whole education away, and do something quite beneath him. And besides—”

Rosamond hesitated, and her cheeks were gathering a slight flush.

Lydgate had never seen her in trouble since the morning of their

engagement, and he had never felt so passionately towards her as at

this moment. He kissed the hesitating lips gently, as if to encourage

them.

“I feel that papa is not quite pleased about our engagement,” Rosamond

continued, almost in a whisper; “and he said last night that he should

certainly speak to you and say it must be given up.”

“Will you give it up?” said Lydgate, with quick energy—almost angrily.

“I never give up anything that I choose to do,” said Rosamond,

recovering her calmness at the touching of this chord.

“God bless you!” said Lydgate, kissing her again. This constancy of

purpose in the right place was adorable. He went on:—

“It is too late now for your father to say that our engagement must be

given up. You are of age, and I claim you as mine. If anything is done

to make you unhappy,—that is a reason for hastening our marriage.”

An unmistakable delight shone forth from the blue eyes that met his,

and the radiance seemed to light up all his future with mild sunshine.

Ideal happiness (of the kind known in the Arabian Nights, in which you

are invited to step from the labor and discord of the street into a

paradise where everything is given to you and nothing claimed) seemed

to be an affair of a few weeks’ waiting, more or less.

“Why should we defer it?” he said, with ardent insistence. “I have

taken the house now: everything else can soon be got ready—can it not?

You will not mind about new clothes. Those can be bought afterwards.”

“What original notions you clever men have!” said Rosamond, dimpling

with more thorough laughter than usual at this humorous incongruity.

“This is the first time I ever heard of wedding-clothes being bought

after marriage.”

“But you don’t mean to say you would insist on my waiting months for

the sake of clothes?” said Lydgate, half thinking that Rosamond was

tormenting him prettily, and half fearing that she really shrank from

speedy marriage. “Remember, we are looking forward to a better sort of

happiness even than this—being continually together, independent of

others, and ordering our lives as we will. Come, dear, tell me how soon

you can be altogether mine.”

There was a serious pleading in Lydgate’s tone, as if he felt that she

would be injuring him by any fantastic delays. Rosamond became serious

too, and slightly meditative; in fact, she was going through many

intricacies of lace-edging and hosiery and petticoat-tucking, in order

to give an answer that would at least be approximative.

“Six weeks would be ample—say so, Rosamond,” insisted Lydgate,

releasing her hands to put his arm gently round her.

One little hand immediately went to pat her hair, while she gave her

neck a meditative turn, and then said seriously—

“There would be the house-linen and the furniture to be prepared.

Still, mamma could see to those while we were away.”

“Yes, to be sure. We must be away a week or so.”

“Oh, more than that!” said Rosamond, earnestly. She was thinking of her

evening dresses for the visit to Sir Godwin Lydgate’s, which she had

long been secretly hoping for as a delightful employment of at least

one quarter of the honeymoon, even if she deferred her introduction to

the uncle who was a doctor of divinity (also a pleasing though sober

kind of rank, when sustained by blood). She looked at her lover with

some wondering remonstrance as she spoke, and he readily understood

that she might wish to lengthen the sweet time of double solitude.

“Whatever you wish, my darling, when the day is fixed. But let us take

a decided course, and put an end to any discomfort you may be

suffering. Six weeks!—I am sure they would be ample.”

“I could certainly hasten the work,” said Rosamond. “Will you, then,

mention it to papa?—I think it would be better to write to him.” She

blushed and looked at him as the garden flowers look at us when we walk

forth happily among them in the transcendent evening light: is there

not a soul beyond utterance, half nymph, half child, in those delicate

petals which glow and breathe about the centres of deep color?

He touched her ear and a little bit of neck under it with his lips, and

they sat quite still for many minutes which flowed by them like a small

gurgling brook with the kisses of the sun upon it. Rosamond thought

that no one could be more in love than she was; and Lydgate thought

that after all his wild mistakes and absurd credulity, he had found

perfect womanhood—felt as if already breathed upon by exquisite wedded

affection such as would be bestowed by an accomplished creature who

venerated his high musings and momentous labors and would never

interfere with them; who would create order in the home and accounts

with still magic, yet keep her fingers ready to touch the lute and

transform life into romance at any moment; who was instructed to the

true womanly limit and not a hair’s-breadth beyond—docile, therefore,

and ready to carry out behests which came from that limit. It was

plainer now than ever that his notion of remaining much longer a

bachelor had been a mistake: marriage would not be an obstruction but a

furtherance. And happening the next day to accompany a patient to

Brassing, he saw a dinner-service there which struck him as so exactly

the right thing that he bought it at once. It saved time to do these

things just when you thought of them, and Lydgate hated ugly crockery.

The dinner-service in question was expensive, but that might be in the

nature of dinner-services. Furnishing was necessarily expensive; but

then it had to be done only once.

“It must be lovely,” said Mrs. Vincy, when Lydgate mentioned his

purchase with some descriptive touches. “Just what Rosy ought to have.

I trust in heaven it won’t be broken!”

“One must hire servants who will not break things,” said Lydgate.

(Certainly, this was reasoning with an imperfect vision of sequences.

But at that period there was no sort of reasoning which was not more or

less sanctioned by men of science.)

Of course it was unnecessary to defer the mention of anything to mamma,

who did not readily take views that were not cheerful, and being a

happy wife herself, had hardly any feeling but pride in her daughter’s

marriage. But Rosamond had good reasons for suggesting to Lydgate that

papa should be appealed to in writing. She prepared for the arrival of

the letter by walking with her papa to the warehouse the next morning,

and telling him on the way that Mr. Lydgate wished to be married soon.

“Nonsense, my dear!” said Mr. Vincy. “What has he got to marry on?

You’d much better give up the engagement. I’ve told you so pretty

plainly before this. What have you had such an education for, if you

are to go and marry a poor man? It’s a cruel thing for a father to

see.”

“Mr. Lydgate is not poor, papa. He bought Mr. Peacock’s practice,

which, they say, is worth eight or nine hundred a-year.”

“Stuff and nonsense! What’s buying a practice? He might as well buy

next year’s swallows. It’ll all slip through his fingers.”

“On the contrary, papa, he will increase the practice. See how he has

been called in by the Chettams and Casaubons.”

“I hope he knows I shan’t give anything—with this disappointment about

Fred, and Parliament going to be dissolved, and machine-breaking

everywhere, and an election coming on—”

“Dear papa! what can that have to do with my marriage?”

“A pretty deal to do with it! We may all be ruined for what I know—the

country’s in that state! Some say it’s the end of the world, and be

hanged if I don’t think it looks like it! Anyhow, it’s not a time for

me to be drawing money out of my business, and I should wish Lydgate to

know that.”

“I am sure he expects nothing, papa. And he has such very high

connections: he is sure to rise in one way or another. He is engaged in

making scientific discoveries.”

Mr. Vincy was silent.

“I cannot give up my only prospect of happiness, papa. Mr. Lydgate is a

gentleman. I could never love any one who was not a perfect gentleman.

You would not like me to go into a consumption, as Arabella Hawley did.

And you know that I never change my mind.”

Again papa was silent.

“Promise me, papa, that you will consent to what we wish. We shall

never give each other up; and you know that you have always objected to

long courtships and late marriages.”

There was a little more urgency of this kind, till Mr. Vincy said,

“Well, well, child, he must write to me first before I can answer

him,”—and Rosamond was certain that she had gained her point.

Mr. Vincy’s answer consisted chiefly in a demand that Lydgate should

insure his life—a demand immediately conceded. This was a delightfully

reassuring idea supposing that Lydgate died, but in the mean time not a

self-supporting idea. However, it seemed to make everything comfortable

about Rosamond’s marriage; and the necessary purchases went on with

much spirit. Not without prudential considerations, however. A bride

(who is going to visit at a baronet’s) must have a few first-rate

pocket-handkerchiefs; but beyond the absolutely necessary half-dozen,

Rosamond contented herself without the very highest style of embroidery

and Valenciennes. Lydgate also, finding that his sum of eight hundred

pounds had been considerably reduced since he had come to Middlemarch,

restrained his inclination for some plate of an old pattern which was

shown to him when he went into Kibble’s establishment at Brassing to

buy forks and spoons. He was too proud to act as if he presupposed that

Mr. Vincy would advance money to provide furniture; and though, since

it would not be necessary to pay for everything at once, some bills

would be left standing over, he did not waste time in conjecturing how

much his father-in-law would give in the form of dowry, to make payment

easy. He was not going to do anything extravagant, but the requisite

things must be bought, and it would be bad economy to buy them of a

poor quality. All these matters were by the bye. Lydgate foresaw that

science and his profession were the objects he should alone pursue

enthusiastically; but he could not imagine himself pursuing them in

such a home as Wrench had—the doors all open, the oil-cloth worn, the

children in soiled pinafores, and lunch lingering in the form of bones,

black-handled knives, and willow-pattern. But Wrench had a wretched

lymphatic wife who made a mummy of herself indoors in a large shawl;

and he must have altogether begun with an ill-chosen domestic

apparatus.

Rosamond, however, was on her side much occupied with conjectures,

though her quick imitative perception warned her against betraying them

too crudely.

“I shall like so much to know your family,” she said one day, when the

wedding journey was being discussed. “We might perhaps take a direction

that would allow us to see them as we returned. Which of your uncles do

you like best?”

“Oh,—my uncle Godwin, I think. He is a good-natured old fellow.”

“You were constantly at his house at Quallingham, when you were a boy,

were you not? I should so like to see the old spot and everything you

were used to. Does he know you are going to be married?”

“No,” said Lydgate, carelessly, turning in his chair and rubbing his

hair up.

“Do send him word of it, you naughty undutiful nephew. He will perhaps

ask you to take me to Quallingham; and then you could show me about the

grounds, and I could imagine you there when you were a boy. Remember,

you see me in my home, just as it has been since I was a child. It is

not fair that I should be so ignorant of yours. But perhaps you would

be a little ashamed of me. I forgot that.”

Lydgate smiled at her tenderly, and really accepted the suggestion that

the proud pleasure of showing so charming a bride was worth some

trouble. And now he came to think of it, he would like to see the old

spots with Rosamond.

“I will write to him, then. But my cousins are bores.”

It seemed magnificent to Rosamond to be able to speak so slightingly of

a baronet’s family, and she felt much contentment in the prospect of

being able to estimate them contemptuously on her own account.

But mamma was near spoiling all, a day or two later, by saying—

“I hope your uncle Sir Godwin will not look down on Rosy, Mr. Lydgate.

I should think he would do something handsome. A thousand or two can be

nothing to a baronet.”

“Mamma!” said Rosamond, blushing deeply; and Lydgate pitied her so much

that he remained silent and went to the other end of the room to

examine a print curiously, as if he had been absent-minded. Mamma had a

little filial lecture afterwards, and was docile as usual. But Rosamond

reflected that if any of those high-bred cousins who were bores, should

be induced to visit Middlemarch, they would see many things in her own

family which might shock them. Hence it seemed desirable that Lydgate

should by-and-by get some first-rate position elsewhere than in

Middlemarch; and this could hardly be difficult in the case of a man

who had a titled uncle and could make discoveries. Lydgate, you

perceive, had talked fervidly to Rosamond of his hopes as to the

highest uses of his life, and had found it delightful to be listened to

by a creature who would bring him the sweet furtherance of satisfying

affection—beauty—repose—such help as our thoughts get from the summer

sky and the flower-fringed meadows.

Lydgate relied much on the psychological difference between what for

the sake of variety I will call goose and gander: especially on the

innate submissiveness of the goose as beautifully corresponding to the

strength of the gander.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Thrice happy she that is so well assured

Unto herself and settled so in heart

That neither will for better be allured

Ne fears to worse with any chance to start,

But like a steddy ship doth strongly part

The raging waves and keeps her course aright;

Ne aught for tempest doth from it depart,

Ne aught for fairer weather’s false delight.

Such self-assurance need not fear the spight

Of grudging foes; ne favour seek of friends;

But in the stay of her own stedfast might

Neither to one herself nor other bends.

Most happy she that most assured doth rest,

But he most happy who such one loves best.

—SPENSER.

The doubt hinted by Mr. Vincy whether it were only the general election

or the end of the world that was coming on, now that George the Fourth

was dead, Parliament dissolved, Wellington and Peel generally

depreciated and the new King apologetic, was a feeble type of the

uncertainties in provincial opinion at that time. With the glow-worm

lights of country places, how could men see which were their own

thoughts in the confusion of a Tory Ministry passing Liberal measures,

of Tory nobles and electors being anxious to return Liberals rather

than friends of the recreant Ministers, and of outcries for remedies

which seemed to have a mysteriously remote bearing on private interest,

and were made suspicious by the advocacy of disagreeable neighbors?

Buyers of the Middlemarch newspapers found themselves in an anomalous

position: during the agitation on the Catholic Question many had given

up the “Pioneer”—which had a motto from Charles James Fox and was in

the van of progress—because it had taken Peel’s side about the Papists,

and had thus blotted its Liberalism with a toleration of Jesuitry and

Baal; but they were ill-satisfied with the “Trumpet,” which—since its

blasts against Rome, and in the general flaccidity of the public mind

(nobody knowing who would support whom)—had become feeble in its

blowing.

It was a time, according to a noticeable article in the “Pioneer,” when

the crying needs of the country might well counteract a reluctance to

public action on the part of men whose minds had from long experience

acquired breadth as well as concentration, decision of judgment as well

as tolerance, dispassionateness as well as energy—in fact, all those

qualities which in the melancholy experience of mankind have been the

least disposed to share lodgings.

Mr. Hackbutt, whose fluent speech was at that time floating more widely

than usual, and leaving much uncertainty as to its ultimate channel,

was heard to say in Mr. Hawley’s office that the article in question

“emanated” from Brooke of Tipton, and that Brooke had secretly bought

the “Pioneer” some months ago.

“That means mischief, eh?” said Mr. Hawley. “He’s got the freak of

being a popular man now, after dangling about like a stray tortoise. So

much the worse for him. I’ve had my eye on him for some time. He shall

be prettily pumped upon. He’s a damned bad landlord. What business has

an old county man to come currying favor with a low set of dark-blue

freemen? As to his paper, I only hope he may do the writing himself. It

would be worth our paying for.”

“I understand he has got a very brilliant young fellow to edit it, who

can write the highest style of leading article, quite equal to anything

in the London papers. And he means to take very high ground on Reform.”

“Let Brooke reform his rent-roll. He’s a cursed old screw, and the

buildings all over his estate are going to rack. I suppose this young

fellow is some loose fish from London.”

“His name is Ladislaw. He is said to be of foreign extraction.”

“I know the sort,” said Mr. Hawley; “some emissary. He’ll begin with

flourishing about the Rights of Man and end with murdering a wench.

That’s the style.”

“You must concede that there are abuses, Hawley,” said Mr. Hackbutt,

foreseeing some political disagreement with his family lawyer. “I

myself should never favor immoderate views—in fact I take my stand with

Huskisson—but I cannot blind myself to the consideration that the

non-representation of large towns—”

“Large towns be damned!” said Mr. Hawley, impatient of exposition. “I

know a little too much about Middlemarch elections. Let ’em quash every

pocket borough to-morrow, and bring in every mushroom town in the

kingdom—they’ll only increase the expense of getting into Parliament. I

go upon facts.”

Mr. Hawley’s disgust at the notion of the “Pioneer” being edited by an

emissary, and of Brooke becoming actively political—as if a tortoise of

desultory pursuits should protrude its small head ambitiously and

become rampant—was hardly equal to the annoyance felt by some members

of Mr. Brooke’s own family. The result had oozed forth gradually, like

the discovery that your neighbor has set up an unpleasant kind of

manufacture which will be permanently under your nostrils without legal

remedy. The “Pioneer” had been secretly bought even before Will

Ladislaw’s arrival, the expected opportunity having offered itself in

the readiness of the proprietor to part with a valuable property which

did not pay; and in the interval since Mr. Brooke had written his

invitation, those germinal ideas of making his mind tell upon the world

at large which had been present in him from his younger years, but had

hitherto lain in some obstruction, had been sprouting under cover.

The development was much furthered by a delight in his guest which

proved greater even than he had anticipated. For it seemed that Will

was not only at home in all those artistic and literary subjects which

Mr. Brooke had gone into at one time, but that he was strikingly ready

at seizing the points of the political situation, and dealing with them

in that large spirit which, aided by adequate memory, lends itself to

quotation and general effectiveness of treatment.

“He seems to me a kind of Shelley, you know,” Mr. Brooke took an

opportunity of saying, for the gratification of Mr. Casaubon. “I don’t

mean as to anything objectionable—laxities or atheism, or anything of

that kind, you know—Ladislaw’s sentiments in every way I am sure are

good—indeed, we were talking a great deal together last night. But he

has the same sort of enthusiasm for liberty, freedom, emancipation—a

fine thing under guidance—under guidance, you know. I think I shall be

able to put him on the right tack; and I am the more pleased because he

is a relation of yours, Casaubon.”

If the right tack implied anything more precise than the rest of Mr.

Brooke’s speech, Mr. Casaubon silently hoped that it referred to some

occupation at a great distance from Lowick. He had disliked Will while

he helped him, but he had begun to dislike him still more now that Will

had declined his help. That is the way with us when we have any uneasy

jealousy in our disposition: if our talents are chiefly of the

burrowing kind, our honey-sipping cousin (whom we have grave reasons

for objecting to) is likely to have a secret contempt for us, and any

one who admires him passes an oblique criticism on ourselves. Having

the scruples of rectitude in our souls, we are above the meanness of

injuring him—rather we meet all his claims on us by active benefits;

and the drawing of cheques for him, being a superiority which he must

recognize, gives our bitterness a milder infusion. Now Mr. Casaubon had

been deprived of that superiority (as anything more than a remembrance)

in a sudden, capricious manner. His antipathy to Will did not spring

from the common jealousy of a winter-worn husband: it was something

deeper, bred by his lifelong claims and discontents; but Dorothea, now

that she was present—Dorothea, as a young wife who herself had shown an

offensive capability of criticism, necessarily gave concentration to

the uneasiness which had before been vague.

Will Ladislaw on his side felt that his dislike was flourishing at the

expense of his gratitude, and spent much inward discourse in justifying

the dislike. Casaubon hated him—he knew that very well; on his first

entrance he could discern a bitterness in the mouth and a venom in the

glance which would almost justify declaring war in spite of past

benefits. He was much obliged to Casaubon in the past, but really the

act of marrying this wife was a set-off against the obligation. It was

a question whether gratitude which refers to what is done for one’s

self ought not to give way to indignation at what is done against

another. And Casaubon had done a wrong to Dorothea in marrying her. A

man was bound to know himself better than that, and if he chose to grow

gray crunching bones in a cavern, he had no business to be luring a

girl into his companionship. “It is the most horrible of

virgin-sacrifices,” said Will; and he painted to himself what were

Dorothea’s inward sorrows as if he had been writing a choric wail. But

he would never lose sight of her: he would watch over her—if he gave up

everything else in life he would watch over her, and she should know

that she had one slave in the world. Will had—to use Sir Thomas

Browne’s phrase—a “passionate prodigality” of statement both to himself

and others. The simple truth was that nothing then invited him so

strongly as the presence of Dorothea.

Invitations of the formal kind had been wanting, however, for Will had

never been asked to go to Lowick. Mr. Brooke, indeed, confident of

doing everything agreeable which Casaubon, poor fellow, was too much

absorbed to think of, had arranged to bring Ladislaw to Lowick several

times (not neglecting meanwhile to introduce him elsewhere on every

opportunity as “a young relative of Casaubon’s”). And though Will had

not seen Dorothea alone, their interviews had been enough to restore

her former sense of young companionship with one who was cleverer than

herself, yet seemed ready to be swayed by her. Poor Dorothea before her

marriage had never found much room in other minds for what she cared

most to say; and she had not, as we know, enjoyed her husband’s

superior instruction so much as she had expected. If she spoke with any

keenness of interest to Mr. Casaubon, he heard her with an air of

patience as if she had given a quotation from the Delectus familiar to

him from his tender years, and sometimes mentioned curtly what ancient

sects or personages had held similar ideas, as if there were too much

of that sort in stock already; at other times he would inform her that

she was mistaken, and reassert what her remark had questioned.

But Will Ladislaw always seemed to see more in what she said than she

herself saw. Dorothea had little vanity, but she had the ardent woman’s

need to rule beneficently by making the joy of another soul. Hence the

mere chance of seeing Will occasionally was like a lunette opened in

the wall of her prison, giving her a glimpse of the sunny air; and this

pleasure began to nullify her original alarm at what her husband might

think about the introduction of Will as her uncle’s guest. On this

subject Mr. Casaubon had remained dumb.

But Will wanted to talk with Dorothea alone, and was impatient of slow

circumstance. However slight the terrestrial intercourse between Dante

and Beatrice or Petrarch and Laura, time changes the proportion of

things, and in later days it is preferable to have fewer sonnets and

more conversation. Necessity excused stratagem, but stratagem was

limited by the dread of offending Dorothea. He found out at last that

he wanted to take a particular sketch at Lowick; and one morning when

Mr. Brooke had to drive along the Lowick road on his way to the county

town, Will asked to be set down with his sketch-book and camp-stool at

Lowick, and without announcing himself at the Manor settled himself to

sketch in a position where he must see Dorothea if she came out to

walk—and he knew that she usually walked an hour in the morning.

But the stratagem was defeated by the weather. Clouds gathered with

treacherous quickness, the rain came down, and Will was obliged to take

shelter in the house. He intended, on the strength of relationship, to

go into the drawing-room and wait there without being announced; and

seeing his old acquaintance the butler in the hall, he said, “Don’t

mention that I am here, Pratt; I will wait till luncheon; I know Mr.

Casaubon does not like to be disturbed when he is in the library.”

“Master is out, sir; there’s only Mrs. Casaubon in the library. I’d

better tell her you’re here, sir,” said Pratt, a red-cheeked man given

to lively converse with Tantripp, and often agreeing with her that it

must be dull for Madam.

“Oh, very well; this confounded rain has hindered me from sketching,”

said Will, feeling so happy that he affected indifference with

delightful ease.

In another minute he was in the library, and Dorothea was meeting him

with her sweet unconstrained smile.

“Mr. Casaubon has gone to the Archdeacon’s,” she said, at once. “I

don’t know whether he will be at home again long before dinner. He was

uncertain how long he should be. Did you want to say anything

particular to him?”

“No; I came to sketch, but the rain drove me in. Else I would not have

disturbed you yet. I supposed that Mr. Casaubon was here, and I know he

dislikes interruption at this hour.”

“I am indebted to the rain, then. I am so glad to see you.” Dorothea

uttered these common words with the simple sincerity of an unhappy

child, visited at school.

“I really came for the chance of seeing you alone,” said Will,

mysteriously forced to be just as simple as she was. He could not stay

to ask himself, why not? “I wanted to talk about things, as we did in

Rome. It always makes a difference when other people are present.”

“Yes,” said Dorothea, in her clear full tone of assent. “Sit down.” She

seated herself on a dark ottoman with the brown books behind her,

looking in her plain dress of some thin woollen-white material, without

a single ornament on her besides her wedding-ring, as if she were under

a vow to be different from all other women; and Will sat down opposite

her at two yards’ distance, the light falling on his bright curls and

delicate but rather petulant profile, with its defiant curves of lip

and chin. Each looked at the other as if they had been two flowers

which had opened then and there. Dorothea for the moment forgot her

husband’s mysterious irritation against Will: it seemed fresh water at

her thirsty lips to speak without fear to the one person whom she had

found receptive; for in looking backward through sadness she

exaggerated a past solace.

“I have often thought that I should like to talk to you again,” she

said, immediately. “It seems strange to me how many things I said to

you.”

“I remember them all,” said Will, with the unspeakable content in his

soul of feeling that he was in the presence of a creature worthy to be

perfectly loved. I think his own feelings at that moment were perfect,

for we mortals have our divine moments, when love is satisfied in the

completeness of the beloved object.

“I have tried to learn a great deal since we were in Rome,” said

Dorothea. “I can read Latin a little, and I am beginning to understand

just a little Greek. I can help Mr. Casaubon better now. I can find out

references for him and save his eyes in many ways. But it is very

difficult to be learned; it seems as if people were worn out on the way

to great thoughts, and can never enjoy them because they are too

tired.”

“If a man has a capacity for great thoughts, he is likely to overtake

them before he is decrepit,” said Will, with irrepressible quickness.

But through certain sensibilities Dorothea was as quick as he, and

seeing her face change, he added, immediately, “But it is quite true

that the best minds have been sometimes overstrained in working out

their ideas.”

“You correct me,” said Dorothea. “I expressed myself ill. I should have

said that those who have great thoughts get too much worn in working

them out. I used to feel about that, even when I was a little girl; and

it always seemed to me that the use I should like to make of my life

would be to help some one who did great works, so that his burthen

might be lighter.”

Dorothea was led on to this bit of autobiography without any sense of

making a revelation. But she had never before said anything to Will

which threw so strong a light on her marriage. He did not shrug his

shoulders; and for want of that muscular outlet he thought the more

irritably of beautiful lips kissing holy skulls and other emptinesses

ecclesiastically enshrined. Also he had to take care that his speech

should not betray that thought.

“But you may easily carry the help too far,” he said, “and get

over-wrought yourself. Are you not too much shut up? You already look

paler. It would be better for Mr. Casaubon to have a secretary; he

could easily get a man who would do half his work for him. It would

save him more effectually, and you need only help him in lighter ways.”

“How can you think of that?” said Dorothea, in a tone of earnest

remonstrance. “I should have no happiness if I did not help him in his

work. What could I do? There is no good to be done in Lowick. The only

thing I desire is to help him more. And he objects to a secretary:

please not to mention that again.”

“Certainly not, now I know your feeling. But I have heard both Mr.

Brooke and Sir James Chettam express the same wish.”

“Yes,” said Dorothea, “but they don’t understand—they want me to be a

great deal on horseback, and have the garden altered and new

conservatories, to fill up my days. I thought you could understand that

one’s mind has other wants,” she added, rather impatiently—“besides,

Mr. Casaubon cannot bear to hear of a secretary.”

“My mistake is excusable,” said Will. “In old days I used to hear Mr.

Casaubon speak as if he looked forward to having a secretary. Indeed he

held out the prospect of that office to me. But I turned out to be—not

good enough for it.”

Dorothea was trying to extract out of this an excuse for her husband’s

evident repulsion, as she said, with a playful smile, “You were not a

steady worker enough.”

“No,” said Will, shaking his head backward somewhat after the manner of

a spirited horse. And then, the old irritable demon prompting him to

give another good pinch at the moth-wings of poor Mr. Casaubon’s glory,

he went on, “And I have seen since that Mr. Casaubon does not like any

one to overlook his work and know thoroughly what he is doing. He is

too doubtful—too uncertain of himself. I may not be good for much, but

he dislikes me because I disagree with him.”

Will was not without his intentions to be always generous, but our

tongues are little triggers which have usually been pulled before

general intentions can be brought to bear. And it was too intolerable

that Casaubon’s dislike of him should not be fairly accounted for to

Dorothea. Yet when he had spoken he was rather uneasy as to the effect

on her.

But Dorothea was strangely quiet—not immediately indignant, as she had

been on a like occasion in Rome. And the cause lay deep. She was no

longer struggling against the perception of facts, but adjusting

herself to their clearest perception; and now when she looked steadily

at her husband’s failure, still more at his possible consciousness of

failure, she seemed to be looking along the one track where duty became

tenderness. Will’s want of reticence might have been met with more

severity, if he had not already been recommended to her mercy by her

husband’s dislike, which must seem hard to her till she saw better

reason for it.

She did not answer at once, but after looking down ruminatingly she

said, with some earnestness, “Mr. Casaubon must have overcome his

dislike of you so far as his actions were concerned: and that is

admirable.”

“Yes; he has shown a sense of justice in family matters. It was an

abominable thing that my grandmother should have been disinherited

because she made what they called a \_mesalliance\_, though there was

nothing to be said against her husband except that he was a Polish

refugee who gave lessons for his bread.”

“I wish I knew all about her!” said Dorothea. “I wonder how she bore

the change from wealth to poverty: I wonder whether she was happy with

her husband! Do you know much about them?”

“No; only that my grandfather was a patriot—a bright fellow—could speak

many languages—musical—got his bread by teaching all sorts of things.

They both died rather early. And I never knew much of my father, beyond

what my mother told me; but he inherited the musical talents. I

remember his slow walk and his long thin hands; and one day remains

with me when he was lying ill, and I was very hungry, and had only a

little bit of bread.”

“Ah, what a different life from mine!” said Dorothea, with keen

interest, clasping her hands on her lap. “I have always had too much of

everything. But tell me how it was—Mr. Casaubon could not have known

about you then.”

“No; but my father had made himself known to Mr. Casaubon, and that was

my last hungry day. My father died soon after, and my mother and I were

well taken care of. Mr. Casaubon always expressly recognized it as his

duty to take care of us because of the harsh injustice which had been

shown to his mother’s sister. But now I am telling you what is not new

to you.”

In his inmost soul Will was conscious of wishing to tell Dorothea what

was rather new even in his own construction of things—namely, that Mr.

Casaubon had never done more than pay a debt towards him. Will was much

too good a fellow to be easy under the sense of being ungrateful. And

when gratitude has become a matter of reasoning there are many ways of

escaping from its bonds.

“No,” answered Dorothea; “Mr. Casaubon has always avoided dwelling on

his own honorable actions.” She did not feel that her husband’s conduct

was depreciated; but this notion of what justice had required in his

relations with Will Ladislaw took strong hold on her mind. After a

moment’s pause, she added, “He had never told me that he supported your

mother. Is she still living?”

“No; she died by an accident—a fall—four years ago. It is curious that

my mother, too, ran away from her family, but not for the sake of her

husband. She never would tell me anything about her family, except that

she forsook them to get her own living—went on the stage, in fact. She

was a dark-eyed creature, with crisp ringlets, and never seemed to be

getting old. You see I come of rebellious blood on both sides,” Will

ended, smiling brightly at Dorothea, while she was still looking with

serious intentness before her, like a child seeing a drama for the

first time.

But her face, too, broke into a smile as she said, “That is your

apology, I suppose, for having yourself been rather rebellious; I mean,

to Mr. Casaubon’s wishes. You must remember that you have not done what

he thought best for you. And if he dislikes you—you were speaking of

dislike a little while ago—but I should rather say, if he has shown any

painful feelings towards you, you must consider how sensitive he has

become from the wearing effect of study. Perhaps,” she continued,

getting into a pleading tone, “my uncle has not told you how serious

Mr. Casaubon’s illness was. It would be very petty of us who are well

and can bear things, to think much of small offences from those who

carry a weight of trial.”

“You teach me better,” said Will. “I will never grumble on that subject

again.” There was a gentleness in his tone which came from the

unutterable contentment of perceiving—what Dorothea was hardly

conscious of—that she was travelling into the remoteness of pure pity

and loyalty towards her husband. Will was ready to adore her pity and

loyalty, if she would associate himself with her in manifesting them.

“I have really sometimes been a perverse fellow,” he went on, “but I

will never again, if I can help it, do or say what you would

disapprove.”

“That is very good of you,” said Dorothea, with another open smile. “I

shall have a little kingdom then, where I shall give laws. But you will

soon go away, out of my rule, I imagine. You will soon be tired of

staying at the Grange.”

“That is a point I wanted to mention to you—one of the reasons why I

wished to speak to you alone. Mr. Brooke proposes that I should stay in

this neighborhood. He has bought one of the Middlemarch newspapers, and

he wishes me to conduct that, and also to help him in other ways.”

“Would not that be a sacrifice of higher prospects for you?” said

Dorothea.

“Perhaps; but I have always been blamed for thinking of prospects, and

not settling to anything. And here is something offered to me. If you

would not like me to accept it, I will give it up. Otherwise I would

rather stay in this part of the country than go away. I belong to

nobody anywhere else.”

“I should like you to stay very much,” said Dorothea, at once, as

simply and readily as she had spoken at Rome. There was not the shadow

of a reason in her mind at the moment why she should not say so.

“Then I \_will\_ stay,” said Ladislaw, shaking his head backward, rising

and going towards the window, as if to see whether the rain had ceased.

But the next moment, Dorothea, according to a habit which was getting

continually stronger, began to reflect that her husband felt

differently from herself, and she colored deeply under the double

embarrassment of having expressed what might be in opposition to her

husband’s feeling, and of having to suggest this opposition to Will.

His face was not turned towards her, and this made it easier to say—

“But my opinion is of little consequence on such a subject. I think you

should be guided by Mr. Casaubon. I spoke without thinking of anything

else than my own feeling, which has nothing to do with the real

question. But it now occurs to me—perhaps Mr. Casaubon might see that

the proposal was not wise. Can you not wait now and mention it to him?”

“I can’t wait to-day,” said Will, inwardly seared by the possibility

that Mr. Casaubon would enter. “The rain is quite over now. I told Mr.

Brooke not to call for me: I would rather walk the five miles. I shall

strike across Halsell Common, and see the gleams on the wet grass. I

like that.”

He approached her to shake hands quite hurriedly, longing but not

daring to say, “Don’t mention the subject to Mr. Casaubon.” No, he

dared not, could not say it. To ask her to be less simple and direct

would be like breathing on the crystal that you want to see the light

through. And there was always the other great dread—of himself becoming

dimmed and forever ray-shorn in her eyes.

“I wish you could have stayed,” said Dorothea, with a touch of

mournfulness, as she rose and put out her hand. She also had her

thought which she did not like to express:—Will certainly ought to lose

no time in consulting Mr. Casaubon’s wishes, but for her to urge this

might seem an undue dictation.

So they only said “Good-by,” and Will quitted the house, striking

across the fields so as not to run any risk of encountering Mr.

Casaubon’s carriage, which, however, did not appear at the gate until

four o’clock. That was an unpropitious hour for coming home: it was too

early to gain the moral support under ennui of dressing his person for

dinner, and too late to undress his mind of the day’s frivolous

ceremony and affairs, so as to be prepared for a good plunge into the

serious business of study. On such occasions he usually threw into an

easy-chair in the library, and allowed Dorothea to read the London

papers to him, closing his eyes the while. To-day, however, he declined

that relief, observing that he had already had too many public details

urged upon him; but he spoke more cheerfully than usual, when Dorothea

asked about his fatigue, and added with that air of formal effort which

never forsook him even when he spoke without his waistcoat and cravat—

“I have had the gratification of meeting my former acquaintance, Dr.

Spanning, to-day, and of being praised by one who is himself a worthy

recipient of praise. He spoke very handsomely of my late tractate on

the Egyptian Mysteries,—using, in fact, terms which it would not become

me to repeat.” In uttering the last clause, Mr. Casaubon leaned over

the elbow of his chair, and swayed his head up and down, apparently as

a muscular outlet instead of that recapitulation which would not have

been becoming.

“I am very glad you have had that pleasure,” said Dorothea, delighted

to see her husband less weary than usual at this hour. “Before you came

I had been regretting that you happened to be out to-day.”

“Why so, my dear?” said Mr. Casaubon, throwing himself backward again.

“Because Mr. Ladislaw has been here; and he has mentioned a proposal of

my uncle’s which I should like to know your opinion of.” Her husband

she felt was really concerned in this question. Even with her ignorance

of the world she had a vague impression that the position offered to

Will was out of keeping with his family connections, and certainly Mr.

Casaubon had a claim to be consulted. He did not speak, but merely

bowed.

“Dear uncle, you know, has many projects. It appears that he has bought

one of the Middlemarch newspapers, and he has asked Mr. Ladislaw to

stay in this neighborhood and conduct the paper for him, besides

helping him in other ways.”

Dorothea looked at her husband while she spoke, but he had at first

blinked and finally closed his eyes, as if to save them; while his lips

became more tense. “What is your opinion?” she added, rather timidly,

after a slight pause.

“Did Mr. Ladislaw come on purpose to ask my opinion?” said Mr.

Casaubon, opening his eyes narrowly with a knife-edged look at

Dorothea. She was really uncomfortable on the point he inquired about,

but she only became a little more serious, and her eyes did not swerve.

“No,” she answered immediately, “he did not say that he came to ask

your opinion. But when he mentioned the proposal, he of course expected

me to tell you of it.”

Mr. Casaubon was silent.

“I feared that you might feel some objection. But certainly a young man

with so much talent might be very useful to my uncle—might help him to

do good in a better way. And Mr. Ladislaw wishes to have some fixed

occupation. He has been blamed, he says, for not seeking something of

that kind, and he would like to stay in this neighborhood because no

one cares for him elsewhere.”

Dorothea felt that this was a consideration to soften her husband.

However, he did not speak, and she presently recurred to Dr. Spanning

and the Archdeacon’s breakfast. But there was no longer sunshine on

these subjects.

The next morning, without Dorothea’s knowledge, Mr. Casaubon despatched

the following letter, beginning “Dear Mr. Ladislaw” (he had always

before addressed him as “Will”):—

“Mrs. Casaubon informs me that a proposal has been made to you, and

(according to an inference by no means stretched) has on your part been

in some degree entertained, which involves your residence in this

neighborhood in a capacity which I am justified in saying touches my

own position in such a way as renders it not only natural and

warrantable in me when that effect is viewed under the influence of

legitimate feeling, but incumbent on me when the same effect is

considered in the light of my responsibilities, to state at once that

your acceptance of the proposal above indicated would be highly

offensive to me. That I have some claim to the exercise of a veto here,

would not, I believe, be denied by any reasonable person cognizant of

the relations between us: relations which, though thrown into the past

by your recent procedure, are not thereby annulled in their character

of determining antecedents. I will not here make reflections on any

person’s judgment. It is enough for me to point out to yourself that

there are certain social fitnesses and proprieties which should hinder

a somewhat near relative of mine from becoming any wise conspicuous in

this vicinity in a status not only much beneath my own, but associated

at best with the sciolism of literary or political adventurers. At any

rate, the contrary issue must exclude you from further reception at my

house.

Yours faithfully,

“EDWARD CASAUBON.”

Meanwhile Dorothea’s mind was innocently at work towards the further

embitterment of her husband; dwelling, with a sympathy that grew to

agitation, on what Will had told her about his parents and

grandparents. Any private hours in her day were usually spent in her

blue-green boudoir, and she had come to be very fond of its pallid

quaintness. Nothing had been outwardly altered there; but while the

summer had gradually advanced over the western fields beyond the avenue

of elms, the bare room had gathered within it those memories of an

inward life which fill the air as with a cloud of good or bad angels,

the invisible yet active forms of our spiritual triumphs or our

spiritual falls. She had been so used to struggle for and to find

resolve in looking along the avenue towards the arch of western light

that the vision itself had gained a communicating power. Even the pale

stag seemed to have reminding glances and to mean mutely, “Yes, we

know.” And the group of delicately touched miniatures had made an

audience as of beings no longer disturbed about their own earthly lot,

but still humanly interested. Especially the mysterious “Aunt Julia”

about whom Dorothea had never found it easy to question her husband.

And now, since her conversation with Will, many fresh images had

gathered round that Aunt Julia who was Will’s grandmother; the presence

of that delicate miniature, so like a living face that she knew,

helping to concentrate her feelings. What a wrong, to cut off the girl

from the family protection and inheritance only because she had chosen

a man who was poor! Dorothea, early troubling her elders with questions

about the facts around her, had wrought herself into some independent

clearness as to the historical, political reasons why eldest sons had

superior rights, and why land should be entailed: those reasons,

impressing her with a certain awe, might be weightier than she knew,

but here was a question of ties which left them uninfringed. Here was a

daughter whose child—even according to the ordinary aping of

aristocratic institutions by people who are no more aristocratic than

retired grocers, and who have no more land to “keep together” than a

lawn and a paddock—would have a prior claim. Was inheritance a question

of liking or of responsibility? All the energy of Dorothea’s nature

went on the side of responsibility—the fulfilment of claims founded on

our own deeds, such as marriage and parentage.

It was true, she said to herself, that Mr. Casaubon had a debt to the

Ladislaws—that he had to pay back what the Ladislaws had been wronged

of. And now she began to think of her husband’s will, which had been

made at the time of their marriage, leaving the bulk of his property to

her, with proviso in case of her having children. That ought to be

altered; and no time ought to be lost. This very question which had

just arisen about Will Ladislaw’s occupation, was the occasion for

placing things on a new, right footing. Her husband, she felt sure,

according to all his previous conduct, would be ready to take the just

view, if she proposed it—she, in whose interest an unfair concentration

of the property had been urged. His sense of right had surmounted and

would continue to surmount anything that might be called antipathy. She

suspected that her uncle’s scheme was disapproved by Mr. Casaubon, and

this made it seem all the more opportune that a fresh understanding

should be begun, so that instead of Will’s starting penniless and

accepting the first function that offered itself, he should find

himself in possession of a rightful income which should be paid by her

husband during his life, and, by an immediate alteration of the will,

should be secured at his death. The vision of all this as what ought to

be done seemed to Dorothea like a sudden letting in of daylight, waking

her from her previous stupidity and incurious self-absorbed ignorance

about her husband’s relation to others. Will Ladislaw had refused Mr.

Casaubon’s future aid on a ground that no longer appeared right to her;

and Mr. Casaubon had never himself seen fully what was the claim upon

him. “But he will!” said Dorothea. “The great strength of his character

lies here. And what are we doing with our money? We make no use of half

of our income. My own money buys me nothing but an uneasy conscience.”

There was a peculiar fascination for Dorothea in this division of

property intended for herself, and always regarded by her as excessive.

She was blind, you see, to many things obvious to others—likely to

tread in the wrong places, as Celia had warned her; yet her blindness

to whatever did not lie in her own pure purpose carried her safely by

the side of precipices where vision would have been perilous with fear.

The thoughts which had gathered vividness in the solitude of her

boudoir occupied her incessantly through the day on which Mr. Casaubon

had sent his letter to Will. Everything seemed hindrance to her till

she could find an opportunity of opening her heart to her husband. To

his preoccupied mind all subjects were to be approached gently, and she

had never since his illness lost from her consciousness the dread of

agitating him. But when young ardor is set brooding over the conception

of a prompt deed, the deed itself seems to start forth with independent

life, mastering ideal obstacles. The day passed in a sombre fashion,

not unusual, though Mr. Casaubon was perhaps unusually silent; but

there were hours of the night which might be counted on as

opportunities of conversation; for Dorothea, when aware of her

husband’s sleeplessness, had established a habit of rising, lighting a

candle, and reading him to sleep again. And this night she was from the

beginning sleepless, excited by resolves. He slept as usual for a few

hours, but she had risen softly and had sat in the darkness for nearly

an hour before he said—

“Dorothea, since you are up, will you light a candle?”

“Do you feel ill, dear?” was her first question, as she obeyed him.

“No, not at all; but I shall be obliged, since you are up, if you will

read me a few pages of Lowth.”

“May I talk to you a little instead?” said Dorothea.

“Certainly.”

“I have been thinking about money all day—that I have always had too

much, and especially the prospect of too much.”

“These, my dear Dorothea, are providential arrangements.”

“But if one has too much in consequence of others being wronged, it

seems to me that the divine voice which tells us to set that wrong

right must be obeyed.”

“What, my love, is the bearing of your remark?”

“That you have been too liberal in arrangements for me—I mean, with

regard to property; and that makes me unhappy.”

“How so? I have none but comparatively distant connections.”

“I have been led to think about your aunt Julia, and how she was left

in poverty only because she married a poor man, an act which was not

disgraceful, since he was not unworthy. It was on that ground, I know,

that you educated Mr. Ladislaw and provided for his mother.”

Dorothea waited a few moments for some answer that would help her

onward. None came, and her next words seemed the more forcible to her,

falling clear upon the dark silence.

“But surely we should regard his claim as a much greater one, even to

the half of that property which I know that you have destined for me.

And I think he ought at once to be provided for on that understanding.

It is not right that he should be in the dependence of poverty while we

are rich. And if there is any objection to the proposal he mentioned,

the giving him his true place and his true share would set aside any

motive for his accepting it.”

“Mr. Ladislaw has probably been speaking to you on this subject?” said

Mr. Casaubon, with a certain biting quickness not habitual to him.

“Indeed, no!” said Dorothea, earnestly. “How can you imagine it, since

he has so lately declined everything from you? I fear you think too

hardly of him, dear. He only told me a little about his parents and

grandparents, and almost all in answer to my questions. You are so

good, so just—you have done everything you thought to be right. But it

seems to me clear that more than that is right; and I must speak about

it, since I am the person who would get what is called benefit by that

‘more’ not being done.”

There was a perceptible pause before Mr. Casaubon replied, not quickly

as before, but with a still more biting emphasis.

“Dorothea, my love, this is not the first occasion, but it were well

that it should be the last, on which you have assumed a judgment on

subjects beyond your scope. Into the question how far conduct,

especially in the matter of alliances, constitutes a forfeiture of

family claims, I do not now enter. Suffice it, that you are not here

qualified to discriminate. What I now wish you to understand is, that I

accept no revision, still less dictation within that range of affairs

which I have deliberated upon as distinctly and properly mine. It is

not for you to interfere between me and Mr. Ladislaw, and still less to

encourage communications from him to you which constitute a criticism

on my procedure.”

Poor Dorothea, shrouded in the darkness, was in a tumult of conflicting

emotions. Alarm at the possible effect on himself of her husband’s

strongly manifested anger, would have checked any expression of her own

resentment, even if she had been quite free from doubt and compunction

under the consciousness that there might be some justice in his last

insinuation. Hearing him breathe quickly after he had spoken, she sat

listening, frightened, wretched—with a dumb inward cry for help to bear

this nightmare of a life in which every energy was arrested by dread.

But nothing else happened, except that they both remained a long while

sleepless, without speaking again.

The next day, Mr. Casaubon received the following answer from Will

Ladislaw:—

“DEAR MR. CASAUBON,—I have given all due consideration to your letter

of yesterday, but I am unable to take precisely your view of our mutual

position. With the fullest acknowledgment of your generous conduct to

me in the past, I must still maintain that an obligation of this kind

cannot fairly fetter me as you appear to expect that it should. Granted

that a benefactor’s wishes may constitute a claim; there must always be

a reservation as to the quality of those wishes. They may possibly

clash with more imperative considerations. Or a benefactor’s veto might

impose such a negation on a man’s life that the consequent blank might

be more cruel than the benefaction was generous. I am merely using

strong illustrations. In the present case I am unable to take your view

of the bearing which my acceptance of occupation—not enriching

certainly, but not dishonorable—will have on your own position which

seems to me too substantial to be affected in that shadowy manner. And

though I do not believe that any change in our relations will occur

(certainly none has yet occurred) which can nullify the obligations

imposed on me by the past, pardon me for not seeing that those

obligations should restrain me from using the ordinary freedom of

living where I choose, and maintaining myself by any lawful occupation

I may choose. Regretting that there exists this difference between us

as to a relation in which the conferring of benefits has been entirely

on your side—

I remain, yours with persistent obligation,

WILL LADISLAW.”

Poor Mr. Casaubon felt (and must not we, being impartial, feel with him

a little?) that no man had juster cause for disgust and suspicion than

he. Young Ladislaw, he was sure, meant to defy and annoy him, meant to

win Dorothea’s confidence and sow her mind with disrespect, and perhaps

aversion, towards her husband. Some motive beneath the surface had been

needed to account for Will’s sudden change of course in rejecting Mr.

Casaubon’s aid and quitting his travels; and this defiant determination

to fix himself in the neighborhood by taking up something so much at

variance with his former choice as Mr. Brooke’s Middlemarch projects,

revealed clearly enough that the undeclared motive had relation to

Dorothea. Not for one moment did Mr. Casaubon suspect Dorothea of any

doubleness: he had no suspicions of her, but he had (what was little

less uncomfortable) the positive knowledge that her tendency to form

opinions about her husband’s conduct was accompanied with a disposition

to regard Will Ladislaw favorably and be influenced by what he said.

His own proud reticence had prevented him from ever being undeceived in

the supposition that Dorothea had originally asked her uncle to invite

Will to his house.

And now, on receiving Will’s letter, Mr. Casaubon had to consider his

duty. He would never have been easy to call his action anything else

than duty; but in this case, contending motives thrust him back into

negations.

Should he apply directly to Mr. Brooke, and demand of that troublesome

gentleman to revoke his proposal? Or should he consult Sir James

Chettam, and get him to concur in remonstrance against a step which

touched the whole family? In either case Mr. Casaubon was aware that

failure was just as probable as success. It was impossible for him to

mention Dorothea’s name in the matter, and without some alarming

urgency Mr. Brooke was as likely as not, after meeting all

representations with apparent assent, to wind up by saying, “Never

fear, Casaubon! Depend upon it, young Ladislaw will do you credit.

Depend upon it, I have put my finger on the right thing.” And Mr.

Casaubon shrank nervously from communicating on the subject with Sir

James Chettam, between whom and himself there had never been any

cordiality, and who would immediately think of Dorothea without any

mention of her.

Poor Mr. Casaubon was distrustful of everybody’s feeling towards him,

especially as a husband. To let any one suppose that he was jealous

would be to admit their (suspected) view of his disadvantages: to let

them know that he did not find marriage particularly blissful would

imply his conversion to their (probably) earlier disapproval. It would

be as bad as letting Carp, and Brasenose generally, know how backward

he was in organizing the matter for his “Key to all Mythologies.” All

through his life Mr. Casaubon had been trying not to admit even to

himself the inward sores of self-doubt and jealousy. And on the most

delicate of all personal subjects, the habit of proud suspicious

reticence told doubly.

Thus Mr. Casaubon remained proudly, bitterly silent. But he had

forbidden Will to come to Lowick Manor, and he was mentally preparing

other measures of frustration.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

“C’est beaucoup que le jugement des hommes sur les actions humaines;

tôt ou tard il devient efficace.”—GUIZOT.

Sir James Chettam could not look with any satisfaction on Mr. Brooke’s

new courses; but it was easier to object than to hinder. Sir James

accounted for his having come in alone one day to lunch with the

Cadwalladers by saying—

“I can’t talk to you as I want, before Celia: it might hurt her.

Indeed, it would not be right.”

“I know what you mean—the ‘Pioneer’ at the Grange!” darted in Mrs.

Cadwallader, almost before the last word was off her friend’s tongue.

“It is frightful—this taking to buying whistles and blowing them in

everybody’s hearing. Lying in bed all day and playing at dominoes, like

poor Lord Plessy, would be more private and bearable.”

“I see they are beginning to attack our friend Brooke in the

‘Trumpet,’” said the Rector, lounging back and smiling easily, as he

would have done if he had been attacked himself. “There are tremendous

sarcasms against a landlord not a hundred miles from Middlemarch, who

receives his own rents, and makes no returns.”

“I do wish Brooke would leave that off,” said Sir James, with his

little frown of annoyance.

“Is he really going to be put in nomination, though?” said Mr.

Cadwallader. “I saw Farebrother yesterday—he’s Whiggish himself, hoists

Brougham and Useful Knowledge; that’s the worst I know of him;—and he

says that Brooke is getting up a pretty strong party. Bulstrode, the

banker, is his foremost man. But he thinks Brooke would come off badly

at a nomination.”

“Exactly,” said Sir James, with earnestness. “I have been inquiring

into the thing, for I’ve never known anything about Middlemarch

politics before—the county being my business. What Brooke trusts to, is

that they are going to turn out Oliver because he is a Peelite. But

Hawley tells me that if they send up a Whig at all it is sure to be

Bagster, one of those candidates who come from heaven knows where, but

dead against Ministers, and an experienced Parliamentary man. Hawley’s

rather rough: he forgot that he was speaking to me. He said if Brooke

wanted a pelting, he could get it cheaper than by going to the

hustings.”

“I warned you all of it,” said Mrs. Cadwallader, waving her hands

outward. “I said to Humphrey long ago, Mr. Brooke is going to make a

splash in the mud. And now he has done it.”

“Well, he might have taken it into his head to marry,” said the Rector.

“That would have been a graver mess than a little flirtation with

politics.”

“He may do that afterwards,” said Mrs. Cadwallader—“when he has come

out on the other side of the mud with an ague.”

“What I care for most is his own dignity,” said Sir James. “Of course I

care the more because of the family. But he’s getting on in life now,

and I don’t like to think of his exposing himself. They will be raking

up everything against him.”

“I suppose it’s no use trying any persuasion,” said the Rector.

“There’s such an odd mixture of obstinacy and changeableness in Brooke.

Have you tried him on the subject?”

“Well, no,” said Sir James; “I feel a delicacy in appearing to dictate.

But I have been talking to this young Ladislaw that Brooke is making a

factotum of. Ladislaw seems clever enough for anything. I thought it as

well to hear what he had to say; and he is against Brooke’s standing

this time. I think he’ll turn him round: I think the nomination may be

staved off.”

“I know,” said Mrs. Cadwallader, nodding. “The independent member

hasn’t got his speeches well enough by heart.”

“But this Ladislaw—there again is a vexatious business,” said Sir

James. “We have had him two or three times to dine at the Hall (you

have met him, by the bye) as Brooke’s guest and a relation of

Casaubon’s, thinking he was only on a flying visit. And now I find he’s

in everybody’s mouth in Middlemarch as the editor of the ‘Pioneer.’

There are stories going about him as a quill-driving alien, a foreign

emissary, and what not.”

“Casaubon won’t like that,” said the Rector.

“There \_is\_ some foreign blood in Ladislaw,” returned Sir James. “I

hope he won’t go into extreme opinions and carry Brooke on.”

“Oh, he’s a dangerous young sprig, that Mr. Ladislaw,” said Mrs.

Cadwallader, “with his opera songs and his ready tongue. A sort of

Byronic hero—an amorous conspirator, it strikes me. And Thomas Aquinas

is not fond of him. I could see that, the day the picture was brought.”

“I don’t like to begin on the subject with Casaubon,” said Sir James.

“He has more right to interfere than I. But it’s a disagreeable affair

all round. What a character for anybody with decent connections to show

himself in!—one of those newspaper fellows! You have only to look at

Keck, who manages the ‘Trumpet.’ I saw him the other day with Hawley.

His writing is sound enough, I believe, but he’s such a low fellow,

that I wished he had been on the wrong side.”

“What can you expect with these peddling Middlemarch papers?” said the

Rector. “I don’t suppose you could get a high style of man anywhere to

be writing up interests he doesn’t really care about, and for pay that

hardly keeps him in at elbows.”

“Exactly: that makes it so annoying that Brooke should have put a man

who has a sort of connection with the family in a position of that

kind. For my part, I think Ladislaw is rather a fool for accepting.”

“It is Aquinas’s fault,” said Mrs. Cadwallader. “Why didn’t he use his

interest to get Ladislaw made an \_attache\_ or sent to India? That is

how families get rid of troublesome sprigs.”

“There is no knowing to what lengths the mischief may go,” said Sir

James, anxiously. “But if Casaubon says nothing, what can I do?”

“Oh my dear Sir James,” said the Rector, “don’t let us make too much of

all this. It is likely enough to end in mere smoke. After a month or

two Brooke and this Master Ladislaw will get tired of each other;

Ladislaw will take wing; Brooke will sell the ‘Pioneer,’ and everything

will settle down again as usual.”

“There is one good chance—that he will not like to feel his money

oozing away,” said Mrs. Cadwallader. “If I knew the items of election

expenses I could scare him. It’s no use plying him with wide words like

Expenditure: I wouldn’t talk of phlebotomy, I would empty a pot of

leeches upon him. What we good stingy people don’t like, is having our

sixpences sucked away from us.”

“And he will not like having things raked up against him,” said Sir

James. “There is the management of his estate. They have begun upon

that already. And it really is painful for me to see. It is a nuisance

under one’s very nose. I do think one is bound to do the best for one’s

land and tenants, especially in these hard times.”

“Perhaps the ‘Trumpet’ may rouse him to make a change, and some good

may come of it all,” said the Rector. “I know I should be glad. I

should hear less grumbling when my tithe is paid. I don’t know what I

should do if there were not a modus in Tipton.”

“I want him to have a proper man to look after things—I want him to

take on Garth again,” said Sir James. “He got rid of Garth twelve years

ago, and everything has been going wrong since. I think of getting

Garth to manage for me—he has made such a capital plan for my

buildings; and Lovegood is hardly up to the mark. But Garth would not

undertake the Tipton estate again unless Brooke left it entirely to

him.”

“In the right of it too,” said the Rector. “Garth is an independent

fellow: an original, simple-minded fellow. One day, when he was doing

some valuation for me, he told me point-blank that clergymen seldom

understood anything about business, and did mischief when they meddled;

but he said it as quietly and respectfully as if he had been talking to

me about sailors. He would make a different parish of Tipton, if Brooke

would let him manage. I wish, by the help of the ‘Trumpet,’ you could

bring that round.”

“If Dorothea had kept near her uncle, there would have been some

chance,” said Sir James. “She might have got some power over him in

time, and she was always uneasy about the estate. She had wonderfully

good notions about such things. But now Casaubon takes her up entirely.

Celia complains a good deal. We can hardly get her to dine with us,

since he had that fit.” Sir James ended with a look of pitying disgust,

and Mrs. Cadwallader shrugged her shoulders as much as to say that

\_she\_ was not likely to see anything new in that direction.

“Poor Casaubon!” the Rector said. “That was a nasty attack. I thought

he looked shattered the other day at the Archdeacon’s.”

“In point of fact,” resumed Sir James, not choosing to dwell on “fits,”

“Brooke doesn’t mean badly by his tenants or any one else, but he has

got that way of paring and clipping at expenses.”

“Come, that’s a blessing,” said Mrs. Cadwallader. “That helps him to

find himself in a morning. He may not know his own opinions, but he

does know his own pocket.”

“I don’t believe a man is in pocket by stinginess on his land,” said

Sir James.

“Oh, stinginess may be abused like other virtues: it will not do to

keep one’s own pigs lean,” said Mrs. Cadwallader, who had risen to look

out of the window. “But talk of an independent politician and he will

appear.”

“What! Brooke?” said her husband.

“Yes. Now, you ply him with the ‘Trumpet,’ Humphrey; and I will put the

leeches on him. What will you do, Sir James?”

“The fact is, I don’t like to begin about it with Brooke, in our mutual

position; the whole thing is so unpleasant. I do wish people would

behave like gentlemen,” said the good baronet, feeling that this was a

simple and comprehensive programme for social well-being.

“Here you all are, eh?” said Mr. Brooke, shuffling round and shaking

hands. “I was going up to the Hall by-and-by, Chettam. But it’s

pleasant to find everybody, you know. Well, what do you think of

things?—going on a little fast! It was true enough, what Lafitte

said—‘Since yesterday, a century has passed away:’—they’re in the next

century, you know, on the other side of the water. Going on faster than

we are.”

“Why, yes,” said the Rector, taking up the newspaper. “Here is the

‘Trumpet’ accusing you of lagging behind—did you see?”

“Eh? no,” said Mr. Brooke, dropping his gloves into his hat and hastily

adjusting his eye-glass. But Mr. Cadwallader kept the paper in his

hand, saying, with a smile in his eyes—

“Look here! all this is about a landlord not a hundred miles from

Middlemarch, who receives his own rents. They say he is the most

retrogressive man in the county. I think you must have taught them that

word in the ‘Pioneer.’”

“Oh, that is Keck—an illiterate fellow, you know. Retrogressive, now!

Come, that’s capital. He thinks it means destructive: they want to make

me out a destructive, you know,” said Mr. Brooke, with that

cheerfulness which is usually sustained by an adversary’s ignorance.

“I think he knows the meaning of the word. Here is a sharp stroke or

two. \_If we had to describe a man who is retrogressive in the most evil

sense of the word—we should say, he is one who would dub himself a

reformer of our constitution, while every interest for which he is

immediately responsible is going to decay: a philanthropist who cannot

bear one rogue to be hanged, but does not mind five honest tenants

being half-starved: a man who shrieks at corruption, and keeps his

farms at rack-rent: who roars himself red at rotten boroughs, and does

not mind if every field on his farms has a rotten gate: a man very

open-hearted to Leeds and Manchester, no doubt; he would give any

number of representatives who will pay for their seats out of their own

pockets: what he objects to giving, is a little return on rent-days to

help a tenant to buy stock, or an outlay on repairs to keep the weather

out at a tenant’s barn-door or make his house look a little less like

an Irish cottier’s. But we all know the wag’s definition of a

philanthropist: a man whose charity increases directly as the square of

the distance.\_ And so on. All the rest is to show what sort of

legislator a philanthropist is likely to make,” ended the Rector,

throwing down the paper, and clasping his hands at the back of his

head, while he looked at Mr. Brooke with an air of amused neutrality.

“Come, that’s rather good, you know,” said Mr. Brooke, taking up the

paper and trying to bear the attack as easily as his neighbor did, but

coloring and smiling rather nervously; “that about roaring himself red

at rotten boroughs—I never made a speech about rotten boroughs in my

life. And as to roaring myself red and that kind of thing—these men

never understand what is good satire. Satire, you know, should be true

up to a certain point. I recollect they said that in ‘The Edinburgh’

somewhere—it must be true up to a certain point.”

“Well, that is really a hit about the gates,” said Sir James, anxious

to tread carefully. “Dagley complained to me the other day that he

hadn’t got a decent gate on his farm. Garth has invented a new pattern

of gate—I wish you would try it. One ought to use some of one’s timber

in that way.”

“You go in for fancy farming, you know, Chettam,” said Mr. Brooke,

appearing to glance over the columns of the “Trumpet.” “That’s your

hobby, and you don’t mind the expense.”

“I thought the most expensive hobby in the world was standing for

Parliament,” said Mrs. Cadwallader. “They said the last unsuccessful

candidate at Middlemarch—Giles, wasn’t his name?—spent ten thousand

pounds and failed because he did not bribe enough. What a bitter

reflection for a man!”

“Somebody was saying,” said the Rector, laughingly, “that East Retford

was nothing to Middlemarch, for bribery.”

“Nothing of the kind,” said Mr. Brooke. “The Tories bribe, you know:

Hawley and his set bribe with treating, hot codlings, and that sort of

thing; and they bring the voters drunk to the poll. But they are not

going to have it their own way in future—not in future, you know.

Middlemarch is a little backward, I admit—the freemen are a little

backward. But we shall educate them—we shall bring them on, you know.

The best people there are on our side.”

“Hawley says you have men on your side who will do you harm,” remarked

Sir James. “He says Bulstrode the banker will do you harm.”

“And that if you got pelted,” interposed Mrs. Cadwallader, “half the

rotten eggs would mean hatred of your committee-man. Good heavens!

Think what it must be to be pelted for wrong opinions. And I seem to

remember a story of a man they pretended to chair and let him fall into

a dust-heap on purpose!”

“Pelting is nothing to their finding holes in one’s coat,” said the

Rector. “I confess that’s what I should be afraid of, if we parsons had

to stand at the hustings for preferment. I should be afraid of their

reckoning up all my fishing days. Upon my word, I think the truth is

the hardest missile one can be pelted with.”

“The fact is,” said Sir James, “if a man goes into public life he must

be prepared for the consequences. He must make himself proof against

calumny.”

“My dear Chettam, that is all very fine, you know,” said Mr. Brooke.

“But how will you make yourself proof against calumny? You should read

history—look at ostracism, persecution, martyrdom, and that kind of

thing. They always happen to the best men, you know. But what is that

in Horace?—\_fiat justitia, ruat\_ … something or other.”

“Exactly,” said Sir James, with a little more heat than usual. “What I

mean by being proof against calumny is being able to point to the fact

as a contradiction.”

“And it is not martyrdom to pay bills that one has run into one’s

self,” said Mrs. Cadwallader.

But it was Sir James’s evident annoyance that most stirred Mr. Brooke.

“Well, you know, Chettam,” he said, rising, taking up his hat and

leaning on his stick, “you and I have a different system. You are all

for outlay with your farms. I don’t want to make out that my system is

good under all circumstances—under all circumstances, you know.”

“There ought to be a new valuation made from time to time,” said Sir

James. “Returns are very well occasionally, but I like a fair

valuation. What do you say, Cadwallader?”

“I agree with you. If I were Brooke, I would choke the ‘Trumpet’ at

once by getting Garth to make a new valuation of the farms, and giving

him \_carte blanche\_ about gates and repairs: that’s my view of the

political situation,” said the Rector, broadening himself by sticking

his thumbs in his armholes, and laughing towards Mr. Brooke.

“That’s a showy sort of thing to do, you know,” said Mr. Brooke. “But I

should like you to tell me of another landlord who has distressed his

tenants for arrears as little as I have. I let the old tenants stay on.

I’m uncommonly easy, let me tell you, uncommonly easy. I have my own

ideas, and I take my stand on them, you know. A man who does that is

always charged with eccentricity, inconsistency, and that kind of

thing. When I change my line of action, I shall follow my own ideas.”

After that, Mr. Brooke remembered that there was a packet which he had

omitted to send off from the Grange, and he bade everybody hurriedly

good-by.

“I didn’t want to take a liberty with Brooke,” said Sir James; “I see

he is nettled. But as to what he says about old tenants, in point of

fact no new tenant would take the farms on the present terms.”

“I have a notion that he will be brought round in time,” said the

Rector. “But you were pulling one way, Elinor, and we were pulling

another. You wanted to frighten him away from expense, and we want to

frighten him into it. Better let him try to be popular and see that his

character as a landlord stands in his way. I don’t think it signifies

two straws about the ‘Pioneer,’ or Ladislaw, or Brooke’s speechifying

to the Middlemarchers. But it does signify about the parishioners in

Tipton being comfortable.”

“Excuse me, it is you two who are on the wrong tack,” said Mrs.

Cadwallader. “You should have proved to him that he loses money by bad

management, and then we should all have pulled together. If you put him

a-horseback on politics, I warn you of the consequences. It was all

very well to ride on sticks at home and call them ideas.”

CHAPTER XXXIX.

“If, as I have, you also doe,

Vertue attired in woman see,

And dare love that, and say so too,

And forget the He and She;

And if this love, though placed so,

From prophane men you hide,

Which will no faith on this bestow,

Or, if they doe, deride:

Then you have done a braver thing

Than all the Worthies did,

And a braver thence will spring,

Which is, to keep that hid.”

—DR. DONNE.

Sir James Chettam’s mind was not fruitful in devices, but his growing

anxiety to “act on Brooke,” once brought close to his constant belief

in Dorothea’s capacity for influence, became formative, and issued in a

little plan; namely, to plead Celia’s indisposition as a reason for

fetching Dorothea by herself to the Hall, and to leave her at the

Grange with the carriage on the way, after making her fully aware of

the situation concerning the management of the estate.

In this way it happened that one day near four o’clock, when Mr. Brooke

and Ladislaw were seated in the library, the door opened and Mrs.

Casaubon was announced.

Will, the moment before, had been low in the depths of boredom, and,

obliged to help Mr. Brooke in arranging “documents” about hanging

sheep-stealers, was exemplifying the power our minds have of riding

several horses at once by inwardly arranging measures towards getting a

lodging for himself in Middlemarch and cutting short his constant

residence at the Grange; while there flitted through all these steadier

images a tickling vision of a sheep-stealing epic written with Homeric

particularity. When Mrs. Casaubon was announced he started up as from

an electric shock, and felt a tingling at his finger-ends. Any one

observing him would have seen a change in his complexion, in the

adjustment of his facial muscles, in the vividness of his glance, which

might have made them imagine that every molecule in his body had passed

the message of a magic touch. And so it had. For effective magic is

transcendent nature; and who shall measure the subtlety of those

touches which convey the quality of soul as well as body, and make a

man’s passion for one woman differ from his passion for another as joy

in the morning light over valley and river and white mountain-top

differs from joy among Chinese lanterns and glass panels? Will, too,

was made of very impressible stuff. The bow of a violin drawn near him

cleverly, would at one stroke change the aspect of the world for him,

and his point of view shifted as easily as his mood. Dorothea’s

entrance was the freshness of morning.

“Well, my dear, this is pleasant, now,” said Mr. Brooke, meeting and

kissing her. “You have left Casaubon with his books, I suppose. That’s

right. We must not have you getting too learned for a woman, you know.”

“There is no fear of that, uncle,” said Dorothea, turning to Will and

shaking hands with open cheerfulness, while she made no other form of

greeting, but went on answering her uncle. “I am very slow. When I want

to be busy with books, I am often playing truant among my thoughts. I

find it is not so easy to be learned as to plan cottages.”

She seated herself beside her uncle opposite to Will, and was evidently

preoccupied with something that made her almost unmindful of him. He

was ridiculously disappointed, as if he had imagined that her coming

had anything to do with him.

“Why, yes, my dear, it was quite your hobby to draw plans. But it was

good to break that off a little. Hobbies are apt to run away with us,

you know; it doesn’t do to be run away with. We must keep the reins. I

have never let myself be run away with; I always pulled up. That is

what I tell Ladislaw. He and I are alike, you know: he likes to go into

everything. We are working at capital punishment. We shall do a great

deal together, Ladislaw and I.”

“Yes,” said Dorothea, with characteristic directness, “Sir James has

been telling me that he is in hope of seeing a great change made soon

in your management of the estate—that you are thinking of having the

farms valued, and repairs made, and the cottages improved, so that

Tipton may look quite another place. Oh, how happy!”—she went on,

clasping her hands, with a return to that more childlike impetuous

manner, which had been subdued since her marriage. “If I were at home

still, I should take to riding again, that I might go about with you

and see all that! And you are going to engage Mr. Garth, who praised my

cottages, Sir James says.”

“Chettam is a little hasty, my dear,” said Mr. Brooke, coloring

slightly; “a little hasty, you know. I never said I should do anything

of the kind. I never said I should \_not\_ do it, you know.”

“He only feels confident that you will do it,” said Dorothea, in a

voice as clear and unhesitating as that of a young chorister chanting a

credo, “because you mean to enter Parliament as a member who cares for

the improvement of the people, and one of the first things to be made

better is the state of the land and the laborers. Think of Kit Downes,

uncle, who lives with his wife and seven children in a house with one

sitting room and one bedroom hardly larger than this table!—and those

poor Dagleys, in their tumble-down farmhouse, where they live in the

back kitchen and leave the other rooms to the rats! That is one reason

why I did not like the pictures here, dear uncle—which you think me

stupid about. I used to come from the village with all that dirt and

coarse ugliness like a pain within me, and the simpering pictures in

the drawing-room seemed to me like a wicked attempt to find delight in

what is false, while we don’t mind how hard the truth is for the

neighbors outside our walls. I think we have no right to come forward

and urge wider changes for good, until we have tried to alter the evils

which lie under our own hands.”

Dorothea had gathered emotion as she went on, and had forgotten

everything except the relief of pouring forth her feelings, unchecked:

an experience once habitual with her, but hardly ever present since her

marriage, which had been a perpetual struggle of energy with fear. For

the moment, Will’s admiration was accompanied with a chilling sense of

remoteness. A man is seldom ashamed of feeling that he cannot love a

woman so well when he sees a certain greatness in her: nature having

intended greatness for men. But nature has sometimes made sad

oversights in carrying out her intention; as in the case of good Mr.

Brooke, whose masculine consciousness was at this moment in rather a

stammering condition under the eloquence of his niece. He could not

immediately find any other mode of expressing himself than that of

rising, fixing his eye-glass, and fingering the papers before him. At

last he said—

“There is something in what you say, my dear, something in what you

say—but not everything—eh, Ladislaw? You and I don’t like our pictures

and statues being found fault with. Young ladies are a little ardent,

you know—a little one-sided, my dear. Fine art, poetry, that kind of

thing, elevates a nation—\_emollit mores\_—you understand a little Latin

now. But—eh? what?”

These interrogatives were addressed to the footman who had come in to

say that the keeper had found one of Dagley’s boys with a leveret in

his hand just killed.

“I’ll come, I’ll come. I shall let him off easily, you know,” said Mr.

Brooke aside to Dorothea, shuffling away very cheerfully.

“I hope you feel how right this change is that I—that Sir James wishes

for,” said Dorothea to Will, as soon as her uncle was gone.

“I do, now I have heard you speak about it. I shall not forget what you

have said. But can you think of something else at this moment? I may

not have another opportunity of speaking to you about what has

occurred,” said Will, rising with a movement of impatience, and holding

the back of his chair with both hands.

“Pray tell me what it is,” said Dorothea, anxiously, also rising and

going to the open window, where Monk was looking in, panting and

wagging his tail. She leaned her back against the window-frame, and

laid her hand on the dog’s head; for though, as we know, she was not

fond of pets that must be held in the hands or trodden on, she was

always attentive to the feelings of dogs, and very polite if she had to

decline their advances.

Will followed her only with his eyes and said, “I presume you know that

Mr. Casaubon has forbidden me to go to his house.”

“No, I did not,” said Dorothea, after a moment’s pause. She was

evidently much moved. “I am very, very sorry,” she added, mournfully.

She was thinking of what Will had no knowledge of—the conversation

between her and her husband in the darkness; and she was anew smitten

with hopelessness that she could influence Mr. Casaubon’s action. But

the marked expression of her sorrow convinced Will that it was not all

given to him personally, and that Dorothea had not been visited by the

idea that Mr. Casaubon’s dislike and jealousy of him turned upon

herself. He felt an odd mixture of delight and vexation: of delight

that he could dwell and be cherished in her thought as in a pure home,

without suspicion and without stint—of vexation because he was of too

little account with her, was not formidable enough, was treated with an

unhesitating benevolence which did not flatter him. But his dread of

any change in Dorothea was stronger than his discontent, and he began

to speak again in a tone of mere explanation.

“Mr. Casaubon’s reason is, his displeasure at my taking a position here

which he considers unsuited to my rank as his cousin. I have told him

that I cannot give way on this point. It is a little too hard on me to

expect that my course in life is to be hampered by prejudices which I

think ridiculous. Obligation may be stretched till it is no better than

a brand of slavery stamped on us when we were too young to know its

meaning. I would not have accepted the position if I had not meant to

make it useful and honorable. I am not bound to regard family dignity

in any other light.”

Dorothea felt wretched. She thought her husband altogether in the

wrong, on more grounds than Will had mentioned.

“It is better for us not to speak on the subject,” she said, with a

tremulousness not common in her voice, “since you and Mr. Casaubon

disagree. You intend to remain?” She was looking out on the lawn, with

melancholy meditation.

“Yes; but I shall hardly ever see you now,” said Will, in a tone of

almost boyish complaint.

“No,” said Dorothea, turning her eyes full upon him, “hardly ever. But

I shall hear of you. I shall know what you are doing for my uncle.”

“I shall know hardly anything about you,” said Will. “No one will tell

me anything.”

“Oh, my life is very simple,” said Dorothea, her lips curling with an

exquisite smile, which irradiated her melancholy. “I am always at

Lowick.”

“That is a dreadful imprisonment,” said Will, impetuously.

“No, don’t think that,” said Dorothea. “I have no longings.”

He did not speak, but she replied to some change in his expression. “I

mean, for myself. Except that I should like not to have so much more

than my share without doing anything for others. But I have a belief of

my own, and it comforts me.”

“What is that?” said Will, rather jealous of the belief.

“That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don’t quite know

what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power

against evil—widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with

darkness narrower.”

“That is a beautiful mysticism—it is a—”

“Please not to call it by any name,” said Dorothea, putting out her

hands entreatingly. “You will say it is Persian, or something else

geographical. It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with

it. I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little

girl. I used to pray so much—now I hardly ever pray. I try not to have

desires merely for myself, because they may not be good for others, and

I have too much already. I only told you, that you might know quite

well how my days go at Lowick.”

“God bless you for telling me!” said Will, ardently, and rather

wondering at himself. They were looking at each other like two fond

children who were talking confidentially of birds.

“What is \_your\_ religion?” said Dorothea. “I mean—not what you know

about religion, but the belief that helps you most?”

“To love what is good and beautiful when I see it,” said Will. “But I

am a rebel: I don’t feel bound, as you do, to submit to what I don’t

like.”

“But if you like what is good, that comes to the same thing,” said

Dorothea, smiling.

“Now you are subtle,” said Will.

“Yes; Mr. Casaubon often says I am too subtle. I don’t feel as if I

were subtle,” said Dorothea, playfully. “But how long my uncle is! I

must go and look for him. I must really go on to the Hall. Celia is

expecting me.”

Will offered to tell Mr. Brooke, who presently came and said that he

would step into the carriage and go with Dorothea as far as Dagley’s,

to speak about the small delinquent who had been caught with the

leveret. Dorothea renewed the subject of the estate as they drove

along, but Mr. Brooke, not being taken unawares, got the talk under his

own control.

“Chettam, now,” he replied; “he finds fault with me, my dear; but I

should not preserve my game if it were not for Chettam, and he can’t

say that that expense is for the sake of the tenants, you know. It’s a

little against my feeling:—poaching, now, if you come to look into it—I

have often thought of getting up the subject. Not long ago, Flavell,

the Methodist preacher, was brought up for knocking down a hare that

came across his path when he and his wife were walking out together. He

was pretty quick, and knocked it on the neck.”

“That was very brutal, I think,” said Dorothea.

“Well, now, it seemed rather black to me, I confess, in a Methodist

preacher, you know. And Johnson said, ‘You may judge what a hypo\_crite\_

he is.’ And upon my word, I thought Flavell looked very little like

‘the highest style of man’—as somebody calls the Christian—Young, the

poet Young, I think—you know Young? Well, now, Flavell in his shabby

black gaiters, pleading that he thought the Lord had sent him and his

wife a good dinner, and he had a right to knock it down, though not a

mighty hunter before the Lord, as Nimrod was—I assure you it was rather

comic: Fielding would have made something of it—or Scott, now—Scott

might have worked it up. But really, when I came to think of it, I

couldn’t help liking that the fellow should have a bit of hare to say

grace over. It’s all a matter of prejudice—prejudice with the law on

its side, you know—about the stick and the gaiters, and so on. However,

it doesn’t do to reason about things; and law is law. But I got Johnson

to be quiet, and I hushed the matter up. I doubt whether Chettam would

not have been more severe, and yet he comes down on me as if I were the

hardest man in the county. But here we are at Dagley’s.”

Mr. Brooke got down at a farmyard-gate, and Dorothea drove on. It is

wonderful how much uglier things will look when we only suspect that we

are blamed for them. Even our own persons in the glass are apt to

change their aspect for us after we have heard some frank remark on

their less admirable points; and on the other hand it is astonishing

how pleasantly conscience takes our encroachments on those who never

complain or have nobody to complain for them. Dagley’s homestead never

before looked so dismal to Mr. Brooke as it did today, with his mind

thus sore about the fault-finding of the “Trumpet,” echoed by Sir

James.

It is true that an observer, under that softening influence of the fine

arts which makes other people’s hardships picturesque, might have been

delighted with this homestead called Freeman’s End: the old house had

dormer-windows in the dark red roof, two of the chimneys were choked

with ivy, the large porch was blocked up with bundles of sticks, and

half the windows were closed with gray worm-eaten shutters about which

the jasmine-boughs grew in wild luxuriance; the mouldering garden wall

with hollyhocks peeping over it was a perfect study of highly mingled

subdued color, and there was an aged goat (kept doubtless on

interesting superstitious grounds) lying against the open back-kitchen

door. The mossy thatch of the cow-shed, the broken gray barn-doors, the

pauper laborers in ragged breeches who had nearly finished unloading a

wagon of corn into the barn ready for early thrashing; the scanty dairy

of cows being tethered for milking and leaving one half of the shed in

brown emptiness; the very pigs and white ducks seeming to wander about

the uneven neglected yard as if in low spirits from feeding on a too

meagre quality of rinsings,—all these objects under the quiet light of

a sky marbled with high clouds would have made a sort of picture which

we have all paused over as a “charming bit,” touching other

sensibilities than those which are stirred by the depression of the

agricultural interest, with the sad lack of farming capital, as seen

constantly in the newspapers of that time. But these troublesome

associations were just now strongly present to Mr. Brooke, and spoiled

the scene for him. Mr. Dagley himself made a figure in the landscape,

carrying a pitchfork and wearing his milking-hat—a very old beaver

flattened in front. His coat and breeches were the best he had, and he

would not have been wearing them on this weekday occasion if he had not

been to market and returned later than usual, having given himself the

rare treat of dining at the public table of the Blue Bull. How he came

to fall into this extravagance would perhaps be matter of wonderment to

himself on the morrow; but before dinner something in the state of the

country, a slight pause in the harvest before the Far Dips were cut,

the stories about the new King and the numerous handbills on the walls,

had seemed to warrant a little recklessness. It was a maxim about

Middlemarch, and regarded as self-evident, that good meat should have

good drink, which last Dagley interpreted as plenty of table ale well

followed up by rum-and-water. These liquors have so far truth in them

that they were not false enough to make poor Dagley seem merry: they

only made his discontent less tongue-tied than usual. He had also taken

too much in the shape of muddy political talk, a stimulant dangerously

disturbing to his farming conservatism, which consisted in holding that

whatever is, is bad, and any change is likely to be worse. He was

flushed, and his eyes had a decidedly quarrelsome stare as he stood

still grasping his pitchfork, while the landlord approached with his

easy shuffling walk, one hand in his trouser-pocket and the other

swinging round a thin walking-stick.

“Dagley, my good fellow,” began Mr. Brooke, conscious that he was going

to be very friendly about the boy.

“Oh, ay, I’m a good feller, am I? Thank ye, sir, thank ye,” said

Dagley, with a loud snarling irony which made Fag the sheep-dog stir

from his seat and prick his ears; but seeing Monk enter the yard after

some outside loitering, Fag seated himself again in an attitude of

observation. “I’m glad to hear I’m a good feller.”

Mr. Brooke reflected that it was market-day, and that his worthy tenant

had probably been dining, but saw no reason why he should not go on,

since he could take the precaution of repeating what he had to say to

Mrs. Dagley.

“Your little lad Jacob has been caught killing a leveret, Dagley: I

have told Johnson to lock him up in the empty stable an hour or two,

just to frighten him, you know. But he will be brought home by-and-by,

before night: and you’ll just look after him, will you, and give him a

reprimand, you know?”

“No, I woon’t: I’ll be dee’d if I’ll leather my boy to please you or

anybody else, not if you was twenty landlords istid o’ one, and that a

bad un.”

Dagley’s words were loud enough to summon his wife to the back-kitchen

door—the only entrance ever used, and one always open except in bad

weather—and Mr. Brooke, saying soothingly, “Well, well, I’ll speak to

your wife—I didn’t mean beating, you know,” turned to walk to the

house. But Dagley, only the more inclined to “have his say” with a

gentleman who walked away from him, followed at once, with Fag

slouching at his heels and sullenly evading some small and probably

charitable advances on the part of Monk.

“How do you do, Mrs. Dagley?” said Mr. Brooke, making some haste. “I

came to tell you about your boy: I don’t want you to give him the

stick, you know.” He was careful to speak quite plainly this time.

Overworked Mrs. Dagley—a thin, worn woman, from whose life pleasure had

so entirely vanished that she had not even any Sunday clothes which

could give her satisfaction in preparing for church—had already had a

misunderstanding with her husband since he had come home, and was in

low spirits, expecting the worst. But her husband was beforehand in

answering.

“No, nor he woon’t hev the stick, whether you want it or no,” pursued

Dagley, throwing out his voice, as if he wanted it to hit hard. “You’ve

got no call to come an’ talk about sticks o’ these primises, as you

woon’t give a stick tow’rt mending. Go to Middlemarch to ax for \_your\_

charrickter.”

“You’d far better hold your tongue, Dagley,” said the wife, “and not

kick your own trough over. When a man as is father of a family has been

an’ spent money at market and made himself the worse for liquor, he’s

done enough mischief for one day. But I should like to know what my

boy’s done, sir.”

“Niver do you mind what he’s done,” said Dagley, more fiercely, “it’s

my business to speak, an’ not yourn. An’ I wull speak, too. I’ll hev my

say—supper or no. An’ what I say is, as I’ve lived upo’ your ground

from my father and grandfather afore me, an’ hev dropped our money

into’t, an’ me an’ my children might lie an’ rot on the ground for

top-dressin’ as we can’t find the money to buy, if the King wasn’t to

put a stop.”

“My good fellow, you’re drunk, you know,” said Mr. Brooke,

confidentially but not judiciously. “Another day, another day,” he

added, turning as if to go.

But Dagley immediately fronted him, and Fag at his heels growled low,

as his master’s voice grew louder and more insulting, while Monk also

drew close in silent dignified watch. The laborers on the wagon were

pausing to listen, and it seemed wiser to be quite passive than to

attempt a ridiculous flight pursued by a bawling man.

“I’m no more drunk nor you are, nor so much,” said Dagley. “I can carry

my liquor, an’ I know what I meean. An’ I meean as the King ’ull put a

stop to ’t, for them say it as knows it, as there’s to be a Rinform,

and them landlords as never done the right thing by their tenants ’ull

be treated i’ that way as they’ll hev to scuttle off. An’ there’s them

i’ Middlemarch knows what the Rinform is—an’ as knows who’ll hev to

scuttle. Says they, ‘I know who \_your\_ landlord is.’ An’ says I, ‘I

hope you’re the better for knowin’ him, I arn’t.’ Says they, ‘He’s a

close-fisted un.’ ‘Ay ay,’ says I. ‘He’s a man for the Rinform,’ says

they. That’s what they says. An’ I made out what the Rinform were—an’

it were to send you an’ your likes a-scuttlin’ an’ wi’ pretty

strong-smellin’ things too. An’ you may do as you like now, for I’m

none afeard on you. An’ you’d better let my boy aloan, an’ look to

yoursen, afore the Rinform has got upo’ your back. That’s what I’n got

to say,” concluded Mr. Dagley, striking his fork into the ground with a

firmness which proved inconvenient as he tried to draw it up again.

At this last action Monk began to bark loudly, and it was a moment for

Mr. Brooke to escape. He walked out of the yard as quickly as he could,

in some amazement at the novelty of his situation. He had never been

insulted on his own land before, and had been inclined to regard

himself as a general favorite (we are all apt to do so, when we think

of our own amiability more than of what other people are likely to want

of us). When he had quarrelled with Caleb Garth twelve years before he

had thought that the tenants would be pleased at the landlord’s taking

everything into his own hands.

Some who follow the narrative of his experience may wonder at the

midnight darkness of Mr. Dagley; but nothing was easier in those times

than for an hereditary farmer of his grade to be ignorant, in spite

somehow of having a rector in the twin parish who was a gentleman to

the backbone, a curate nearer at hand who preached more learnedly than

the rector, a landlord who had gone into everything, especially fine

art and social improvement, and all the lights of Middlemarch only

three miles off. As to the facility with which mortals escape

knowledge, try an average acquaintance in the intellectual blaze of

London, and consider what that eligible person for a dinner-party would

have been if he had learned scant skill in “summing” from the

parish-clerk of Tipton, and read a chapter in the Bible with immense

difficulty, because such names as Isaiah or Apollos remained

unmanageable after twice spelling. Poor Dagley read a few verses

sometimes on a Sunday evening, and the world was at least not darker to

him than it had been before. Some things he knew thoroughly, namely,

the slovenly habits of farming, and the awkwardness of weather, stock

and crops, at Freeman’s End—so called apparently by way of sarcasm, to

imply that a man was free to quit it if he chose, but that there was no

earthly “beyond” open to him.

CHAPTER XL.

Wise in his daily work was he:

To fruits of diligence,

And not to faiths or polity,

He plied his utmost sense.

These perfect in their little parts,

Whose work is all their prize—

Without them how could laws, or arts,

Or towered cities rise?

In watching effects, if only of an electric battery, it is often

necessary to change our place and examine a particular mixture or group

at some distance from the point where the movement we are interested in

was set up. The group I am moving towards is at Caleb Garth’s

breakfast-table in the large parlor where the maps and desk were:

father, mother, and five of the children. Mary was just now at home

waiting for a situation, while Christy, the boy next to her, was

getting cheap learning and cheap fare in Scotland, having to his

father’s disappointment taken to books instead of that sacred calling

“business.”

The letters had come—nine costly letters, for which the postman had

been paid three and twopence, and Mr. Garth was forgetting his tea and

toast while he read his letters and laid them open one above the other,

sometimes swaying his head slowly, sometimes screwing up his mouth in

inward debate, but not forgetting to cut off a large red seal unbroken,

which Letty snatched up like an eager terrier.

The talk among the rest went on unrestrainedly, for nothing disturbed

Caleb’s absorption except shaking the table when he was writing.

Two letters of the nine had been for Mary. After reading them, she had

passed them to her mother, and sat playing with her tea-spoon absently,

till with a sudden recollection she returned to her sewing, which she

had kept on her lap during breakfast.

“Oh, don’t sew, Mary!” said Ben, pulling her arm down. “Make me a

peacock with this bread-crumb.” He had been kneading a small mass for

the purpose.

“No, no, Mischief!” said Mary, good-humoredly, while she pricked his

hand lightly with her needle. “Try and mould it yourself: you have seen

me do it often enough. I must get this sewing done. It is for Rosamond

Vincy: she is to be married next week, and she can’t be married without

this handkerchief.” Mary ended merrily, amused with the last notion.

“Why can’t she, Mary?” said Letty, seriously interested in this

mystery, and pushing her head so close to her sister that Mary now

turned the threatening needle towards Letty’s nose.

“Because this is one of a dozen, and without it there would only be

eleven,” said Mary, with a grave air of explanation, so that Letty sank

back with a sense of knowledge.

“Have you made up your mind, my dear?” said Mrs. Garth, laying the

letters down.

“I shall go to the school at York,” said Mary. “I am less unfit to

teach in a school than in a family. I like to teach classes best. And,

you see, I must teach: there is nothing else to be done.”

“Teaching seems to me the most delightful work in the world,” said Mrs.

Garth, with a touch of rebuke in her tone. “I could understand your

objection to it if you had not knowledge enough, Mary, or if you

disliked children.”

“I suppose we never quite understand why another dislikes what we like,

mother,” said Mary, rather curtly. “I am not fond of a schoolroom: I

like the outside world better. It is a very inconvenient fault of

mine.”

“It must be very stupid to be always in a girls’ school,” said Alfred.

“Such a set of nincompoops, like Mrs. Ballard’s pupils walking two and

two.”

“And they have no games worth playing at,” said Jim. “They can neither

throw nor leap. I don’t wonder at Mary’s not liking it.”

“What is that Mary doesn’t like, eh?” said the father, looking over his

spectacles and pausing before he opened his next letter.

“Being among a lot of nincompoop girls,” said Alfred.

“Is it the situation you had heard of, Mary?” said Caleb, gently,

looking at his daughter.

“Yes, father: the school at York. I have determined to take it. It is

quite the best. Thirty-five pounds a-year, and extra pay for teaching

the smallest strummers at the piano.”

“Poor child! I wish she could stay at home with us, Susan,” said Caleb,

looking plaintively at his wife.

“Mary would not be happy without doing her duty,” said Mrs. Garth,

magisterially, conscious of having done her own.

“It wouldn’t make me happy to do such a nasty duty as that,” said

Alfred—at which Mary and her father laughed silently, but Mrs. Garth

said, gravely—

“Do find a fitter word than nasty, my dear Alfred, for everything that

you think disagreeable. And suppose that Mary could help you to go to

Mr. Hanmer’s with the money she gets?”

“That seems to me a great shame. But she’s an old brick,” said Alfred,

rising from his chair, and pulling Mary’s head backward to kiss her.

Mary colored and laughed, but could not conceal that the tears were

coming. Caleb, looking on over his spectacles, with the angles of his

eyebrows falling, had an expression of mingled delight and sorrow as he

returned to the opening of his letter; and even Mrs. Garth, her lips

curling with a calm contentment, allowed that inappropriate language to

pass without correction, although Ben immediately took it up, and sang,

“She’s an old brick, old brick, old brick!” to a cantering measure,

which he beat out with his fist on Mary’s arm.

But Mrs. Garth’s eyes were now drawn towards her husband, who was

already deep in the letter he was reading. His face had an expression

of grave surprise, which alarmed her a little, but he did not like to

be questioned while he was reading, and she remained anxiously watching

till she saw him suddenly shaken by a little joyous laugh as he turned

back to the beginning of the letter, and looking at her above his

spectacles, said, in a low tone, “What do you think, Susan?”

She went and stood behind him, putting her hand on his shoulder, while

they read the letter together. It was from Sir James Chettam, offering

to Mr. Garth the management of the family estates at Freshitt and

elsewhere, and adding that Sir James had been requested by Mr. Brooke

of Tipton to ascertain whether Mr. Garth would be disposed at the same

time to resume the agency of the Tipton property. The Baronet added in

very obliging words that he himself was particularly desirous of seeing

the Freshitt and Tipton estates under the same management, and he hoped

to be able to show that the double agency might be held on terms

agreeable to Mr. Garth, whom he would be glad to see at the Hall at

twelve o’clock on the following day.

“He writes handsomely, doesn’t he, Susan?” said Caleb, turning his eyes

upward to his wife, who raised her hand from his shoulder to his ear,

while she rested her chin on his head. “Brooke didn’t like to ask me

himself, I can see,” he continued, laughing silently.

“Here is an honor to your father, children,” said Mrs. Garth, looking

round at the five pair of eyes, all fixed on the parents. “He is asked

to take a post again by those who dismissed him long ago. That shows

that he did his work well, so that they feel the want of him.”

“Like Cincinnatus—hooray!” said Ben, riding on his chair, with a

pleasant confidence that discipline was relaxed.

“Will they come to fetch him, mother?” said Letty, thinking of the

Mayor and Corporation in their robes.

Mrs. Garth patted Letty’s head and smiled, but seeing that her husband

was gathering up his letters and likely soon to be out of reach in that

sanctuary “business,” she pressed his shoulder and said emphatically—

“Now, mind you ask fair pay, Caleb.”

“Oh yes,” said Caleb, in a deep voice of assent, as if it would be

unreasonable to suppose anything else of him. “It’ll come to between

four and five hundred, the two together.” Then with a little start of

remembrance he said, “Mary, write and give up that school. Stay and

help your mother. I’m as pleased as Punch, now I’ve thought of that.”

No manner could have been less like that of Punch triumphant than

Caleb’s, but his talents did not lie in finding phrases, though he was

very particular about his letter-writing, and regarded his wife as a

treasury of correct language.

There was almost an uproar among the children now, and Mary held up the

cambric embroidery towards her mother entreatingly, that it might be

put out of reach while the boys dragged her into a dance. Mrs. Garth,

in placid joy, began to put the cups and plates together, while Caleb

pushing his chair from the table, as if he were going to move to the

desk, still sat holding his letters in his hand and looking on the

ground meditatively, stretching out the fingers of his left hand,

according to a mute language of his own. At last he said—

“It’s a thousand pities Christy didn’t take to business, Susan. I shall

want help by-and-by. And Alfred must go off to the engineering—I’ve

made up my mind to that.” He fell into meditation and finger-rhetoric

again for a little while, and then continued: “I shall make Brooke have

new agreements with the tenants, and I shall draw up a rotation of

crops. And I’ll lay a wager we can get fine bricks out of the clay at

Bott’s corner. I must look into that: it would cheapen the repairs.

It’s a fine bit of work, Susan! A man without a family would be glad to

do it for nothing.”

“Mind you don’t, though,” said his wife, lifting up her finger.

“No, no; but it’s a fine thing to come to a man when he’s seen into the

nature of business: to have the chance of getting a bit of the country

into good fettle, as they say, and putting men into the right way with

their farming, and getting a bit of good contriving and solid building

done—that those who are living and those who come after will be the

better for. I’d sooner have it than a fortune. I hold it the most

honorable work that is.” Here Caleb laid down his letters, thrust his

fingers between the buttons of his waistcoat, and sat upright, but

presently proceeded with some awe in his voice and moving his head

slowly aside—“It’s a great gift of God, Susan.”

“That it is, Caleb,” said his wife, with answering fervor. “And it will

be a blessing to your children to have had a father who did such work:

a father whose good work remains though his name may be forgotten.” She

could not say any more to him then about the pay.

In the evening, when Caleb, rather tired with his day’s work, was

seated in silence with his pocket-book open on his knee, while Mrs.

Garth and Mary were at their sewing, and Letty in a corner was

whispering a dialogue with her doll, Mr. Farebrother came up the

orchard walk, dividing the bright August lights and shadows with the

tufted grass and the apple-tree boughs. We know that he was fond of his

parishioners the Garths, and had thought Mary worth mentioning to

Lydgate. He used to the full the clergyman’s privilege of disregarding

the Middlemarch discrimination of ranks, and always told his mother

that Mrs. Garth was more of a lady than any matron in the town. Still,

you see, he spent his evenings at the Vincys’, where the matron, though

less of a lady, presided over a well-lit drawing-room and whist. In

those days human intercourse was not determined solely by respect. But

the Vicar did heartily respect the Garths, and a visit from him was no

surprise to that family. Nevertheless he accounted for it even while he

was shaking hands, by saying, “I come as an envoy, Mrs. Garth: I have

something to say to you and Garth on behalf of Fred Vincy. The fact is,

poor fellow,” he continued, as he seated himself and looked round with

his bright glance at the three who were listening to him, “he has taken

me into his confidence.”

Mary’s heart beat rather quickly: she wondered how far Fred’s

confidence had gone.

“We haven’t seen the lad for months,” said Caleb. “I couldn’t think

what was become of him.”

“He has been away on a visit,” said the Vicar, “because home was a

little too hot for him, and Lydgate told his mother that the poor

fellow must not begin to study yet. But yesterday he came and poured

himself out to me. I am very glad he did, because I have seen him grow

up from a youngster of fourteen, and I am so much at home in the house

that the children are like nephews and nieces to me. But it is a

difficult case to advise upon. However, he has asked me to come and

tell you that he is going away, and that he is so miserable about his

debt to you, and his inability to pay, that he can’t bear to come

himself even to bid you good by.”

“Tell him it doesn’t signify a farthing,” said Caleb, waving his hand.

“We’ve had the pinch and have got over it. And now I’m going to be as

rich as a Jew.”

“Which means,” said Mrs. Garth, smiling at the Vicar, “that we are

going to have enough to bring up the boys well and to keep Mary at

home.”

“What is the treasure-trove?” said Mr. Farebrother.

“I’m going to be agent for two estates, Freshitt and Tipton; and

perhaps for a pretty little bit of land in Lowick besides: it’s all the

same family connection, and employment spreads like water if it’s once

set going. It makes me very happy, Mr. Farebrother”—here Caleb threw

back his head a little, and spread his arms on the elbows of his

chair—“that I’ve got an opportunity again with the letting of the land,

and carrying out a notion or two with improvements. It’s a most

uncommonly cramping thing, as I’ve often told Susan, to sit on

horseback and look over the hedges at the wrong thing, and not be able

to put your hand to it to make it right. What people do who go into

politics I can’t think: it drives me almost mad to see mismanagement

over only a few hundred acres.”

It was seldom that Caleb volunteered so long a speech, but his

happiness had the effect of mountain air: his eyes were bright, and the

words came without effort.

“I congratulate you heartily, Garth,” said the Vicar. “This is the best

sort of news I could have had to carry to Fred Vincy, for he dwelt a

good deal on the injury he had done you in causing you to part with

money—robbing you of it, he said—which you wanted for other purposes. I

wish Fred were not such an idle dog; he has some very good points, and

his father is a little hard upon him.”

“Where is he going?” said Mrs. Garth, rather coldly.

“He means to try again for his degree, and he is going up to study

before term. I have advised him to do that. I don’t urge him to enter

the Church—on the contrary. But if he will go and work so as to pass,

that will be some guarantee that he has energy and a will; and he is

quite at sea; he doesn’t know what else to do. So far he will please

his father, and I have promised in the mean time to try and reconcile

Vincy to his son’s adopting some other line of life. Fred says frankly

he is not fit for a clergyman, and I would do anything I could to

hinder a man from the fatal step of choosing the wrong profession. He

quoted to me what you said, Miss Garth—do you remember it?” (Mr.

Farebrother used to say “Mary” instead of “Miss Garth,” but it was part

of his delicacy to treat her with the more deference because, according

to Mrs. Vincy’s phrase, she worked for her bread.)

Mary felt uncomfortable, but, determined to take the matter lightly,

answered at once, “I have said so many impertinent things to Fred—we

are such old playfellows.”

“You said, according to him, that he would be one of those ridiculous

clergymen who help to make the whole clergy ridiculous. Really, that

was so cutting that I felt a little cut myself.”

Caleb laughed. “She gets her tongue from you, Susan,” he said, with

some enjoyment.

“Not its flippancy, father,” said Mary, quickly, fearing that her

mother would be displeased. “It is rather too bad of Fred to repeat my

flippant speeches to Mr. Farebrother.”

“It was certainly a hasty speech, my dear,” said Mrs. Garth, with whom

speaking evil of dignities was a high misdemeanor. “We should not value

our Vicar the less because there was a ridiculous curate in the next

parish.”

“There’s something in what she says, though,” said Caleb, not disposed

to have Mary’s sharpness undervalued. “A bad workman of any sort makes

his fellows mistrusted. Things hang together,” he added, looking on the

floor and moving his feet uneasily with a sense that words were

scantier than thoughts.

“Clearly,” said the Vicar, amused. “By being contemptible we set men’s

minds to the tune of contempt. I certainly agree with Miss Garth’s view

of the matter, whether I am condemned by it or not. But as to Fred

Vincy, it is only fair he should be excused a little: old

Featherstone’s delusive behavior did help to spoil him. There was

something quite diabolical in not leaving him a farthing after all. But

Fred has the good taste not to dwell on that. And what he cares most

about is having offended you, Mrs. Garth; he supposes you will never

think well of him again.”

“I have been disappointed in Fred,” said Mrs. Garth, with decision.

“But I shall be ready to think well of him again when he gives me good

reason to do so.”

At this point Mary went out of the room, taking Letty with her.

“Oh, we must forgive young people when they’re sorry,” said Caleb,

watching Mary close the door. “And as you say, Mr. Farebrother, there

was the very devil in that old man. Now Mary’s gone out, I must tell

you a thing—it’s only known to Susan and me, and you’ll not tell it

again. The old scoundrel wanted Mary to burn one of the wills the very

night he died, when she was sitting up with him by herself, and he

offered her a sum of money that he had in the box by him if she would

do it. But Mary, you understand, could do no such thing—would not be

handling his iron chest, and so on. Now, you see, the will he wanted

burnt was this last, so that if Mary had done what he wanted, Fred

Vincy would have had ten thousand pounds. The old man did turn to him

at the last. That touches poor Mary close; she couldn’t help it—she was

in the right to do what she did, but she feels, as she says, much as if

she had knocked down somebody’s property and broken it against her

will, when she was rightfully defending herself. I feel with her,

somehow, and if I could make any amends to the poor lad, instead of

bearing him a grudge for the harm he did us, I should be glad to do it.

Now, what is your opinion, sir? Susan doesn’t agree with me; she

says—tell what you say, Susan.”

“Mary could not have acted otherwise, even if she had known what would

be the effect on Fred,” said Mrs. Garth, pausing from her work, and

looking at Mr. Farebrother.

“And she was quite ignorant of it. It seems to me, a loss which falls

on another because we have done right is not to lie upon our

conscience.”

The Vicar did not answer immediately, and Caleb said, “It’s the

feeling. The child feels in that way, and I feel with her. You don’t

mean your horse to tread on a dog when you’re backing out of the way;

but it goes through you, when it’s done.”

“I am sure Mrs. Garth would agree with you there,” said Mr.

Farebrother, who for some reason seemed more inclined to ruminate than

to speak. “One could hardly say that the feeling you mention about Fred

is wrong—or rather, mistaken—though no man ought to make a claim on

such feeling.”

“Well, well,” said Caleb, “it’s a secret. You will not tell Fred.”

“Certainly not. But I shall carry the other good news—that you can

afford the loss he caused you.”

Mr. Farebrother left the house soon after, and seeing Mary in the

orchard with Letty, went to say good-by to her. They made a pretty

picture in the western light which brought out the brightness of the

apples on the old scant-leaved boughs—Mary in her lavender gingham and

black ribbons holding a basket, while Letty in her well-worn nankin

picked up the fallen apples. If you want to know more particularly how

Mary looked, ten to one you will see a face like hers in the crowded

street to-morrow, if you are there on the watch: she will not be among

those daughters of Zion who are haughty, and walk with stretched-out

necks and wanton eyes, mincing as they go: let all those pass, and fix

your eyes on some small plump brownish person of firm but quiet

carriage, who looks about her, but does not suppose that anybody is

looking at her. If she has a broad face and square brow, well-marked

eyebrows and curly dark hair, a certain expression of amusement in her

glance which her mouth keeps the secret of, and for the rest features

entirely insignificant—take that ordinary but not disagreeable person

for a portrait of Mary Garth. If you made her smile, she would show you

perfect little teeth; if you made her angry, she would not raise her

voice, but would probably say one of the bitterest things you have ever

tasted the flavor of; if you did her a kindness, she would never forget

it. Mary admired the keen-faced handsome little Vicar in his

well-brushed threadbare clothes more than any man she had had the

opportunity of knowing. She had never heard him say a foolish thing,

though she knew that he did unwise ones; and perhaps foolish sayings

were more objectionable to her than any of Mr. Farebrother’s unwise

doings. At least, it was remarkable that the actual imperfections of

the Vicar’s clerical character never seemed to call forth the same

scorn and dislike which she showed beforehand for the predicted

imperfections of the clerical character sustained by Fred Vincy. These

irregularities of judgment, I imagine, are found even in riper minds

than Mary Garth’s: our impartiality is kept for abstract merit and

demerit, which none of us ever saw. Will any one guess towards which of

those widely different men Mary had the peculiar woman’s

tenderness?—the one she was most inclined to be severe on, or the

contrary?

“Have you any message for your old playfellow, Miss Garth?” said the

Vicar, as he took a fragrant apple from the basket which she held

towards him, and put it in his pocket. “Something to soften down that

harsh judgment? I am going straight to see him.”

“No,” said Mary, shaking her head, and smiling. “If I were to say that

he would not be ridiculous as a clergyman, I must say that he would be

something worse than ridiculous. But I am very glad to hear that he is

going away to work.”

“On the other hand, I am very glad to hear that \_you\_ are not going

away to work. My mother, I am sure, will be all the happier if you will

come to see her at the vicarage: you know she is fond of having young

people to talk to, and she has a great deal to tell about old times.

You will really be doing a kindness.”

“I should like it very much, if I may,” said Mary. “Everything seems

too happy for me all at once. I thought it would always be part of my

life to long for home, and losing that grievance makes me feel rather

empty: I suppose it served instead of sense to fill up my mind?”

“May I go with you, Mary?” whispered Letty—a most inconvenient child,

who listened to everything. But she was made exultant by having her

chin pinched and her cheek kissed by Mr. Farebrother—an incident which

she narrated to her mother and father.

As the Vicar walked to Lowick, any one watching him closely might have

seen him twice shrug his shoulders. I think that the rare Englishmen

who have this gesture are never of the heavy type—for fear of any

lumbering instance to the contrary, I will say, hardly ever; they have

usually a fine temperament and much tolerance towards the smaller

errors of men (themselves inclusive). The Vicar was holding an inward

dialogue in which he told himself that there was probably something

more between Fred and Mary Garth than the regard of old playfellows,

and replied with a question whether that bit of womanhood were not a

great deal too choice for that crude young gentleman. The rejoinder to

this was the first shrug. Then he laughed at himself for being likely

to have felt jealous, as if he had been a man able to marry, which,

added he, it is as clear as any balance-sheet that I am not. Whereupon

followed the second shrug.

What could two men, so different from each other, see in this “brown

patch,” as Mary called herself? It was certainly not her plainness that

attracted them (and let all plain young ladies be warned against the

dangerous encouragement given them by Society to confide in their want

of beauty). A human being in this aged nation of ours is a very

wonderful whole, the slow creation of long interchanging influences:

and charm is a result of two such wholes, the one loving and the one

loved.

When Mr. and Mrs. Garth were sitting alone, Caleb said, “Susan, guess

what I’m thinking of.”

“The rotation of crops,” said Mrs. Garth, smiling at him, above her

knitting, “or else the back-doors of the Tipton cottages.”

“No,” said Caleb, gravely; “I am thinking that I could do a great turn

for Fred Vincy. Christy’s gone, Alfred will be gone soon, and it will

be five years before Jim is ready to take to business. I shall want

help, and Fred might come in and learn the nature of things and act

under me, and it might be the making of him into a useful man, if he

gives up being a parson. What do you think?”

“I think, there is hardly anything honest that his family would object

to more,” said Mrs. Garth, decidedly.

“What care I about their objecting?” said Caleb, with a sturdiness

which he was apt to show when he had an opinion. “The lad is of age and

must get his bread. He has sense enough and quickness enough; he likes

being on the land, and it’s my belief that he could learn business well

if he gave his mind to it.”

“But would he? His father and mother wanted him to be a fine gentleman,

and I think he has the same sort of feeling himself. They all think us

beneath them. And if the proposal came from you, I am sure Mrs. Vincy

would say that we wanted Fred for Mary.”

“Life is a poor tale, if it is to be settled by nonsense of that sort,”

said Caleb, with disgust.

“Yes, but there is a certain pride which is proper, Caleb.”

“I call it improper pride to let fools’ notions hinder you from doing a

good action. There’s no sort of work,” said Caleb, with fervor, putting

out his hand and moving it up and down to mark his emphasis, “that

could ever be done well, if you minded what fools say. You must have it

inside you that your plan is right, and that plan you must follow.”

“I will not oppose any plan you have set your mind on, Caleb,” said

Mrs. Garth, who was a firm woman, but knew that there were some points

on which her mild husband was yet firmer. “Still, it seems to be fixed

that Fred is to go back to college: will it not be better to wait and

see what he will choose to do after that? It is not easy to keep people

against their will. And you are not yet quite sure enough of your own

position, or what you will want.”

“Well, it may be better to wait a bit. But as to my getting plenty of

work for two, I’m pretty sure of that. I’ve always had my hands full

with scattered things, and there’s always something fresh turning up.

Why, only yesterday—bless me, I don’t think I told you!—it was rather

odd that two men should have been at me on different sides to do the

same bit of valuing. And who do you think they were?” said Caleb,

taking a pinch of snuff and holding it up between his fingers, as if it

were a part of his exposition. He was fond of a pinch when it occurred

to him, but he usually forgot that this indulgence was at his command.

His wife held down her knitting and looked attentive.

“Why, that Rigg, or Rigg Featherstone, was one. But Bulstrode was

before him, so I’m going to do it for Bulstrode. Whether it’s mortgage

or purchase they’re going for, I can’t tell yet.”

“Can that man be going to sell the land just left him—which he has

taken the name for?” said Mrs. Garth.

“Deuce knows,” said Caleb, who never referred the knowledge of

discreditable doings to any higher power than the deuce. “But Bulstrode

has long been wanting to get a handsome bit of land under his

fingers—that I know. And it’s a difficult matter to get, in this part

of the country.”

Caleb scattered his snuff carefully instead of taking it, and then

added, “The ins and outs of things are curious. Here is the land

they’ve been all along expecting for Fred, which it seems the old man

never meant to leave him a foot of, but left it to this side-slip of a

son that he kept in the dark, and thought of his sticking there and

vexing everybody as well as he could have vexed ’em himself if he could

have kept alive. I say, it would be curious if it got into Bulstrode’s

hands after all. The old man hated him, and never would bank with him.”

“What reason could the miserable creature have for hating a man whom he

had nothing to do with?” said Mrs. Garth.

“Pooh! where’s the use of asking for such fellows’ reasons? The soul of

man,” said Caleb, with the deep tone and grave shake of the head which

always came when he used this phrase—“The soul of man, when it gets

fairly rotten, will bear you all sorts of poisonous toad-stools, and no

eye can see whence came the seed thereof.”

It was one of Caleb’s quaintnesses, that in his difficulty of finding

speech for his thought, he caught, as it were, snatches of diction

which he associated with various points of view or states of mind; and

whenever he had a feeling of awe, he was haunted by a sense of Biblical

phraseology, though he could hardly have given a strict quotation.

CHAPTER XLI.

By swaggering could I never thrive,

For the rain it raineth every day.

—\_Twelfth Night\_.

The transactions referred to by Caleb Garth as having gone forward

between Mr. Bulstrode and Mr. Joshua Rigg Featherstone concerning the

land attached to Stone Court, had occasioned the interchange of a

letter or two between these personages.

Who shall tell what may be the effect of writing? If it happens to have

been cut in stone, though it lie face down-most for ages on a forsaken

beach, or “rest quietly under the drums and tramplings of many

conquests,” it may end by letting us into the secret of usurpations and

other scandals gossiped about long empires ago:—this world being

apparently a huge whispering-gallery. Such conditions are often

minutely represented in our petty lifetimes. As the stone which has

been kicked by generations of clowns may come by curious little links

of effect under the eyes of a scholar, through whose labors it may at

last fix the date of invasions and unlock religions, so a bit of ink

and paper which has long been an innocent wrapping or stop-gap may at

last be laid open under the one pair of eyes which have knowledge

enough to turn it into the opening of a catastrophe. To Uriel watching

the progress of planetary history from the sun, the one result would be

just as much of a coincidence as the other.

Having made this rather lofty comparison I am less uneasy in calling

attention to the existence of low people by whose interference, however

little we may like it, the course of the world is very much determined.

It would be well, certainly, if we could help to reduce their number,

and something might perhaps be done by not lightly giving occasion to

their existence. Socially speaking, Joshua Rigg would have been

generally pronounced a superfluity. But those who like Peter

Featherstone never had a copy of themselves demanded, are the very last

to wait for such a request either in prose or verse. The copy in this

case bore more of outside resemblance to the mother, in whose sex

frog-features, accompanied with fresh-colored cheeks and a well-rounded

figure, are compatible with much charm for a certain order of admirers.

The result is sometimes a frog-faced male, desirable, surely, to no

order of intelligent beings. Especially when he is suddenly brought

into evidence to frustrate other people’s expectations—the very lowest

aspect in which a social superfluity can present himself.

But Mr. Rigg Featherstone’s low characteristics were all of the sober,

water-drinking kind. From the earliest to the latest hour of the day he

was always as sleek, neat, and cool as the frog he resembled, and old

Peter had secretly chuckled over an offshoot almost more calculating,

and far more imperturbable, than himself. I will add that his

finger-nails were scrupulously attended to, and that he meant to marry

a well-educated young lady (as yet unspecified) whose person was good,

and whose connections, in a solid middle-class way, were undeniable.

Thus his nails and modesty were comparable to those of most gentlemen;

though his ambition had been educated only by the opportunities of a

clerk and accountant in the smaller commercial houses of a seaport. He

thought the rural Featherstones very simple absurd people, and they in

their turn regarded his “bringing up” in a seaport town as an

exaggeration of the monstrosity that their brother Peter, and still

more Peter’s property, should have had such belongings.

The garden and gravel approach, as seen from the two windows of the

wainscoted parlor at Stone Court, were never in better trim than now,

when Mr. Rigg Featherstone stood, with his hands behind him, looking

out on these grounds as their master. But it seemed doubtful whether he

looked out for the sake of contemplation or of turning his back to a

person who stood in the middle of the room, with his legs considerably

apart and his hands in his trouser-pockets: a person in all respects a

contrast to the sleek and cool Rigg. He was a man obviously on the way

towards sixty, very florid and hairy, with much gray in his bushy

whiskers and thick curly hair, a stoutish body which showed to

disadvantage the somewhat worn joinings of his clothes, and the air of

a swaggerer, who would aim at being noticeable even at a show of

fireworks, regarding his own remarks on any other person’s performance

as likely to be more interesting than the performance itself.

His name was John Raffles, and he sometimes wrote jocosely W.A.G. after

his signature, observing when he did so, that he was once taught by

Leonard Lamb of Finsbury who wrote B.A. after his name, and that he,

Raffles, originated the witticism of calling that celebrated principal

Ba-Lamb. Such were the appearance and mental flavor of Mr. Raffles,

both of which seemed to have a stale odor of travellers’ rooms in the

commercial hotels of that period.

“Come, now, Josh,” he was saying, in a full rumbling tone, “look at it

in this light: here is your poor mother going into the vale of years,

and you could afford something handsome now to make her comfortable.”

“Not while you live. Nothing would make her comfortable while you

live,” returned Rigg, in his cool high voice. “What I give her, you’ll

take.”

“You bear me a grudge, Josh, that I know. But come, now—as between man

and man—without humbug—a little capital might enable me to make a

first-rate thing of the shop. The tobacco trade is growing. I should

cut my own nose off in not doing the best I could at it. I should stick

to it like a flea to a fleece for my own sake. I should always be on

the spot. And nothing would make your poor mother so happy. I’ve pretty

well done with my wild oats—turned fifty-five. I want to settle down in

my chimney-corner. And if I once buckled to the tobacco trade, I could

bring an amount of brains and experience to bear on it that would not

be found elsewhere in a hurry. I don’t want to be bothering you one

time after another, but to get things once for all into the right

channel. Consider that, Josh—as between man and man—and with your poor

mother to be made easy for her life. I was always fond of the old

woman, by Jove!”

“Have you done?” said Mr. Rigg, quietly, without looking away from the

window.

“Yes, \_I\_’ve done,” said Raffles, taking hold of his hat which stood

before him on the table, and giving it a sort of oratorical push.

“Then just listen to me. The more you say anything, the less I shall

believe it. The more you want me to do a thing, the more reason I shall

have for never doing it. Do you think I mean to forget your kicking me

when I was a lad, and eating all the best victual away from me and my

mother? Do you think I forget your always coming home to sell and

pocket everything, and going off again leaving us in the lurch? I

should be glad to see you whipped at the cart-tail. My mother was a

fool to you: she’d no right to give me a father-in-law, and she’s been

punished for it. She shall have her weekly allowance paid and no more:

and that shall be stopped if you dare to come on to these premises

again, or to come into this country after me again. The next time you

show yourself inside the gates here, you shall be driven off with the

dogs and the wagoner’s whip.”

As Rigg pronounced the last words he turned round and looked at Raffles

with his prominent frozen eyes. The contrast was as striking as it

could have been eighteen years before, when Rigg was a most unengaging

kickable boy, and Raffles was the rather thick-set Adonis of bar-rooms

and back-parlors. But the advantage now was on the side of Rigg, and

auditors of this conversation might probably have expected that Raffles

would retire with the air of a defeated dog. Not at all. He made a

grimace which was habitual with him whenever he was “out” in a game;

then subsided into a laugh, and drew a brandy-flask from his pocket.

“Come, Josh,” he said, in a cajoling tone, “give us a spoonful of

brandy, and a sovereign to pay the way back, and I’ll go. Honor bright!

I’ll go like a bullet, \_by\_ Jove!”

“Mind,” said Rigg, drawing out a bunch of keys, “if I ever see you

again, I shan’t speak to you. I don’t own you any more than if I saw a

crow; and if you want to own me you’ll get nothing by it but a

character for being what you are—a spiteful, brassy, bullying rogue.”

“That’s a pity, now, Josh,” said Raffles, affecting to scratch his head

and wrinkle his brows upward as if he were nonplussed. “I’m very fond

of you; \_by\_ Jove, I am! There’s nothing I like better than plaguing

you—you’re so like your mother, and I must do without it. But the

brandy and the sovereign’s a bargain.”

He jerked forward the flask and Rigg went to a fine old oaken bureau

with his keys. But Raffles had reminded himself by his movement with

the flask that it had become dangerously loose from its leather

covering, and catching sight of a folded paper which had fallen within

the fender, he took it up and shoved it under the leather so as to make

the glass firm.

By that time Rigg came forward with a brandy-bottle, filled the flask,

and handed Raffles a sovereign, neither looking at him nor speaking to

him. After locking up the bureau again, he walked to the window and

gazed out as impassibly as he had done at the beginning of the

interview, while Raffles took a small allowance from the flask, screwed

it up, and deposited it in his side-pocket, with provoking slowness,

making a grimace at his stepson’s back.

“Farewell, Josh—and if forever!” said Raffles, turning back his head as

he opened the door.

Rigg saw him leave the grounds and enter the lane. The gray day had

turned to a light drizzling rain, which freshened the hedgerows and the

grassy borders of the by-roads, and hastened the laborers who were

loading the last shocks of corn. Raffles, walking with the uneasy gait

of a town loiterer obliged to do a bit of country journeying on foot,

looked as incongruous amid this moist rural quiet and industry as if he

had been a baboon escaped from a menagerie. But there were none to

stare at him except the long-weaned calves, and none to show dislike of

his appearance except the little water-rats which rustled away at his

approach.

He was fortunate enough when he got on to the highroad to be overtaken

by the stage-coach, which carried him to Brassing; and there he took

the new-made railway, observing to his fellow-passengers that he

considered it pretty well seasoned now it had done for Huskisson. Mr.

Raffles on most occasions kept up the sense of having been educated at

an academy, and being able, if he chose, to pass well everywhere;

indeed, there was not one of his fellow-men whom he did not feel

himself in a position to ridicule and torment, confident of the

entertainment which he thus gave to all the rest of the company.

He played this part now with as much spirit as if his journey had been

entirely successful, resorting at frequent intervals to his flask. The

paper with which he had wedged it was a letter signed \_Nicholas

Bulstrode\_, but Raffles was not likely to disturb it from its present

useful position.

CHAPTER XLII.

How much, methinks, I could despise this man

Were I not bound in charity against it!

—SHAKESPEARE: \_Henry VIII\_.

One of the professional calls made by Lydgate soon after his return

from his wedding-journey was to Lowick Manor, in consequence of a

letter which had requested him to fix a time for his visit.

Mr. Casaubon had never put any question concerning the nature of his

illness to Lydgate, nor had he even to Dorothea betrayed any anxiety as

to how far it might be likely to cut short his labors or his life. On

this point, as on all others, he shrank from pity; and if the suspicion

of being pitied for anything in his lot surmised or known in spite of

himself was embittering, the idea of calling forth a show of compassion

by frankly admitting an alarm or a sorrow was necessarily intolerable

to him. Every proud mind knows something of this experience, and

perhaps it is only to be overcome by a sense of fellowship deep enough

to make all efforts at isolation seem mean and petty instead of

exalting.

But Mr. Casaubon was now brooding over something through which the

question of his health and life haunted his silence with a more

harassing importunity even than through the autumnal unripeness of his

authorship. It is true that this last might be called his central

ambition; but there are some kinds of authorship in which by far the

largest result is the uneasy susceptibility accumulated in the

consciousness of the author—one knows of the river by a few streaks

amid a long-gathered deposit of uncomfortable mud. That was the way

with Mr. Casaubon’s hard intellectual labors. Their most characteristic

result was not the “Key to all Mythologies,” but a morbid consciousness

that others did not give him the place which he had not demonstrably

merited—a perpetual suspicious conjecture that the views entertained of

him were not to his advantage—a melancholy absence of passion in his

efforts at achievement, and a passionate resistance to the confession

that he had achieved nothing.

Thus his intellectual ambition which seemed to others to have absorbed

and dried him, was really no security against wounds, least of all

against those which came from Dorothea. And he had begun now to frame

possibilities for the future which were somehow more embittering to him

than anything his mind had dwelt on before.

Against certain facts he was helpless: against Will Ladislaw’s

existence, his defiant stay in the neighborhood of Lowick, and his

flippant state of mind with regard to the possessors of authentic,

well-stamped erudition: against Dorothea’s nature, always taking on

some new shape of ardent activity, and even in submission and silence

covering fervid reasons which it was an irritation to think of: against

certain notions and likings which had taken possession of her mind in

relation to subjects that he could not possibly discuss with her. There

was no denying that Dorothea was as virtuous and lovely a young lady as

he could have obtained for a wife; but a young lady turned out to be

something more troublesome than he had conceived. She nursed him, she

read to him, she anticipated his wants, and was solicitous about his

feelings; but there had entered into the husband’s mind the certainty

that she judged him, and that her wifely devotedness was like a

penitential expiation of unbelieving thoughts—was accompanied with a

power of comparison by which himself and his doings were seen too

luminously as a part of things in general. His discontent passed

vapor-like through all her gentle loving manifestations, and clung to

that inappreciative world which she had only brought nearer to him.

Poor Mr. Casaubon! This suffering was the harder to bear because it

seemed like a betrayal: the young creature who had worshipped him with

perfect trust had quickly turned into the critical wife; and early

instances of criticism and resentment had made an impression which no

tenderness and submission afterwards could remove. To his suspicious

interpretation Dorothea’s silence now was a suppressed rebellion; a

remark from her which he had not in any way anticipated was an

assertion of conscious superiority; her gentle answers had an

irritating cautiousness in them; and when she acquiesced it was a

self-approved effort of forbearance. The tenacity with which he strove

to hide this inward drama made it the more vivid for him; as we hear

with the more keenness what we wish others not to hear.

Instead of wondering at this result of misery in Mr. Casaubon, I think

it quite ordinary. Will not a tiny speck very close to our vision blot

out the glory of the world, and leave only a margin by which we see the

blot? I know no speck so troublesome as self. And who, if Mr. Casaubon

had chosen to expound his discontents—his suspicions that he was not

any longer adored without criticism—could have denied that they were

founded on good reasons? On the contrary, there was a strong reason to

be added, which he had not himself taken explicitly into

account—namely, that he was not unmixedly adorable. He suspected this,

however, as he suspected other things, without confessing it, and like

the rest of us, felt how soothing it would have been to have a

companion who would never find it out.

This sore susceptibility in relation to Dorothea was thoroughly

prepared before Will Ladislaw had returned to Lowick, and what had

occurred since then had brought Mr. Casaubon’s power of suspicious

construction into exasperated activity. To all the facts which he knew,

he added imaginary facts both present and future which became more real

to him than those because they called up a stronger dislike, a more

predominating bitterness. Suspicion and jealousy of Will Ladislaw’s

intentions, suspicion and jealousy of Dorothea’s impressions, were

constantly at their weaving work. It would be quite unjust to him to

suppose that he could have entered into any coarse misinterpretation of

Dorothea: his own habits of mind and conduct, quite as much as the open

elevation of her nature, saved him from any such mistake. What he was

jealous of was her opinion, the sway that might be given to her ardent

mind in its judgments, and the future possibilities to which these

might lead her. As to Will, though until his last defiant letter he had

nothing definite which he would choose formally to allege against him,

he felt himself warranted in believing that he was capable of any

design which could fascinate a rebellious temper and an undisciplined

impulsiveness. He was quite sure that Dorothea was the cause of Will’s

return from Rome, and his determination to settle in the neighborhood;

and he was penetrating enough to imagine that Dorothea had innocently

encouraged this course. It was as clear as possible that she was ready

to be attached to Will and to be pliant to his suggestions: they had

never had a \_tête-à-tête\_ without her bringing away from it some new

troublesome impression, and the last interview that Mr. Casaubon was

aware of (Dorothea, on returning from Freshitt Hall, had for the first

time been silent about having seen Will) had led to a scene which

roused an angrier feeling against them both than he had ever known

before. Dorothea’s outpouring of her notions about money, in the

darkness of the night, had done nothing but bring a mixture of more

odious foreboding into her husband’s mind.

And there was the shock lately given to his health always sadly present

with him. He was certainly much revived; he had recovered all his usual

power of work: the illness might have been mere fatigue, and there

might still be twenty years of achievement before him, which would

justify the thirty years of preparation. That prospect was made the

sweeter by a flavor of vengeance against the hasty sneers of Carp &

Company; for even when Mr. Casaubon was carrying his taper among the

tombs of the past, those modern figures came athwart the dim light, and

interrupted his diligent exploration. To convince Carp of his mistake,

so that he would have to eat his own words with a good deal of

indigestion, would be an agreeable accident of triumphant authorship,

which the prospect of living to future ages on earth and to all

eternity in heaven could not exclude from contemplation. Since, thus,

the prevision of his own unending bliss could not nullify the bitter

savors of irritated jealousy and vindictiveness, it is the less

surprising that the probability of a transient earthly bliss for other

persons, when he himself should have entered into glory, had not a

potently sweetening effect. If the truth should be that some

undermining disease was at work within him, there might be large

opportunity for some people to be the happier when he was gone; and if

one of those people should be Will Ladislaw, Mr. Casaubon objected so

strongly that it seemed as if the annoyance would make part of his

disembodied existence.

This is a very bare and therefore a very incomplete way of putting the

case. The human soul moves in many channels, and Mr. Casaubon, we know,

had a sense of rectitude and an honorable pride in satisfying the

requirements of honor, which compelled him to find other reasons for

his conduct than those of jealousy and vindictiveness. The way in which

Mr. Casaubon put the case was this:—“In marrying Dorothea Brooke I had

to care for her well-being in case of my death. But well-being is not

to be secured by ample, independent possession of property; on the

contrary, occasions might arise in which such possession might expose

her to the more danger. She is ready prey to any man who knows how to

play adroitly either on her affectionate ardor or her Quixotic

enthusiasm; and a man stands by with that very intention in his mind—a

man with no other principle than transient caprice, and who has a

personal animosity towards me—I am sure of it—an animosity which is fed

by the consciousness of his ingratitude, and which he has constantly

vented in ridicule of which I am as well assured as if I had heard it.

Even if I live I shall not be without uneasiness as to what he may

attempt through indirect influence. This man has gained Dorothea’s ear:

he has fascinated her attention; he has evidently tried to impress her

mind with the notion that he has claims beyond anything I have done for

him. If I die—and he is waiting here on the watch for that—he will

persuade her to marry him. That would be calamity for her and success

for him. \_She\_ would not think it calamity: he would make her believe

anything; she has a tendency to immoderate attachment which she

inwardly reproaches me for not responding to, and already her mind is

occupied with his fortunes. He thinks of an easy conquest and of

entering into my nest. That I will hinder! Such a marriage would be

fatal to Dorothea. Has he ever persisted in anything except from

contradiction? In knowledge he has always tried to be showy at small

cost. In religion he could be, as long as it suited him, the facile

echo of Dorothea’s vagaries. When was sciolism ever dissociated from

laxity? I utterly distrust his morals, and it is my duty to hinder to

the utmost the fulfilment of his designs.”

The arrangements made by Mr. Casaubon on his marriage left strong

measures open to him, but in ruminating on them his mind inevitably

dwelt so much on the probabilities of his own life that the longing to

get the nearest possible calculation had at last overcome his proud

reticence, and had determined him to ask Lydgate’s opinion as to the

nature of his illness.

He had mentioned to Dorothea that Lydgate was coming by appointment at

half-past three, and in answer to her anxious question, whether he had

felt ill, replied,—“No, I merely wish to have his opinion concerning

some habitual symptoms. You need not see him, my dear. I shall give

orders that he may be sent to me in the Yew-tree Walk, where I shall be

taking my usual exercise.”

When Lydgate entered the Yew-tree Walk he saw Mr. Casaubon slowly

receding with his hands behind him according to his habit, and his head

bent forward. It was a lovely afternoon; the leaves from the lofty

limes were falling silently across the sombre evergreens, while the

lights and shadows slept side by side: there was no sound but the

cawing of the rooks, which to the accustomed ear is a lullaby, or that

last solemn lullaby, a dirge. Lydgate, conscious of an energetic frame

in its prime, felt some compassion when the figure which he was likely

soon to overtake turned round, and in advancing towards him showed more

markedly than ever the signs of premature age—the student’s bent

shoulders, the emaciated limbs, and the melancholy lines of the mouth.

“Poor fellow,” he thought, “some men with his years are like lions; one

can tell nothing of their age except that they are full grown.”

“Mr. Lydgate,” said Mr. Casaubon, with his invariably polite air, “I am

exceedingly obliged to you for your punctuality. We will, if you

please, carry on our conversation in walking to and fro.”

“I hope your wish to see me is not due to the return of unpleasant

symptoms,” said Lydgate, filling up a pause.

“Not immediately—no. In order to account for that wish I must

mention—what it were otherwise needless to refer to—that my life, on

all collateral accounts insignificant, derives a possible importance

from the incompleteness of labors which have extended through all its

best years. In short, I have long had on hand a work which I would fain

leave behind me in such a state, at least, that it might be committed

to the press by—others. Were I assured that this is the utmost I can

reasonably expect, that assurance would be a useful circumscription of

my attempts, and a guide in both the positive and negative

determination of my course.”

Here Mr. Casaubon paused, removed one hand from his back and thrust it

between the buttons of his single-breasted coat. To a mind largely

instructed in the human destiny hardly anything could be more

interesting than the inward conflict implied in his formal measured

address, delivered with the usual sing-song and motion of the head.

Nay, are there many situations more sublimely tragic than the struggle

of the soul with the demand to renounce a work which has been all the

significance of its life—a significance which is to vanish as the

waters which come and go where no man has need of them? But there was

nothing to strike others as sublime about Mr. Casaubon, and Lydgate,

who had some contempt at hand for futile scholarship, felt a little

amusement mingling with his pity. He was at present too ill acquainted

with disaster to enter into the pathos of a lot where everything is

below the level of tragedy except the passionate egoism of the

sufferer.

“You refer to the possible hindrances from want of health?” he said,

wishing to help forward Mr. Casaubon’s purpose, which seemed to be

clogged by some hesitation.

“I do. You have not implied to me that the symptoms which—I am bound to

testify—you watched with scrupulous care, were those of a fatal

disease. But were it so, Mr. Lydgate, I should desire to know the truth

without reservation, and I appeal to you for an exact statement of your

conclusions: I request it as a friendly service. If you can tell me

that my life is not threatened by anything else than ordinary

casualties, I shall rejoice, on grounds which I have already indicated.

If not, knowledge of the truth is even more important to me.”

“Then I can no longer hesitate as to my course,” said Lydgate; “but the

first thing I must impress on you is that my conclusions are doubly

uncertain—uncertain not only because of my fallibility, but because

diseases of the heart are eminently difficult to found predictions on.

In any case, one can hardly increase appreciably the tremendous

uncertainty of life.”

Mr. Casaubon winced perceptibly, but bowed.

“I believe that you are suffering from what is called fatty

degeneration of the heart, a disease which was first divined and

explored by Laennec, the man who gave us the stethoscope, not so very

many years ago. A good deal of experience—a more lengthened

observation—is wanting on the subject. But after what you have said, it

is my duty to tell you that death from this disease is often sudden. At

the same time, no such result can be predicted. Your condition may be

consistent with a tolerably comfortable life for another fifteen years,

or even more. I could add no information to this beyond anatomical or

medical details, which would leave expectation at precisely the same

point.” Lydgate’s instinct was fine enough to tell him that plain

speech, quite free from ostentatious caution, would be felt by Mr.

Casaubon as a tribute of respect.

“I thank you, Mr. Lydgate,” said Mr. Casaubon, after a moment’s pause.

“One thing more I have still to ask: did you communicate what you have

now told me to Mrs. Casaubon?”

“Partly—I mean, as to the possible issues.” Lydgate was going to

explain why he had told Dorothea, but Mr. Casaubon, with an

unmistakable desire to end the conversation, waved his hand slightly,

and said again, “I thank you,” proceeding to remark on the rare beauty

of the day.

Lydgate, certain that his patient wished to be alone, soon left him;

and the black figure with hands behind and head bent forward continued

to pace the walk where the dark yew-trees gave him a mute companionship

in melancholy, and the little shadows of bird or leaf that fleeted

across the isles of sunlight, stole along in silence as in the presence

of a sorrow. Here was a man who now for the first time found himself

looking into the eyes of death—who was passing through one of those

rare moments of experience when we feel the truth of a commonplace,

which is as different from what we call knowing it, as the vision of

waters upon the earth is different from the delirious vision of the

water which cannot be had to cool the burning tongue. When the

commonplace “We must all die” transforms itself suddenly into the acute

consciousness “I must die—and soon,” then death grapples us, and his

fingers are cruel; afterwards, he may come to fold us in his arms as

our mother did, and our last moment of dim earthly discerning may be

like the first. To Mr. Casaubon now, it was as if he suddenly found

himself on the dark river-brink and heard the plash of the oncoming

oar, not discerning the forms, but expecting the summons. In such an

hour the mind does not change its lifelong bias, but carries it onward

in imagination to the other side of death, gazing backward—perhaps with

the divine calm of beneficence, perhaps with the petty anxieties of

self-assertion. What was Mr. Casaubon’s bias his acts will give us a

clew to. He held himself to be, with some private scholarly

reservations, a believing Christian, as to estimates of the present and

hopes of the future. But what we strive to gratify, though we may call

it a distant hope, is an immediate desire: the future estate for which

men drudge up city alleys exists already in their imagination and love.

And Mr. Casaubon’s immediate desire was not for divine communion and

light divested of earthly conditions; his passionate longings, poor

man, clung low and mist-like in very shady places.

Dorothea had been aware when Lydgate had ridden away, and she had

stepped into the garden, with the impulse to go at once to her husband.

But she hesitated, fearing to offend him by obtruding herself; for her

ardor, continually repulsed, served, with her intense memory, to

heighten her dread, as thwarted energy subsides into a shudder; and she

wandered slowly round the nearer clumps of trees until she saw him

advancing. Then she went towards him, and might have represented a

heaven-sent angel coming with a promise that the short hours remaining

should yet be filled with that faithful love which clings the closer to

a comprehended grief. His glance in reply to hers was so chill that she

felt her timidity increased; yet she turned and passed her hand through

his arm.

Mr. Casaubon kept his hands behind him and allowed her pliant arm to

cling with difficulty against his rigid arm.

There was something horrible to Dorothea in the sensation which this

unresponsive hardness inflicted on her. That is a strong word, but not

too strong: it is in these acts called trivialities that the seeds of

joy are forever wasted, until men and women look round with haggard

faces at the devastation their own waste has made, and say, the earth

bears no harvest of sweetness—calling their denial knowledge. You may

ask why, in the name of manliness, Mr. Casaubon should have behaved in

that way. Consider that his was a mind which shrank from pity: have you

ever watched in such a mind the effect of a suspicion that what is

pressing it as a grief may be really a source of contentment, either

actual or future, to the being who already offends by pitying? Besides,

he knew little of Dorothea’s sensations, and had not reflected that on

such an occasion as the present they were comparable in strength to his

own sensibilities about Carp’s criticisms.

Dorothea did not withdraw her arm, but she could not venture to speak.

Mr. Casaubon did not say, “I wish to be alone,” but he directed his

steps in silence towards the house, and as they entered by the glass

door on this eastern side, Dorothea withdrew her arm and lingered on

the matting, that she might leave her husband quite free. He entered

the library and shut himself in, alone with his sorrow.

She went up to her boudoir. The open bow-window let in the serene glory

of the afternoon lying in the avenue, where the lime-trees cast long

shadows. But Dorothea knew nothing of the scene. She threw herself on a

chair, not heeding that she was in the dazzling sun-rays: if there were

discomfort in that, how could she tell that it was not part of her

inward misery?

She was in the reaction of a rebellious anger stronger than any she had

felt since her marriage. Instead of tears there came words:—

“What have I done—what am I—that he should treat me so? He never knows

what is in my mind—he never cares. What is the use of anything I do? He

wishes he had never married me.”

She began to hear herself, and was checked into stillness. Like one who

has lost his way and is weary, she sat and saw as in one glance all the

paths of her young hope which she should never find again. And just as

clearly in the miserable light she saw her own and her husband’s

solitude—how they walked apart so that she was obliged to survey him.

If he had drawn her towards him, she would never have surveyed

him—never have said, “Is he worth living for?” but would have felt him

simply a part of her own life. Now she said bitterly, “It is his fault,

not mine.” In the jar of her whole being, Pity was overthrown. Was it

her fault that she had believed in him—had believed in his

worthiness?—And what, exactly, was he?— She was able enough to estimate

him—she who waited on his glances with trembling, and shut her best

soul in prison, paying it only hidden visits, that she might be petty

enough to please him. In such a crisis as this, some women begin to

hate.

The sun was low when Dorothea was thinking that she would not go down

again, but would send a message to her husband saying that she was not

well and preferred remaining up-stairs. She had never deliberately

allowed her resentment to govern her in this way before, but she

believed now that she could not see him again without telling him the

truth about her feeling, and she must wait till she could do it without

interruption. He might wonder and be hurt at her message. It was good

that he should wonder and be hurt. Her anger said, as anger is apt to

say, that God was with her—that all heaven, though it were crowded with

spirits watching them, must be on her side. She had determined to ring

her bell, when there came a rap at the door.

Mr. Casaubon had sent to say that he would have his dinner in the

library. He wished to be quite alone this evening, being much occupied.

“I shall not dine, then, Tantripp.”

“Oh, madam, let me bring you a little something?”

“No; I am not well. Get everything ready in my dressing room, but pray

do not disturb me again.”

Dorothea sat almost motionless in her meditative struggle, while the

evening slowly deepened into night. But the struggle changed

continually, as that of a man who begins with a movement towards

striking and ends with conquering his desire to strike. The energy that

would animate a crime is not more than is wanted to inspire a resolved

submission, when the noble habit of the soul reasserts itself. That

thought with which Dorothea had gone out to meet her husband—her

conviction that he had been asking about the possible arrest of all his

work, and that the answer must have wrung his heart, could not be long

without rising beside the image of him, like a shadowy monitor looking

at her anger with sad remonstrance. It cost her a litany of pictured

sorrows and of silent cries that she might be the mercy for those

sorrows—but the resolved submission did come; and when the house was

still, and she knew that it was near the time when Mr. Casaubon

habitually went to rest, she opened her door gently and stood outside

in the darkness waiting for his coming up-stairs with a light in his

hand. If he did not come soon she thought that she would go down and

even risk incurring another pang. She would never again expect anything

else. But she did hear the library door open, and slowly the light

advanced up the staircase without noise from the footsteps on the

carpet. When her husband stood opposite to her, she saw that his face

was more haggard. He started slightly on seeing her, and she looked up

at him beseechingly, without speaking.

“Dorothea!” he said, with a gentle surprise in his tone. “Were you

waiting for me?”

“Yes, I did not like to disturb you.”

“Come, my dear, come. You are young, and need not to extend your life

by watching.”

When the kind quiet melancholy of that speech fell on Dorothea’s ears,

she felt something like the thankfulness that might well up in us if we

had narrowly escaped hurting a lamed creature. She put her hand into

her husband’s, and they went along the broad corridor together.

BOOK V.

THE DEAD HAND.

CHAPTER XLIII.

“This figure hath high price: ’t was wrought with love

Ages ago in finest ivory;

Nought modish in it, pure and noble lines

Of generous womanhood that fits all time

That too is costly ware; majolica

Of deft design, to please a lordly eye:

The smile, you see, is perfect—wonderful

As mere Faience! a table ornament

To suit the richest mounting.”

Dorothea seldom left home without her husband, but she did occasionally

drive into Middlemarch alone, on little errands of shopping or charity

such as occur to every lady of any wealth when she lives within three

miles of a town. Two days after that scene in the Yew-tree Walk, she

determined to use such an opportunity in order if possible to see

Lydgate, and learn from him whether her husband had really felt any

depressing change of symptoms which he was concealing from her, and

whether he had insisted on knowing the utmost about himself. She felt

almost guilty in asking for knowledge about him from another, but the

dread of being without it—the dread of that ignorance which would make

her unjust or hard—overcame every scruple. That there had been some

crisis in her husband’s mind she was certain: he had the very next day

begun a new method of arranging his notes, and had associated her quite

newly in carrying out his plan. Poor Dorothea needed to lay up stores

of patience.

It was about four o’clock when she drove to Lydgate’s house in Lowick

Gate, wishing, in her immediate doubt of finding him at home, that she

had written beforehand. And he was not at home.

“Is Mrs. Lydgate at home?” said Dorothea, who had never, that she knew

of, seen Rosamond, but now remembered the fact of the marriage. Yes,

Mrs. Lydgate was at home.

“I will go in and speak to her, if she will allow me. Will you ask her

if she can see me—see Mrs. Casaubon, for a few minutes?”

When the servant had gone to deliver that message, Dorothea could hear

sounds of music through an open window—a few notes from a man’s voice

and then a piano bursting into roulades. But the roulades broke off

suddenly, and then the servant came back saying that Mrs. Lydgate would

be happy to see Mrs. Casaubon.

When the drawing-room door opened and Dorothea entered, there was a

sort of contrast not infrequent in country life when the habits of the

different ranks were less blent than now. Let those who know, tell us

exactly what stuff it was that Dorothea wore in those days of mild

autumn—that thin white woollen stuff soft to the touch and soft to the

eye. It always seemed to have been lately washed, and to smell of the

sweet hedges—was always in the shape of a pelisse with sleeves hanging

all out of the fashion. Yet if she had entered before a still audience

as Imogene or Cato’s daughter, the dress might have seemed right

enough: the grace and dignity were in her limbs and neck; and about her

simply parted hair and candid eyes the large round poke which was then

in the fate of women, seemed no more odd as a head-dress than the gold

trencher we call a halo. By the present audience of two persons, no

dramatic heroine could have been expected with more interest than Mrs.

Casaubon. To Rosamond she was one of those county divinities not mixing

with Middlemarch mortality, whose slightest marks of manner or

appearance were worthy of her study; moreover, Rosamond was not without

satisfaction that Mrs. Casaubon should have an opportunity of studying

\_her\_. What is the use of being exquisite if you are not seen by the

best judges? and since Rosamond had received the highest compliments at

Sir Godwin Lydgate’s, she felt quite confident of the impression she

must make on people of good birth. Dorothea put out her hand with her

usual simple kindness, and looked admiringly at Lydgate’s lovely

bride—aware that there was a gentleman standing at a distance, but

seeing him merely as a coated figure at a wide angle. The gentleman was

too much occupied with the presence of the one woman to reflect on the

contrast between the two—a contrast that would certainly have been

striking to a calm observer. They were both tall, and their eyes were

on a level; but imagine Rosamond’s infantine blondness and wondrous

crown of hair-plaits, with her pale-blue dress of a fit and fashion so

perfect that no dressmaker could look at it without emotion, a large

embroidered collar which it was to be hoped all beholders would know

the price of, her small hands duly set off with rings, and that

controlled self-consciousness of manner which is the expensive

substitute for simplicity.

“Thank you very much for allowing me to interrupt you,” said Dorothea,

immediately. “I am anxious to see Mr. Lydgate, if possible, before I go

home, and I hoped that you might possibly tell me where I could find

him, or even allow me to wait for him, if you expect him soon.”

“He is at the New Hospital,” said Rosamond; “I am not sure how soon he

will come home. But I can send for him.”

“Will you let me go and fetch him?” said Will Ladislaw, coming forward.

He had already taken up his hat before Dorothea entered. She colored

with surprise, but put out her hand with a smile of unmistakable

pleasure, saying—

“I did not know it was you: I had no thought of seeing you here.”

“May I go to the Hospital and tell Mr. Lydgate that you wish to see

him?” said Will.

“It would be quicker to send the carriage for him,” said Dorothea, “if

you will be kind enough to give the message to the coachman.”

Will was moving to the door when Dorothea, whose mind had flashed in an

instant over many connected memories, turned quickly and said, “I will

go myself, thank you. I wish to lose no time before getting home again.

I will drive to the Hospital and see Mr. Lydgate there. Pray excuse me,

Mrs. Lydgate. I am very much obliged to you.”

Her mind was evidently arrested by some sudden thought, and she left

the room hardly conscious of what was immediately around her—hardly

conscious that Will opened the door for her and offered her his arm to

lead her to the carriage. She took the arm but said nothing. Will was

feeling rather vexed and miserable, and found nothing to say on his

side. He handed her into the carriage in silence, they said good-by,

and Dorothea drove away.

In the five minutes’ drive to the Hospital she had time for some

reflections that were quite new to her. Her decision to go, and her

preoccupation in leaving the room, had come from the sudden sense that

there would be a sort of deception in her voluntarily allowing any

further intercourse between herself and Will which she was unable to

mention to her husband, and already her errand in seeking Lydgate was a

matter of concealment. That was all that had been explicitly in her

mind; but she had been urged also by a vague discomfort. Now that she

was alone in her drive, she heard the notes of the man’s voice and the

accompanying piano, which she had not noted much at the time, returning

on her inward sense; and she found herself thinking with some wonder

that Will Ladislaw was passing his time with Mrs. Lydgate in her

husband’s absence. And then she could not help remembering that he had

passed some time with her under like circumstances, so why should there

be any unfitness in the fact? But Will was Mr. Casaubon’s relative, and

one towards whom she was bound to show kindness. Still there had been

signs which perhaps she ought to have understood as implying that Mr.

Casaubon did not like his cousin’s visits during his own absence.

“Perhaps I have been mistaken in many things,” said poor Dorothea to

herself, while the tears came rolling and she had to dry them quickly.

She felt confusedly unhappy, and the image of Will which had been so

clear to her before was mysteriously spoiled. But the carriage stopped

at the gate of the Hospital. She was soon walking round the grass plots

with Lydgate, and her feelings recovered the strong bent which had made

her seek for this interview.

Will Ladislaw, meanwhile, was mortified, and knew the reason of it

clearly enough. His chances of meeting Dorothea were rare; and here for

the first time there had come a chance which had set him at a

disadvantage. It was not only, as it had been hitherto, that she was

not supremely occupied with him, but that she had seen him under

circumstances in which he might appear not to be supremely occupied

with her. He felt thrust to a new distance from her, amongst the

circles of Middlemarchers who made no part of her life. But that was

not his fault: of course, since he had taken his lodgings in the town,

he had been making as many acquaintances as he could, his position

requiring that he should know everybody and everything. Lydgate was

really better worth knowing than any one else in the neighborhood, and

he happened to have a wife who was musical and altogether worth calling

upon. Here was the whole history of the situation in which Diana had

descended too unexpectedly on her worshipper. It was mortifying. Will

was conscious that he should not have been at Middlemarch but for

Dorothea; and yet his position there was threatening to divide him from

her with those barriers of habitual sentiment which are more fatal to

the persistence of mutual interest than all the distance between Rome

and Britain. Prejudices about rank and status were easy enough to defy

in the form of a tyrannical letter from Mr. Casaubon; but prejudices,

like odorous bodies, have a double existence both solid and

subtle—solid as the pyramids, subtle as the twentieth echo of an echo,

or as the memory of hyacinths which once scented the darkness. And Will

was of a temperament to feel keenly the presence of subtleties: a man

of clumsier perceptions would not have felt, as he did, that for the

first time some sense of unfitness in perfect freedom with him had

sprung up in Dorothea’s mind, and that their silence, as he conducted

her to the carriage, had had a chill in it. Perhaps Casaubon, in his

hatred and jealousy, had been insisting to Dorothea that Will had slid

below her socially. Confound Casaubon!

Will re-entered the drawing-room, took up his hat, and looking

irritated as he advanced towards Mrs. Lydgate, who had seated herself

at her work-table, said—

“It is always fatal to have music or poetry interrupted. May I come

another day and just finish about the rendering of ‘Lungi dal caro

bene’?”

“I shall be happy to be taught,” said Rosamond. “But I am sure you

admit that the interruption was a very beautiful one. I quite envy your

acquaintance with Mrs. Casaubon. Is she very clever? She looks as if

she were.”

“Really, I never thought about it,” said Will, sulkily.

“That is just the answer Tertius gave me, when I first asked him if she

were handsome. What is it that you gentlemen are thinking of when you

are with Mrs. Casaubon?”

“Herself,” said Will, not indisposed to provoke the charming Mrs.

Lydgate. “When one sees a perfect woman, one never thinks of her

attributes—one is conscious of her presence.”

“I shall be jealous when Tertius goes to Lowick,” said Rosamond,

dimpling, and speaking with aery lightness. “He will come back and

think nothing of me.”

“That does not seem to have been the effect on Lydgate hitherto. Mrs.

Casaubon is too unlike other women for them to be compared with her.”

“You are a devout worshipper, I perceive. You often see her, I

suppose.”

“No,” said Will, almost pettishly. “Worship is usually a matter of

theory rather than of practice. But I am practising it to excess just

at this moment—I must really tear myself away.”

“Pray come again some evening: Mr. Lydgate will like to hear the music,

and I cannot enjoy it so well without him.”

When her husband was at home again, Rosamond said, standing in front of

him and holding his coat-collar with both her hands, “Mr. Ladislaw was

here singing with me when Mrs. Casaubon came in. He seemed vexed. Do

you think he disliked her seeing him at our house? Surely your position

is more than equal to his—whatever may be his relation to the

Casaubons.”

“No, no; it must be something else if he were really vexed. Ladislaw is

a sort of gypsy; he thinks nothing of leather and prunella.”

“Music apart, he is not always very agreeable. Do you like him?”

“Yes: I think he is a good fellow: rather miscellaneous and

bric-a-brac, but likable.”

“Do you know, I think he adores Mrs. Casaubon.”

“Poor devil!” said Lydgate, smiling and pinching his wife’s ears.

Rosamond felt herself beginning to know a great deal of the world,

especially in discovering what when she was in her unmarried girlhood

had been inconceivable to her except as a dim tragedy in by-gone

costumes—that women, even after marriage, might make conquests and

enslave men. At that time young ladies in the country, even when

educated at Mrs. Lemon’s, read little French literature later than

Racine, and public prints had not cast their present magnificent

illumination over the scandals of life. Still, vanity, with a woman’s

whole mind and day to work in, can construct abundantly on slight

hints, especially on such a hint as the possibility of indefinite

conquests. How delightful to make captives from the throne of marriage

with a husband as crown-prince by your side—himself in fact a

subject—while the captives look up forever hopeless, losing their rest

probably, and if their appetite too, so much the better! But Rosamond’s

romance turned at present chiefly on her crown-prince, and it was

enough to enjoy his assured subjection. When he said, “Poor devil!” she

asked, with playful curiosity—

“Why so?”

“Why, what can a man do when he takes to adoring one of you mermaids?

He only neglects his work and runs up bills.”

“I am sure you do not neglect your work. You are always at the

Hospital, or seeing poor patients, or thinking about some doctor’s

quarrel; and then at home you always want to pore over your microscope

and phials. Confess you like those things better than me.”

“Haven’t you ambition enough to wish that your husband should be

something better than a Middlemarch doctor?” said Lydgate, letting his

hands fall on to his wife’s shoulders, and looking at her with

affectionate gravity. “I shall make you learn my favorite bit from an

old poet—

‘Why should our pride make such a stir to be

And be forgot? What good is like to this,

To do worthy the writing, and to write

Worthy the reading and the worlds delight?’

What I want, Rosy, is to do worthy the writing,—and to write out myself

what I have done. A man must work, to do that, my pet.”

“Of course, I wish you to make discoveries: no one could more wish you

to attain a high position in some better place than Middlemarch. You

cannot say that I have ever tried to hinder you from working. But we

cannot live like hermits. You are not discontented with me, Tertius?”

“No, dear, no. I am too entirely contented.”

“But what did Mrs. Casaubon want to say to you?”

“Merely to ask about her husband’s health. But I think she is going to

be splendid to our New Hospital: I think she will give us two hundred

a-year.”

CHAPTER XLIV.

I would not creep along the coast but steer

Out in mid-sea, by guidance of the stars.

When Dorothea, walking round the laurel-planted plots of the New

Hospital with Lydgate, had learned from him that there were no signs of

change in Mr. Casaubon’s bodily condition beyond the mental sign of

anxiety to know the truth about his illness, she was silent for a few

moments, wondering whether she had said or done anything to rouse this

new anxiety. Lydgate, not willing to let slip an opportunity of

furthering a favorite purpose, ventured to say—

“I don’t know whether your or Mr. Casaubon’s attention has been drawn

to the needs of our New Hospital. Circumstances have made it seem

rather egotistic in me to urge the subject; but that is not my fault:

it is because there is a fight being made against it by the other

medical men. I think you are generally interested in such things, for I

remember that when I first had the pleasure of seeing you at Tipton

Grange before your marriage, you were asking me some questions about

the way in which the health of the poor was affected by their miserable

housing.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Dorothea, brightening. “I shall be quite grateful

to you if you will tell me how I can help to make things a little

better. Everything of that sort has slipped away from me since I have

been married. I mean,” she said, after a moment’s hesitation, “that the

people in our village are tolerably comfortable, and my mind has been

too much taken up for me to inquire further. But here—in such a place

as Middlemarch—there must be a great deal to be done.”

“There is everything to be done,” said Lydgate, with abrupt energy.

“And this Hospital is a capital piece of work, due entirely to Mr.

Bulstrode’s exertions, and in a great degree to his money. But one man

can’t do everything in a scheme of this sort. Of course he looked

forward to help. And now there’s a mean, petty feud set up against the

thing in the town, by certain persons who want to make it a failure.”

“What can be their reasons?” said Dorothea, with naive surprise.

“Chiefly Mr. Bulstrode’s unpopularity, to begin with. Half the town

would almost take trouble for the sake of thwarting him. In this stupid

world most people never consider that a thing is good to be done unless

it is done by their own set. I had no connection with Bulstrode before

I came here. I look at him quite impartially, and I see that he has

some notions—that he has set things on foot—which I can turn to good

public purpose. If a fair number of the better educated men went to

work with the belief that their observations might contribute to the

reform of medical doctrine and practice, we should soon see a change

for the better. That’s my point of view. I hold that by refusing to

work with Mr. Bulstrode I should be turning my back on an opportunity

of making my profession more generally serviceable.”

“I quite agree with you,” said Dorothea, at once fascinated by the

situation sketched in Lydgate’s words. “But what is there against Mr.

Bulstrode? I know that my uncle is friendly with him.”

“People don’t like his religious tone,” said Lydgate, breaking off

there.

“That is all the stronger reason for despising such an opposition,”

said Dorothea, looking at the affairs of Middlemarch by the light of

the great persecutions.

“To put the matter quite fairly, they have other objections to him:—he

is masterful and rather unsociable, and he is concerned with trade,

which has complaints of its own that I know nothing about. But what has

that to do with the question whether it would not be a fine thing to

establish here a more valuable hospital than any they have in the

county? The immediate motive to the opposition, however, is the fact

that Bulstrode has put the medical direction into my hands. Of course I

am glad of that. It gives me an opportunity of doing some good

work,—and I am aware that I have to justify his choice of me. But the

consequence is, that the whole profession in Middlemarch have set

themselves tooth and nail against the Hospital, and not only refuse to

cooperate themselves, but try to blacken the whole affair and hinder

subscriptions.”

“How very petty!” exclaimed Dorothea, indignantly.

“I suppose one must expect to fight one’s way: there is hardly anything

to be done without it. And the ignorance of people about here is

stupendous. I don’t lay claim to anything else than having used some

opportunities which have not come within everybody’s reach; but there

is no stifling the offence of being young, and a new-comer, and

happening to know something more than the old inhabitants. Still, if I

believe that I can set going a better method of treatment—if I believe

that I can pursue certain observations and inquiries which may be a

lasting benefit to medical practice, I should be a base truckler if I

allowed any consideration of personal comfort to hinder me. And the

course is all the clearer from there being no salary in question to put

my persistence in an equivocal light.”

“I am glad you have told me this, Mr. Lydgate,” said Dorothea,

cordially. “I feel sure I can help a little. I have some money, and

don’t know what to do with it—that is often an uncomfortable thought to

me. I am sure I can spare two hundred a-year for a grand purpose like

this. How happy you must be, to know things that you feel sure will do

great good! I wish I could awake with that knowledge every morning.

There seems to be so much trouble taken that one can hardly see the

good of!”

There was a melancholy cadence in Dorothea’s voice as she spoke these

last words. But she presently added, more cheerfully, “Pray come to

Lowick and tell us more of this. I will mention the subject to Mr.

Casaubon. I must hasten home now.”

She did mention it that evening, and said that she should like to

subscribe two hundred a-year—she had seven hundred a-year as the

equivalent of her own fortune, settled on her at her marriage. Mr.

Casaubon made no objection beyond a passing remark that the sum might

be disproportionate in relation to other good objects, but when

Dorothea in her ignorance resisted that suggestion, he acquiesced. He

did not care himself about spending money, and was not reluctant to

give it. If he ever felt keenly any question of money it was through

the medium of another passion than the love of material property.

Dorothea told him that she had seen Lydgate, and recited the gist of

her conversation with him about the Hospital. Mr. Casaubon did not

question her further, but he felt sure that she had wished to know what

had passed between Lydgate and himself. “She knows that I know,” said

the ever-restless voice within; but that increase of tacit knowledge

only thrust further off any confidence between them. He distrusted her

affection; and what loneliness is more lonely than distrust?

CHAPTER XLV.

It is the humor of many heads to extol the days of their forefathers,

and declaim against the wickedness of times present. Which

notwithstanding they cannot handsomely do, without the borrowed help

and satire of times past; condemning the vices of their own times, by

the expressions of vices in times which they commend, which cannot but

argue the community of vice in both. Horace, therefore, Juvenal, and

Persius, were no prophets, although their lines did seem to indigitate

and point at our times.—SIR THOMAS BROWNE: \_Pseudodoxia Epidemica\_.

That opposition to the New Fever Hospital which Lydgate had sketched to

Dorothea was, like other oppositions, to be viewed in many different

lights. He regarded it as a mixture of jealousy and dunderheaded

prejudice. Mr. Bulstrode saw in it not only medical jealousy but a

determination to thwart himself, prompted mainly by a hatred of that

vital religion of which he had striven to be an effectual lay

representative—a hatred which certainly found pretexts apart from

religion such as were only too easy to find in the entanglements of

human action. These might be called the ministerial views. But

oppositions have the illimitable range of objections at command, which

need never stop short at the boundary of knowledge, but can draw

forever on the vasts of ignorance. What the opposition in Middlemarch

said about the New Hospital and its administration had certainly a

great deal of echo in it, for heaven has taken care that everybody

shall not be an originator; but there were differences which

represented every social shade between the polished moderation of Dr.

Minchin and the trenchant assertion of Mrs. Dollop, the landlady of the

Tankard in Slaughter Lane.

Mrs. Dollop became more and more convinced by her own asseveration,

that Dr. Lydgate meant to let the people die in the Hospital, if not to

poison them, for the sake of cutting them up without saying by your

leave or with your leave; for it was a known “fac” that he had wanted

to cut up Mrs. Goby, as respectable a woman as any in Parley Street,

who had money in trust before her marriage—a poor tale for a doctor,

who if he was good for anything should know what was the matter with

you before you died, and not want to pry into your inside after you

were gone. If that was not reason, Mrs. Dollop wished to know what was;

but there was a prevalent feeling in her audience that her opinion was

a bulwark, and that if it were overthrown there would be no limits to

the cutting-up of bodies, as had been well seen in Burke and Hare with

their pitch-plaisters—such a hanging business as that was not wanted in

Middlemarch!

And let it not be supposed that opinion at the Tankard in Slaughter

Lane was unimportant to the medical profession: that old authentic

public-house—the original Tankard, known by the name of Dollop’s—was

the resort of a great Benefit Club, which had some months before put to

the vote whether its long-standing medical man, “Doctor Gambit,” should

not be cashiered in favor of “this Doctor Lydgate,” who was capable of

performing the most astonishing cures, and rescuing people altogether

given up by other practitioners. But the balance had been turned

against Lydgate by two members, who for some private reasons held that

this power of resuscitating persons as good as dead was an equivocal

recommendation, and might interfere with providential favors. In the

course of the year, however, there had been a change in the public

sentiment, of which the unanimity at Dollop’s was an index.

A good deal more than a year ago, before anything was known of

Lydgate’s skill, the judgments on it had naturally been divided,

depending on a sense of likelihood, situated perhaps in the pit of the

stomach or in the pineal gland, and differing in its verdicts, but not

the less valuable as a guide in the total deficit of evidence. Patients

who had chronic diseases or whose lives had long been worn threadbare,

like old Featherstone’s, had been at once inclined to try him; also,

many who did not like paying their doctor’s bills, thought agreeably of

opening an account with a new doctor and sending for him without stint

if the children’s temper wanted a dose, occasions when the old

practitioners were often crusty; and all persons thus inclined to

employ Lydgate held it likely that he was clever. Some considered that

he might do more than others “where there was liver;”—at least there

would be no harm in getting a few bottles of “stuff” from him, since if

these proved useless it would still be possible to return to the

Purifying Pills, which kept you alive if they did not remove the

yellowness. But these were people of minor importance. Good Middlemarch

families were of course not going to change their doctor without reason

shown; and everybody who had employed Mr. Peacock did not feel obliged

to accept a new man merely in the character of his successor, objecting

that he was “not likely to be equal to Peacock.”

But Lydgate had not been long in the town before there were particulars

enough reported of him to breed much more specific expectations and to

intensify differences into partisanship; some of the particulars being

of that impressive order of which the significance is entirely hidden,

like a statistical amount without a standard of comparison, but with a

note of exclamation at the end. The cubic feet of oxygen yearly

swallowed by a full-grown man—what a shudder they might have created in

some Middlemarch circles! “Oxygen! nobody knows what that may be—is it

any wonder the cholera has got to Dantzic? And yet there are people who

say quarantine is no good!”

One of the facts quickly rumored was that Lydgate did not dispense

drugs. This was offensive both to the physicians whose exclusive

distinction seemed infringed on, and to the surgeon-apothecaries with

whom he ranged himself; and only a little while before, they might have

counted on having the law on their side against a man who without

calling himself a London-made M.D. dared to ask for pay except as a

charge on drugs. But Lydgate had not been experienced enough to foresee

that his new course would be even more offensive to the laity; and to

Mr. Mawmsey, an important grocer in the Top Market, who, though not one

of his patients, questioned him in an affable manner on the subject, he

was injudicious enough to give a hasty popular explanation of his

reasons, pointing out to Mr. Mawmsey that it must lower the character

of practitioners, and be a constant injury to the public, if their only

mode of getting paid for their work was by their making out long bills

for draughts, boluses, and mixtures.

“It is in that way that hard-working medical men may come to be almost

as mischievous as quacks,” said Lydgate, rather thoughtlessly. “To get

their own bread they must overdose the king’s lieges; and that’s a bad

sort of treason, Mr. Mawmsey—undermines the constitution in a fatal

way.”

Mr. Mawmsey was not only an overseer (it was about a question of

outdoor pay that he was having an interview with Lydgate), he was also

asthmatic and had an increasing family: thus, from a medical point of

view, as well as from his own, he was an important man; indeed, an

exceptional grocer, whose hair was arranged in a flame-like pyramid,

and whose retail deference was of the cordial, encouraging

kind—jocosely complimentary, and with a certain considerate abstinence

from letting out the full force of his mind. It was Mr. Mawmsey’s

friendly jocoseness in questioning him which had set the tone of

Lydgate’s reply. But let the wise be warned against too great readiness

at explanation: it multiplies the sources of mistake, lengthening the

sum for reckoners sure to go wrong.

Lydgate smiled as he ended his speech, putting his foot into the

stirrup, and Mr. Mawmsey laughed more than he would have done if he had

known who the king’s lieges were, giving his “Good morning, sir,

good-morning, sir,” with the air of one who saw everything clearly

enough. But in truth his views were perturbed. For years he had been

paying bills with strictly made items, so that for every half-crown and

eighteen-pence he was certain something measurable had been delivered.

He had done this with satisfaction, including it among his

responsibilities as a husband and father, and regarding a longer bill

than usual as a dignity worth mentioning. Moreover, in addition to the

massive benefit of the drugs to “self and family,” he had enjoyed the

pleasure of forming an acute judgment as to their immediate effects, so

as to give an intelligent statement for the guidance of Mr. Gambit—a

practitioner just a little lower in status than Wrench or Toller, and

especially esteemed as an accoucheur, of whose ability Mr. Mawmsey had

the poorest opinion on all other points, but in doctoring, he was wont

to say in an undertone, he placed Gambit above any of them.

Here were deeper reasons than the superficial talk of a new man, which

appeared still flimsier in the drawing-room over the shop, when they

were recited to Mrs. Mawmsey, a woman accustomed to be made much of as

a fertile mother,—generally under attendance more or less frequent from

Mr. Gambit, and occasionally having attacks which required Dr. Minchin.

“Does this Mr. Lydgate mean to say there is no use in taking medicine?”

said Mrs. Mawmsey, who was slightly given to drawling. “I should like

him to tell me how I could bear up at Fair time, if I didn’t take

strengthening medicine for a month beforehand. Think of what I have to

provide for calling customers, my dear!”—here Mrs. Mawmsey turned to an

intimate female friend who sat by—“a large veal pie—a stuffed fillet—a

round of beef—ham, tongue, et cetera, et cetera! But what keeps me up

best is the pink mixture, not the brown. I wonder, Mr. Mawmsey, with

\_your\_ experience, you could have patience to listen. I should have

told him at once that I knew a little better than that.”

“No, no, no,” said Mr. Mawmsey; “I was not going to tell him my

opinion. Hear everything and judge for yourself is my motto. But he

didn’t know who he was talking to. I was not to be turned on \_his\_

finger. People often pretend to tell me things, when they might as well

say, ‘Mawmsey, you’re a fool.’ But I smile at it: I humor everybody’s

weak place. If physic had done harm to self and family, I should have

found it out by this time.”

The next day Mr. Gambit was told that Lydgate went about saying physic

was of no use.

“Indeed!” said he, lifting his eyebrows with cautious surprise. (He was

a stout husky man with a large ring on his fourth finger.) “How will he

cure his patients, then?”

“That is what I say,” returned Mrs. Mawmsey, who habitually gave weight

to her speech by loading her pronouns. “Does \_he\_ suppose that people

will pay him only to come and sit with them and go away again?”

Mrs. Mawmsey had had a great deal of sitting from Mr. Gambit, including

very full accounts of his own habits of body and other affairs; but of

course he knew there was no innuendo in her remark, since his spare

time and personal narrative had never been charged for. So he replied,

humorously—

“Well, Lydgate is a good-looking young fellow, you know.”

“Not one that \_I\_ would employ,” said Mrs. Mawmsey. “\_Others\_ may do as

they please.”

Hence Mr. Gambit could go away from the chief grocer’s without fear of

rivalry, but not without a sense that Lydgate was one of those

hypocrites who try to discredit others by advertising their own

honesty, and that it might be worth some people’s while to show him up.

Mr. Gambit, however, had a satisfactory practice, much pervaded by the

smells of retail trading which suggested the reduction of cash payments

to a balance. And he did not think it worth his while to show Lydgate

up until he knew how. He had not indeed great resources of education,

and had had to work his own way against a good deal of professional

contempt; but he made none the worse accoucheur for calling the

breathing apparatus “longs.”

Other medical men felt themselves more capable. Mr. Toller shared the

highest practice in the town and belonged to an old Middlemarch family:

there were Tollers in the law and everything else above the line of

retail trade. Unlike our irascible friend Wrench, he had the easiest

way in the world of taking things which might be supposed to annoy him,

being a well-bred, quietly facetious man, who kept a good house, was

very fond of a little sporting when he could get it, very friendly with

Mr. Hawley, and hostile to Mr. Bulstrode. It may seem odd that with

such pleasant habits he should have been given to the heroic treatment,

bleeding and blistering and starving his patients, with a dispassionate

disregard to his personal example; but the incongruity favored the

opinion of his ability among his patients, who commonly observed that

Mr. Toller had lazy manners, but his treatment was as active as you

could desire: no man, said they, carried more seriousness into his

profession: he was a little slow in coming, but when he came, he \_did\_

something. He was a great favorite in his own circle, and whatever he

implied to any one’s disadvantage told doubly from his careless

ironical tone.

He naturally got tired of smiling and saying, “Ah!” when he was told

that Mr. Peacock’s successor did not mean to dispense medicines; and

Mr. Hackbutt one day mentioning it over the wine at a dinner-party, Mr.

Toller said, laughingly, “Dibbitts will get rid of his stale drugs,

then. I’m fond of little Dibbitts—I’m glad he’s in luck.”

“I see your meaning, Toller,” said Mr. Hackbutt, “and I am entirely of

your opinion. I shall take an opportunity of expressing myself to that

effect. A medical man should be responsible for the quality of the

drugs consumed by his patients. That is the rationale of the system of

charging which has hitherto obtained; and nothing is more offensive

than this ostentation of reform, where there is no real amelioration.”

“Ostentation, Hackbutt?” said Mr. Toller, ironically. “I don’t see

that. A man can’t very well be ostentatious of what nobody believes in.

There’s no reform in the matter: the question is, whether the profit on

the drugs is paid to the medical man by the druggist or by the patient,

and whether there shall be extra pay under the name of attendance.”

“Ah, to be sure; one of your damned new versions of old humbug,” said

Mr. Hawley, passing the decanter to Mr. Wrench.

Mr. Wrench, generally abstemious, often drank wine rather freely at a

party, getting the more irritable in consequence.

“As to humbug, Hawley,” he said, “that’s a word easy to fling about.

But what I contend against is the way medical men are fouling their own

nest, and setting up a cry about the country as if a general

practitioner who dispenses drugs couldn’t be a gentleman. I throw back

the imputation with scorn. I say, the most ungentlemanly trick a man

can be guilty of is to come among the members of his profession with

innovations which are a libel on their time-honored procedure. That is

my opinion, and I am ready to maintain it against any one who

contradicts me.” Mr. Wrench’s voice had become exceedingly sharp.

“I can’t oblige you there, Wrench,” said Mr. Hawley, thrusting his

hands into his trouser-pockets.

“My dear fellow,” said Mr. Toller, striking in pacifically, and looking

at Mr. Wrench, “the physicians have their toes trodden on more than we

have. If you come to dignity it is a question for Minchin and Sprague.”

“Does medical jurisprudence provide nothing against these

infringements?” said Mr. Hackbutt, with a disinterested desire to offer

his lights. “How does the law stand, eh, Hawley?”

“Nothing to be done there,” said Mr. Hawley. “I looked into it for

Sprague. You’d only break your nose against a damned judge’s decision.”

“Pooh! no need of law,” said Mr. Toller. “So far as practice is

concerned the attempt is an absurdity. No patient will like

it—certainly not Peacock’s, who have been used to depletion. Pass the

wine.”

Mr. Toller’s prediction was partly verified. If Mr. and Mrs. Mawmsey,

who had no idea of employing Lydgate, were made uneasy by his supposed

declaration against drugs, it was inevitable that those who called him

in should watch a little anxiously to see whether he did “use all the

means he might use” in the case. Even good Mr. Powderell, who in his

constant charity of interpretation was inclined to esteem Lydgate the

more for what seemed a conscientious pursuit of a better plan, had his

mind disturbed with doubts during his wife’s attack of erysipelas, and

could not abstain from mentioning to Lydgate that Mr. Peacock on a

similar occasion had administered a series of boluses which were not

otherwise definable than by their remarkable effect in bringing Mrs.

Powderell round before Michaelmas from an illness which had begun in a

remarkably hot August. At last, indeed, in the conflict between his

desire not to hurt Lydgate and his anxiety that no “means” should be

lacking, he induced his wife privately to take Widgeon’s Purifying

Pills, an esteemed Middlemarch medicine, which arrested every disease

at the fountain by setting to work at once upon the blood. This

co-operative measure was not to be mentioned to Lydgate, and Mr.

Powderell himself had no certain reliance on it, only hoping that it

might be attended with a blessing.

But in this doubtful stage of Lydgate’s introduction he was helped by

what we mortals rashly call good fortune. I suppose no doctor ever came

newly to a place without making cures that surprised somebody—cures

which may be called fortune’s testimonials, and deserve as much credit

as the written or printed kind. Various patients got well while Lydgate

was attending them, some even of dangerous illnesses; and it was

remarked that the new doctor with his new ways had at least the merit

of bringing people back from the brink of death. The trash talked on

such occasions was the more vexatious to Lydgate, because it gave

precisely the sort of prestige which an incompetent and unscrupulous

man would desire, and was sure to be imputed to him by the simmering

dislike of the other medical men as an encouragement on his own part of

ignorant puffing. But even his proud outspokenness was checked by the

discernment that it was as useless to fight against the interpretations

of ignorance as to whip the fog; and “good fortune” insisted on using

those interpretations.

Mrs. Larcher having just become charitably concerned about alarming

symptoms in her charwoman, when Dr. Minchin called, asked him to see

her then and there, and to give her a certificate for the Infirmary;

whereupon after examination he wrote a statement of the case as one of

tumor, and recommended the bearer Nancy Nash as an out-patient. Nancy,

calling at home on her way to the Infirmary, allowed the stay maker and

his wife, in whose attic she lodged, to read Dr. Minchin’s paper, and

by this means became a subject of compassionate conversation in the

neighboring shops of Churchyard Lane as being afflicted with a tumor at

first declared to be as large and hard as a duck’s egg, but later in

the day to be about the size of “your fist.” Most hearers agreed that

it would have to be cut out, but one had known of oil and another of

“squitchineal” as adequate to soften and reduce any lump in the body

when taken enough of into the inside—the oil by gradually “soopling,”

the squitchineal by eating away.

Meanwhile when Nancy presented herself at the Infirmary, it happened to

be one of Lydgate’s days there. After questioning and examining her,

Lydgate said to the house-surgeon in an undertone, “It’s not tumor:

it’s cramp.” He ordered her a blister and some steel mixture, and told

her to go home and rest, giving her at the same time a note to Mrs.

Larcher, who, she said, was her best employer, to testify that she was

in need of good food.

But by-and-by Nancy, in her attic, became portentously worse, the

supposed tumor having indeed given way to the blister, but only

wandered to another region with angrier pain. The staymaker’s wife went

to fetch Lydgate, and he continued for a fortnight to attend Nancy in

her own home, until under his treatment she got quite well and went to

work again. But the case continued to be described as one of tumor in

Churchyard Lane and other streets—nay, by Mrs. Larcher also; for when

Lydgate’s remarkable cure was mentioned to Dr. Minchin, he naturally

did not like to say, “The case was not one of tumor, and I was mistaken

in describing it as such,” but answered, “Indeed! ah! I saw it was a

surgical case, not of a fatal kind.” He had been inwardly annoyed,

however, when he had asked at the Infirmary about the woman he had

recommended two days before, to hear from the house-surgeon, a

youngster who was not sorry to vex Minchin with impunity, exactly what

had occurred: he privately pronounced that it was indecent in a general

practitioner to contradict a physician’s diagnosis in that open manner,

and afterwards agreed with Wrench that Lydgate was disagreeably

inattentive to etiquette. Lydgate did not make the affair a ground for

valuing himself or (very particularly) despising Minchin, such

rectification of misjudgments often happening among men of equal

qualifications. But report took up this amazing case of tumor, not

clearly distinguished from cancer, and considered the more awful for

being of the wandering sort; till much prejudice against Lydgate’s

method as to drugs was overcome by the proof of his marvellous skill in

the speedy restoration of Nancy Nash after she had been rolling and

rolling in agonies from the presence of a tumor both hard and

obstinate, but nevertheless compelled to yield.

How could Lydgate help himself? It is offensive to tell a lady when she

is expressing her amazement at your skill, that she is altogether

mistaken and rather foolish in her amazement. And to have entered into

the nature of diseases would only have added to his breaches of medical

propriety. Thus he had to wince under a promise of success given by

that ignorant praise which misses every valid quality.

In the case of a more conspicuous patient, Mr. Borthrop Trumbull,

Lydgate was conscious of having shown himself something better than an

every-day doctor, though here too it was an equivocal advantage that he

won. The eloquent auctioneer was seized with pneumonia, and having been

a patient of Mr. Peacock’s, sent for Lydgate, whom he had expressed his

intention to patronize. Mr Trumbull was a robust man, a good subject

for trying the expectant theory upon—watching the course of an

interesting disease when left as much as possible to itself, so that

the stages might be noted for future guidance; and from the air with

which he described his sensations Lydgate surmised that he would like

to be taken into his medical man’s confidence, and be represented as a

partner in his own cure. The auctioneer heard, without much surprise,

that his was a constitution which (always with due watching) might be

left to itself, so as to offer a beautiful example of a disease with

all its phases seen in clear delineation, and that he probably had the

rare strength of mind voluntarily to become the test of a rational

procedure, and thus make the disorder of his pulmonary functions a

general benefit to society.

Mr. Trumbull acquiesced at once, and entered strongly into the view

that an illness of his was no ordinary occasion for medical science.

“Never fear, sir; you are not speaking to one who is altogether

ignorant of the \_vis medicatrix\_,” said he, with his usual superiority

of expression, made rather pathetic by difficulty of breathing. And he

went without shrinking through his abstinence from drugs, much

sustained by application of the thermometer which implied the

importance of his temperature, by the sense that he furnished objects

for the microscope, and by learning many new words which seemed suited

to the dignity of his secretions. For Lydgate was acute enough to

indulge him with a little technical talk.

It may be imagined that Mr. Trumbull rose from his couch with a

disposition to speak of an illness in which he had manifested the

strength of his mind as well as constitution; and he was not backward

in awarding credit to the medical man who had discerned the quality of

patient he had to deal with. The auctioneer was not an ungenerous man,

and liked to give others their due, feeling that he could afford it. He

had caught the words “expectant method,” and rang chimes on this and

other learned phrases to accompany the assurance that Lydgate “knew a

thing or two more than the rest of the doctors—was far better versed in

the secrets of his profession than the majority of his compeers.”

This had happened before the affair of Fred Vincy’s illness had given

to Mr. Wrench’s enmity towards Lydgate more definite personal ground.

The new-comer already threatened to be a nuisance in the shape of

rivalry, and was certainly a nuisance in the shape of practical

criticism or reflections on his hard-driven elders, who had had

something else to do than to busy themselves with untried notions. His

practice had spread in one or two quarters, and from the first the

report of his high family had led to his being pretty generally

invited, so that the other medical men had to meet him at dinner in the

best houses; and having to meet a man whom you dislike is not observed

always to end in a mutual attachment. There was hardly ever so much

unanimity among them as in the opinion that Lydgate was an arrogant

young fellow, and yet ready for the sake of ultimately predominating to

show a crawling subservience to Bulstrode. That Mr. Farebrother, whose

name was a chief flag of the anti-Bulstrode party, always defended

Lydgate and made a friend of him, was referred to Farebrother’s

unaccountable way of fighting on both sides.

Here was plenty of preparation for the outburst of professional disgust

at the announcement of the laws Mr. Bulstrode was laying down for the

direction of the New Hospital, which were the more exasperating because

there was no present possibility of interfering with his will and

pleasure, everybody except Lord Medlicote having refused help towards

the building, on the ground that they preferred giving to the Old

Infirmary. Mr. Bulstrode met all the expenses, and had ceased to be

sorry that he was purchasing the right to carry out his notions of

improvement without hindrance from prejudiced coadjutors; but he had

had to spend large sums, and the building had lingered. Caleb Garth had

undertaken it, had failed during its progress, and before the interior

fittings were begun had retired from the management of the business;

and when referring to the Hospital he often said that however Bulstrode

might ring if you tried him, he liked good solid carpentry and masonry,

and had a notion both of drains and chimneys. In fact, the Hospital had

become an object of intense interest to Bulstrode, and he would

willingly have continued to spare a large yearly sum that he might rule

it dictatorially without any Board; but he had another favorite object

which also required money for its accomplishment: he wished to buy some

land in the neighborhood of Middlemarch, and therefore he wished to get

considerable contributions towards maintaining the Hospital. Meanwhile

he framed his plan of management. The Hospital was to be reserved for

fever in all its forms; Lydgate was to be chief medical superintendent,

that he might have free authority to pursue all comparative

investigations which his studies, particularly in Paris, had shown him

the importance of, the other medical visitors having a consultative

influence, but no power to contravene Lydgate’s ultimate decisions; and

the general management was to be lodged exclusively in the hands of

five directors associated with Mr. Bulstrode, who were to have votes in

the ratio of their contributions, the Board itself filling up any

vacancy in its numbers, and no mob of small contributors being admitted

to a share of government.

There was an immediate refusal on the part of every medical man in the

town to become a visitor at the Fever Hospital.

“Very well,” said Lydgate to Mr. Bulstrode, “we have a capital

house-surgeon and dispenser, a clear-headed, neat-handed fellow; we’ll

get Webbe from Crabsley, as good a country practitioner as any of them,

to come over twice a-week, and in case of any exceptional operation,

Protheroe will come from Brassing. I must work the harder, that’s all,

and I have given up my post at the Infirmary. The plan will flourish in

spite of them, and then they’ll be glad to come in. Things can’t last

as they are: there must be all sorts of reform soon, and then young

fellows may be glad to come and study here.” Lydgate was in high

spirits.

“I shall not flinch, you may depend upon it, Mr. Lydgate,” said Mr.

Bulstrode. “While I see you carrying out high intentions with vigor,

you shall have my unfailing support. And I have humble confidence that

the blessing which has hitherto attended my efforts against the spirit

of evil in this town will not be withdrawn. Suitable directors to

assist me I have no doubt of securing. Mr. Brooke of Tipton has already

given me his concurrence, and a pledge to contribute yearly: he has not

specified the sum—probably not a great one. But he will be a useful

member of the board.”

A useful member was perhaps to be defined as one who would originate

nothing, and always vote with Mr. Bulstrode.

The medical aversion to Lydgate was hardly disguised now. Neither Dr.

Sprague nor Dr. Minchin said that he disliked Lydgate’s knowledge, or

his disposition to improve treatment: what they disliked was his

arrogance, which nobody felt to be altogether deniable. They implied

that he was insolent, pretentious, and given to that reckless

innovation for the sake of noise and show which was the essence of the

charlatan.

The word charlatan once thrown on the air could not be let drop. In

those days the world was agitated about the wondrous doings of Mr. St.

John Long, “noblemen and gentlemen” attesting his extraction of a fluid

like mercury from the temples of a patient.

Mr. Toller remarked one day, smilingly, to Mrs. Taft, that “Bulstrode

had found a man to suit him in Lydgate; a charlatan in religion is sure

to like other sorts of charlatans.”

“Yes, indeed, I can imagine,” said Mrs. Taft, keeping the number of

thirty stitches carefully in her mind all the while; “there are so many

of that sort. I remember Mr. Cheshire, with his irons, trying to make

people straight when the Almighty had made them crooked.”

“No, no,” said Mr. Toller, “Cheshire was all right—all fair and above

board. But there’s St. John Long—that’s the kind of fellow we call a

charlatan, advertising cures in ways nobody knows anything about: a

fellow who wants to make a noise by pretending to go deeper than other

people. The other day he was pretending to tap a man’s brain and get

quicksilver out of it.”

“Good gracious! what dreadful trifling with people’s constitutions!”

said Mrs. Taft.

After this, it came to be held in various quarters that Lydgate played

even with respectable constitutions for his own purposes, and how much

more likely that in his flighty experimenting he should make sixes and

sevens of hospital patients. Especially it was to be expected, as the

landlady of the Tankard had said, that he would recklessly cut up their

dead bodies. For Lydgate having attended Mrs. Goby, who died apparently

of a heart-disease not very clearly expressed in the symptoms, too

daringly asked leave of her relatives to open the body, and thus gave

an offence quickly spreading beyond Parley Street, where that lady had

long resided on an income such as made this association of her body

with the victims of Burke and Hare a flagrant insult to her memory.

Affairs were in this stage when Lydgate opened the subject of the

Hospital to Dorothea. We see that he was bearing enmity and silly

misconception with much spirit, aware that they were partly created by

his good share of success.

“They will not drive me away,” he said, talking confidentially in Mr.

Farebrother’s study. “I have got a good opportunity here, for the ends

I care most about; and I am pretty sure to get income enough for our

wants. By-and-by I shall go on as quietly as possible: I have no

seductions now away from home and work. And I am more and more

convinced that it will be possible to demonstrate the homogeneous

origin of all the tissues. Raspail and others are on the same track,

and I have been losing time.”

“I have no power of prophecy there,” said Mr. Farebrother, who had been

puffing at his pipe thoughtfully while Lydgate talked; “but as to the

hostility in the town, you’ll weather it if you are prudent.”

“How am I to be prudent?” said Lydgate, “I just do what comes before me

to do. I can’t help people’s ignorance and spite, any more than

Vesalius could. It isn’t possible to square one’s conduct to silly

conclusions which nobody can foresee.”

“Quite true; I didn’t mean that. I meant only two things. One is, keep

yourself as separable from Bulstrode as you can: of course, you can go

on doing good work of your own by his help; but don’t get tied. Perhaps

it seems like personal feeling in me to say so—and there’s a good deal

of that, I own—but personal feeling is not always in the wrong if you

boil it down to the impressions which make it simply an opinion.”

“Bulstrode is nothing to me,” said Lydgate, carelessly, “except on

public grounds. As to getting very closely united to him, I am not fond

enough of him for that. But what was the other thing you meant?” said

Lydgate, who was nursing his leg as comfortably as possible, and

feeling in no great need of advice.

“Why, this. Take care—\_experto crede\_—take care not to get hampered

about money matters. I know, by a word you let fall one day, that you

don’t like my playing at cards so much for money. You are right enough

there. But try and keep clear of wanting small sums that you haven’t

got. I am perhaps talking rather superfluously; but a man likes to

assume superiority over himself, by holding up his bad example and

sermonizing on it.”

Lydgate took Mr. Farebrother’s hints very cordially, though he would

hardly have borne them from another man. He could not help remembering

that he had lately made some debts, but these had seemed inevitable,

and he had no intention now to do more than keep house in a simple way.

The furniture for which he owed would not want renewing; nor even the

stock of wine for a long while.

Many thoughts cheered him at that time—and justly. A man conscious of

enthusiasm for worthy aims is sustained under petty hostilities by the

memory of great workers who had to fight their way not without wounds,

and who hover in his mind as patron saints, invisibly helping. At home,

that same evening when he had been chatting with Mr. Farebrother, he

had his long legs stretched on the sofa, his head thrown back, and his

hands clasped behind it according to his favorite ruminating attitude,

while Rosamond sat at the piano, and played one tune after another, of

which her husband only knew (like the emotional elephant he was!) that

they fell in with his mood as if they had been melodious sea-breezes.

There was something very fine in Lydgate’s look just then, and any one

might have been encouraged to bet on his achievement. In his dark eyes

and on his mouth and brow there was that placidity which comes from the

fulness of contemplative thought—the mind not searching, but beholding,

and the glance seeming to be filled with what is behind it.

Presently Rosamond left the piano and seated herself on a chair close

to the sofa and opposite her husband’s face.

“Is that enough music for you, my lord?” she said, folding her hands

before her and putting on a little air of meekness.

“Yes, dear, if you are tired,” said Lydgate, gently, turning his eyes

and resting them on her, but not otherwise moving. Rosamond’s presence

at that moment was perhaps no more than a spoonful brought to the lake,

and her woman’s instinct in this matter was not dull.

“What is absorbing you?” she said, leaning forward and bringing her

face nearer to his.

He moved his hands and placed them gently behind her shoulders.

“I am thinking of a great fellow, who was about as old as I am three

hundred years ago, and had already begun a new era in anatomy.”

“I can’t guess,” said Rosamond, shaking her head. “We used to play at

guessing historical characters at Mrs. Lemon’s, but not anatomists.”

“I’ll tell you. His name was Vesalius. And the only way he could get to

know anatomy as he did, was by going to snatch bodies at night, from

graveyards and places of execution.”

“Oh!” said Rosamond, with a look of disgust on her pretty face, “I am

very glad you are not Vesalius. I should have thought he might find

some less horrible way than that.”

“No, he couldn’t,” said Lydgate, going on too earnestly to take much

notice of her answer. “He could only get a complete skeleton by

snatching the whitened bones of a criminal from the gallows, and

burying them, and fetching them away by bits secretly, in the dead of

night.”

“I hope he is not one of your great heroes,” said Rosamond, half

playfully, half anxiously, “else I shall have you getting up in the

night to go to St. Peter’s churchyard. You know how angry you told me

the people were about Mrs. Goby. You have enemies enough already.”

“So had Vesalius, Rosy. No wonder the medical fogies in Middlemarch are

jealous, when some of the greatest doctors living were fierce upon

Vesalius because they had believed in Galen, and he showed that Galen

was wrong. They called him a liar and a poisonous monster. But the

facts of the human frame were on his side; and so he got the better of

them.”

“And what happened to him afterwards?” said Rosamond, with some

interest.

“Oh, he had a good deal of fighting to the last. And they did

exasperate him enough at one time to make him burn a good deal of his

work. Then he got shipwrecked just as he was coming from Jerusalem to

take a great chair at Padua. He died rather miserably.”

There was a moment’s pause before Rosamond said, “Do you know, Tertius,

I often wish you had not been a medical man.”

“Nay, Rosy, don’t say that,” said Lydgate, drawing her closer to him.

“That is like saying you wish you had married another man.”

“Not at all; you are clever enough for anything: you might easily have

been something else. And your cousins at Quallingham all think that you

have sunk below them in your choice of a profession.”

“The cousins at Quallingham may go to the devil!” said Lydgate, with

scorn. “It was like their impudence if they said anything of the sort

to you.”

“Still,” said Rosamond, “I do \_not\_ think it is a nice profession,

dear.” We know that she had much quiet perseverance in her opinion.

“It is the grandest profession in the world, Rosamond,” said Lydgate,

gravely. “And to say that you love me without loving the medical man in

me, is the same sort of thing as to say that you like eating a peach

but don’t like its flavor. Don’t say that again, dear, it pains me.”

“Very well, Doctor Grave-face,” said Rosy, dimpling, “I will declare in

future that I dote on skeletons, and body-snatchers, and bits of things

in phials, and quarrels with everybody, that end in your dying

miserably.”

“No, no, not so bad as that,” said Lydgate, giving up remonstrance and

petting her resignedly.

CHAPTER XLVI.

Pues no podemos haber aquello que queremos, queramos aquello que

podremos.

Since we cannot get what we like, let us like what we can get.—\_Spanish

Proverb\_.

While Lydgate, safely married and with the Hospital under his command,

felt himself struggling for Medical Reform against Middlemarch,

Middlemarch was becoming more and more conscious of the national

struggle for another kind of Reform.

By the time that Lord John Russell’s measure was being debated in the

House of Commons, there was a new political animation in Middlemarch,

and a new definition of parties which might show a decided change of

balance if a new election came. And there were some who already

predicted this event, declaring that a Reform Bill would never be

carried by the actual Parliament. This was what Will Ladislaw dwelt on

to Mr. Brooke as a reason for congratulation that he had not yet tried

his strength at the hustings.

“Things will grow and ripen as if it were a comet year,” said Will.

“The public temper will soon get to a cometary heat, now the question

of Reform has set in. There is likely to be another election before

long, and by that time Middlemarch will have got more ideas into its

head. What we have to work at now is the ‘Pioneer’ and political

meetings.”

“Quite right, Ladislaw; we shall make a new thing of opinion here,”

said Mr. Brooke. “Only I want to keep myself independent about Reform,

you know; I don’t want to go too far. I want to take up Wilberforce’s

and Romilly’s line, you know, and work at Negro Emancipation, Criminal

Law—that kind of thing. But of course I should support Grey.”

“If you go in for the principle of Reform, you must be prepared to take

what the situation offers,” said Will. “If everybody pulled for his own

bit against everybody else, the whole question would go to tatters.”

“Yes, yes, I agree with you—I quite take that point of view. I should

put it in that light. I should support Grey, you know. But I don’t want

to change the balance of the constitution, and I don’t think Grey

would.”

“But that is what the country wants,” said Will. “Else there would be

no meaning in political unions or any other movement that knows what

it’s about. It wants to have a House of Commons which is not weighted

with nominees of the landed class, but with representatives of the

other interests. And as to contending for a reform short of that, it is

like asking for a bit of an avalanche which has already begun to

thunder.”

“That is fine, Ladislaw: that is the way to put it. Write that down,

now. We must begin to get documents about the feeling of the country,

as well as the machine-breaking and general distress.”

“As to documents,” said Will, “a two-inch card will hold plenty. A few

rows of figures are enough to deduce misery from, and a few more will

show the rate at which the political determination of the people is

growing.”

“Good: draw that out a little more at length, Ladislaw. That is an

idea, now: write it out in the ‘Pioneer.’ Put the figures and deduce

the misery, you know; and put the other figures and deduce—and so on.

You have a way of putting things. Burke, now:—when I think of Burke, I

can’t help wishing somebody had a pocket-borough to give you, Ladislaw.

You’d never get elected, you know. And we shall always want talent in

the House: reform as we will, we shall always want talent. That

avalanche and the thunder, now, was really a little like Burke. I want

that sort of thing—not ideas, you know, but a way of putting them.”

“Pocket-boroughs would be a fine thing,” said Ladislaw, “if they were

always in the right pocket, and there were always a Burke at hand.”

Will was not displeased with that complimentary comparison, even from

Mr. Brooke; for it is a little too trying to human flesh to be

conscious of expressing one’s self better than others and never to have

it noticed, and in the general dearth of admiration for the right

thing, even a chance bray of applause falling exactly in time is rather

fortifying. Will felt that his literary refinements were usually beyond

the limits of Middlemarch perception; nevertheless, he was beginning

thoroughly to like the work of which when he began he had said to

himself rather languidly, “Why not?”—and he studied the political

situation with as ardent an interest as he had ever given to poetic

metres or mediaevalism. It is undeniable that but for the desire to be

where Dorothea was, and perhaps the want of knowing what else to do,

Will would not at this time have been meditating on the needs of the

English people or criticising English statesmanship: he would probably

have been rambling in Italy sketching plans for several dramas, trying

prose and finding it too jejune, trying verse and finding it too

artificial, beginning to copy “bits” from old pictures, leaving off

because they were “no good,” and observing that, after all,

self-culture was the principal point; while in politics he would have

been sympathizing warmly with liberty and progress in general. Our

sense of duty must often wait for some work which shall take the place

of dilettanteism and make us feel that the quality of our action is not

a matter of indifference.

Ladislaw had now accepted his bit of work, though it was not that

indeterminate loftiest thing which he had once dreamed of as alone

worthy of continuous effort. His nature warmed easily in the presence

of subjects which were visibly mixed with life and action, and the

easily stirred rebellion in him helped the glow of public spirit. In

spite of Mr. Casaubon and the banishment from Lowick, he was rather

happy; getting a great deal of fresh knowledge in a vivid way and for

practical purposes, and making the “Pioneer” celebrated as far as

Brassing (never mind the smallness of the area; the writing was not

worse than much that reaches the four corners of the earth).

Mr. Brooke was occasionally irritating; but Will’s impatience was

relieved by the division of his time between visits to the Grange and

retreats to his Middlemarch lodgings, which gave variety to his life.

“Shift the pegs a little,” he said to himself, “and Mr. Brooke might be

in the Cabinet, while I was Under-Secretary. That is the common order

of things: the little waves make the large ones and are of the same

pattern. I am better here than in the sort of life Mr. Casaubon would

have trained me for, where the doing would be all laid down by a

precedent too rigid for me to react upon. I don’t care for prestige or

high pay.”

As Lydgate had said of him, he was a sort of gypsy, rather enjoying the

sense of belonging to no class; he had a feeling of romance in his

position, and a pleasant consciousness of creating a little surprise

wherever he went. That sort of enjoyment had been disturbed when he had

felt some new distance between himself and Dorothea in their accidental

meeting at Lydgate’s, and his irritation had gone out towards Mr.

Casaubon, who had declared beforehand that Will would lose caste. “I

never had any caste,” he would have said, if that prophecy had been

uttered to him, and the quick blood would have come and gone like

breath in his transparent skin. But it is one thing to like defiance,

and another thing to like its consequences.

Meanwhile, the town opinion about the new editor of the “Pioneer” was

tending to confirm Mr. Casaubon’s view. Will’s relationship in that

distinguished quarter did not, like Lydgate’s high connections, serve

as an advantageous introduction: if it was rumored that young Ladislaw

was Mr. Casaubon’s nephew or cousin, it was also rumored that “Mr.

Casaubon would have nothing to do with him.”

“Brooke has taken him up,” said Mr. Hawley, “because that is what no

man in his senses could have expected. Casaubon has devilish good

reasons, you may be sure, for turning the cold shoulder on a young

fellow whose bringing-up he paid for. Just like Brooke—one of those

fellows who would praise a cat to sell a horse.”

And some oddities of Will’s, more or less poetical, appeared to support

Mr. Keck, the editor of the “Trumpet,” in asserting that Ladislaw, if

the truth were known, was not only a Polish emissary but crack-brained,

which accounted for the preternatural quickness and glibness of his

speech when he got on to a platform—as he did whenever he had an

opportunity, speaking with a facility which cast reflections on solid

Englishmen generally. It was disgusting to Keck to see a strip of a

fellow, with light curls round his head, get up and speechify by the

hour against institutions “which had existed when he was in his

cradle.” And in a leading article of the “Trumpet,” Keck characterized

Ladislaw’s speech at a Reform meeting as “the violence of an

energumen—a miserable effort to shroud in the brilliancy of fireworks

the daring of irresponsible statements and the poverty of a knowledge

which was of the cheapest and most recent description.”

“That was a rattling article yesterday, Keck,” said Dr. Sprague, with

sarcastic intentions. “But what is an energumen?”

“Oh, a term that came up in the French Revolution,” said Keck.

This dangerous aspect of Ladislaw was strangely contrasted with other

habits which became matter of remark. He had a fondness, half artistic,

half affectionate, for little children—the smaller they were on

tolerably active legs, and the funnier their clothing, the better Will

liked to surprise and please them. We know that in Rome he was given to

ramble about among the poor people, and the taste did not quit him in

Middlemarch.

He had somehow picked up a troop of droll children, little hatless boys

with their galligaskins much worn and scant shirting to hang out,

little girls who tossed their hair out of their eyes to look at him,

and guardian brothers at the mature age of seven. This troop he had led

out on gypsy excursions to Halsell Wood at nutting-time, and since the

cold weather had set in he had taken them on a clear day to gather

sticks for a bonfire in the hollow of a hillside, where he drew out a

small feast of gingerbread for them, and improvised a Punch-and-Judy

drama with some private home-made puppets. Here was one oddity. Another

was, that in houses where he got friendly, he was given to stretch

himself at full length on the rug while he talked, and was apt to be

discovered in this attitude by occasional callers for whom such an

irregularity was likely to confirm the notions of his dangerously mixed

blood and general laxity.

But Will’s articles and speeches naturally recommended him in families

which the new strictness of party division had marked off on the side

of Reform. He was invited to Mr. Bulstrode’s; but here he could not lie

down on the rug, and Mrs. Bulstrode felt that his mode of talking about

Catholic countries, as if there were any truce with Antichrist,

illustrated the usual tendency to unsoundness in intellectual men.

At Mr. Farebrother’s, however, whom the irony of events had brought on

the same side with Bulstrode in the national movement, Will became a

favorite with the ladies; especially with little Miss Noble, whom it

was one of his oddities to escort when he met her in the street with

her little basket, giving her his arm in the eyes of the town, and

insisting on going with her to pay some call where she distributed her

small filchings from her own share of sweet things.

But the house where he visited oftenest and lay most on the rug was

Lydgate’s. The two men were not at all alike, but they agreed none the

worse. Lydgate was abrupt but not irritable, taking little notice of

megrims in healthy people; and Ladislaw did not usually throw away his

susceptibilities on those who took no notice of them. With Rosamond, on

the other hand, he pouted and was wayward—nay, often uncomplimentary,

much to her inward surprise; nevertheless he was gradually becoming

necessary to her entertainment by his companionship in her music, his

varied talk, and his freedom from the grave preoccupation which, with

all her husband’s tenderness and indulgence, often made his manners

unsatisfactory to her, and confirmed her dislike of the medical

profession.

Lydgate, inclined to be sarcastic on the superstitious faith of the

people in the efficacy of “the bill,” while nobody cared about the low

state of pathology, sometimes assailed Will with troublesome questions.

One evening in March, Rosamond in her cherry-colored dress with

swansdown trimming about the throat sat at the tea-table; Lydgate,

lately come in tired from his outdoor work, was seated sideways on an

easy-chair by the fire with one leg over the elbow, his brow looking a

little troubled as his eyes rambled over the columns of the “Pioneer,”

while Rosamond, having noticed that he was perturbed, avoided looking

at him, and inwardly thanked heaven that she herself had not a moody

disposition. Will Ladislaw was stretched on the rug contemplating the

curtain-pole abstractedly, and humming very low the notes of “When

first I saw thy face;” while the house spaniel, also stretched out with

small choice of room, looked from between his paws at the usurper of

the rug with silent but strong objection.

Rosamond bringing Lydgate his cup of tea, he threw down the paper, and

said to Will, who had started up and gone to the table—

“It’s no use your puffing Brooke as a reforming landlord, Ladislaw:

they only pick the more holes in his coat in the ‘Trumpet.’”

“No matter; those who read the ‘Pioneer’ don’t read the ‘Trumpet,’”

said Will, swallowing his tea and walking about. “Do you suppose the

public reads with a view to its own conversion? We should have a

witches’ brewing with a vengeance then—‘Mingle, mingle, mingle, mingle,

You that mingle may’—and nobody would know which side he was going to

take.”

“Farebrother says, he doesn’t believe Brooke would get elected if the

opportunity came: the very men who profess to be for him would bring

another member out of the bag at the right moment.”

“There’s no harm in trying. It’s good to have resident members.”

“Why?” said Lydgate, who was much given to use that inconvenient word

in a curt tone.

“They represent the local stupidity better,” said Will, laughing, and

shaking his curls; “and they are kept on their best behavior in the

neighborhood. Brooke is not a bad fellow, but he has done some good

things on his estate that he never would have done but for this

Parliamentary bite.”

“He’s not fitted to be a public man,” said Lydgate, with contemptuous

decision. “He would disappoint everybody who counted on him: I can see

that at the Hospital. Only, there Bulstrode holds the reins and drives

him.”

“That depends on how you fix your standard of public men,” said Will.

“He’s good enough for the occasion: when the people have made up their

mind as they are making it up now, they don’t want a man—they only want

a vote.”

“That is the way with you political writers, Ladislaw—crying up a

measure as if it were a universal cure, and crying up men who are a

part of the very disease that wants curing.”

“Why not? Men may help to cure themselves off the face of the land

without knowing it,” said Will, who could find reasons impromptu, when

he had not thought of a question beforehand.

“That is no excuse for encouraging the superstitious exaggeration of

hopes about this particular measure, helping the cry to swallow it

whole and to send up voting popinjays who are good for nothing but to

carry it. You go against rottenness, and there is nothing more

thoroughly rotten than making people believe that society can be cured

by a political hocus-pocus.”

“That’s very fine, my dear fellow. But your cure must begin somewhere,

and put it that a thousand things which debase a population can never

be reformed without this particular reform to begin with. Look what

Stanley said the other day—that the House had been tinkering long

enough at small questions of bribery, inquiring whether this or that

voter has had a guinea when everybody knows that the seats have been

sold wholesale. Wait for wisdom and conscience in public

agents—fiddlestick! The only conscience we can trust to is the massive

sense of wrong in a class, and the best wisdom that will work is the

wisdom of balancing claims. That’s my text—which side is injured? I

support the man who supports their claims; not the virtuous upholder of

the wrong.”

“That general talk about a particular case is mere question begging,

Ladislaw. When I say, I go in for the dose that cures, it doesn’t

follow that I go in for opium in a given case of gout.”

“I am not begging the question we are upon—whether we are to try for

nothing till we find immaculate men to work with. Should you go on that

plan? If there were one man who would carry you a medical reform and

another who would oppose it, should you inquire which had the better

motives or even the better brains?”

“Oh, of course,” said Lydgate, seeing himself checkmated by a move

which he had often used himself, “if one did not work with such men as

are at hand, things must come to a dead-lock. Suppose the worst opinion

in the town about Bulstrode were a true one, that would not make it

less true that he has the sense and the resolution to do what I think

ought to be done in the matters I know and care most about; but that is

the only ground on which I go with him,” Lydgate added rather proudly,

bearing in mind Mr. Farebrother’s remarks. “He is nothing to me

otherwise; I would not cry him up on any personal ground—I would keep

clear of that.”

“Do you mean that I cry up Brooke on any personal ground?” said Will

Ladislaw, nettled, and turning sharp round. For the first time he felt

offended with Lydgate; not the less so, perhaps, because he would have

declined any close inquiry into the growth of his relation to Mr.

Brooke.

“Not at all,” said Lydgate, “I was simply explaining my own action. I

meant that a man may work for a special end with others whose motives

and general course are equivocal, if he is quite sure of his personal

independence, and that he is not working for his private

interest—either place or money.”

“Then, why don’t you extend your liberality to others?” said Will,

still nettled. “My personal independence is as important to me as yours

is to you. You have no more reason to imagine that I have personal

expectations from Brooke, than I have to imagine that you have personal

expectations from Bulstrode. Motives are points of honor, I

suppose—nobody can prove them. But as to money and place in the world,”

Will ended, tossing back his head, “I think it is pretty clear that I

am not determined by considerations of that sort.”

“You quite mistake me, Ladislaw,” said Lydgate, surprised. He had been

preoccupied with his own vindication, and had been blind to what

Ladislaw might infer on his own account. “I beg your pardon for

unintentionally annoying you. In fact, I should rather attribute to you

a romantic disregard of your own worldly interests. On the political

question, I referred simply to intellectual bias.”

“How very unpleasant you both are this evening!” said Rosamond. “I

cannot conceive why money should have been referred to. Politics and

Medicine are sufficiently disagreeable to quarrel upon. You can both of

you go on quarrelling with all the world and with each other on those

two topics.”

Rosamond looked mildly neutral as she said this, rising to ring the

bell, and then crossing to her work-table.

“Poor Rosy!” said Lydgate, putting out his hand to her as she was

passing him. “Disputation is not amusing to cherubs. Have some music.

Ask Ladislaw to sing with you.”

When Will was gone Rosamond said to her husband, “What put you out of

temper this evening, Tertius?”

“Me? It was Ladislaw who was out of temper. He is like a bit of

tinder.”

“But I mean, before that. Something had vexed you before you came in,

you looked cross. And that made you begin to dispute with Mr. Ladislaw.

You hurt me very much when you look so, Tertius.”

“Do I? Then I am a brute,” said Lydgate, caressing her penitently.

“What vexed you?”

“Oh, outdoor things—business.” It was really a letter insisting on the

payment of a bill for furniture. But Rosamond was expecting to have a

baby, and Lydgate wished to save her from any perturbation.

CHAPTER XLVII.

Was never true love loved in vain,

For truest love is highest gain.

No art can make it: it must spring

Where elements are fostering.

So in heaven’s spot and hour

Springs the little native flower,

Downward root and upward eye,

Shapen by the earth and sky.

It happened to be on a Saturday evening that Will Ladislaw had that

little discussion with Lydgate. Its effect when he went to his own

rooms was to make him sit up half the night, thinking over again, under

a new irritation, all that he had before thought of his having settled

in Middlemarch and harnessed himself with Mr. Brooke. Hesitations

before he had taken the step had since turned into susceptibility to

every hint that he would have been wiser not to take it; and hence came

his heat towards Lydgate—a heat which still kept him restless. Was he

not making a fool of himself?—and at a time when he was more than ever

conscious of being something better than a fool? And for what end?

Well, for no definite end. True, he had dreamy visions of

possibilities: there is no human being who having both passions and

thoughts does not think in consequence of his passions—does not find

images rising in his mind which soothe the passion with hope or sting

it with dread. But this, which happens to us all, happens to some with

a wide difference; and Will was not one of those whose wit “keeps the

roadway:” he had his bypaths where there were little joys of his own

choosing, such as gentlemen cantering on the highroad might have

thought rather idiotic. The way in which he made a sort of happiness

for himself out of his feeling for Dorothea was an example of this. It

may seem strange, but it is the fact, that the ordinary vulgar vision

of which Mr. Casaubon suspected him—namely, that Dorothea might become

a widow, and that the interest he had established in her mind might

turn into acceptance of him as a husband—had no tempting, arresting

power over him; he did not live in the scenery of such an event, and

follow it out, as we all do with that imagined “otherwise” which is our

practical heaven. It was not only that he was unwilling to entertain

thoughts which could be accused of baseness, and was already uneasy in

the sense that he had to justify himself from the charge of

ingratitude—the latent consciousness of many other barriers between

himself and Dorothea besides the existence of her husband, had helped

to turn away his imagination from speculating on what might befall Mr.

Casaubon. And there were yet other reasons. Will, we know, could not

bear the thought of any flaw appearing in his crystal: he was at once

exasperated and delighted by the calm freedom with which Dorothea

looked at him and spoke to him, and there was something so exquisite in

thinking of her just as she was, that he could not long for a change

which must somehow change her. Do we not shun the street version of a

fine melody?—or shrink from the news that the rarity—some bit of

chiselling or engraving perhaps—which we have dwelt on even with

exultation in the trouble it has cost us to snatch glimpses of it, is

really not an uncommon thing, and may be obtained as an every-day

possession? Our good depends on the quality and breadth of our emotion;

and to Will, a creature who cared little for what are called the solid

things of life and greatly for its subtler influences, to have within

him such a feeling as he had towards Dorothea, was like the inheritance

of a fortune. What others might have called the futility of his

passion, made an additional delight for his imagination: he was

conscious of a generous movement, and of verifying in his own

experience that higher love-poetry which had charmed his fancy.

Dorothea, he said to himself, was forever enthroned in his soul: no

other woman could sit higher than her footstool; and if he could have

written out in immortal syllables the effect she wrought within him, he

might have boasted after the example of old Drayton, that,—

“Queens hereafter might be glad to live

Upon the alms of her superfluous praise.”

But this result was questionable. And what else could he do for

Dorothea? What was his devotion worth to her? It was impossible to

tell. He would not go out of her reach. He saw no creature among her

friends to whom he could believe that she spoke with the same simple

confidence as to him. She had once said that she would like him to

stay; and stay he would, whatever fire-breathing dragons might hiss

around her.

This had always been the conclusion of Will’s hesitations. But he was

not without contradictoriness and rebellion even towards his own

resolve. He had often got irritated, as he was on this particular

night, by some outside demonstration that his public exertions with Mr.

Brooke as a chief could not seem as heroic as he would like them to be,

and this was always associated with the other ground of irritation—that

notwithstanding his sacrifice of dignity for Dorothea’s sake, he could

hardly ever see her. Whereupon, not being able to contradict these

unpleasant facts, he contradicted his own strongest bias and said, “I

am a fool.”

Nevertheless, since the inward debate necessarily turned on Dorothea,

he ended, as he had done before, only by getting a livelier sense of

what her presence would be to him; and suddenly reflecting that the

morrow would be Sunday, he determined to go to Lowick Church and see

her. He slept upon that idea, but when he was dressing in the rational

morning light, Objection said—

“That will be a virtual defiance of Mr. Casaubon’s prohibition to visit

Lowick, and Dorothea will be displeased.”

“Nonsense!” argued Inclination, “it would be too monstrous for him to

hinder me from going out to a pretty country church on a spring

morning. And Dorothea will be glad.”

“It will be clear to Mr. Casaubon that you have come either to annoy

him or to see Dorothea.”

“It is not true that I go to annoy him, and why should I not go to see

Dorothea? Is he to have everything to himself and be always

comfortable? Let him smart a little, as other people are obliged to do.

I have always liked the quaintness of the church and congregation;

besides, I know the Tuckers: I shall go into their pew.”

Having silenced Objection by force of unreason, Will walked to Lowick

as if he had been on the way to Paradise, crossing Halsell Common and

skirting the wood, where the sunlight fell broadly under the budding

boughs, bringing out the beauties of moss and lichen, and fresh green

growths piercing the brown. Everything seemed to know that it was

Sunday, and to approve of his going to Lowick Church. Will easily felt

happy when nothing crossed his humor, and by this time the thought of

vexing Mr. Casaubon had become rather amusing to him, making his face

break into its merry smile, pleasant to see as the breaking of sunshine

on the water—though the occasion was not exemplary. But most of us are

apt to settle within ourselves that the man who blocks our way is

odious, and not to mind causing him a little of the disgust which his

personality excites in ourselves. Will went along with a small book

under his arm and a hand in each side-pocket, never reading, but

chanting a little, as he made scenes of what would happen in church and

coming out. He was experimenting in tunes to suit some words of his

own, sometimes trying a ready-made melody, sometimes improvising. The

words were not exactly a hymn, but they certainly fitted his Sunday

experience:—

“O me, O me, what frugal cheer

My love doth feed upon!

A touch, a ray, that is not here,

A shadow that is gone:

“A dream of breath that might be near,

An inly-echoed tone,

The thought that one may think me dear,

The place where one was known,

“The tremor of a banished fear,

An ill that was not done—

O me, O me, what frugal cheer

My love doth feed upon!”

Sometimes, when he took off his hat, shaking his head backward, and

showing his delicate throat as he sang, he looked like an incarnation

of the spring whose spirit filled the air—a bright creature, abundant

in uncertain promises.

The bells were still ringing when he got to Lowick, and he went into

the curate’s pew before any one else arrived there. But he was still

left alone in it when the congregation had assembled. The curate’s pew

was opposite the rector’s at the entrance of the small chancel, and

Will had time to fear that Dorothea might not come while he looked

round at the group of rural faces which made the congregation from year

to year within the white-washed walls and dark old pews, hardly with

more change than we see in the boughs of a tree which breaks here and

there with age, but yet has young shoots. Mr. Rigg’s frog-face was

something alien and unaccountable, but notwithstanding this shock to

the order of things, there were still the Waules and the rural stock of

the Powderells in their pews side by side; brother Samuel’s cheek had

the same purple round as ever, and the three generations of decent

cottagers came as of old with a sense of duty to their betters

generally—the smaller children regarding Mr. Casaubon, who wore the

black gown and mounted to the highest box, as probably the chief of all

betters, and the one most awful if offended. Even in 1831 Lowick was at

peace, not more agitated by Reform than by the solemn tenor of the

Sunday sermon. The congregation had been used to seeing Will at church

in former days, and no one took much note of him except the choir, who

expected him to make a figure in the singing.

Dorothea did at last appear on this quaint background, walking up the

short aisle in her white beaver bonnet and gray cloak—the same she had

worn in the Vatican. Her face being, from her entrance, towards the

chancel, even her shortsighted eyes soon discerned Will, but there was

no outward show of her feeling except a slight paleness and a grave bow

as she passed him. To his own surprise Will felt suddenly

uncomfortable, and dared not look at her after they had bowed to each

other. Two minutes later, when Mr. Casaubon came out of the vestry,

and, entering the pew, seated himself in face of Dorothea, Will felt

his paralysis more complete. He could look nowhere except at the choir

in the little gallery over the vestry-door: Dorothea was perhaps

pained, and he had made a wretched blunder. It was no longer amusing to

vex Mr. Casaubon, who had the advantage probably of watching him and

seeing that he dared not turn his head. Why had he not imagined this

beforehand?—but he could not expect that he should sit in that square

pew alone, unrelieved by any Tuckers, who had apparently departed from

Lowick altogether, for a new clergyman was in the desk. Still he called

himself stupid now for not foreseeing that it would be impossible for

him to look towards Dorothea—nay, that she might feel his coming an

impertinence. There was no delivering himself from his cage, however;

and Will found his places and looked at his book as if he had been a

school-mistress, feeling that the morning service had never been so

immeasurably long before, that he was utterly ridiculous, out of

temper, and miserable. This was what a man got by worshipping the sight

of a woman! The clerk observed with surprise that Mr. Ladislaw did not

join in the tune of Hanover, and reflected that he might have a cold.

Mr. Casaubon did not preach that morning, and there was no change in

Will’s situation until the blessing had been pronounced and every one

rose. It was the fashion at Lowick for “the betters” to go out first.

With a sudden determination to break the spell that was upon him, Will

looked straight at Mr. Casaubon. But that gentleman’s eyes were on the

button of the pew-door, which he opened, allowing Dorothea to pass, and

following her immediately without raising his eyelids. Will’s glance

had caught Dorothea’s as she turned out of the pew, and again she

bowed, but this time with a look of agitation, as if she were

repressing tears. Will walked out after them, but they went on towards

the little gate leading out of the churchyard into the shrubbery, never

looking round.

It was impossible for him to follow them, and he could only walk back

sadly at mid-day along the same road which he had trodden hopefully in

the morning. The lights were all changed for him both without and

within.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

Surely the golden hours are turning gray

And dance no more, and vainly strive to run:

I see their white locks streaming in the wind—

Each face is haggard as it looks at me,

Slow turning in the constant clasping round

Storm-driven.

Dorothea’s distress when she was leaving the church came chiefly from

the perception that Mr. Casaubon was determined not to speak to his

cousin, and that Will’s presence at church had served to mark more

strongly the alienation between them. Will’s coming seemed to her quite

excusable, nay, she thought it an amiable movement in him towards a

reconciliation which she herself had been constantly wishing for. He

had probably imagined, as she had, that if Mr. Casaubon and he could

meet easily, they would shake hands and friendly intercourse might

return. But now Dorothea felt quite robbed of that hope. Will was

banished further than ever, for Mr. Casaubon must have been newly

embittered by this thrusting upon him of a presence which he refused to

recognize.

He had not been very well that morning, suffering from some difficulty

in breathing, and had not preached in consequence; she was not

surprised, therefore, that he was nearly silent at luncheon, still less

that he made no allusion to Will Ladislaw. For her own part she felt

that she could never again introduce that subject. They usually spent

apart the hours between luncheon and dinner on a Sunday; Mr. Casaubon

in the library dozing chiefly, and Dorothea in her boudoir, where she

was wont to occupy herself with some of her favorite books. There was a

little heap of them on the table in the bow-window—of various sorts,

from Herodotus, which she was learning to read with Mr. Casaubon, to

her old companion Pascal, and Keble’s “Christian Year.” But to-day she

opened one after another, and could read none of them. Everything

seemed dreary: the portents before the birth of Cyrus—Jewish

antiquities—oh dear!—devout epigrams—the sacred chime of favorite

hymns—all alike were as flat as tunes beaten on wood: even the spring

flowers and the grass had a dull shiver in them under the afternoon

clouds that hid the sun fitfully; even the sustaining thoughts which

had become habits seemed to have in them the weariness of long future

days in which she would still live with them for her sole companions.

It was another or rather a fuller sort of companionship that poor

Dorothea was hungering for, and the hunger had grown from the perpetual

effort demanded by her married life. She was always trying to be what

her husband wished, and never able to repose on his delight in what she

was. The thing that she liked, that she spontaneously cared to have,

seemed to be always excluded from her life; for if it was only granted

and not shared by her husband it might as well have been denied. About

Will Ladislaw there had been a difference between them from the first,

and it had ended, since Mr. Casaubon had so severely repulsed

Dorothea’s strong feeling about his claims on the family property, by

her being convinced that she was in the right and her husband in the

wrong, but that she was helpless. This afternoon the helplessness was

more wretchedly benumbing than ever: she longed for objects who could

be dear to her, and to whom she could be dear. She longed for work

which would be directly beneficent like the sunshine and the rain, and

now it appeared that she was to live more and more in a virtual tomb,

where there was the apparatus of a ghastly labor producing what would

never see the light. Today she had stood at the door of the tomb and

seen Will Ladislaw receding into the distant world of warm activity and

fellowship—turning his face towards her as he went.

Books were of no use. Thinking was of no use. It was Sunday, and she

could not have the carriage to go to Celia, who had lately had a baby.

There was no refuge now from spiritual emptiness and discontent, and

Dorothea had to bear her bad mood, as she would have borne a headache.

After dinner, at the hour when she usually began to read aloud, Mr.

Casaubon proposed that they should go into the library, where, he said,

he had ordered a fire and lights. He seemed to have revived, and to be

thinking intently.

In the library Dorothea observed that he had newly arranged a row of

his note-books on a table, and now he took up and put into her hand a

well-known volume, which was a table of contents to all the others.

“You will oblige me, my dear,” he said, seating himself, “if instead of

other reading this evening, you will go through this aloud, pencil in

hand, and at each point where I say ‘mark,’ will make a cross with your

pencil. This is the first step in a sifting process which I have long

had in view, and as we go on I shall be able to indicate to you certain

principles of selection whereby you will, I trust, have an intelligent

participation in my purpose.”

This proposal was only one more sign added to many since his memorable

interview with Lydgate, that Mr. Casaubon’s original reluctance to let

Dorothea work with him had given place to the contrary disposition,

namely, to demand much interest and labor from her.

After she had read and marked for two hours, he said, “We will take the

volume up-stairs—and the pencil, if you please—and in case of reading

in the night, we can pursue this task. It is not wearisome to you, I

trust, Dorothea?”

“I prefer always reading what you like best to hear,” said Dorothea,

who told the simple truth; for what she dreaded was to exert herself in

reading or anything else which left him as joyless as ever.

It was a proof of the force with which certain characteristics in

Dorothea impressed those around her, that her husband, with all his

jealousy and suspicion, had gathered implicit trust in the integrity of

her promises, and her power of devoting herself to her idea of the

right and best. Of late he had begun to feel that these qualities were

a peculiar possession for himself, and he wanted to engross them.

The reading in the night did come. Dorothea in her young weariness had

slept soon and fast: she was awakened by a sense of light, which seemed

to her at first like a sudden vision of sunset after she had climbed a

steep hill: she opened her eyes and saw her husband wrapped in his warm

gown seating himself in the arm-chair near the fire-place where the

embers were still glowing. He had lit two candles, expecting that

Dorothea would awake, but not liking to rouse her by more direct means.

“Are you ill, Edward?” she said, rising immediately.

“I felt some uneasiness in a reclining posture. I will sit here for a

time.” She threw wood on the fire, wrapped herself up, and said, “You

would like me to read to you?”

“You would oblige me greatly by doing so, Dorothea,” said Mr. Casaubon,

with a shade more meekness than usual in his polite manner. “I am

wakeful: my mind is remarkably lucid.”

“I fear that the excitement may be too great for you,” said Dorothea,

remembering Lydgate’s cautions.

“No, I am not conscious of undue excitement. Thought is easy.” Dorothea

dared not insist, and she read for an hour or more on the same plan as

she had done in the evening, but getting over the pages with more

quickness. Mr. Casaubon’s mind was more alert, and he seemed to

anticipate what was coming after a very slight verbal indication,

saying, “That will do—mark that”—or “Pass on to the next head—I omit

the second excursus on Crete.” Dorothea was amazed to think of the

bird-like speed with which his mind was surveying the ground where it

had been creeping for years. At last he said—

“Close the book now, my dear. We will resume our work to-morrow. I have

deferred it too long, and would gladly see it completed. But you

observe that the principle on which my selection is made, is to give

adequate, and not disproportionate illustration to each of the theses

enumerated in my introduction, as at present sketched. You have

perceived that distinctly, Dorothea?”

“Yes,” said Dorothea, rather tremulously. She felt sick at heart.

“And now I think that I can take some repose,” said Mr. Casaubon. He

laid down again and begged her to put out the lights. When she had lain

down too, and there was a darkness only broken by a dull glow on the

hearth, he said—

“Before I sleep, I have a request to make, Dorothea.”

“What is it?” said Dorothea, with dread in her mind.

“It is that you will let me know, deliberately, whether, in case of my

death, you will carry out my wishes: whether you will avoid doing what

I should deprecate, and apply yourself to do what I should desire.”

Dorothea was not taken by surprise: many incidents had been leading her

to the conjecture of some intention on her husband’s part which might

make a new yoke for her. She did not answer immediately.

“You refuse?” said Mr. Casaubon, with more edge in his tone.

“No, I do not yet refuse,” said Dorothea, in a clear voice, the need of

freedom asserting itself within her; “but it is too solemn—I think it

is not right—to make a promise when I am ignorant what it will bind me

to. Whatever affection prompted I would do without promising.”

“But you would use your own judgment: I ask you to obey mine; you

refuse.”

“No, dear, no!” said Dorothea, beseechingly, crushed by opposing fears.

“But may I wait and reflect a little while? I desire with my whole soul

to do what will comfort you; but I cannot give any pledge

suddenly—still less a pledge to do I know not what.”

“You cannot then confide in the nature of my wishes?”

“Grant me till to-morrow,” said Dorothea, beseechingly.

“Till to-morrow then,” said Mr. Casaubon.

Soon she could hear that he was sleeping, but there was no more sleep

for her. While she constrained herself to lie still lest she should

disturb him, her mind was carrying on a conflict in which imagination

ranged its forces first on one side and then on the other. She had no

presentiment that the power which her husband wished to establish over

her future action had relation to anything else than his work. But it

was clear enough to her that he would expect her to devote herself to

sifting those mixed heaps of material, which were to be the doubtful

illustration of principles still more doubtful. The poor child had

become altogether unbelieving as to the trustworthiness of that Key

which had made the ambition and the labor of her husband’s life. It was

not wonderful that, in spite of her small instruction, her judgment in

this matter was truer than his: for she looked with unbiassed

comparison and healthy sense at probabilities on which he had risked

all his egoism. And now she pictured to herself the days, and months,

and years which she must spend in sorting what might be called

shattered mummies, and fragments of a tradition which was itself a

mosaic wrought from crushed ruins—sorting them as food for a theory

which was already withered in the birth like an elfin child. Doubtless

a vigorous error vigorously pursued has kept the embryos of truth

a-breathing: the quest of gold being at the same time a questioning of

substances, the body of chemistry is prepared for its soul, and

Lavoisier is born. But Mr. Casaubon’s theory of the elements which made

the seed of all tradition was not likely to bruise itself unawares

against discoveries: it floated among flexible conjectures no more

solid than those etymologies which seemed strong because of likeness in

sound until it was shown that likeness in sound made them impossible:

it was a method of interpretation which was not tested by the necessity

of forming anything which had sharper collisions than an elaborate

notion of Gog and Magog: it was as free from interruption as a plan for

threading the stars together. And Dorothea had so often had to check

her weariness and impatience over this questionable riddle-guessing, as

it revealed itself to her instead of the fellowship in high knowledge

which was to make life worthier! She could understand well enough now

why her husband had come to cling to her, as possibly the only hope

left that his labors would ever take a shape in which they could be

given to the world. At first it had seemed that he wished to keep even

her aloof from any close knowledge of what he was doing; but gradually

the terrible stringency of human need—the prospect of a too speedy

death—

And here Dorothea’s pity turned from her own future to her husband’s

past—nay, to his present hard struggle with a lot which had grown out

of that past: the lonely labor, the ambition breathing hardly under the

pressure of self-distrust; the goal receding, and the heavier limbs;

and now at last the sword visibly trembling above him! And had she not

wished to marry him that she might help him in his life’s labor?—But

she had thought the work was to be something greater, which she could

serve in devoutly for its own sake. Was it right, even to soothe his

grief—would it be possible, even if she promised—to work as in a

treadmill fruitlessly?

And yet, could she deny him? Could she say, “I refuse to content this

pining hunger?” It would be refusing to do for him dead, what she was

almost sure to do for him living. If he lived as Lydgate had said he

might, for fifteen years or more, her life would certainly be spent in

helping him and obeying him.

Still, there was a deep difference between that devotion to the living

and that indefinite promise of devotion to the dead. While he lived, he

could claim nothing that she would not still be free to remonstrate

against, and even to refuse. But—the thought passed through her mind

more than once, though she could not believe in it—might he not mean to

demand something more from her than she had been able to imagine, since

he wanted her pledge to carry out his wishes without telling her

exactly what they were? No; his heart was bound up in his work only:

that was the end for which his failing life was to be eked out by hers.

And now, if she were to say, “No! if you die, I will put no finger to

your work”—it seemed as if she would be crushing that bruised heart.

For four hours Dorothea lay in this conflict, till she felt ill and

bewildered, unable to resolve, praying mutely. Helpless as a child

which has sobbed and sought too long, she fell into a late morning

sleep, and when she waked Mr. Casaubon was already up. Tantripp told

her that he had read prayers, breakfasted, and was in the library.

“I never saw you look so pale, madam,” said Tantripp, a solid-figured

woman who had been with the sisters at Lausanne.

“Was I ever high-colored, Tantripp?” said Dorothea, smiling faintly.

“Well, not to say high-colored, but with a bloom like a Chiny rose. But

always smelling those leather books, what can be expected? Do rest a

little this morning, madam. Let me say you are ill and not able to go

into that close library.”

“Oh no, no! let me make haste,” said Dorothea. “Mr. Casaubon wants me

particularly.”

When she went down she felt sure that she should promise to fulfil his

wishes; but that would be later in the day—not yet.

As Dorothea entered the library, Mr. Casaubon turned round from the

table where he had been placing some books, and said—

“I was waiting for your appearance, my dear. I had hoped to set to work

at once this morning, but I find myself under some indisposition,

probably from too much excitement yesterday. I am going now to take a

turn in the shrubbery, since the air is milder.”

“I am glad to hear that,” said Dorothea. “Your mind, I feared, was too

active last night.”

“I would fain have it set at rest on the point I last spoke of,

Dorothea. You can now, I hope, give me an answer.”

“May I come out to you in the garden presently?” said Dorothea, winning

a little breathing space in that way.

“I shall be in the Yew-tree Walk for the next half-hour,” said Mr.

Casaubon, and then he left her.

Dorothea, feeling very weary, rang and asked Tantripp to bring her some

wraps. She had been sitting still for a few minutes, but not in any

renewal of the former conflict: she simply felt that she was going to

say “Yes” to her own doom: she was too weak, too full of dread at the

thought of inflicting a keen-edged blow on her husband, to do anything

but submit completely. She sat still and let Tantripp put on her bonnet

and shawl, a passivity which was unusual with her, for she liked to

wait on herself.

“God bless you, madam!” said Tantripp, with an irrepressible movement

of love towards the beautiful, gentle creature for whom she felt unable

to do anything more, now that she had finished tying the bonnet.

This was too much for Dorothea’s highly-strung feeling, and she burst

into tears, sobbing against Tantripp’s arm. But soon she checked

herself, dried her eyes, and went out at the glass door into the

shrubbery.

“I wish every book in that library was built into a caticom for your

master,” said Tantripp to Pratt, the butler, finding him in the

breakfast-room. She had been at Rome, and visited the antiquities, as

we know; and she always declined to call Mr. Casaubon anything but

“your master,” when speaking to the other servants.

Pratt laughed. He liked his master very well, but he liked Tantripp

better.

When Dorothea was out on the gravel walks, she lingered among the

nearer clumps of trees, hesitating, as she had done once before, though

from a different cause. Then she had feared lest her effort at

fellowship should be unwelcome; now she dreaded going to the spot where

she foresaw that she must bind herself to a fellowship from which she

shrank. Neither law nor the world’s opinion compelled her to this—only

her husband’s nature and her own compassion, only the ideal and not the

real yoke of marriage. She saw clearly enough the whole situation, yet

she was fettered: she could not smite the stricken soul that entreated

hers. If that were weakness, Dorothea was weak. But the half-hour was

passing, and she must not delay longer. When she entered the Yew-tree

Walk she could not see her husband; but the walk had bends, and she

went, expecting to catch sight of his figure wrapped in a blue cloak,

which, with a warm velvet cap, was his outer garment on chill days for

the garden. It occurred to her that he might be resting in the

summer-house, towards which the path diverged a little. Turning the

angle, she could see him seated on the bench, close to a stone table.

His arms were resting on the table, and his brow was bowed down on

them, the blue cloak being dragged forward and screening his face on

each side.

“He exhausted himself last night,” Dorothea said to herself, thinking

at first that he was asleep, and that the summer-house was too damp a

place to rest in. But then she remembered that of late she had seen him

take that attitude when she was reading to him, as if he found it

easier than any other; and that he would sometimes speak, as well as

listen, with his face down in that way. She went into the summerhouse

and said, “I am come, Edward; I am ready.”

He took no notice, and she thought that he must be fast asleep. She

laid her hand on his shoulder, and repeated, “I am ready!” Still he was

motionless; and with a sudden confused fear, she leaned down to him,

took off his velvet cap, and leaned her cheek close to his head, crying

in a distressed tone—

“Wake, dear, wake! Listen to me. I am come to answer.” But Dorothea

never gave her answer.

Later in the day, Lydgate was seated by her bedside, and she was

talking deliriously, thinking aloud, and recalling what had gone

through her mind the night before. She knew him, and called him by his

name, but appeared to think it right that she should explain everything

to him; and again, and again, begged him to explain everything to her

husband.

“Tell him I shall go to him soon: I am ready to promise. Only, thinking

about it was so dreadful—it has made me ill. Not very ill. I shall soon

be better. Go and tell him.”

But the silence in her husband’s ear was never more to be broken.

CHAPTER XLIX.

“A task too strong for wizard spells

This squire had brought about;

’T is easy dropping stones in wells,

But who shall get them out?”

“I wish to God we could hinder Dorothea from knowing this,” said Sir

James Chettam, with a little frown on his brow, and an expression of

intense disgust about his mouth.

He was standing on the hearth-rug in the library at Lowick Grange, and

speaking to Mr. Brooke. It was the day after Mr. Casaubon had been

buried, and Dorothea was not yet able to leave her room.

“That would be difficult, you know, Chettam, as she is an executrix,

and she likes to go into these things—property, land, that kind of

thing. She has her notions, you know,” said Mr. Brooke, sticking his

eye-glasses on nervously, and exploring the edges of a folded paper

which he held in his hand; “and she would like to act—depend upon it,

as an executrix Dorothea would want to act. And she was twenty-one last

December, you know. I can hinder nothing.”

Sir James looked at the carpet for a minute in silence, and then

lifting his eyes suddenly fixed them on Mr. Brooke, saying, “I will

tell you what we can do. Until Dorothea is well, all business must be

kept from her, and as soon as she is able to be moved she must come to

us. Being with Celia and the baby will be the best thing in the world

for her, and will pass away the time. And meanwhile you must get rid of

Ladislaw: you must send him out of the country.” Here Sir James’s look

of disgust returned in all its intensity.

Mr. Brooke put his hands behind him, walked to the window and

straightened his back with a little shake before he replied.

“That is easily said, Chettam, easily said, you know.”

“My dear sir,” persisted Sir James, restraining his indignation within

respectful forms, “it was you who brought him here, and you who keep

him here—I mean by the occupation you give him.”

“Yes, but I can’t dismiss him in an instant without assigning reasons,

my dear Chettam. Ladislaw has been invaluable, most satisfactory. I

consider that I have done this part of the country a service by

bringing him—by bringing him, you know.” Mr. Brooke ended with a nod,

turning round to give it.

“It’s a pity this part of the country didn’t do without him, that’s all

I have to say about it. At any rate, as Dorothea’s brother-in-law, I

feel warranted in objecting strongly to his being kept here by any

action on the part of her friends. You admit, I hope, that I have a

right to speak about what concerns the dignity of my wife’s sister?”

Sir James was getting warm.

“Of course, my dear Chettam, of course. But you and I have different

ideas—different—”

“Not about this action of Casaubon’s, I should hope,” interrupted Sir

James. “I say that he has most unfairly compromised Dorothea. I say

that there never was a meaner, more ungentlemanly action than this—a

codicil of this sort to a will which he made at the time of his

marriage with the knowledge and reliance of her family—a positive

insult to Dorothea!”

“Well, you know, Casaubon was a little twisted about Ladislaw. Ladislaw

has told me the reason—dislike of the bent he took, you know—Ladislaw

didn’t think much of Casaubon’s notions, Thoth and Dagon—that sort of

thing: and I fancy that Casaubon didn’t like the independent position

Ladislaw had taken up. I saw the letters between them, you know. Poor

Casaubon was a little buried in books—he didn’t know the world.”

“It’s all very well for Ladislaw to put that color on it,” said Sir

James. “But I believe Casaubon was only jealous of him on Dorothea’s

account, and the world will suppose that she gave him some reason; and

that is what makes it so abominable—coupling her name with this young

fellow’s.”

“My dear Chettam, it won’t lead to anything, you know,” said Mr.

Brooke, seating himself and sticking on his eye-glass again. “It’s all

of a piece with Casaubon’s oddity. This paper, now, ‘Synoptical

Tabulation’ and so on, ‘for the use of Mrs. Casaubon,’ it was locked up

in the desk with the will. I suppose he meant Dorothea to publish his

researches, eh? and she’ll do it, you know; she has gone into his

studies uncommonly.”

“My dear sir,” said Sir James, impatiently, “that is neither here nor

there. The question is, whether you don’t see with me the propriety of

sending young Ladislaw away?”

“Well, no, not the urgency of the thing. By-and-by, perhaps, it may

come round. As to gossip, you know, sending him away won’t hinder

gossip. People say what they like to say, not what they have chapter

and verse for,” said Mr Brooke, becoming acute about the truths that

lay on the side of his own wishes. “I might get rid of Ladislaw up to a

certain point—take away the ‘Pioneer’ from him, and that sort of thing;

but I couldn’t send him out of the country if he didn’t choose to

go—didn’t choose, you know.”

Mr. Brooke, persisting as quietly as if he were only discussing the

nature of last year’s weather, and nodding at the end with his usual

amenity, was an exasperating form of obstinacy.

“Good God!” said Sir James, with as much passion as he ever showed,

“let us get him a post; let us spend money on him. If he could go in

the suite of some Colonial Governor! Grampus might take him—and I could

write to Fulke about it.”

“But Ladislaw won’t be shipped off like a head of cattle, my dear

fellow; Ladislaw has his ideas. It’s my opinion that if he were to part

from me to-morrow, you’d only hear the more of him in the country. With

his talent for speaking and drawing up documents, there are few men who

could come up to him as an agitator—an agitator, you know.”

“Agitator!” said Sir James, with bitter emphasis, feeling that the

syllables of this word properly repeated were a sufficient exposure of

its hatefulness.

“But be reasonable, Chettam. Dorothea, now. As you say, she had better

go to Celia as soon as possible. She can stay under your roof, and in

the mean time things may come round quietly. Don’t let us be firing off

our guns in a hurry, you know. Standish will keep our counsel, and the

news will be old before it’s known. Twenty things may happen to carry

off Ladislaw—without my doing anything, you know.”

“Then I am to conclude that you decline to do anything?”

“Decline, Chettam?—no—I didn’t say decline. But I really don’t see what

I could do. Ladislaw is a gentleman.”

“I am glad to hear it!” said Sir James, his irritation making him

forget himself a little. “I am sure Casaubon was not.”

“Well, it would have been worse if he had made the codicil to hinder

her from marrying again at all, you know.”

“I don’t know that,” said Sir James. “It would have been less

indelicate.”

“One of poor Casaubon’s freaks! That attack upset his brain a little.

It all goes for nothing. She doesn’t \_want\_ to marry Ladislaw.”

“But this codicil is framed so as to make everybody believe that she

did. I don’t believe anything of the sort about Dorothea,” said Sir

James—then frowningly, “but I suspect Ladislaw. I tell you frankly, I

suspect Ladislaw.”

“I couldn’t take any immediate action on that ground, Chettam. In fact,

if it were possible to pack him off—send him to Norfolk Island—that

sort of thing—it would look all the worse for Dorothea to those who

knew about it. It would seem as if we distrusted her—distrusted her,

you know.”

That Mr. Brooke had hit on an undeniable argument, did not tend to

soothe Sir James. He put out his hand to reach his hat, implying that

he did not mean to contend further, and said, still with some heat—

“Well, I can only say that I think Dorothea was sacrificed once,

because her friends were too careless. I shall do what I can, as her

brother, to protect her now.”

“You can’t do better than get her to Freshitt as soon as possible,

Chettam. I approve that plan altogether,” said Mr. Brooke, well pleased

that he had won the argument. It would have been highly inconvenient to

him to part with Ladislaw at that time, when a dissolution might happen

any day, and electors were to be convinced of the course by which the

interests of the country would be best served. Mr. Brooke sincerely

believed that this end could be secured by his own return to

Parliament: he offered the forces of his mind honestly to the nation.

CHAPTER L.

“This Loller here wol precilen us somewhat.”

“Nay by my father’s soule! that schal he nat,”

Sayde the Schipman, ‘here schal he not preche,

We schal no gospel glosen here ne teche.

We leven all in the gret God,’ quod he.

He wolden sowen some diffcultee.”—\_Canterbury Tales\_.

Dorothea had been safe at Freshitt Hall nearly a week before she had

asked any dangerous questions. Every morning now she sat with Celia in

the prettiest of up-stairs sitting-rooms, opening into a small

conservatory—Celia all in white and lavender like a bunch of mixed

violets, watching the remarkable acts of the baby, which were so

dubious to her inexperienced mind that all conversation was interrupted

by appeals for their interpretation made to the oracular nurse.

Dorothea sat by in her widow’s dress, with an expression which rather

provoked Celia, as being much too sad; for not only was baby quite

well, but really when a husband had been so dull and troublesome while

he lived, and besides that had—well, well! Sir James, of course, had

told Celia everything, with a strong representation how important it

was that Dorothea should not know it sooner than was inevitable.

But Mr. Brooke had been right in predicting that Dorothea would not

long remain passive where action had been assigned to her; she knew the

purport of her husband’s will made at the time of their marriage, and

her mind, as soon as she was clearly conscious of her position, was

silently occupied with what she ought to do as the owner of Lowick

Manor with the patronage of the living attached to it.

One morning when her uncle paid his usual visit, though with an unusual

alacrity in his manner which he accounted for by saying that it was now

pretty certain Parliament would be dissolved forthwith, Dorothea said—

“Uncle, it is right now that I should consider who is to have the

living at Lowick. After Mr. Tucker had been provided for, I never heard

my husband say that he had any clergyman in his mind as a successor to

himself. I think I ought to have the keys now and go to Lowick to

examine all my husband’s papers. There may be something that would

throw light on his wishes.”

“No hurry, my dear,” said Mr. Brooke, quietly. “By-and-by, you know,

you can go, if you like. But I cast my eyes over things in the desks

and drawers—there was nothing—nothing but deep subjects, you

know—besides the will. Everything can be done by-and-by. As to the

living, I have had an application for interest already—I should say

rather good. Mr. Tyke has been strongly recommended to me—I had

something to do with getting him an appointment before. An apostolic

man, I believe—the sort of thing that would suit you, my dear.”

“I should like to have fuller knowledge about him, uncle, and judge for

myself, if Mr. Casaubon has not left any expression of his wishes. He

has perhaps made some addition to his will—there may be some

instructions for me,” said Dorothea, who had all the while had this

conjecture in her mind with relation to her husband’s work.

“Nothing about the rectory, my dear—nothing,” said Mr. Brooke, rising

to go away, and putting out his hand to his nieces: “nor about his

researches, you know. Nothing in the will.”

Dorothea’s lip quivered.

“Come, you must not think of these things yet, my dear. By-and-by, you

know.”

“I am quite well now, uncle; I wish to exert myself.”

“Well, well, we shall see. But I must run away now—I have no end of

work now—it’s a crisis—a political crisis, you know. And here is Celia

and her little man—you are an aunt, you know, now, and I am a sort of

grandfather,” said Mr. Brooke, with placid hurry, anxious to get away

and tell Chettam that it would not be his (Mr. Brooke’s) fault if

Dorothea insisted on looking into everything.

Dorothea sank back in her chair when her uncle had left the room, and

cast her eyes down meditatively on her crossed hands.

“Look, Dodo! look at him! Did you ever see anything like that?” said

Celia, in her comfortable staccato.

“What, Kitty?” said Dorothea, lifting her eyes rather absently.

“What? why, his upper lip; see how he is drawing it down, as if he

meant to make a face. Isn’t it wonderful! He may have his little

thoughts. I wish nurse were here. Do look at him.”

A large tear which had been for some time gathering, rolled down

Dorothea’s cheek as she looked up and tried to smile.

“Don’t be sad, Dodo; kiss baby. What are you brooding over so? I am

sure you did everything, and a great deal too much. You should be happy

now.”

“I wonder if Sir James would drive me to Lowick. I want to look over

everything—to see if there were any words written for me.”

“You are not to go till Mr. Lydgate says you may go. And he has not

said so yet (here you are, nurse; take baby and walk up and down the

gallery). Besides, you have got a wrong notion in your head as usual,

Dodo—I can see that: it vexes me.”

“Where am I wrong, Kitty?” said Dorothea, quite meekly. She was almost

ready now to think Celia wiser than herself, and was really wondering

with some fear what her wrong notion was. Celia felt her advantage, and

was determined to use it. None of them knew Dodo as well as she did, or

knew how to manage her. Since Celia’s baby was born, she had had a new

sense of her mental solidity and calm wisdom. It seemed clear that

where there was a baby, things were right enough, and that error, in

general, was a mere lack of that central poising force.

“I can see what you are thinking of as well as can be, Dodo,” said

Celia. “You are wanting to find out if there is anything uncomfortable

for you to do now, only because Mr. Casaubon wished it. As if you had

not been uncomfortable enough before. And he doesn’t deserve it, and

you will find that out. He has behaved very badly. James is as angry

with him as can be. And I had better tell you, to prepare you.”

“Celia,” said Dorothea, entreatingly, “you distress me. Tell me at once

what you mean.” It glanced through her mind that Mr. Casaubon had left

the property away from her—which would not be so very distressing.

“Why, he has made a codicil to his will, to say the property was all to

go away from you if you married—I mean—”

“That is of no consequence,” said Dorothea, breaking in impetuously.

“But if you married Mr. Ladislaw, not anybody else,” Celia went on with

persevering quietude. “Of course that is of no consequence in one

way—you never \_would\_ marry Mr. Ladislaw; but that only makes it worse

of Mr. Casaubon.”

The blood rushed to Dorothea’s face and neck painfully. But Celia was

administering what she thought a sobering dose of fact. It was taking

up notions that had done Dodo’s health so much harm. So she went on in

her neutral tone, as if she had been remarking on baby’s robes.

“James says so. He says it is abominable, and not like a gentleman. And

there never was a better judge than James. It is as if Mr. Casaubon

wanted to make people believe that you would wish to marry Mr.

Ladislaw—which is ridiculous. Only James says it was to hinder Mr.

Ladislaw from wanting to marry you for your money—just as if he ever

would think of making you an offer. Mrs. Cadwallader said you might as

well marry an Italian with white mice! But I must just go and look at

baby,” Celia added, without the least change of tone, throwing a light

shawl over her, and tripping away.

Dorothea by this time had turned cold again, and now threw herself back

helplessly in her chair. She might have compared her experience at that

moment to the vague, alarmed consciousness that her life was taking on

a new form, that she was undergoing a metamorphosis in which memory

would not adjust itself to the stirring of new organs. Everything was

changing its aspect: her husband’s conduct, her own duteous feeling

towards him, every struggle between them—and yet more, her whole

relation to Will Ladislaw. Her world was in a state of convulsive

change; the only thing she could say distinctly to herself was, that

she must wait and think anew. One change terrified her as if it had

been a sin; it was a violent shock of repulsion from her departed

husband, who had had hidden thoughts, perhaps perverting everything she

said and did. Then again she was conscious of another change which also

made her tremulous; it was a sudden strange yearning of heart towards

Will Ladislaw. It had never before entered her mind that he could,

under any circumstances, be her lover: conceive the effect of the

sudden revelation that another had thought of him in that light—that

perhaps he himself had been conscious of such a possibility,—and this

with the hurrying, crowding vision of unfitting conditions, and

questions not soon to be solved.

It seemed a long while—she did not know how long—before she heard Celia

saying, “That will do, nurse; he will be quiet on my lap now. You can

go to lunch, and let Garratt stay in the next room. What I think,

Dodo,” Celia went on, observing nothing more than that Dorothea was

leaning back in her chair, and likely to be passive, “is that Mr.

Casaubon was spiteful. I never did like him, and James never did. I

think the corners of his mouth were dreadfully spiteful. And now he has

behaved in this way, I am sure religion does not require you to make

yourself uncomfortable about him. If he has been taken away, that is a

mercy, and you ought to be grateful. We should not grieve, should we,

baby?” said Celia confidentially to that unconscious centre and poise

of the world, who had the most remarkable fists all complete even to

the nails, and hair enough, really, when you took his cap off, to

make—you didn’t know what:—in short, he was Bouddha in a Western form.

At this crisis Lydgate was announced, and one of the first things he

said was, “I fear you are not so well as you were, Mrs. Casaubon; have

you been agitated? allow me to feel your pulse.” Dorothea’s hand was of

a marble coldness.

“She wants to go to Lowick, to look over papers,” said Celia. “She

ought not, ought she?”

Lydgate did not speak for a few moments. Then he said, looking at

Dorothea. “I hardly know. In my opinion Mrs. Casaubon should do what

would give her the most repose of mind. That repose will not always

come from being forbidden to act.”

“Thank you,” said Dorothea, exerting herself, “I am sure that is wise.

There are so many things which I ought to attend to. Why should I sit

here idle?” Then, with an effort to recall subjects not connected with

her agitation, she added, abruptly, “You know every one in Middlemarch,

I think, Mr. Lydgate. I shall ask you to tell me a great deal. I have

serious things to do now. I have a living to give away. You know Mr.

Tyke and all the—” But Dorothea’s effort was too much for her; she

broke off and burst into sobs.

Lydgate made her drink a dose of sal volatile.

“Let Mrs. Casaubon do as she likes,” he said to Sir James, whom he

asked to see before quitting the house. “She wants perfect freedom, I

think, more than any other prescription.”

His attendance on Dorothea while her brain was excited, had enabled him

to form some true conclusions concerning the trials of her life. He

felt sure that she had been suffering from the strain and conflict of

self-repression; and that she was likely now to feel herself only in

another sort of pinfold than that from which she had been released.

Lydgate’s advice was all the easier for Sir James to follow when he

found that Celia had already told Dorothea the unpleasant fact about

the will. There was no help for it now—no reason for any further delay

in the execution of necessary business. And the next day Sir James

complied at once with her request that he would drive her to Lowick.

“I have no wish to stay there at present,” said Dorothea; “I could

hardly bear it. I am much happier at Freshitt with Celia. I shall be

able to think better about what should be done at Lowick by looking at

it from a distance. And I should like to be at the Grange a little

while with my uncle, and go about in all the old walks and among the

people in the village.”

“Not yet, I think. Your uncle is having political company, and you are

better out of the way of such doings,” said Sir James, who at that

moment thought of the Grange chiefly as a haunt of young Ladislaw’s.

But no word passed between him and Dorothea about the objectionable

part of the will; indeed, both of them felt that the mention of it

between them would be impossible. Sir James was shy, even with men,

about disagreeable subjects; and the one thing that Dorothea would have

chosen to say, if she had spoken on the matter at all, was forbidden to

her at present because it seemed to be a further exposure of her

husband’s injustice. Yet she did wish that Sir James could know what

had passed between her and her husband about Will Ladislaw’s moral

claim on the property: it would then, she thought, be apparent to him

as it was to her, that her husband’s strange indelicate proviso had

been chiefly urged by his bitter resistance to that idea of claim, and

not merely by personal feelings more difficult to talk about. Also, it

must be admitted, Dorothea wished that this could be known for Will’s

sake, since her friends seemed to think of him as simply an object of

Mr. Casaubon’s charity. Why should he be compared with an Italian

carrying white mice? That word quoted from Mrs. Cadwallader seemed like

a mocking travesty wrought in the dark by an impish finger.

At Lowick Dorothea searched desk and drawer—searched all her husband’s

places of deposit for private writing, but found no paper addressed

especially to her, except that “Synoptical Tabulation,” which was

probably only the beginning of many intended directions for her

guidance. In carrying out this bequest of labor to Dorothea, as in all

else, Mr. Casaubon had been slow and hesitating, oppressed in the plan

of transmitting his work, as he had been in executing it, by the sense

of moving heavily in a dim and clogging medium: distrust of Dorothea’s

competence to arrange what he had prepared was subdued only by distrust

of any other redactor. But he had come at last to create a trust for

himself out of Dorothea’s nature: she could do what she resolved to do:

and he willingly imagined her toiling under the fetters of a promise to

erect a tomb with his name upon it. (Not that Mr. Casaubon called the

future volumes a tomb; he called them the Key to all Mythologies.) But

the months gained on him and left his plans belated: he had only had

time to ask for that promise by which he sought to keep his cold grasp

on Dorothea’s life.

The grasp had slipped away. Bound by a pledge given from the depths of

her pity, she would have been capable of undertaking a toil which her

judgment whispered was vain for all uses except that consecration of

faithfulness which is a supreme use. But now her judgment, instead of

being controlled by duteous devotion, was made active by the

imbittering discovery that in her past union there had lurked the

hidden alienation of secrecy and suspicion. The living, suffering man

was no longer before her to awaken her pity: there remained only the

retrospect of painful subjection to a husband whose thoughts had been

lower than she had believed, whose exorbitant claims for himself had

even blinded his scrupulous care for his own character, and made him

defeat his own pride by shocking men of ordinary honor. As for the

property which was the sign of that broken tie, she would have been

glad to be free from it and have nothing more than her original fortune

which had been settled on her, if there had not been duties attached to

ownership, which she ought not to flinch from. About this property many

troublous questions insisted on rising: had she not been right in

thinking that the half of it ought to go to Will Ladislaw?—but was it

not impossible now for her to do that act of justice? Mr. Casaubon had

taken a cruelly effective means of hindering her: even with indignation

against him in her heart, any act that seemed a triumphant eluding of

his purpose revolted her.

After collecting papers of business which she wished to examine, she

locked up again the desks and drawers—all empty of personal words for

her—empty of any sign that in her husband’s lonely brooding his heart

had gone out to her in excuse or explanation; and she went back to

Freshitt with the sense that around his last hard demand and his last

injurious assertion of his power, the silence was unbroken.

Dorothea tried now to turn her thoughts towards immediate duties, and

one of these was of a kind which others were determined to remind her

of. Lydgate’s ear had caught eagerly her mention of the living, and as

soon as he could, he reopened the subject, seeing here a possibility of

making amends for the casting-vote he had once given with an

ill-satisfied conscience. “Instead of telling you anything about Mr.

Tyke,” he said, “I should like to speak of another man—Mr. Farebrother,

the Vicar of St. Botolph’s. His living is a poor one, and gives him a

stinted provision for himself and his family. His mother, aunt, and

sister all live with him, and depend upon him. I believe he has never

married because of them. I never heard such good preaching as his—such

plain, easy eloquence. He would have done to preach at St. Paul’s Cross

after old Latimer. His talk is just as good about all subjects:

original, simple, clear. I think him a remarkable fellow: he ought to

have done more than he has done.”

“Why has he not done more?” said Dorothea, interested now in all who

had slipped below their own intention.

“That’s a hard question,” said Lydgate. “I find myself that it’s

uncommonly difficult to make the right thing work: there are so many

strings pulling at once. Farebrother often hints that he has got into

the wrong profession; he wants a wider range than that of a poor

clergyman, and I suppose he has no interest to help him on. He is very

fond of Natural History and various scientific matters, and he is

hampered in reconciling these tastes with his position. He has no money

to spare—hardly enough to use; and that has led him into

card-playing—Middlemarch is a great place for whist. He does play for

money, and he wins a good deal. Of course that takes him into company a

little beneath him, and makes him slack about some things; and yet,

with all that, looking at him as a whole, I think he is one of the most

blameless men I ever knew. He has neither venom nor doubleness in him,

and those often go with a more correct outside.”

“I wonder whether he suffers in his conscience because of that habit,”

said Dorothea; “I wonder whether he wishes he could leave it off.”

“I have no doubt he would leave it off, if he were transplanted into

plenty: he would be glad of the time for other things.”

“My uncle says that Mr. Tyke is spoken of as an apostolic man,” said

Dorothea, meditatively. She was wishing it were possible to restore the

times of primitive zeal, and yet thinking of Mr. Farebrother with a

strong desire to rescue him from his chance-gotten money.

“I don’t pretend to say that Farebrother is apostolic,” said Lydgate.

“His position is not quite like that of the Apostles: he is only a

parson among parishioners whose lives he has to try and make better.

Practically I find that what is called being apostolic now, is an

impatience of everything in which the parson doesn’t cut the principal

figure. I see something of that in Mr. Tyke at the Hospital: a good

deal of his doctrine is a sort of pinching hard to make people

uncomfortably aware of him. Besides, an apostolic man at Lowick!—he

ought to think, as St. Francis did, that it is needful to preach to the

birds.”

“True,” said Dorothea. “It is hard to imagine what sort of notions our

farmers and laborers get from their teaching. I have been looking into

a volume of sermons by Mr. Tyke: such sermons would be of no use at

Lowick—I mean, about imputed righteousness and the prophecies in the

Apocalypse. I have always been thinking of the different ways in which

Christianity is taught, and whenever I find one way that makes it a

wider blessing than any other, I cling to that as the truest—I mean

that which takes in the most good of all kinds, and brings in the most

people as sharers in it. It is surely better to pardon too much, than

to condemn too much. But I should like to see Mr. Farebrother and hear

him preach.”

“Do,” said Lydgate; “I trust to the effect of that. He is very much

beloved, but he has his enemies too: there are always people who can’t

forgive an able man for differing from them. And that money-winning

business is really a blot. You don’t, of course, see many Middlemarch

people: but Mr. Ladislaw, who is constantly seeing Mr. Brooke, is a

great friend of Mr. Farebrother’s old ladies, and would be glad to sing

the Vicar’s praises. One of the old ladies—Miss Noble, the aunt—is a

wonderfully quaint picture of self-forgetful goodness, and Ladislaw

gallants her about sometimes. I met them one day in a back street: you

know Ladislaw’s look—a sort of Daphnis in coat and waistcoat; and this

little old maid reaching up to his arm—they looked like a couple

dropped out of a romantic comedy. But the best evidence about

Farebrother is to see him and hear him.”

Happily Dorothea was in her private sitting-room when this conversation

occurred, and there was no one present to make Lydgate’s innocent

introduction of Ladislaw painful to her. As was usual with him in

matters of personal gossip, Lydgate had quite forgotten Rosamond’s

remark that she thought Will adored Mrs. Casaubon. At that moment he

was only caring for what would recommend the Farebrother family; and he

had purposely given emphasis to the worst that could be said about the

Vicar, in order to forestall objections. In the weeks since Mr.

Casaubon’s death he had hardly seen Ladislaw, and he had heard no rumor

to warn him that Mr. Brooke’s confidential secretary was a dangerous

subject with Mrs. Casaubon. When he was gone, his picture of Ladislaw

lingered in her mind and disputed the ground with that question of the

Lowick living. What was Will Ladislaw thinking about her? Would he hear

of that fact which made her cheeks burn as they never used to do? And

how would he feel when he heard it?—But she could see as well as

possible how he smiled down at the little old maid. An Italian with

white mice!—on the contrary, he was a creature who entered into every

one’s feelings, and could take the pressure of their thought instead of

urging his own with iron resistance.

CHAPTER LI.

Party is Nature too, and you shall see

By force of Logic how they both agree:

The Many in the One, the One in Many;

All is not Some, nor Some the same as Any:

Genus holds species, both are great or small;

One genus highest, one not high at all;

Each species has its differentia too,

This is not That, and He was never You,

Though this and that are AYES, and you and he

Are like as one to one, or three to three.

No gossip about Mr. Casaubon’s will had yet reached Ladislaw: the air

seemed to be filled with the dissolution of Parliament and the coming

election, as the old wakes and fairs were filled with the rival clatter

of itinerant shows; and more private noises were taken little notice

of. The famous “dry election” was at hand, in which the depths of

public feeling might be measured by the low flood-mark of drink. Will

Ladislaw was one of the busiest at this time; and though Dorothea’s

widowhood was continually in his thought, he was so far from wishing to

be spoken to on the subject, that when Lydgate sought him out to tell

him what had passed about the Lowick living, he answered rather

waspishly—

“Why should you bring me into the matter? I never see Mrs. Casaubon,

and am not likely to see her, since she is at Freshitt. I never go

there. It is Tory ground, where I and the ‘Pioneer’ are no more welcome

than a poacher and his gun.”

The fact was that Will had been made the more susceptible by observing

that Mr. Brooke, instead of wishing him, as before, to come to the

Grange oftener than was quite agreeable to himself, seemed now to

contrive that he should go there as little as possible. This was a

shuffling concession of Mr. Brooke’s to Sir James Chettam’s indignant

remonstrance; and Will, awake to the slightest hint in this direction,

concluded that he was to be kept away from the Grange on Dorothea’s

account. Her friends, then, regarded him with some suspicion? Their

fears were quite superfluous: they were very much mistaken if they

imagined that he would put himself forward as a needy adventurer trying

to win the favor of a rich woman.

Until now Will had never fully seen the chasm between himself and

Dorothea—until now that he was come to the brink of it, and saw her on

the other side. He began, not without some inward rage, to think of

going away from the neighborhood: it would be impossible for him to

show any further interest in Dorothea without subjecting himself to

disagreeable imputations—perhaps even in her mind, which others might

try to poison.

“We are forever divided,” said Will. “I might as well be at Rome; she

would be no farther from me.” But what we call our despair is often

only the painful eagerness of unfed hope. There were plenty of reasons

why he should not go—public reasons why he should not quit his post at

this crisis, leaving Mr. Brooke in the lurch when he needed “coaching”

for the election, and when there was so much canvassing, direct and

indirect, to be carried on. Will could not like to leave his own

chessmen in the heat of a game; and any candidate on the right side,

even if his brain and marrow had been as soft as was consistent with a

gentlemanly bearing, might help to turn a majority. To coach Mr. Brooke

and keep him steadily to the idea that he must pledge himself to vote

for the actual Reform Bill, instead of insisting on his independence

and power of pulling up in time, was not an easy task. Mr.

Farebrother’s prophecy of a fourth candidate “in the bag” had not yet

been fulfilled, neither the Parliamentary Candidate Society nor any

other power on the watch to secure a reforming majority seeing a worthy

nodus for interference while there was a second reforming candidate

like Mr. Brooke, who might be returned at his own expense; and the

fight lay entirely between Pinkerton the old Tory member, Bagster the

new Whig member returned at the last election, and Brooke the future

independent member, who was to fetter himself for this occasion only.

Mr. Hawley and his party would bend all their forces to the return of

Pinkerton, and Mr. Brooke’s success must depend either on plumpers

which would leave Bagster in the rear, or on the new minting of Tory

votes into reforming votes. The latter means, of course, would be

preferable.

This prospect of converting votes was a dangerous distraction to Mr.

Brooke: his impression that waverers were likely to be allured by

wavering statements, and also the liability of his mind to stick afresh

at opposing arguments as they turned up in his memory, gave Will

Ladislaw much trouble.

“You know there are tactics in these things,” said Mr. Brooke; “meeting

people half-way—tempering your ideas—saying, ‘Well now, there’s

something in that,’ and so on. I agree with you that this is a peculiar

occasion—the country with a will of its own—political unions—that sort

of thing—but we sometimes cut with rather too sharp a knife, Ladislaw.

These ten-pound householders, now: why ten? Draw the line

somewhere—yes: but why just at ten? That’s a difficult question, now,

if you go into it.”

“Of course it is,” said Will, impatiently. “But if you are to wait till

we get a logical Bill, you must put yourself forward as a

revolutionist, and then Middlemarch would not elect you, I fancy. As

for trimming, this is not a time for trimming.”

Mr. Brooke always ended by agreeing with Ladislaw, who still appeared

to him a sort of Burke with a leaven of Shelley; but after an interval

the wisdom of his own methods reasserted itself, and he was again drawn

into using them with much hopefulness. At this stage of affairs he was

in excellent spirits, which even supported him under large advances of

money; for his powers of convincing and persuading had not yet been

tested by anything more difficult than a chairman’s speech introducing

other orators, or a dialogue with a Middlemarch voter, from which he

came away with a sense that he was a tactician by nature, and that it

was a pity he had not gone earlier into this kind of thing. He was a

little conscious of defeat, however, with Mr. Mawmsey, a chief

representative in Middlemarch of that great social power, the retail

trader, and naturally one of the most doubtful voters in the

borough—willing for his own part to supply an equal quality of teas and

sugars to reformer and anti-reformer, as well as to agree impartially

with both, and feeling like the burgesses of old that this necessity of

electing members was a great burthen to a town; for even if there were

no danger in holding out hopes to all parties beforehand, there would

be the painful necessity at last of disappointing respectable people

whose names were on his books. He was accustomed to receive large

orders from Mr. Brooke of Tipton; but then, there were many of

Pinkerton’s committee whose opinions had a great weight of grocery on

their side. Mr. Mawmsey thinking that Mr. Brooke, as not too “clever in

his intellects,” was the more likely to forgive a grocer who gave a

hostile vote under pressure, had become confidential in his back

parlor.

“As to Reform, sir, put it in a family light,” he said, rattling the

small silver in his pocket, and smiling affably. “Will it support Mrs.

Mawmsey, and enable her to bring up six children when I am no more? I

put the question \_fictiously\_, knowing what must be the answer. Very

well, sir. I ask you what, as a husband and a father, I am to do when

gentlemen come to me and say, ‘Do as you like, Mawmsey; but if you vote

against us, I shall get my groceries elsewhere: when I sugar my liquor

I like to feel that I am benefiting the country by maintaining

tradesmen of the right color.’ Those very words have been spoken to me,

sir, in the very chair where you are now sitting. I don’t mean by your

honorable self, Mr. Brooke.”

“No, no, no—that’s narrow, you know. Until my butler complains to me of

your goods, Mr. Mawmsey,” said Mr. Brooke, soothingly, “until I hear

that you send bad sugars, spices—that sort of thing—I shall never order

him to go elsewhere.”

“Sir, I am your humble servant, and greatly obliged,” said Mr. Mawmsey,

feeling that politics were clearing up a little. “There would be some

pleasure in voting for a gentleman who speaks in that honorable

manner.”

“Well, you know, Mr. Mawmsey, you would find it the right thing to put

yourself on our side. This Reform will touch everybody by-and-by—a

thoroughly popular measure—a sort of A, B, C, you know, that must come

first before the rest can follow. I quite agree with you that you’ve

got to look at the thing in a family light: but public spirit, now.

We’re all one family, you know—it’s all one cupboard. Such a thing as a

vote, now: why, it may help to make men’s fortunes at the Cape—there’s

no knowing what may be the effect of a vote,” Mr. Brooke ended, with a

sense of being a little out at sea, though finding it still enjoyable.

But Mr. Mawmsey answered in a tone of decisive check.

“I beg your pardon, sir, but I can’t afford that. When I give a vote I

must know what I am doing; I must look to what will be the effects on

my till and ledger, speaking respectfully. Prices, I’ll admit, are what

nobody can know the merits of; and the sudden falls after you’ve bought

in currants, which are a goods that will not keep—I’ve never; myself

seen into the ins and outs there; which is a rebuke to human pride. But

as to one family, there’s debtor and creditor, I hope; they’re not

going to reform that away; else I should vote for things staying as

they are. Few men have less need to cry for change than I have,

personally speaking—that is, for self and family. I am not one of those

who have nothing to lose: I mean as to respectability both in parish

and private business, and noways in respect of your honorable self and

custom, which you was good enough to say you would not withdraw from

me, vote or no vote, while the article sent in was satisfactory.”

After this conversation Mr. Mawmsey went up and boasted to his wife

that he had been rather too many for Brooke of Tipton, and that he

didn’t mind so much now about going to the poll.

Mr. Brooke on this occasion abstained from boasting of his tactics to

Ladislaw, who for his part was glad enough to persuade himself that he

had no concern with any canvassing except the purely argumentative

sort, and that he worked no meaner engine than knowledge. Mr. Brooke,

necessarily, had his agents, who understood the nature of the

Middlemarch voter and the means of enlisting his ignorance on the side

of the Bill—which were remarkably similar to the means of enlisting it

on the side against the Bill. Will stopped his ears. Occasionally

Parliament, like the rest of our lives, even to our eating and apparel,

could hardly go on if our imaginations were too active about processes.

There were plenty of dirty-handed men in the world to do dirty

business; and Will protested to himself that his share in bringing Mr.

Brooke through would be quite innocent.

But whether he should succeed in that mode of contributing to the

majority on the right side was very doubtful to him. He had written out

various speeches and memoranda for speeches, but he had begun to

perceive that Mr. Brooke’s mind, if it had the burthen of remembering

any train of thought, would let it drop, run away in search of it, and

not easily come back again. To collect documents is one mode of serving

your country, and to remember the contents of a document is another.

No! the only way in which Mr. Brooke could be coerced into thinking of

the right arguments at the right time was to be well plied with them

till they took up all the room in his brain. But here there was the

difficulty of finding room, so many things having been taken in

beforehand. Mr. Brooke himself observed that his ideas stood rather in

his way when he was speaking.

However, Ladislaw’s coaching was forthwith to be put to the test, for

before the day of nomination Mr. Brooke was to explain himself to the

worthy electors of Middlemarch from the balcony of the White Hart,

which looked out advantageously at an angle of the market-place,

commanding a large area in front and two converging streets. It was a

fine May morning, and everything seemed hopeful: there was some

prospect of an understanding between Bagster’s committee and Brooke’s,

to which Mr. Bulstrode, Mr. Standish as a Liberal lawyer, and such

manufacturers as Mr. Plymdale and Mr. Vincy, gave a solidity which

almost counterbalanced Mr. Hawley and his associates who sat for

Pinkerton at the Green Dragon. Mr. Brooke, conscious of having weakened

the blasts of the “Trumpet” against him, by his reforms as a landlord

in the last half year, and hearing himself cheered a little as he drove

into the town, felt his heart tolerably light under his buff-colored

waistcoat. But with regard to critical occasions, it often happens that

all moments seem comfortably remote until the last.

“This looks well, eh?” said Mr. Brooke as the crowd gathered. “I shall

have a good audience, at any rate. I like this, now—this kind of public

made up of one’s own neighbors, you know.”

The weavers and tanners of Middlemarch, unlike Mr. Mawmsey, had never

thought of Mr. Brooke as a neighbor, and were not more attached to him

than if he had been sent in a box from London. But they listened

without much disturbance to the speakers who introduced the candidate,

one of them—a political personage from Brassing, who came to tell

Middlemarch its duty—spoke so fully, that it was alarming to think what

the candidate could find to say after him. Meanwhile the crowd became

denser, and as the political personage neared the end of his speech,

Mr. Brooke felt a remarkable change in his sensations while he still

handled his eye-glass, trifled with documents before him, and exchanged

remarks with his committee, as a man to whom the moment of summons was

indifferent.

“I’ll take another glass of sherry, Ladislaw,” he said, with an easy

air, to Will, who was close behind him, and presently handed him the

supposed fortifier. It was ill-chosen; for Mr. Brooke was an abstemious

man, and to drink a second glass of sherry quickly at no great interval

from the first was a surprise to his system which tended to scatter his

energies instead of collecting them. Pray pity him: so many English

gentlemen make themselves miserable by speechifying on entirely private

grounds! whereas Mr. Brooke wished to serve his country by standing for

Parliament—which, indeed, may also be done on private grounds, but

being once undertaken does absolutely demand some speechifying.

It was not about the beginning of his speech that Mr. Brooke was at all

anxious; this, he felt sure, would be all right; he should have it

quite pat, cut out as neatly as a set of couplets from Pope. Embarking

would be easy, but the vision of open sea that might come after was

alarming. “And questions, now,” hinted the demon just waking up in his

stomach, “somebody may put questions about the schedules.—Ladislaw,” he

continued, aloud, “just hand me the memorandum of the schedules.”

When Mr. Brooke presented himself on the balcony, the cheers were quite

loud enough to counterbalance the yells, groans, brayings, and other

expressions of adverse theory, which were so moderate that Mr. Standish

(decidedly an old bird) observed in the ear next to him, “This looks

dangerous, by God! Hawley has got some deeper plan than this.” Still,

the cheers were exhilarating, and no candidate could look more amiable

than Mr. Brooke, with the memorandum in his breast-pocket, his left

hand on the rail of the balcony, and his right trifling with his

eye-glass. The striking points in his appearance were his buff

waistcoat, short-clipped blond hair, and neutral physiognomy. He began

with some confidence.

“Gentlemen—Electors of Middlemarch!”

This was so much the right thing that a little pause after it seemed

natural.

“I’m uncommonly glad to be here—I was never so proud and happy in my

life—never so happy, you know.”

This was a bold figure of speech, but not exactly the right thing; for,

unhappily, the pat opening had slipped away—even couplets from Pope may

be but “fallings from us, vanishings,” when fear clutches us, and a

glass of sherry is hurrying like smoke among our ideas. Ladislaw, who

stood at the window behind the speaker, thought, “it’s all up now. The

only chance is that, since the best thing won’t always do, floundering

may answer for once.” Mr. Brooke, meanwhile, having lost other clews,

fell back on himself and his qualifications—always an appropriate

graceful subject for a candidate.

“I am a close neighbor of yours, my good friends—you’ve known me on the

bench a good while—I’ve always gone a good deal into public

questions—machinery, now, and machine-breaking—you’re many of you

concerned with machinery, and I’ve been going into that lately. It

won’t do, you know, breaking machines: everything must go on—trade,

manufactures, commerce, interchange of staples—that kind of thing—since

Adam Smith, that must go on. We must look all over the

globe:—‘Observation with extensive view,’ must look everywhere, ‘from

China to Peru,’ as somebody says—Johnson, I think, ‘The Rambler,’ you

know. That is what I have done up to a certain point—not as far as

Peru; but I’ve not always stayed at home—I saw it wouldn’t do. I’ve

been in the Levant, where some of your Middlemarch goods go—and then,

again, in the Baltic. The Baltic, now.”

Plying among his recollections in this way, Mr. Brooke might have got

along, easily to himself, and would have come back from the remotest

seas without trouble; but a diabolical procedure had been set up by the

enemy. At one and the same moment there had risen above the shoulders

of the crowd, nearly opposite Mr. Brooke, and within ten yards of him,

the effigy of himself: buff-colored waistcoat, eye-glass, and neutral

physiognomy, painted on rag; and there had arisen, apparently in the

air, like the note of the cuckoo, a parrot-like, Punch-voiced echo of

his words. Everybody looked up at the open windows in the houses at the

opposite angles of the converging streets; but they were either blank,

or filled by laughing listeners. The most innocent echo has an impish

mockery in it when it follows a gravely persistent speaker, and this

echo was not at all innocent; if it did not follow with the precision

of a natural echo, it had a wicked choice of the words it overtook. By

the time it said, “The Baltic, now,” the laugh which had been running

through the audience became a general shout, and but for the sobering

effects of party and that great public cause which the entanglement of

things had identified with “Brooke of Tipton,” the laugh might have

caught his committee. Mr. Bulstrode asked, reprehensively, what the new

police was doing; but a voice could not well be collared, and an attack

on the effigy of the candidate would have been too equivocal, since

Hawley probably meant it to be pelted.

Mr. Brooke himself was not in a position to be quickly conscious of

anything except a general slipping away of ideas within himself: he had

even a little singing in the ears, and he was the only person who had

not yet taken distinct account of the echo or discerned the image of

himself. Few things hold the perceptions more thoroughly captive than

anxiety about what we have got to say. Mr. Brooke heard the laughter;

but he had expected some Tory efforts at disturbance, and he was at

this moment additionally excited by the tickling, stinging sense that

his lost exordium was coming back to fetch him from the Baltic.

“That reminds me,” he went on, thrusting a hand into his side-pocket,

with an easy air, “if I wanted a precedent, you know—but we never want

a precedent for the right thing—but there is Chatham, now; I can’t say

I should have supported Chatham, or Pitt, the younger Pitt—he was not a

man of ideas, and we want ideas, you know.”

“Blast your ideas! we want the Bill,” said a loud rough voice from the

crowd below.

Immediately the invisible Punch, who had hitherto followed Mr. Brooke,

repeated, “Blast your ideas! we want the Bill.” The laugh was louder

than ever, and for the first time Mr. Brooke being himself silent,

heard distinctly the mocking echo. But it seemed to ridicule his

interrupter, and in that light was encouraging; so he replied with

amenity—

“There is something in what you say, my good friend, and what do we

meet for but to speak our minds—freedom of opinion, freedom of the

press, liberty—that kind of thing? The Bill, now—you shall have the

Bill”—here Mr. Brooke paused a moment to fix on his eye-glass and take

the paper from his breast-pocket, with a sense of being practical and

coming to particulars. The invisible Punch followed:—

“You shall have the Bill, Mr. Brooke, per electioneering contest, and a

seat outside Parliament as delivered, five thousand pounds, seven

shillings, and fourpence.”

Mr. Brooke, amid the roars of laughter, turned red, let his eye-glass

fall, and looking about him confusedly, saw the image of himself, which

had come nearer. The next moment he saw it dolorously bespattered with

eggs. His spirit rose a little, and his voice too.

“Buffoonery, tricks, ridicule the test of truth—all that is very

well”—here an unpleasant egg broke on Mr. Brooke’s shoulder, as the

echo said, “All that is very well;” then came a hail of eggs, chiefly

aimed at the image, but occasionally hitting the original, as if by

chance. There was a stream of new men pushing among the crowd;

whistles, yells, bellowings, and fifes made all the greater hubbub

because there was shouting and struggling to put them down. No voice

would have had wing enough to rise above the uproar, and Mr. Brooke,

disagreeably anointed, stood his ground no longer. The frustration

would have been less exasperating if it had been less gamesome and

boyish: a serious assault of which the newspaper reporter “can aver

that it endangered the learned gentleman’s ribs,” or can respectfully

bear witness to “the soles of that gentleman’s boots having been

visible above the railing,” has perhaps more consolations attached to

it.

Mr. Brooke re-entered the committee-room, saying, as carelessly as he

could, “This is a little too bad, you know. I should have got the ear

of the people by-and-by—but they didn’t give me time. I should have

gone into the Bill by-and-by, you know,” he added, glancing at

Ladislaw. “However, things will come all right at the nomination.”

But it was not resolved unanimously that things would come right; on

the contrary, the committee looked rather grim, and the political

personage from Brassing was writing busily, as if he were brewing new

devices.

“It was Bowyer who did it,” said Mr. Standish, evasively. “I know it as

well as if he had been advertised. He’s uncommonly good at

ventriloquism, and he did it uncommonly well, by God! Hawley has been

having him to dinner lately: there’s a fund of talent in Bowyer.”

“Well, you know, you never mentioned him to me, Standish, else I would

have invited him to dine,” said poor Mr. Brooke, who had gone through a

great deal of inviting for the good of his country.

“There’s not a more paltry fellow in Middlemarch than Bowyer,” said

Ladislaw, indignantly, “but it seems as if the paltry fellows were

always to turn the scale.”

Will was thoroughly out of temper with himself as well as with his

“principal,” and he went to shut himself in his rooms with a

half-formed resolve to throw up the “Pioneer” and Mr. Brooke together.

Why should he stay? If the impassable gulf between himself and Dorothea

were ever to be filled up, it must rather be by his going away and

getting into a thoroughly different position than by staying here and

slipping into deserved contempt as an understrapper of Brooke’s. Then

came the young dream of wonders that he might do—in five years, for

example: political writing, political speaking, would get a higher

value now public life was going to be wider and more national, and they

might give him such distinction that he would not seem to be asking

Dorothea to step down to him. Five years:—if he could only be sure that

she cared for him more than for others; if he could only make her aware

that he stood aloof until he could tell his love without lowering

himself—then he could go away easily, and begin a career which at

five-and-twenty seemed probable enough in the inward order of things,

where talent brings fame, and fame everything else which is delightful.

He could speak and he could write; he could master any subject if he

chose, and he meant always to take the side of reason and justice, on

which he would carry all his ardor. Why should he not one day be lifted

above the shoulders of the crowd, and feel that he had won that

eminence well? Without doubt he would leave Middlemarch, go to town,

and make himself fit for celebrity by “eating his dinners.”

But not immediately: not until some kind of sign had passed between him

and Dorothea. He could not be satisfied until she knew why, even if he

were the man she would choose to marry, he would not marry her. Hence

he must keep his post and bear with Mr. Brooke a little longer.

But he soon had reason to suspect that Mr. Brooke had anticipated him

in the wish to break up their connection. Deputations without and

voices within had concurred in inducing that philanthropist to take a

stronger measure than usual for the good of mankind; namely, to

withdraw in favor of another candidate, to whom he left the advantages

of his canvassing machinery. He himself called this a strong measure,

but observed that his health was less capable of sustaining excitement

than he had imagined.

“I have felt uneasy about the chest—it won’t do to carry that too far,”

he said to Ladislaw in explaining the affair. “I must pull up. Poor

Casaubon was a warning, you know. I’ve made some heavy advances, but

I’ve dug a channel. It’s rather coarse work—this electioneering, eh,

Ladislaw? dare say you are tired of it. However, we have dug a channel

with the ‘Pioneer’—put things in a track, and so on. A more ordinary

man than you might carry it on now—more ordinary, you know.”

“Do you wish me to give it up?” said Will, the quick color coming in

his face, as he rose from the writing-table, and took a turn of three

steps with his hands in his pockets. “I am ready to do so whenever you

wish it.”

“As to wishing, my dear Ladislaw, I have the highest opinion of your

powers, you know. But about the ‘Pioneer,’ I have been consulting a

little with some of the men on our side, and they are inclined to take

it into their hands—indemnify me to a certain extent—carry it on, in

fact. And under the circumstances, you might like to give up—might find

a better field. These people might not take that high view of you which

I have always taken, as an alter ego, a right hand—though I always

looked forward to your doing something else. I think of having a run

into France. But I’ll write you any letters, you know—to Althorpe and

people of that kind. I’ve met Althorpe.”

“I am exceedingly obliged to you,” said Ladislaw, proudly. “Since you

are going to part with the ‘Pioneer,’ I need not trouble you about the

steps I shall take. I may choose to continue here for the present.”

After Mr. Brooke had left him Will said to himself, “The rest of the

family have been urging him to get rid of me, and he doesn’t care now

about my going. I shall stay as long as I like. I shall go of my own

movements and not because they are afraid of me.”

CHAPTER LII.

“His heart

The lowliest duties on itself did lay.”

—WORDSWORTH.

On that June evening when Mr. Farebrother knew that he was to have the

Lowick living, there was joy in the old fashioned parlor, and even the

portraits of the great lawyers seemed to look on with satisfaction. His

mother left her tea and toast untouched, but sat with her usual pretty

primness, only showing her emotion by that flush in the cheeks and

brightness in the eyes which give an old woman a touching momentary

identity with her far-off youthful self, and saying decisively—

“The greatest comfort, Camden, is that you have deserved it.”

“When a man gets a good berth, mother, half the deserving must come

after,” said the son, brimful of pleasure, and not trying to conceal

it. The gladness in his face was of that active kind which seems to

have energy enough not only to flash outwardly, but to light up busy

vision within: one seemed to see thoughts, as well as delight, in his

glances.

“Now, aunt,” he went on, rubbing his hands and looking at Miss Noble,

who was making tender little beaver-like noises, “There shall be

sugar-candy always on the table for you to steal and give to the

children, and you shall have a great many new stockings to make

presents of, and you shall darn your own more than ever!”

Miss Noble nodded at her nephew with a subdued half-frightened laugh,

conscious of having already dropped an additional lump of sugar into

her basket on the strength of the new preferment.

“As for you, Winny”—the Vicar went on—“I shall make no difficulty about

your marrying any Lowick bachelor—Mr. Solomon Featherstone, for

example, as soon as I find you are in love with him.”

Miss Winifred, who had been looking at her brother all the while and

crying heartily, which was her way of rejoicing, smiled through her

tears and said, “You must set me the example, Cam: \_you\_ must marry

now.”

“With all my heart. But who is in love with me? I am a seedy old

fellow,” said the Vicar, rising, pushing his chair away and looking

down at himself. “What do you say, mother?”

“You are a handsome man, Camden: though not so fine a figure of a man

as your father,” said the old lady.

“I wish you would marry Miss Garth, brother,” said Miss Winifred. “She

would make us so lively at Lowick.”

“Very fine! You talk as if young women were tied up to be chosen, like

poultry at market; as if I had only to ask and everybody would have

me,” said the Vicar, not caring to specify.

“We don’t want everybody,” said Miss Winifred. “But \_you\_ would like

Miss Garth, mother, shouldn’t you?”

“My son’s choice shall be mine,” said Mrs. Farebrother, with majestic

discretion, “and a wife would be most welcome, Camden. You will want

your whist at home when we go to Lowick, and Henrietta Noble never was

a whist-player.” (Mrs. Farebrother always called her tiny old sister by

that magnificent name.)

“I shall do without whist now, mother.”

“Why so, Camden? In my time whist was thought an undeniable amusement

for a good churchman,” said Mrs. Farebrother, innocent of the meaning

that whist had for her son, and speaking rather sharply, as at some

dangerous countenancing of new doctrine.

“I shall be too busy for whist; I shall have two parishes,” said the

Vicar, preferring not to discuss the virtues of that game.

He had already said to Dorothea, “I don’t feel bound to give up St.

Botolph’s. It is protest enough against the pluralism they want to

reform if I give somebody else most of the money. The stronger thing is

not to give up power, but to use it well.”

“I have thought of that,” said Dorothea. “So far as self is concerned,

I think it would be easier to give up power and money than to keep

them. It seems very unfitting that I should have this patronage, yet I

felt that I ought not to let it be used by some one else instead of

me.”

“It is I who am bound to act so that you will not regret your power,”

said Mr. Farebrother.

His was one of the natures in which conscience gets the more active

when the yoke of life ceases to gall them. He made no display of

humility on the subject, but in his heart he felt rather ashamed that

his conduct had shown laches which others who did not get benefices

were free from.

“I used often to wish I had been something else than a clergyman,” he

said to Lydgate, “but perhaps it will be better to try and make as good

a clergyman out of myself as I can. That is the well-beneficed point of

view, you perceive, from which difficulties are much simplified,” he

ended, smiling.

The Vicar did feel then as if his share of duties would be easy. But

Duty has a trick of behaving unexpectedly—something like a heavy friend

whom we have amiably asked to visit us, and who breaks his leg within

our gates.

Hardly a week later, Duty presented itself in his study under the

disguise of Fred Vincy, now returned from Omnibus College with his

bachelor’s degree.

“I am ashamed to trouble you, Mr. Farebrother,” said Fred, whose fair

open face was propitiating, “but you are the only friend I can consult.

I told you everything once before, and you were so good that I can’t

help coming to you again.”

“Sit down, Fred, I’m ready to hear and do anything I can,” said the

Vicar, who was busy packing some small objects for removal, and went on

with his work.

“I wanted to tell you—” Fred hesitated an instant and then went on

plungingly, “I might go into the Church now; and really, look where I

may, I can’t see anything else to do. I don’t like it, but I know it’s

uncommonly hard on my father to say so, after he has spent a good deal

of money in educating me for it.” Fred paused again an instant, and

then repeated, “and I can’t see anything else to do.”

“I did talk to your father about it, Fred, but I made little way with

him. He said it was too late. But you have got over one bridge now:

what are your other difficulties?”

“Merely that I don’t like it. I don’t like divinity, and preaching, and

feeling obliged to look serious. I like riding across country, and

doing as other men do. I don’t mean that I want to be a bad fellow in

any way; but I’ve no taste for the sort of thing people expect of a

clergyman. And yet what else am I to do? My father can’t spare me any

capital, else I might go into farming. And he has no room for me in his

trade. And of course I can’t begin to study for law or physic now, when

my father wants me to earn something. It’s all very well to say I’m

wrong to go into the Church; but those who say so might as well tell me

to go into the backwoods.”

Fred’s voice had taken a tone of grumbling remonstrance, and Mr.

Farebrother might have been inclined to smile if his mind had not been

too busy in imagining more than Fred told him.

“Have you any difficulties about doctrines—about the Articles?” he

said, trying hard to think of the question simply for Fred’s sake.

“No; I suppose the Articles are right. I am not prepared with any

arguments to disprove them, and much better, cleverer fellows than I am

go in for them entirely. I think it would be rather ridiculous in me to

urge scruples of that sort, as if I were a judge,” said Fred, quite

simply.

“I suppose, then, it has occurred to you that you might be a fair

parish priest without being much of a divine?”

“Of course, if I am obliged to be a clergyman, I shall try and do my

duty, though I mayn’t like it. Do you think any body ought to blame

me?”

“For going into the Church under the circumstances? That depends on

your conscience, Fred—how far you have counted the cost, and seen what

your position will require of you. I can only tell you about myself,

that I have always been too lax, and have been uneasy in consequence.”

“But there is another hindrance,” said Fred, coloring. “I did not tell

you before, though perhaps I may have said things that made you guess

it. There is somebody I am very fond of: I have loved her ever since we

were children.”

“Miss Garth, I suppose?” said the Vicar, examining some labels very

closely.

“Yes. I shouldn’t mind anything if she would have me. And I know I

could be a good fellow then.”

“And you think she returns the feeling?”

“She never will say so; and a good while ago she made me promise not to

speak to her about it again. And she has set her mind especially

against my being a clergyman; I know that. But I can’t give her up. I

do think she cares about me. I saw Mrs. Garth last night, and she said

that Mary was staying at Lowick Rectory with Miss Farebrother.”

“Yes, she is very kindly helping my sister. Do you wish to go there?”

“No, I want to ask a great favor of you. I am ashamed to bother you in

this way; but Mary might listen to what you said, if you mentioned the

subject to her—I mean about my going into the Church.”

“That is rather a delicate task, my dear Fred. I shall have to

presuppose your attachment to her; and to enter on the subject as you

wish me to do, will be asking her to tell me whether she returns it.”

“That is what I want her to tell you,” said Fred, bluntly. “I don’t

know what to do, unless I can get at her feeling.”

“You mean that you would be guided by that as to your going into the

Church?”

“If Mary said she would never have me I might as well go wrong in one

way as another.”

“That is nonsense, Fred. Men outlive their love, but they don’t outlive

the consequences of their recklessness.”

“Not my sort of love: I have never been without loving Mary. If I had

to give her up, it would be like beginning to live on wooden legs.”

“Will she not be hurt at my intrusion?”

“No, I feel sure she will not. She respects you more than any one, and

she would not put you off with fun as she does me. Of course I could

not have told any one else, or asked any one else to speak to her, but

you. There is no one else who could be such a friend to both of us.”

Fred paused a moment, and then said, rather complainingly, “And she

ought to acknowledge that I have worked in order to pass. She ought to

believe that I would exert myself for her sake.”

There was a moment’s silence before Mr. Farebrother laid down his work,

and putting out his hand to Fred said—

“Very well, my boy. I will do what you wish.”

That very day Mr. Farebrother went to Lowick parsonage on the nag which

he had just set up. “Decidedly I am an old stalk,” he thought, “the

young growths are pushing me aside.”

He found Mary in the garden gathering roses and sprinkling the petals

on a sheet. The sun was low, and tall trees sent their shadows across

the grassy walks where Mary was moving without bonnet or parasol. She

did not observe Mr. Farebrother’s approach along the grass, and had

just stooped down to lecture a small black-and-tan terrier, which would

persist in walking on the sheet and smelling at the rose-leaves as Mary

sprinkled them. She took his fore-paws in one hand, and lifted up the

forefinger of the other, while the dog wrinkled his brows and looked

embarrassed. “Fly, Fly, I am ashamed of you,” Mary was saying in a

grave contralto. “This is not becoming in a sensible dog; anybody would

think you were a silly young gentleman.”

“You are unmerciful to young gentlemen, Miss Garth,” said the Vicar,

within two yards of her.

Mary started up and blushed. “It always answers to reason with Fly,”

she said, laughingly.

“But not with young gentlemen?”

“Oh, with some, I suppose; since some of them turn into excellent men.”

“I am glad of that admission, because I want at this very moment to

interest you in a young gentleman.”

“Not a silly one, I hope,” said Mary, beginning to pluck the roses

again, and feeling her heart beat uncomfortably.

“No; though perhaps wisdom is not his strong point, but rather

affection and sincerity. However, wisdom lies more in those two

qualities than people are apt to imagine. I hope you know by those

marks what young gentleman I mean.”

“Yes, I think I do,” said Mary, bravely, her face getting more serious,

and her hands cold; “it must be Fred Vincy.”

“He has asked me to consult you about his going into the Church. I hope

you will not think that I consented to take a liberty in promising to

do so.”

“On the contrary, Mr. Farebrother,” said Mary, giving up the roses, and

folding her arms, but unable to look up, “whenever you have anything to

say to me I feel honored.”

“But before I enter on that question, let me just touch a point on

which your father took me into confidence; by the way, it was that very

evening on which I once before fulfilled a mission from Fred, just

after he had gone to college. Mr. Garth told me what happened on the

night of Featherstone’s death—how you refused to burn the will; and he

said that you had some heart-prickings on that subject, because you had

been the innocent means of hindering Fred from getting his ten thousand

pounds. I have kept that in mind, and I have heard something that may

relieve you on that score—may show you that no sin-offering is demanded

from you there.”

Mr. Farebrother paused a moment and looked at Mary. He meant to give

Fred his full advantage, but it would be well, he thought, to clear her

mind of any superstitions, such as women sometimes follow when they do

a man the wrong of marrying him as an act of atonement. Mary’s cheeks

had begun to burn a little, and she was mute.

“I mean, that your action made no real difference to Fred’s lot. I find

that the first will would not have been legally good after the burning

of the last; it would not have stood if it had been disputed, and you

may be sure it would have been disputed. So, on that score, you may

feel your mind free.”

“Thank you, Mr. Farebrother,” said Mary, earnestly. “I am grateful to

you for remembering my feelings.”

“Well, now I may go on. Fred, you know, has taken his degree. He has

worked his way so far, and now the question is, what is he to do? That

question is so difficult that he is inclined to follow his father’s

wishes and enter the Church, though you know better than I do that he

was quite set against that formerly. I have questioned him on the

subject, and I confess I see no insuperable objection to his being a

clergyman, as things go. He says that he could turn his mind to doing

his best in that vocation, on one condition. If that condition were

fulfilled I would do my utmost in helping Fred on. After a time—not, of

course, at first—he might be with me as my curate, and he would have so

much to do that his stipend would be nearly what I used to get as

vicar. But I repeat that there is a condition without which all this

good cannot come to pass. He has opened his heart to me, Miss Garth,

and asked me to plead for him. The condition lies entirely in your

feeling.”

Mary looked so much moved, that he said after a moment, “Let us walk a

little;” and when they were walking he added, “To speak quite plainly,

Fred will not take any course which would lessen the chance that you

would consent to be his wife; but with that prospect, he will try his

best at anything you approve.”

“I cannot possibly say that I will ever be his wife, Mr. Farebrother:

but I certainly never will be his wife if he becomes a clergyman. What

you say is most generous and kind; I don’t mean for a moment to correct

your judgment. It is only that I have my girlish, mocking way of

looking at things,” said Mary, with a returning sparkle of playfulness

in her answer which only made its modesty more charming.

“He wishes me to report exactly what you think,” said Mr. Farebrother.

“I could not love a man who is ridiculous,” said Mary, not choosing to

go deeper. “Fred has sense and knowledge enough to make him

respectable, if he likes, in some good worldly business, but I can

never imagine him preaching and exhorting, and pronouncing blessings,

and praying by the sick, without feeling as if I were looking at a

caricature. His being a clergyman would be only for gentility’s sake,

and I think there is nothing more contemptible than such imbecile

gentility. I used to think that of Mr. Crowse, with his empty face and

neat umbrella, and mincing little speeches. What right have such men to

represent Christianity—as if it were an institution for getting up

idiots genteelly—as if—” Mary checked herself. She had been carried

along as if she had been speaking to Fred instead of Mr. Farebrother.

“Young women are severe: they don’t feel the stress of action as men

do, though perhaps I ought to make you an exception there. But you

don’t put Fred Vincy on so low a level as that?”

“No, indeed, he has plenty of sense, but I think he would not show it

as a clergyman. He would be a piece of professional affectation.”

“Then the answer is quite decided. As a clergyman he could have no

hope?”

Mary shook her head.

“But if he braved all the difficulties of getting his bread in some

other way—will you give him the support of hope? May he count on

winning you?”

“I think Fred ought not to need telling again what I have already said

to him,” Mary answered, with a slight resentment in her manner. “I mean

that he ought not to put such questions until he has done something

worthy, instead of saying that he could do it.”

Mr. Farebrother was silent for a minute or more, and then, as they

turned and paused under the shadow of a maple at the end of a grassy

walk, said, “I understand that you resist any attempt to fetter you,

but either your feeling for Fred Vincy excludes your entertaining

another attachment, or it does not: either he may count on your

remaining single until he shall have earned your hand, or he may in any

case be disappointed. Pardon me, Mary—you know I used to catechise you

under that name—but when the state of a woman’s affections touches the

happiness of another life—of more lives than one—I think it would be

the nobler course for her to be perfectly direct and open.”

Mary in her turn was silent, wondering not at Mr. Farebrother’s manner

but at his tone, which had a grave restrained emotion in it. When the

strange idea flashed across her that his words had reference to

himself, she was incredulous, and ashamed of entertaining it. She had

never thought that any man could love her except Fred, who had espoused

her with the umbrella ring, when she wore socks and little strapped

shoes; still less that she could be of any importance to Mr.

Farebrother, the cleverest man in her narrow circle. She had only time

to feel that all this was hazy and perhaps illusory; but one thing was

clear and determined—her answer.

“Since you think it my duty, Mr. Farebrother, I will tell you that I

have too strong a feeling for Fred to give him up for any one else. I

should never be quite happy if I thought he was unhappy for the loss of

me. It has taken such deep root in me—my gratitude to him for always

loving me best, and minding so much if I hurt myself, from the time

when we were very little. I cannot imagine any new feeling coming to

make that weaker. I should like better than anything to see him worthy

of every one’s respect. But please tell him I will not promise to marry

him till then: I should shame and grieve my father and mother. He is

free to choose some one else.”

“Then I have fulfilled my commission thoroughly,” said Mr. Farebrother,

putting out his hand to Mary, “and I shall ride back to Middlemarch

forthwith. With this prospect before him, we shall get Fred into the

right niche somehow, and I hope I shall live to join your hands. God

bless you!”

“Oh, please stay, and let me give you some tea,” said Mary. Her eyes

filled with tears, for something indefinable, something like the

resolute suppression of a pain in Mr. Farebrother’s manner, made her

feel suddenly miserable, as she had once felt when she saw her father’s

hands trembling in a moment of trouble.

“No, my dear, no. I must get back.”

In three minutes the Vicar was on horseback again, having gone

magnanimously through a duty much harder than the renunciation of

whist, or even than the writing of penitential meditations.

CHAPTER LIII.

It is but a shallow haste which concludeth insincerity from what

outsiders call inconsistency—putting a dead mechanism of “ifs” and

“therefores” for the living myriad of hidden suckers whereby the belief

and the conduct are wrought into mutual sustainment.

Mr. Bulstrode, when he was hoping to acquire a new interest in Lowick,

had naturally had an especial wish that the new clergyman should be one

whom he thoroughly approved; and he believed it to be a chastisement

and admonition directed to his own shortcomings and those of the nation

at large, that just about the time when he came in possession of the

deeds which made him the proprietor of Stone Court, Mr. Farebrother

“read himself” into the quaint little church and preached his first

sermon to the congregation of farmers, laborers, and village artisans.

It was not that Mr. Bulstrode intended to frequent Lowick Church or to

reside at Stone Court for a good while to come: he had bought the

excellent farm and fine homestead simply as a retreat which he might

gradually enlarge as to the land and beautify as to the dwelling, until

it should be conducive to the divine glory that he should enter on it

as a residence, partially withdrawing from his present exertions in the

administration of business, and throwing more conspicuously on the side

of Gospel truth the weight of local landed proprietorship, which

Providence might increase by unforeseen occasions of purchase. A strong

leading in this direction seemed to have been given in the surprising

facility of getting Stone Court, when every one had expected that Mr.

Rigg Featherstone would have clung to it as the Garden of Eden. That

was what poor old Peter himself had expected; having often, in

imagination, looked up through the sods above him, and, unobstructed by

perspective, seen his frog-faced legatee enjoying the fine old place to

the perpetual surprise and disappointment of other survivors.

But how little we know what would make paradise for our neighbors! We

judge from our own desires, and our neighbors themselves are not always

open enough even to throw out a hint of theirs. The cool and judicious

Joshua Rigg had not allowed his parent to perceive that Stone Court was

anything less than the chief good in his estimation, and he had

certainly wished to call it his own. But as Warren Hastings looked at

gold and thought of buying Daylesford, so Joshua Rigg looked at Stone

Court and thought of buying gold. He had a very distinct and intense

vision of his chief good, the vigorous greed which he had inherited

having taken a special form by dint of circumstance: and his chief good

was to be a moneychanger. From his earliest employment as an errand-boy

in a seaport, he had looked through the windows of the moneychangers as

other boys look through the windows of the pastry-cooks; the

fascination had wrought itself gradually into a deep special passion;

he meant, when he had property, to do many things, one of them being to

marry a genteel young person; but these were all accidents and joys

that imagination could dispense with. The one joy after which his soul

thirsted was to have a money-changer’s shop on a much-frequented quay,

to have locks all round him of which he held the keys, and to look

sublimely cool as he handled the breeding coins of all nations, while

helpless Cupidity looked at him enviously from the other side of an

iron lattice. The strength of that passion had been a power enabling

him to master all the knowledge necessary to gratify it. And when

others were thinking that he had settled at Stone Court for life,

Joshua himself was thinking that the moment now was not far off when he

should settle on the North Quay with the best appointments in safes and

locks.

Enough. We are concerned with looking at Joshua Rigg’s sale of his land

from Mr. Bulstrode’s point of view, and he interpreted it as a cheering

dispensation conveying perhaps a sanction to a purpose which he had for

some time entertained without external encouragement; he interpreted it

thus, but not too confidently, offering up his thanksgiving in guarded

phraseology. His doubts did not arise from the possible relations of

the event to Joshua Rigg’s destiny, which belonged to the unmapped

regions not taken under the providential government, except perhaps in

an imperfect colonial way; but they arose from reflecting that this

dispensation too might be a chastisement for himself, as Mr.

Farebrother’s induction to the living clearly was.

This was not what Mr. Bulstrode said to any man for the sake of

deceiving him: it was what he said to himself—it was as genuinely his

mode of explaining events as any theory of yours may be, if you happen

to disagree with him. For the egoism which enters into our theories

does not affect their sincerity; rather, the more our egoism is

satisfied, the more robust is our belief.

However, whether for sanction or for chastisement, Mr. Bulstrode,

hardly fifteen months after the death of Peter Featherstone, had become

the proprietor of Stone Court, and what Peter would say “if he were

worthy to know,” had become an inexhaustible and consolatory subject of

conversation to his disappointed relatives. The tables were now turned

on that dear brother departed, and to contemplate the frustration of

his cunning by the superior cunning of things in general was a cud of

delight to Solomon. Mrs. Waule had a melancholy triumph in the proof

that it did not answer to make false Featherstones and cut off the

genuine; and Sister Martha receiving the news in the Chalky Flats said,

“Dear, dear! then the Almighty could have been none so pleased with the

almshouses after all.”

Affectionate Mrs. Bulstrode was particularly glad of the advantage

which her husband’s health was likely to get from the purchase of Stone

Court. Few days passed without his riding thither and looking over some

part of the farm with the bailiff, and the evenings were delicious in

that quiet spot, when the new hay-ricks lately set up were sending

forth odors to mingle with the breath of the rich old garden. One

evening, while the sun was still above the horizon and burning in

golden lamps among the great walnut boughs, Mr. Bulstrode was pausing

on horseback outside the front gate waiting for Caleb Garth, who had

met him by appointment to give an opinion on a question of stable

drainage, and was now advising the bailiff in the rick-yard.

Mr. Bulstrode was conscious of being in a good spiritual frame and more

than usually serene, under the influence of his innocent recreation. He

was doctrinally convinced that there was a total absence of merit in

himself; but that doctrinal conviction may be held without pain when

the sense of demerit does not take a distinct shape in memory and

revive the tingling of shame or the pang of remorse. Nay, it may be

held with intense satisfaction when the depth of our sinning is but a

measure for the depth of forgiveness, and a clenching proof that we are

peculiar instruments of the divine intention. The memory has as many

moods as the temper, and shifts its scenery like a diorama. At this

moment Mr. Bulstrode felt as if the sunshine were all one with that of

far-off evenings when he was a very young man and used to go out

preaching beyond Highbury. And he would willingly have had that service

of exhortation in prospect now. The texts were there still, and so was

his own facility in expounding them. His brief reverie was interrupted

by the return of Caleb Garth, who also was on horseback, and was just

shaking his bridle before starting, when he exclaimed—

“Bless my heart! what’s this fellow in black coming along the lane?

He’s like one of those men one sees about after the races.”

Mr. Bulstrode turned his horse and looked along the lane, but made no

reply. The comer was our slight acquaintance Mr. Raffles, whose

appearance presented no other change than such as was due to a suit of

black and a crape hat-band. He was within three yards of the horseman

now, and they could see the flash of recognition in his face as he

whirled his stick upward, looking all the while at Mr. Bulstrode, and

at last exclaiming:—

“By Jove, Nick, it’s you! I couldn’t be mistaken, though the

five-and-twenty years have played old Boguy with us both! How are you,

eh? you didn’t expect to see \_me\_ here. Come, shake us by the hand.” To

say that Mr. Raffles’ manner was rather excited would be only one mode

of saying that it was evening. Caleb Garth could see that there was a

moment of struggle and hesitation in Mr. Bulstrode, but it ended in his

putting out his hand coldly to Raffles and saying—

“I did not indeed expect to see you in this remote country place.”

“Well, it belongs to a stepson of mine,” said Raffles, adjusting

himself in a swaggering attitude. “I came to see him here before. I’m

not so surprised at seeing you, old fellow, because I picked up a

letter—what you may call a providential thing. It’s uncommonly

fortunate I met you, though; for I don’t care about seeing my stepson:

he’s not affectionate, and his poor mother’s gone now. To tell the

truth, I came out of love to you, Nick: I came to get your address,

for—look here!” Raffles drew a crumpled paper from his pocket.

Almost any other man than Caleb Garth might have been tempted to linger

on the spot for the sake of hearing all he could about a man whose

acquaintance with Bulstrode seemed to imply passages in the banker’s

life so unlike anything that was known of him in Middlemarch that they

must have the nature of a secret to pique curiosity. But Caleb was

peculiar: certain human tendencies which are commonly strong were

almost absent from his mind; and one of these was curiosity about

personal affairs. Especially if there was anything discreditable to be

found out concerning another man, Caleb preferred not to know it; and

if he had to tell anybody under him that his evil doings were

discovered, he was more embarrassed than the culprit. He now spurred

his horse, and saying, “I wish you good evening, Mr. Bulstrode; I must

be getting home,” set off at a trot.

“You didn’t put your full address to this letter,” Raffles continued.

“That was not like the first-rate man of business you used to be. ‘The

Shrubs,’—they may be anywhere: you live near at hand, eh?—have cut the

London concern altogether—perhaps turned country squire—have a rural

mansion to invite me to. Lord, how many years it is ago! The old lady

must have been dead a pretty long while—gone to glory without the pain

of knowing how poor her daughter was, eh? But, by Jove! you’re very

pale and pasty, Nick. Come, if you’re going home, I’ll walk by your

side.”

Mr. Bulstrode’s usual paleness had in fact taken an almost deathly hue.

Five minutes before, the expanse of his life had been submerged in its

evening sunshine which shone backward to its remembered morning: sin

seemed to be a question of doctrine and inward penitence, humiliation

an exercise of the closet, the bearing of his deeds a matter of private

vision adjusted solely by spiritual relations and conceptions of the

divine purposes. And now, as if by some hideous magic, this loud red

figure had risen before him in unmanageable solidity—an incorporate

past which had not entered into his imagination of chastisements. But

Mr. Bulstrode’s thought was busy, and he was not a man to act or speak

rashly.

“I was going home,” he said, “but I can defer my ride a little. And you

can, if you please, rest here.”

“Thank you,” said Raffles, making a grimace. “I don’t care now about

seeing my stepson. I’d rather go home with you.”

“Your stepson, if Mr. Rigg Featherstone was he, is here no longer. I am

master here now.”

Raffles opened wide eyes, and gave a long whistle of surprise, before

he said, “Well then, I’ve no objection. I’ve had enough walking from

the coach-road. I never was much of a walker, or rider either. What I

like is a smart vehicle and a spirited cob. I was always a little heavy

in the saddle. What a pleasant surprise it must be to you to see me,

old fellow!” he continued, as they turned towards the house. “You don’t

say so; but you never took your luck heartily—you were always thinking

of improving the occasion—you’d such a gift for improving your luck.”

Mr. Raffles seemed greatly to enjoy his own wit, and swung his leg in a

swaggering manner which was rather too much for his companion’s

judicious patience.

“If I remember rightly,” Mr. Bulstrode observed, with chill anger, “our

acquaintance many years ago had not the sort of intimacy which you are

now assuming, Mr. Raffles. Any services you desire of me will be the

more readily rendered if you will avoid a tone of familiarity which did

not lie in our former intercourse, and can hardly be warranted by more

than twenty years of separation.”

“You don’t like being called Nick? Why, I always called you Nick in my

heart, and though lost to sight, to memory dear. By Jove! my feelings

have ripened for you like fine old cognac. I hope you’ve got some in

the house now. Josh filled my flask well the last time.”

Mr. Bulstrode had not yet fully learned that even the desire for cognac

was not stronger in Raffles than the desire to torment, and that a hint

of annoyance always served him as a fresh cue. But it was at least

clear that further objection was useless, and Mr. Bulstrode, in giving

orders to the housekeeper for the accommodation of the guest, had a

resolute air of quietude.

There was the comfort of thinking that this housekeeper had been in the

service of Rigg also, and might accept the idea that Mr. Bulstrode

entertained Raffles merely as a friend of her former master.

When there was food and drink spread before his visitor in the

wainscoted parlor, and no witness in the room, Mr. Bulstrode said—

“Your habits and mine are so different, Mr. Raffles, that we can hardly

enjoy each other’s society. The wisest plan for both of us will

therefore be to part as soon as possible. Since you say that you wished

to meet me, you probably considered that you had some business to

transact with me. But under the circumstances I will invite you to

remain here for the night, and I will myself ride over here early

to-morrow morning—before breakfast, in fact—when I can receive any

communication you have to make to me.”

“With all my heart,” said Raffles; “this is a comfortable place—a

little dull for a continuance; but I can put up with it for a night,

with this good liquor and the prospect of seeing you again in the

morning. You’re a much better host than my stepson was; but Josh owed

me a bit of a grudge for marrying his mother; and between you and me

there was never anything but kindness.”

Mr. Bulstrode, hoping that the peculiar mixture of joviality and

sneering in Raffles’ manner was a good deal the effect of drink, had

determined to wait till he was quite sober before he spent more words

upon him. But he rode home with a terribly lucid vision of the

difficulty there would be in arranging any result that could be

permanently counted on with this man. It was inevitable that he should

wish to get rid of John Raffles, though his reappearance could not be

regarded as lying outside the divine plan. The spirit of evil might

have sent him to threaten Mr. Bulstrode’s subversion as an instrument

of good; but the threat must have been permitted, and was a

chastisement of a new kind. It was an hour of anguish for him very

different from the hours in which his struggle had been securely

private, and which had ended with a sense that his secret misdeeds were

pardoned and his services accepted. Those misdeeds even when

committed—had they not been half sanctified by the singleness of his

desire to devote himself and all he possessed to the furtherance of the

divine scheme? And was he after all to become a mere stone of stumbling

and a rock of offence? For who would understand the work within him?

Who would not, when there was the pretext of casting disgrace upon him,

confound his whole life and the truths he had espoused, in one heap of

obloquy?

In his closest meditations the life-long habit of Mr. Bulstrode’s mind

clad his most egoistic terrors in doctrinal references to superhuman

ends. But even while we are talking and meditating about the earth’s

orbit and the solar system, what we feel and adjust our movements to is

the stable earth and the changing day. And now within all the automatic

succession of theoretic phrases—distinct and inmost as the shiver and

the ache of oncoming fever when we are discussing abstract pain, was

the forecast of disgrace in the presence of his neighbors and of his

own wife. For the pain, as well as the public estimate of disgrace,

depends on the amount of previous profession. To men who only aim at

escaping felony, nothing short of the prisoner’s dock is disgrace. But

Mr. Bulstrode had aimed at being an eminent Christian.

It was not more than half-past seven in the morning when he again

reached Stone Court. The fine old place never looked more like a

delightful home than at that moment; the great white lilies were in

flower, the nasturtiums, their pretty leaves all silvered with dew,

were running away over the low stone wall; the very noises all around

had a heart of peace within them. But everything was spoiled for the

owner as he walked on the gravel in front and awaited the descent of

Mr. Raffles, with whom he was condemned to breakfast.

It was not long before they were seated together in the wainscoted

parlor over their tea and toast, which was as much as Raffles cared to

take at that early hour. The difference between his morning and evening

self was not so great as his companion had imagined that it might be;

the delight in tormenting was perhaps even the stronger because his

spirits were rather less highly pitched. Certainly his manners seemed

more disagreeable by the morning light.

“As I have little time to spare, Mr. Raffles,” said the banker, who

could hardly do more than sip his tea and break his toast without

eating it, “I shall be obliged if you will mention at once the ground

on which you wished to meet with me. I presume that you have a home

elsewhere and will be glad to return to it.”

“Why, if a man has got any heart, doesn’t he want to see an old friend,

Nick?—I must call you Nick—we always did call you young Nick when we

knew you meant to marry the old widow. Some said you had a handsome

family likeness to old Nick, but that was your mother’s fault, calling

you Nicholas. Aren’t you glad to see me again? I expected an invite to

stay with you at some pretty place. My own establishment is broken up

now my wife’s dead. I’ve no particular attachment to any spot; I would

as soon settle hereabout as anywhere.”

“May I ask why you returned from America? I considered that the strong

wish you expressed to go there, when an adequate sum was furnished, was

tantamount to an engagement that you would remain there for life.”

“Never knew that a wish to go to a place was the same thing as a wish

to stay. But I did stay a matter of ten years; it didn’t suit me to

stay any longer. And I’m not going again, Nick.” Here Mr. Raffles

winked slowly as he looked at Mr. Bulstrode.

“Do you wish to be settled in any business? What is your calling now?”

“Thank you, my calling is to enjoy myself as much as I can. I don’t

care about working any more. If I did anything it would be a little

travelling in the tobacco line—or something of that sort, which takes a

man into agreeable company. But not without an independence to fall

back upon. That’s what I want: I’m not so strong as I was, Nick, though

I’ve got more color than you. I want an independence.”

“That could be supplied to you, if you would engage to keep at a

distance,” said Mr. Bulstrode, perhaps with a little too much eagerness

in his undertone.

“That must be as it suits my convenience,” said Raffles coolly. “I see

no reason why I shouldn’t make a few acquaintances hereabout. I’m not

ashamed of myself as company for anybody. I dropped my portmanteau at

the turnpike when I got down—change of linen—genuine—honor bright—more

than fronts and wristbands; and with this suit of mourning, straps and

everything, I should do you credit among the nobs here.” Mr. Raffles

had pushed away his chair and looked down at himself, particularly at

his straps. His chief intention was to annoy Bulstrode, but he really

thought that his appearance now would produce a good effect, and that

he was not only handsome and witty, but clad in a mourning style which

implied solid connections.

“If you intend to rely on me in any way, Mr. Raffles,” said Bulstrode,

after a moment’s pause, “you will expect to meet my wishes.”

“Ah, to be sure,” said Raffles, with a mocking cordiality. “Didn’t I

always do it? Lord, you made a pretty thing out of me, and I got but

little. I’ve often thought since, I might have done better by telling

the old woman that I’d found her daughter and her grandchild: it would

have suited my feelings better; I’ve got a soft place in my heart. But

you’ve buried the old lady by this time, I suppose—it’s all one to her

now. And you’ve got your fortune out of that profitable business which

had such a blessing on it. You’ve taken to being a nob, buying land,

being a country bashaw. Still in the Dissenting line, eh? Still godly?

Or taken to the Church as more genteel?”

This time Mr. Raffles’ slow wink and slight protrusion of his tongue

was worse than a nightmare, because it held the certitude that it was

not a nightmare, but a waking misery. Mr. Bulstrode felt a shuddering

nausea, and did not speak, but was considering diligently whether he

should not leave Raffles to do as he would, and simply defy him as a

slanderer. The man would soon show himself disreputable enough to make

people disbelieve him. “But not when he tells any ugly-looking truth

about \_you\_,” said discerning consciousness. And again: it seemed no

wrong to keep Raffles at a distance, but Mr. Bulstrode shrank from the

direct falsehood of denying true statements. It was one thing to look

back on forgiven sins, nay, to explain questionable conformity to lax

customs, and another to enter deliberately on the necessity of

falsehood.

But since Bulstrode did not speak, Raffles ran on, by way of using time

to the utmost.

“I’ve not had such fine luck as you, by Jove! Things went confoundedly

with me in New York; those Yankees are cool hands, and a man of

gentlemanly feelings has no chance with them. I married when I came

back—a nice woman in the tobacco trade—very fond of me—but the trade

was restricted, as we say. She had been settled there a good many years

by a friend; but there was a son too much in the case. Josh and I never

hit it off. However, I made the most of the position, and I’ve always

taken my glass in good company. It’s been all on the square with me;

I’m as open as the day. You won’t take it ill of me that I didn’t look

you up before. I’ve got a complaint that makes me a little dilatory. I

thought you were trading and praying away in London still, and didn’t

find you there. But you see I was sent to you, Nick—perhaps for a

blessing to both of us.”

Mr. Raffles ended with a jocose snuffle: no man felt his intellect more

superior to religious cant. And if the cunning which calculates on the

meanest feelings in men could be called intellect, he had his share,

for under the blurting rallying tone with which he spoke to Bulstrode,

there was an evident selection of statements, as if they had been so

many moves at chess. Meanwhile Bulstrode had determined on his move,

and he said, with gathered resolution—

“You will do well to reflect, Mr. Raffles, that it is possible for a

man to overreach himself in the effort to secure undue advantage.

Although I am not in any way bound to you, I am willing to supply you

with a regular annuity—in quarterly payments—so long as you fulfil a

promise to remain at a distance from this neighborhood. It is in your

power to choose. If you insist on remaining here, even for a short

time, you will get nothing from me. I shall decline to know you.”

“Ha, ha!” said Raffles, with an affected explosion, “that reminds me of

a droll dog of a thief who declined to know the constable.”

“Your allusions are lost on me sir,” said Bulstrode, with white heat;

“the law has no hold on me either through your agency or any other.”

“You can’t understand a joke, my good fellow. I only meant that I

should never decline to know you. But let us be serious. Your quarterly

payment won’t quite suit me. I like my freedom.”

Here Raffles rose and stalked once or twice up and down the room,

swinging his leg, and assuming an air of masterly meditation. At last

he stopped opposite Bulstrode, and said, “I’ll tell you what! Give us a

couple of hundreds—come, that’s modest—and I’ll go away—honor

bright!—pick up my portmanteau and go away. But I shall not give up my

liberty for a dirty annuity. I shall come and go where I like. Perhaps

it may suit me to stay away, and correspond with a friend; perhaps not.

Have you the money with you?”

“No, I have one hundred,” said Bulstrode, feeling the immediate

riddance too great a relief to be rejected on the ground of future

uncertainties. “I will forward you the other if you will mention an

address.”

“No, I’ll wait here till you bring it,” said Raffles. “I’ll take a

stroll and have a snack, and you’ll be back by that time.”

Mr. Bulstrode’s sickly body, shattered by the agitations he had gone

through since the last evening, made him feel abjectly in the power of

this loud invulnerable man. At that moment he snatched at a temporary

repose to be won on any terms. He was rising to do what Raffles

suggested, when the latter said, lifting up his finger as if with a

sudden recollection—

“I did have another look after Sarah again, though I didn’t tell you;

I’d a tender conscience about that pretty young woman. I didn’t find

her, but I found out her husband’s name, and I made a note of it. But

hang it, I lost my pocketbook. However, if I heard it, I should know it

again. I’ve got my faculties as if I was in my prime, but names wear

out, by Jove! Sometimes I’m no better than a confounded tax-paper

before the names are filled in. However, if I hear of her and her

family, you shall know, Nick. You’d like to do something for her, now

she’s your step-daughter.”

“Doubtless,” said Mr. Bulstrode, with the usual steady look of his

light-gray eyes; “though that might reduce my power of assisting you.”

As he walked out of the room, Raffles winked slowly at his back, and

then turned towards the window to watch the banker riding

away—virtually at his command. His lips first curled with a smile and

then opened with a short triumphant laugh.

“But what the deuce was the name?” he presently said, half aloud,

scratching his head, and wrinkling his brows horizontally. He had not

really cared or thought about this point of forgetfulness until it

occurred to him in his invention of annoyances for Bulstrode.

“It began with L; it was almost all l’s I fancy,” he went on, with a

sense that he was getting hold of the slippery name. But the hold was

too slight, and he soon got tired of this mental chase; for few men

were more impatient of private occupation or more in need of making

themselves continually heard than Mr. Raffles. He preferred using his

time in pleasant conversation with the bailiff and the housekeeper,

from whom he gathered as much as he wanted to know about Mr.

Bulstrode’s position in Middlemarch.

After all, however, there was a dull space of time which needed

relieving with bread and cheese and ale, and when he was seated alone

with these resources in the wainscoted parlor, he suddenly slapped his

knee, and exclaimed, “Ladislaw!” That action of memory which he had

tried to set going, and had abandoned in despair, had suddenly

completed itself without conscious effort—a common experience,

agreeable as a completed sneeze, even if the name remembered is of no

value. Raffles immediately took out his pocket-book, and wrote down the

name, not because he expected to use it, but merely for the sake of not

being at a loss if he ever did happen to want it. He was not going to

tell Bulstrode: there was no actual good in telling, and to a mind like

that of Mr. Raffles there is always probable good in a secret.

He was satisfied with his present success, and by three o’clock that

day he had taken up his portmanteau at the turnpike and mounted the

coach, relieving Mr. Bulstrode’s eyes of an ugly black spot on the

landscape at Stone Court, but not relieving him of the dread that the

black spot might reappear and become inseparable even from the vision

of his hearth.

BOOK VI.

THE WIDOW AND THE WIFE.

CHAPTER LIV.

“Negli occhi porta la mia donna Amore;

Per che si fa gentil ciò ch’ella mira:

Ov’ella passa, ogni uom ver lei si gira,

E cui saluta fa tremar lo core.

Sicchè, bassando il viso, tutto smore,

E d’ogni suo difetto allor sospira:

Fuggon dinanzi a lei Superbia ed Ira:

Aiutatemi, donne, a farle onore.

Ogni dolcezza, ogni pensiero umile

Nasce nel core a chi parlar la sente;

Ond’è beato chi prima la vide.

Quel ch’ella par quand’ un poco sorride,

Non si può dicer, nè tener a mente,

Si è nuovo miracolo gentile.”

—DANTE: \_La Vita Nuova\_.

By that delightful morning when the hay-ricks at Stone Court were

scenting the air quite impartially, as if Mr. Raffles had been a guest

worthy of finest incense, Dorothea had again taken up her abode at

Lowick Manor. After three months Freshitt had become rather oppressive:

to sit like a model for Saint Catherine looking rapturously at Celia’s

baby would not do for many hours in the day, and to remain in that

momentous babe’s presence with persistent disregard was a course that

could not have been tolerated in a childless sister. Dorothea would

have been capable of carrying baby joyfully for a mile if there had

been need, and of loving it the more tenderly for that labor; but to an

aunt who does not recognize her infant nephew as Bouddha, and has

nothing to do for him but to admire, his behavior is apt to appear

monotonous, and the interest of watching him exhaustible. This

possibility was quite hidden from Celia, who felt that Dorothea’s

childless widowhood fell in quite prettily with the birth of little

Arthur (baby was named after Mr. Brooke).

“Dodo is just the creature not to mind about having anything of her

own—children or anything!” said Celia to her husband. “And if she had

had a baby, it never could have been such a dear as Arthur. Could it,

James?

“Not if it had been like Casaubon,” said Sir James, conscious of some

indirectness in his answer, and of holding a strictly private opinion

as to the perfections of his first-born.

“No! just imagine! Really it was a mercy,” said Celia; “and I think it

is very nice for Dodo to be a widow. She can be just as fond of our

baby as if it were her own, and she can have as many notions of her own

as she likes.”

“It is a pity she was not a queen,” said the devout Sir James.

“But what should we have been then? We must have been something else,”

said Celia, objecting to so laborious a flight of imagination. “I like

her better as she is.”

Hence, when she found that Dorothea was making arrangements for her

final departure to Lowick, Celia raised her eyebrows with

disappointment, and in her quiet unemphatic way shot a needle-arrow of

sarcasm.

“What will you do at Lowick, Dodo? You say yourself there is nothing to

be done there: everybody is so clean and well off, it makes you quite

melancholy. And here you have been so happy going all about Tipton with

Mr. Garth into the worst backyards. And now uncle is abroad, you and

Mr. Garth can have it all your own way; and I am sure James does

everything you tell him.”

“I shall often come here, and I shall see how baby grows all the

better,” said Dorothea.

“But you will never see him washed,” said Celia; “and that is quite the

best part of the day.” She was almost pouting: it did seem to her very

hard in Dodo to go away from the baby when she might stay.

“Dear Kitty, I will come and stay all night on purpose,” said Dorothea;

“but I want to be alone now, and in my own home. I wish to know the

Farebrothers better, and to talk to Mr. Farebrother about what there is

to be done in Middlemarch.”

Dorothea’s native strength of will was no longer all converted into

resolute submission. She had a great yearning to be at Lowick, and was

simply determined to go, not feeling bound to tell all her reasons. But

every one around her disapproved. Sir James was much pained, and

offered that they should all migrate to Cheltenham for a few months

with the sacred ark, otherwise called a cradle: at that period a man

could hardly know what to propose if Cheltenham were rejected.

The Dowager Lady Chettam, just returned from a visit to her daughter in

town, wished, at least, that Mrs. Vigo should be written to, and

invited to accept the office of companion to Mrs. Casaubon: it was not

credible that Dorothea as a young widow would think of living alone in

the house at Lowick. Mrs. Vigo had been reader and secretary to royal

personages, and in point of knowledge and sentiments even Dorothea

could have nothing to object to her.

Mrs. Cadwallader said, privately, “You will certainly go mad in that

house alone, my dear. You will see visions. We have all got to exert

ourselves a little to keep sane, and call things by the same names as

other people call them by. To be sure, for younger sons and women who

have no money, it is a sort of provision to go mad: they are taken care

of then. But you must not run into that. I dare say you are a little

bored here with our good dowager; but think what a bore you might

become yourself to your fellow-creatures if you were always playing

tragedy queen and taking things sublimely. Sitting alone in that

library at Lowick you may fancy yourself ruling the weather; you must

get a few people round you who wouldn’t believe you if you told them.

That is a good lowering medicine.”

“I never called everything by the same name that all the people about

me did,” said Dorothea, stoutly.

“But I suppose you have found out your mistake, my dear,” said Mrs.

Cadwallader, “and that is a proof of sanity.”

Dorothea was aware of the sting, but it did not hurt her. “No,” she

said, “I still think that the greater part of the world is mistaken

about many things. Surely one may be sane and yet think so, since the

greater part of the world has often had to come round from its

opinion.”

Mrs. Cadwallader said no more on that point to Dorothea, but to her

husband she remarked, “It will be well for her to marry again as soon

as it is proper, if one could get her among the right people. Of course

the Chettams would not wish it. But I see clearly a husband is the best

thing to keep her in order. If we were not so poor I would invite Lord

Triton. He will be marquis some day, and there is no denying that she

would make a good marchioness: she looks handsomer than ever in her

mourning.”

“My dear Elinor, do let the poor woman alone. Such contrivances are of

no use,” said the easy Rector.

“No use? How are matches made, except by bringing men and women

together? And it is a shame that her uncle should have run away and

shut up the Grange just now. There ought to be plenty of eligible

matches invited to Freshitt and the Grange. Lord Triton is precisely

the man: full of plans for making the people happy in a soft-headed

sort of way. That would just suit Mrs. Casaubon.”

“Let Mrs. Casaubon choose for herself, Elinor.”

“That is the nonsense you wise men talk! How can she choose if she has

no variety to choose from? A woman’s choice usually means taking the

only man she can get. Mark my words, Humphrey. If her friends don’t

exert themselves, there will be a worse business than the Casaubon

business yet.”

“For heaven’s sake don’t touch on that topic, Elinor! It is a very sore

point with Sir James. He would be deeply offended if you entered on it

to him unnecessarily.”

“I have never entered on it,” said Mrs Cadwallader, opening her hands.

“Celia told me all about the will at the beginning, without any asking

of mine.”

“Yes, yes; but they want the thing hushed up, and I understand that the

young fellow is going out of the neighborhood.”

Mrs. Cadwallader said nothing, but gave her husband three significant

nods, with a very sarcastic expression in her dark eyes.

Dorothea quietly persisted in spite of remonstrance and persuasion. So

by the end of June the shutters were all opened at Lowick Manor, and

the morning gazed calmly into the library, shining on the rows of

note-books as it shines on the weary waste planted with huge stones,

the mute memorial of a forgotten faith; and the evening laden with

roses entered silently into the blue-green boudoir where Dorothea chose

oftenest to sit. At first she walked into every room, questioning the

eighteen months of her married life, and carrying on her thoughts as if

they were a speech to be heard by her husband. Then, she lingered in

the library and could not be at rest till she had carefully ranged all

the note-books as she imagined that he would wish to see them, in

orderly sequence. The pity which had been the restraining compelling

motive in her life with him still clung about his image, even while she

remonstrated with him in indignant thought and told him that he was

unjust. One little act of hers may perhaps be smiled at as

superstitious. The Synoptical Tabulation for the use of Mrs. Casaubon,

she carefully enclosed and sealed, writing within the envelope, “I

could not use it. Do you not see now that I could not submit my soul to

yours, by working hopelessly at what I have no belief in—Dorothea?”

Then she deposited the paper in her own desk.

That silent colloquy was perhaps only the more earnest because

underneath and through it all there was always the deep longing which

had really determined her to come to Lowick. The longing was to see

Will Ladislaw. She did not know any good that could come of their

meeting: she was helpless; her hands had been tied from making up to

him for any unfairness in his lot. But her soul thirsted to see him.

How could it be otherwise? If a princess in the days of enchantment had

seen a four-footed creature from among those which live in herds come

to her once and again with a human gaze which rested upon her with

choice and beseeching, what would she think of in her journeying, what

would she look for when the herds passed her? Surely for the gaze which

had found her, and which she would know again. Life would be no better

than candle-light tinsel and daylight rubbish if our spirits were not

touched by what has been, to issues of longing and constancy. It was

true that Dorothea wanted to know the Farebrothers better, and

especially to talk to the new rector, but also true that remembering

what Lydgate had told her about Will Ladislaw and little Miss Noble,

she counted on Will’s coming to Lowick to see the Farebrother family.

The very first Sunday, \_before\_ she entered the church, she saw him as

she had seen him the last time she was there, alone in the clergyman’s

pew; but \_when\_ she entered his figure was gone.

In the week-days when she went to see the ladies at the Rectory, she

listened in vain for some word that they might let fall about Will; but

it seemed to her that Mrs. Farebrother talked of every one else in the

neighborhood and out of it.

“Probably some of Mr. Farebrother’s Middlemarch hearers may follow him

to Lowick sometimes. Do you not think so?” said Dorothea, rather

despising herself for having a secret motive in asking the question.

“If they are wise they will, Mrs. Casaubon,” said the old lady. “I see

that you set a right value on my son’s preaching. His grandfather on my

side was an excellent clergyman, but his father was in the law:—most

exemplary and honest nevertheless, which is a reason for our never

being rich. They say Fortune is a woman and capricious. But sometimes

she is a good woman and gives to those who merit, which has been the

case with you, Mrs. Casaubon, who have given a living to my son.”

Mrs. Farebrother recurred to her knitting with a dignified satisfaction

in her neat little effort at oratory, but this was not what Dorothea

wanted to hear. Poor thing! she did not even know whether Will Ladislaw

was still at Middlemarch, and there was no one whom she dared to ask,

unless it were Lydgate. But just now she could not see Lydgate without

sending for him or going to seek him. Perhaps Will Ladislaw, having

heard of that strange ban against him left by Mr. Casaubon, had felt it

better that he and she should not meet again, and perhaps she was wrong

to wish for a meeting that others might find many good reasons against.

Still “I do wish it” came at the end of those wise reflections as

naturally as a sob after holding the breath. And the meeting did

happen, but in a formal way quite unexpected by her.

One morning, about eleven, Dorothea was seated in her boudoir with a

map of the land attached to the manor and other papers before her,

which were to help her in making an exact statement for herself of her

income and affairs. She had not yet applied herself to her work, but

was seated with her hands folded on her lap, looking out along the

avenue of limes to the distant fields. Every leaf was at rest in the

sunshine, the familiar scene was changeless, and seemed to represent

the prospect of her life, full of motiveless ease—motiveless, if her

own energy could not seek out reasons for ardent action. The widow’s

cap of those times made an oval frame for the face, and had a crown

standing up; the dress was an experiment in the utmost laying on of

crape; but this heavy solemnity of clothing made her face look all the

younger, with its recovered bloom, and the sweet, inquiring candor of

her eyes.

Her reverie was broken by Tantripp, who came to say that Mr. Ladislaw

was below, and begged permission to see Madam if it were not too early.

“I will see him,” said Dorothea, rising immediately. “Let him be shown

into the drawing-room.”

The drawing-room was the most neutral room in the house to her—the one

least associated with the trials of her married life: the damask

matched the wood-work, which was all white and gold; there were two

tall mirrors and tables with nothing on them—in brief, it was a room

where you had no reason for sitting in one place rather than in

another. It was below the boudoir, and had also a bow-window looking

out on the avenue. But when Pratt showed Will Ladislaw into it the

window was open; and a winged visitor, buzzing in and out now and then

without minding the furniture, made the room look less formal and

uninhabited.

“Glad to see you here again, sir,” said Pratt, lingering to adjust a

blind.

“I am only come to say good-by, Pratt,” said Will, who wished even the

butler to know that he was too proud to hang about Mrs. Casaubon now

she was a rich widow.

“Very sorry to hear it, sir,” said Pratt, retiring. Of course, as a

servant who was to be told nothing, he knew the fact of which Ladislaw

was still ignorant, and had drawn his inferences; indeed, had not

differed from his betrothed Tantripp when she said, “Your master was as

jealous as a fiend—and no reason. Madam would look higher than Mr.

Ladislaw, else I don’t know her. Mrs. Cadwallader’s maid says there’s a

lord coming who is to marry her when the mourning’s over.”

There were not many moments for Will to walk about with his hat in his

hand before Dorothea entered. The meeting was very different from that

first meeting in Rome when Will had been embarrassed and Dorothea calm.

This time he felt miserable but determined, while she was in a state of

agitation which could not be hidden. Just outside the door she had felt

that this longed-for meeting was after all too difficult, and when she

saw Will advancing towards her, the deep blush which was rare in her

came with painful suddenness. Neither of them knew how it was, but

neither of them spoke. She gave her hand for a moment, and then they

went to sit down near the window, she on one settee and he on another

opposite. Will was peculiarly uneasy: it seemed to him not like

Dorothea that the mere fact of her being a widow should cause such a

change in her manner of receiving him; and he knew of no other

condition which could have affected their previous relation to each

other—except that, as his imagination at once told him, her friends

might have been poisoning her mind with their suspicions of him.

“I hope I have not presumed too much in calling,” said Will; “I could

not bear to leave the neighborhood and begin a new life without seeing

you to say good-by.”

“Presumed? Surely not. I should have thought it unkind if you had not

wished to see me,” said Dorothea, her habit of speaking with perfect

genuineness asserting itself through all her uncertainty and agitation.

“Are you going away immediately?”

“Very soon, I think. I intend to go to town and eat my dinners as a

barrister, since, they say, that is the preparation for all public

business. There will be a great deal of political work to be done

by-and-by, and I mean to try and do some of it. Other men have managed

to win an honorable position for themselves without family or money.”

“And that will make it all the more honorable,” said Dorothea,

ardently. “Besides, you have so many talents. I have heard from my

uncle how well you speak in public, so that every one is sorry when you

leave off, and how clearly you can explain things. And you care that

justice should be done to every one. I am so glad. When we were in

Rome, I thought you only cared for poetry and art, and the things that

adorn life for us who are well off. But now I know you think about the

rest of the world.”

While she was speaking Dorothea had lost her personal embarrassment,

and had become like her former self. She looked at Will with a direct

glance, full of delighted confidence.

“You approve of my going away for years, then, and never coming here

again till I have made myself of some mark in the world?” said Will,

trying hard to reconcile the utmost pride with the utmost effort to get

an expression of strong feeling from Dorothea.

She was not aware how long it was before she answered. She had turned

her head and was looking out of the window on the rose-bushes, which

seemed to have in them the summers of all the years when Will would be

away. This was not judicious behavior. But Dorothea never thought of

studying her manners: she thought only of bowing to a sad necessity

which divided her from Will. Those first words of his about his

intentions had seemed to make everything clear to her: he knew, she

supposed, all about Mr. Casaubon’s final conduct in relation to him,

and it had come to him with the same sort of shock as to herself. He

had never felt more than friendship for her—had never had anything in

his mind to justify what she felt to be her husband’s outrage on the

feelings of both: and that friendship he still felt. Something which

may be called an inward silent sob had gone on in Dorothea before she

said with a pure voice, just trembling in the last words as if only

from its liquid flexibility—

“Yes, it must be right for you to do as you say. I shall be very happy

when I hear that you have made your value felt. But you must have

patience. It will perhaps be a long while.”

Will never quite knew how it was that he saved himself from falling

down at her feet, when the “long while” came forth with its gentle

tremor. He used to say that the horrible hue and surface of her crape

dress was most likely the sufficient controlling force. He sat still,

however, and only said—

“I shall never hear from you. And you will forget all about me.”

“No,” said Dorothea, “I shall never forget you. I have never forgotten

any one whom I once knew. My life has never been crowded, and seems not

likely to be so. And I have a great deal of space for memory at Lowick,

haven’t I?” She smiled.

“Good God!” Will burst out passionately, rising, with his hat still in

his hand, and walking away to a marble table, where he suddenly turned

and leaned his back against it. The blood had mounted to his face and

neck, and he looked almost angry. It had seemed to him as if they were

like two creatures slowly turning to marble in each other’s presence,

while their hearts were conscious and their eyes were yearning. But

there was no help for it. It should never be true of him that in this

meeting to which he had come with bitter resolution he had ended by a

confession which might be interpreted into asking for her fortune.

Moreover, it was actually true that he was fearful of the effect which

such confessions might have on Dorothea herself.

She looked at him from that distance in some trouble, imagining that

there might have been an offence in her words. But all the while there

was a current of thought in her about his probable want of money, and

the impossibility of her helping him. If her uncle had been at home,

something might have been done through him! It was this preoccupation

with the hardship of Will’s wanting money, while she had what ought to

have been his share, which led her to say, seeing that he remained

silent and looked away from her—

“I wonder whether you would like to have that miniature which hangs

up-stairs—I mean that beautiful miniature of your grandmother. I think

it is not right for me to keep it, if you would wish to have it. It is

wonderfully like you.”

“You are very good,” said Will, irritably. “No; I don’t mind about it.

It is not very consoling to have one’s own likeness. It would be more

consoling if others wanted to have it.”

“I thought you would like to cherish her memory—I thought—” Dorothea

broke off an instant, her imagination suddenly warning her away from

Aunt Julia’s history—“you would surely like to have the miniature as a

family memorial.”

“Why should I have that, when I have nothing else! A man with only a

portmanteau for his stowage must keep his memorials in his head.”

Will spoke at random: he was merely venting his petulance; it was a

little too exasperating to have his grandmother’s portrait offered him

at that moment. But to Dorothea’s feeling his words had a peculiar

sting. She rose and said with a touch of indignation as well as

hauteur—

“You are much the happier of us two, Mr. Ladislaw, to have nothing.”

Will was startled. Whatever the words might be, the tone seemed like a

dismissal; and quitting his leaning posture, he walked a little way

towards her. Their eyes met, but with a strange questioning gravity.

Something was keeping their minds aloof, and each was left to

conjecture what was in the other. Will had really never thought of

himself as having a claim of inheritance on the property which was held

by Dorothea, and would have required a narrative to make him understand

her present feeling.

“I never felt it a misfortune to have nothing till now,” he said. “But

poverty may be as bad as leprosy, if it divides us from what we most

care for.”

The words cut Dorothea to the heart, and made her relent. She answered

in a tone of sad fellowship.

“Sorrow comes in so many ways. Two years ago I had no notion of that—I

mean of the unexpected way in which trouble comes, and ties our hands,

and makes us silent when we long to speak. I used to despise women a

little for not shaping their lives more, and doing better things. I was

very fond of doing as I liked, but I have almost given it up,” she

ended, smiling playfully.

“I have not given up doing as I like, but I can very seldom do it,”

said Will. He was standing two yards from her with his mind full of

contradictory desires and resolves—desiring some unmistakable proof

that she loved him, and yet dreading the position into which such a

proof might bring him. “The thing one most longs for may be surrounded

with conditions that would be intolerable.”

At this moment Pratt entered and said, “Sir James Chettam is in the

library, madam.”

“Ask Sir James to come in here,” said Dorothea, immediately. It was as

if the same electric shock had passed through her and Will. Each of

them felt proudly resistant, and neither looked at the other, while

they awaited Sir James’s entrance.

After shaking hands with Dorothea, he bowed as slightly as possible to

Ladislaw, who repaid the slightness exactly, and then going towards

Dorothea, said—

“I must say good-by, Mrs. Casaubon; and probably for a long while.”

Dorothea put out her hand and said her good-by cordially. The sense

that Sir James was depreciating Will, and behaving rudely to him,

roused her resolution and dignity: there was no touch of confusion in

her manner. And when Will had left the room, she looked with such calm

self-possession at Sir James, saying, “How is Celia?” that he was

obliged to behave as if nothing had annoyed him. And what would be the

use of behaving otherwise? Indeed, Sir James shrank with so much

dislike from the association even in thought of Dorothea with Ladislaw

as her possible lover, that he would himself have wished to avoid an

outward show of displeasure which would have recognized the

disagreeable possibility. If any one had asked him why he shrank in

that way, I am not sure that he would at first have said anything

fuller or more precise than “\_That\_ Ladislaw!”—though on reflection he

might have urged that Mr. Casaubon’s codicil, barring Dorothea’s

marriage with Will, except under a penalty, was enough to cast

unfitness over any relation at all between them. His aversion was all

the stronger because he felt himself unable to interfere.

But Sir James was a power in a way unguessed by himself. Entering at

that moment, he was an incorporation of the strongest reasons through

which Will’s pride became a repellent force, keeping him asunder from

Dorothea.

CHAPTER LV.

Hath she her faults? I would you had them too.

They are the fruity must of soundest wine;

Or say, they are regenerating fire

Such as hath turned the dense black element

Into a crystal pathway for the sun.

If youth is the season of hope, it is often so only in the sense that

our elders are hopeful about us; for no age is so apt as youth to think

its emotions, partings, and resolves are the last of their kind. Each

crisis seems final, simply because it is new. We are told that the

oldest inhabitants in Peru do not cease to be agitated by the

earthquakes, but they probably see beyond each shock, and reflect that

there are plenty more to come.

To Dorothea, still in that time of youth when the eyes with their long

full lashes look out after their rain of tears unsoiled and unwearied

as a freshly opened passion-flower, that morning’s parting with Will

Ladislaw seemed to be the close of their personal relations. He was

going away into the distance of unknown years, and if ever he came back

he would be another man. The actual state of his mind—his proud resolve

to give the lie beforehand to any suspicion that he would play the

needy adventurer seeking a rich woman—lay quite out of her imagination,

and she had interpreted all his behavior easily enough by her

supposition that Mr. Casaubon’s codicil seemed to him, as it did to

her, a gross and cruel interdict on any active friendship between them.

Their young delight in speaking to each other, and saying what no one

else would care to hear, was forever ended, and become a treasure of

the past. For this very reason she dwelt on it without inward check.

That unique happiness too was dead, and in its shadowed silent chamber

she might vent the passionate grief which she herself wondered at. For

the first time she took down the miniature from the wall and kept it

before her, liking to blend the woman who had been too hardly judged

with the grandson whom her own heart and judgment defended. Can any one

who has rejoiced in woman’s tenderness think it a reproach to her that

she took the little oval picture in her palm and made a bed for it

there, and leaned her cheek upon it, as if that would soothe the

creatures who had suffered unjust condemnation? She did not know then

that it was Love who had come to her briefly, as in a dream before

awaking, with the hues of morning on his wings—that it was Love to whom

she was sobbing her farewell as his image was banished by the blameless

rigor of irresistible day. She only felt that there was something

irrevocably amiss and lost in her lot, and her thoughts about the

future were the more readily shapen into resolve. Ardent souls, ready

to construct their coming lives, are apt to commit themselves to the

fulfilment of their own visions.

One day that she went to Freshitt to fulfil her promise of staying all

night and seeing baby washed, Mrs. Cadwallader came to dine, the Rector

being gone on a fishing excursion. It was a warm evening, and even in

the delightful drawing-room, where the fine old turf sloped from the

open window towards a lilied pool and well-planted mounds, the heat was

enough to make Celia in her white muslin and light curls reflect with

pity on what Dodo must feel in her black dress and close cap. But this

was not until some episodes with baby were over, and had left her mind

at leisure. She had seated herself and taken up a fan for some time

before she said, in her quiet guttural—

“Dear Dodo, do throw off that cap. I am sure your dress must make you

feel ill.”

“I am so used to the cap—it has become a sort of shell,” said Dorothea,

smiling. “I feel rather bare and exposed when it is off.”

“I must see you without it; it makes us all warm,” said Celia, throwing

down her fan, and going to Dorothea. It was a pretty picture to see

this little lady in white muslin unfastening the widow’s cap from her

more majestic sister, and tossing it on to a chair. Just as the coils

and braids of dark-brown hair had been set free, Sir James entered the

room. He looked at the released head, and said, “Ah!” in a tone of

satisfaction.

“It was I who did it, James,” said Celia. “Dodo need not make such a

slavery of her mourning; she need not wear that cap any more among her

friends.”

“My dear Celia,” said Lady Chettam, “a widow must wear her mourning at

least a year.”

“Not if she marries again before the end of it,” said Mrs. Cadwallader,

who had some pleasure in startling her good friend the Dowager. Sir

James was annoyed, and leaned forward to play with Celia’s Maltese dog.

“That is very rare, I hope,” said Lady Chettam, in a tone intended to

guard against such events. “No friend of ours ever committed herself in

that way except Mrs. Beevor, and it was very painful to Lord Grinsell

when she did so. Her first husband was objectionable, which made it the

greater wonder. And severely she was punished for it. They said Captain

Beevor dragged her about by the hair, and held up loaded pistols at

her.”

“Oh, if she took the wrong man!” said Mrs. Cadwallader, who was in a

decidedly wicked mood. “Marriage is always bad then, first or second.

Priority is a poor recommendation in a husband if he has got no other.

I would rather have a good second husband than an indifferent first.”

“My dear, your clever tongue runs away with you,” said Lady Chettam. “I

am sure you would be the last woman to marry again prematurely, if our

dear Rector were taken away.”

“Oh, I make no vows; it might be a necessary economy. It is lawful to

marry again, I suppose; else we might as well be Hindoos instead of

Christians. Of course if a woman accepts the wrong man, she must take

the consequences, and one who does it twice over deserves her fate. But

if she can marry blood, beauty, and bravery—the sooner the better.”

“I think the subject of our conversation is very ill-chosen,” said Sir

James, with a look of disgust. “Suppose we change it.”

“Not on my account, Sir James,” said Dorothea, determined not to lose

the opportunity of freeing herself from certain oblique references to

excellent matches. “If you are speaking on my behalf, I can assure you

that no question can be more indifferent and impersonal to me than

second marriage. It is no more to me than if you talked of women going

fox-hunting: whether it is admirable in them or not, I shall not follow

them. Pray let Mrs. Cadwallader amuse herself on that subject as much

as on any other.”

“My dear Mrs. Casaubon,” said Lady Chettam, in her stateliest way, “you

do not, I hope, think there was any allusion to you in my mentioning

Mrs. Beevor. It was only an instance that occurred to me. She was

step-daughter to Lord Grinsell: he married Mrs. Teveroy for his second

wife. There could be no possible allusion to you.”

“Oh no,” said Celia. “Nobody chose the subject; it all came out of

Dodo’s cap. Mrs. Cadwallader only said what was quite true. A woman

could not be married in a widow’s cap, James.”

“Hush, my dear!” said Mrs. Cadwallader. “I will not offend again. I

will not even refer to Dido or Zenobia. Only what are we to talk about?

I, for my part, object to the discussion of Human Nature, because that

is the nature of rectors’ wives.”

Later in the evening, after Mrs. Cadwallader was gone, Celia said

privately to Dorothea, “Really, Dodo, taking your cap off made you like

yourself again in more ways than one. You spoke up just as you used to

do, when anything was said to displease you. But I could hardly make

out whether it was James that you thought wrong, or Mrs. Cadwallader.”

“Neither,” said Dorothea. “James spoke out of delicacy to me, but he

was mistaken in supposing that I minded what Mrs. Cadwallader said. I

should only mind if there were a law obliging me to take any piece of

blood and beauty that she or anybody else recommended.”

“But you know, Dodo, if you ever did marry, it would be all the better

to have blood and beauty,” said Celia, reflecting that Mr. Casaubon had

not been richly endowed with those gifts, and that it would be well to

caution Dorothea in time.

“Don’t be anxious, Kitty; I have quite other thoughts about my life. I

shall never marry again,” said Dorothea, touching her sister’s chin,

and looking at her with indulgent affection. Celia was nursing her

baby, and Dorothea had come to say good-night to her.

“Really—quite?” said Celia. “Not anybody at all—if he were very

wonderful indeed?”

Dorothea shook her head slowly. “Not anybody at all. I have delightful

plans. I should like to take a great deal of land, and drain it, and

make a little colony, where everybody should work, and all the work

should be done well. I should know every one of the people and be their

friend. I am going to have great consultations with Mr. Garth: he can

tell me almost everything I want to know.”

“Then you \_will\_ be happy, if you have a plan, Dodo?” said Celia.

“Perhaps little Arthur will like plans when he grows up, and then he

can help you.”

Sir James was informed that same night that Dorothea was really quite

set against marrying anybody at all, and was going to take to “all

sorts of plans,” just like what she used to have. Sir James made no

remark. To his secret feeling there was something repulsive in a

woman’s second marriage, and no match would prevent him from feeling it

a sort of desecration for Dorothea. He was aware that the world would

regard such a sentiment as preposterous, especially in relation to a

woman of one-and-twenty; the practice of “the world” being to treat of

a young widow’s second marriage as certain and probably near, and to

smile with meaning if the widow acts accordingly. But if Dorothea did

choose to espouse her solitude, he felt that the resolution would well

become her.

CHAPTER LVI.

“How happy is he born and taught

That serveth not another’s will;

Whose armor is his honest thought,

And simple truth his only skill!

. . . . . . .

This man is freed from servile bands

Of hope to rise or fear to fall;

Lord of himself though not of lands;

And having nothing yet hath all.”

—SIR HENRY WOTTON.

Dorothea’s confidence in Caleb Garth’s knowledge, which had begun on

her hearing that he approved of her cottages, had grown fast during her

stay at Freshitt, Sir James having induced her to take rides over the

two estates in company with himself and Caleb, who quite returned her

admiration, and told his wife that Mrs. Casaubon had a head for

business most uncommon in a woman. It must be remembered that by

“business” Caleb never meant money transactions, but the skilful

application of labor.

“Most uncommon!” repeated Caleb. “She said a thing I often used to

think myself when I was a lad:—‘Mr. Garth, I should like to feel, if I

lived to be old, that I had improved a great piece of land and built a

great many good cottages, because the work is of a healthy kind while

it is being done, and after it is done, men are the better for it.’

Those were the very words: she sees into things in that way.”

“But womanly, I hope,” said Mrs. Garth, half suspecting that Mrs.

Casaubon might not hold the true principle of subordination.

“Oh, you can’t think!” said Caleb, shaking his head. “You would like to

hear her speak, Susan. She speaks in such plain words, and a voice like

music. Bless me! it reminds me of bits in the ‘Messiah’—‘and

straightway there appeared a multitude of the heavenly host, praising

God and saying;’ it has a tone with it that satisfies your ear.”

Caleb was very fond of music, and when he could afford it went to hear

an oratorio that came within his reach, returning from it with a

profound reverence for this mighty structure of tones, which made him

sit meditatively, looking on the floor and throwing much unutterable

language into his outstretched hands.

With this good understanding between them, it was natural that Dorothea

asked Mr. Garth to undertake any business connected with the three

farms and the numerous tenements attached to Lowick Manor; indeed, his

expectation of getting work for two was being fast fulfilled. As he

said, “Business breeds.” And one form of business which was beginning

to breed just then was the construction of railways. A projected line

was to run through Lowick parish where the cattle had hitherto grazed

in a peace unbroken by astonishment; and thus it happened that the

infant struggles of the railway system entered into the affairs of

Caleb Garth, and determined the course of this history with regard to

two persons who were dear to him. The submarine railway may have its

difficulties; but the bed of the sea is not divided among various

landed proprietors with claims for damages not only measurable but

sentimental. In the hundred to which Middlemarch belonged railways were

as exciting a topic as the Reform Bill or the imminent horrors of

Cholera, and those who held the most decided views on the subject were

women and landholders. Women both old and young regarded travelling by

steam as presumptuous and dangerous, and argued against it by saying

that nothing should induce them to get into a railway carriage; while

proprietors, differing from each other in their arguments as much as

Mr. Solomon Featherstone differed from Lord Medlicote, were yet

unanimous in the opinion that in selling land, whether to the Enemy of

mankind or to a company obliged to purchase, these pernicious agencies

must be made to pay a very high price to landowners for permission to

injure mankind.

But the slower wits, such as Mr. Solomon and Mrs. Waule, who both

occupied land of their own, took a long time to arrive at this

conclusion, their minds halting at the vivid conception of what it

would be to cut the Big Pasture in two, and turn it into three-cornered

bits, which would be “nohow;” while accommodation-bridges and high

payments were remote and incredible.

“The cows will all cast their calves, brother,” said Mrs. Waule, in a

tone of deep melancholy, “if the railway comes across the Near Close;

and I shouldn’t wonder at the mare too, if she was in foal. It’s a poor

tale if a widow’s property is to be spaded away, and the law say

nothing to it. What’s to hinder ’em from cutting right and left if they

begin? It’s well known, \_I\_ can’t fight.”

“The best way would be to say nothing, and set somebody on to send ’em

away with a flea in their ear, when they came spying and measuring,”

said Solomon. “Folks did that about Brassing, by what I can understand.

It’s all a pretence, if the truth was known, about their being forced

to take one way. Let ’em go cutting in another parish. And I don’t

believe in any pay to make amends for bringing a lot of ruffians to

trample your crops. Where’s a company’s pocket?”

“Brother Peter, God forgive him, got money out of a company,” said Mrs.

Waule. “But that was for the manganese. That wasn’t for railways to

blow you to pieces right and left.”

“Well, there’s this to be said, Jane,” Mr. Solomon concluded, lowering

his voice in a cautious manner—“the more spokes we put in their wheel,

the more they’ll pay us to let ’em go on, if they must come whether or

not.”

This reasoning of Mr. Solomon’s was perhaps less thorough than he

imagined, his cunning bearing about the same relation to the course of

railways as the cunning of a diplomatist bears to the general chill or

catarrh of the solar system. But he set about acting on his views in a

thoroughly diplomatic manner, by stimulating suspicion. His side of

Lowick was the most remote from the village, and the houses of the

laboring people were either lone cottages or were collected in a hamlet

called Frick, where a water-mill and some stone-pits made a little

centre of slow, heavy-shouldered industry.

In the absence of any precise idea as to what railways were, public

opinion in Frick was against them; for the human mind in that grassy

corner had not the proverbial tendency to admire the unknown, holding

rather that it was likely to be against the poor man, and that

suspicion was the only wise attitude with regard to it. Even the rumor

of Reform had not yet excited any millennial expectations in Frick,

there being no definite promise in it, as of gratuitous grains to

fatten Hiram Ford’s pig, or of a publican at the “Weights and Scales”

who would brew beer for nothing, or of an offer on the part of the

three neighboring farmers to raise wages during winter. And without

distinct good of this kind in its promises, Reform seemed on a footing

with the bragging of pedlers, which was a hint for distrust to every

knowing person. The men of Frick were not ill-fed, and were less given

to fanaticism than to a strong muscular suspicion; less inclined to

believe that they were peculiarly cared for by heaven, than to regard

heaven itself as rather disposed to take them in—a disposition

observable in the weather.

Thus the mind of Frick was exactly of the sort for Mr. Solomon

Featherstone to work upon, he having more plenteous ideas of the same

order, with a suspicion of heaven and earth which was better fed and

more entirely at leisure. Solomon was overseer of the roads at that

time, and on his slow-paced cob often took his rounds by Frick to look

at the workmen getting the stones there, pausing with a mysterious

deliberation, which might have misled you into supposing that he had

some other reason for staying than the mere want of impulse to move.

After looking for a long while at any work that was going on, he would

raise his eyes a little and look at the horizon; finally he would shake

his bridle, touch his horse with the whip, and get it to move slowly

onward. The hour-hand of a clock was quick by comparison with Mr.

Solomon, who had an agreeable sense that he could afford to be slow. He

was in the habit of pausing for a cautious, vaguely designing chat with

every hedger or ditcher on his way, and was especially willing to

listen even to news which he had heard before, feeling himself at an

advantage over all narrators in partially disbelieving them. One day,

however, he got into a dialogue with Hiram Ford, a wagoner, in which he

himself contributed information. He wished to know whether Hiram had

seen fellows with staves and instruments spying about: they called

themselves railroad people, but there was no telling what they were or

what they meant to do. The least they pretended was that they were

going to cut Lowick Parish into sixes and sevens.

“Why, there’ll be no stirrin’ from one pla-ace to another,” said Hiram,

thinking of his wagon and horses.

“Not a bit,” said Mr. Solomon. “And cutting up fine land such as this

parish! Let ’em go into Tipton, say I. But there’s no knowing what

there is at the bottom of it. Traffic is what they put for’ard; but

it’s to do harm to the land and the poor man in the long-run.”

“Why, they’re Lunnon chaps, I reckon,” said Hiram, who had a dim notion

of London as a centre of hostility to the country.

“Ay, to be sure. And in some parts against Brassing, by what I’ve heard

say, the folks fell on ’em when they were spying, and broke their

peep-holes as they carry, and drove ’em away, so as they knew better

than come again.”

“It war good foon, I’d be bound,” said Hiram, whose fun was much

restricted by circumstances.

“Well, I wouldn’t meddle with ’em myself,” said Solomon. “But some say

this country’s seen its best days, and the sign is, as it’s being

overrun with these fellows trampling right and left, and wanting to cut

it up into railways; and all for the big traffic to swallow up the

little, so as there shan’t be a team left on the land, nor a whip to

crack.”

“I’ll crack \_my\_ whip about their ear’n, afore they bring it to that,

though,” said Hiram, while Mr. Solomon, shaking his bridle, moved

onward.

Nettle-seed needs no digging. The ruin of this countryside by railroads

was discussed, not only at the “Weights and Scales,” but in the

hay-field, where the muster of working hands gave opportunities for

talk such as were rarely had through the rural year.

One morning, not long after that interview between Mr. Farebrother and

Mary Garth, in which she confessed to him her feeling for Fred Vincy,

it happened that her father had some business which took him to

Yoddrell’s farm in the direction of Frick: it was to measure and value

an outlying piece of land belonging to Lowick Manor, which Caleb

expected to dispose of advantageously for Dorothea (it must be

confessed that his bias was towards getting the best possible terms

from railroad companies). He put up his gig at Yoddrell’s, and in

walking with his assistant and measuring-chain to the scene of his

work, he encountered the party of the company’s agents, who were

adjusting their spirit-level. After a little chat he left them,

observing that by-and-by they would reach him again where he was going

to measure. It was one of those gray mornings after light rains, which

become delicious about twelve o’clock, when the clouds part a little,

and the scent of the earth is sweet along the lanes and by the

hedgerows.

The scent would have been sweeter to Fred Vincy, who was coming along

the lanes on horseback, if his mind had not been worried by

unsuccessful efforts to imagine what he was to do, with his father on

one side expecting him straightway to enter the Church, with Mary on

the other threatening to forsake him if he did enter it, and with the

working-day world showing no eager need whatever of a young gentleman

without capital and generally unskilled. It was the harder to Fred’s

disposition because his father, satisfied that he was no longer

rebellious, was in good humor with him, and had sent him on this

pleasant ride to see after some greyhounds. Even when he had fixed on

what he should do, there would be the task of telling his father. But

it must be admitted that the fixing, which had to come first, was the

more difficult task:—what secular avocation on earth was there for a

young man (whose friends could not get him an “appointment”) which was

at once gentlemanly, lucrative, and to be followed without special

knowledge? Riding along the lanes by Frick in this mood, and slackening

his pace while he reflected whether he should venture to go round by

Lowick Parsonage to call on Mary, he could see over the hedges from one

field to another. Suddenly a noise roused his attention, and on the far

side of a field on his left hand he could see six or seven men in

smock-frocks with hay-forks in their hands making an offensive approach

towards the four railway agents who were facing them, while Caleb Garth

and his assistant were hastening across the field to join the

threatened group. Fred, delayed a few moments by having to find the

gate, could not gallop up to the spot before the party in smock-frocks,

whose work of turning the hay had not been too pressing after

swallowing their mid-day beer, were driving the men in coats before

them with their hay-forks; while Caleb Garth’s assistant, a lad of

seventeen, who had snatched up the spirit-level at Caleb’s order, had

been knocked down and seemed to be lying helpless. The coated men had

the advantage as runners, and Fred covered their retreat by getting in

front of the smock-frocks and charging them suddenly enough to throw

their chase into confusion. “What do you confounded fools mean?”

shouted Fred, pursuing the divided group in a zigzag, and cutting right

and left with his whip. “I’ll swear to every one of you before the

magistrate. You’ve knocked the lad down and killed him, for what I

know. You’ll every one of you be hanged at the next assizes, if you

don’t mind,” said Fred, who afterwards laughed heartily as he

remembered his own phrases.

The laborers had been driven through the gate-way into their hay-field,

and Fred had checked his horse, when Hiram Ford, observing himself at a

safe challenging distance, turned back and shouted a defiance which he

did not know to be Homeric.

“Yo’re a coward, yo are. Yo git off your horse, young measter, and I’ll

have a round wi’ ye, I wull. Yo daredn’t come on wi’out your hoss an’

whip. I’d soon knock the breath out on ye, I would.”

“Wait a minute, and I’ll come back presently, and have a round with you

all in turn, if you like,” said Fred, who felt confidence in his power

of boxing with his dearly beloved brethren. But just now he wanted to

hasten back to Caleb and the prostrate youth.

The lad’s ankle was strained, and he was in much pain from it, but he

was no further hurt, and Fred placed him on the horse that he might

ride to Yoddrell’s and be taken care of there.

“Let them put the horse in the stable, and tell the surveyors they can

come back for their traps,” said Fred. “The ground is clear now.”

“No, no,” said Caleb, “here’s a breakage. They’ll have to give up for

to-day, and it will be as well. Here, take the things before you on the

horse, Tom. They’ll see you coming, and they’ll turn back.”

“I’m glad I happened to be here at the right moment, Mr. Garth,” said

Fred, as Tom rode away. “No knowing what might have happened if the

cavalry had not come up in time.”

“Ay, ay, it was lucky,” said Caleb, speaking rather absently, and

looking towards the spot where he had been at work at the moment of

interruption. “But—deuce take it—this is what comes of men being

fools—I’m hindered of my day’s work. I can’t get along without somebody

to help me with the measuring-chain. However!” He was beginning to move

towards the spot with a look of vexation, as if he had forgotten Fred’s

presence, but suddenly he turned round and said quickly, “What have you

got to do to-day, young fellow?”

“Nothing, Mr. Garth. I’ll help you with pleasure—can I?” said Fred,

with a sense that he should be courting Mary when he was helping her

father.

“Well, you mustn’t mind stooping and getting hot.”

“I don’t mind anything. Only I want to go first and have a round with

that hulky fellow who turned to challenge me. It would be a good lesson

for him. I shall not be five minutes.”

“Nonsense!” said Caleb, with his most peremptory intonation. “I shall

go and speak to the men myself. It’s all ignorance. Somebody has been

telling them lies. The poor fools don’t know any better.”

“I shall go with you, then,” said Fred.

“No, no; stay where you are. I don’t want your young blood. I can take

care of myself.”

Caleb was a powerful man and knew little of any fear except the fear of

hurting others and the fear of having to speechify. But he felt it his

duty at this moment to try and give a little harangue. There was a

striking mixture in him—which came from his having always been a

hard-working man himself—of rigorous notions about workmen and

practical indulgence towards them. To do a good day’s work and to do it

well, he held to be part of their welfare, as it was the chief part of

his own happiness; but he had a strong sense of fellowship with them.

When he advanced towards the laborers they had not gone to work again,

but were standing in that form of rural grouping which consists in each

turning a shoulder towards the other, at a distance of two or three

yards. They looked rather sulkily at Caleb, who walked quickly with one

hand in his pocket and the other thrust between the buttons of his

waistcoat, and had his every-day mild air when he paused among them.

“Why, my lads, how’s this?” he began, taking as usual to brief phrases,

which seemed pregnant to himself, because he had many thoughts lying

under them, like the abundant roots of a plant that just manages to

peep above the water. “How came you to make such a mistake as this?

Somebody has been telling you lies. You thought those men up there

wanted to do mischief.”

“Aw!” was the answer, dropped at intervals by each according to his

degree of unreadiness.

“Nonsense! No such thing! They’re looking out to see which way the

railroad is to take. Now, my lads, you can’t hinder the railroad: it

will be made whether you like it or not. And if you go fighting against

it, you’ll get yourselves into trouble. The law gives those men leave

to come here on the land. The owner has nothing to say against it, and

if you meddle with them you’ll have to do with the constable and

Justice Blakesley, and with the handcuffs and Middlemarch jail. And you

might be in for it now, if anybody informed against you.”

Caleb paused here, and perhaps the greatest orator could not have

chosen either his pause or his images better for the occasion.

“But come, you didn’t mean any harm. Somebody told you the railroad was

a bad thing. That was a lie. It may do a bit of harm here and there, to

this and to that; and so does the sun in heaven. But the railway’s a

good thing.”

“Aw! good for the big folks to make money out on,” said old Timothy

Cooper, who had stayed behind turning his hay while the others had been

gone on their spree;—“I’n seen lots o’ things turn up sin’ I war a

young un—the war an’ the peace, and the canells, an’ the oald King

George, an’ the Regen’, an’ the new King George, an’ the new un as has

got a new ne-ame—an’ it’s been all aloike to the poor mon. What’s the

canells been t’ him? They’n brought him neyther me-at nor be-acon, nor

wage to lay by, if he didn’t save it wi’ clemmin’ his own inside. Times

ha’ got wusser for him sin’ I war a young un. An’ so it’ll be wi’ the

railroads. They’ll on’y leave the poor mon furder behind. But them are

fools as meddle, and so I told the chaps here. This is the big folks’s

world, this is. But yo’re for the big folks, Muster Garth, yo are.”

Timothy was a wiry old laborer, of a type lingering in those times—who

had his savings in a stocking-foot, lived in a lone cottage, and was

not to be wrought on by any oratory, having as little of the feudal

spirit, and believing as little, as if he had not been totally

unacquainted with the Age of Reason and the Rights of Man. Caleb was in

a difficulty known to any person attempting in dark times and

unassisted by miracle to reason with rustics who are in possession of

an undeniable truth which they know through a hard process of feeling,

and can let it fall like a giant’s club on your neatly carved argument

for a social benefit which they do not feel. Caleb had no cant at

command, even if he could have chosen to use it; and he had been

accustomed to meet all such difficulties in no other way than by doing

his “business” faithfully. He answered—

“If you don’t think well of me, Tim, never mind; that’s neither here

nor there now. Things may be bad for the poor man—bad they are; but I

want the lads here not to do what will make things worse for

themselves. The cattle may have a heavy load, but it won’t help ’em to

throw it over into the roadside pit, when it’s partly their own

fodder.”

“We war on’y for a bit o’ foon,” said Hiram, who was beginning to see

consequences. “That war all we war arter.”

“Well, promise me not to meddle again, and I’ll see that nobody informs

against you.”

“I’n ne’er meddled, an’ I’n no call to promise,” said Timothy.

“No, but the rest. Come, I’m as hard at work as any of you to-day, and

I can’t spare much time. Say you’ll be quiet without the constable.”

“Aw, we wooant meddle—they may do as they loike for oos”—were the forms

in which Caleb got his pledges; and then he hastened back to Fred, who

had followed him, and watched him in the gateway.

They went to work, and Fred helped vigorously. His spirits had risen,

and he heartily enjoyed a good slip in the moist earth under the

hedgerow, which soiled his perfect summer trousers. Was it his

successful onset which had elated him, or the satisfaction of helping

Mary’s father? Something more. The accidents of the morning had helped

his frustrated imagination to shape an employment for himself which had

several attractions. I am not sure that certain fibres in Mr. Garth’s

mind had not resumed their old vibration towards the very end which now

revealed itself to Fred. For the effective accident is but the touch of

fire where there is oil and tow; and it always appeared to Fred that

the railway brought the needed touch. But they went on in silence

except when their business demanded speech. At last, when they had

finished and were walking away, Mr. Garth said—

“A young fellow needn’t be a B. A. to do this sort of work, eh, Fred?”

“I wish I had taken to it before I had thought of being a B. A.,” said

Fred. He paused a moment, and then added, more hesitatingly, “Do you

think I am too old to learn your business, Mr. Garth?”

“My business is of many sorts, my boy,” said Mr. Garth, smiling. “A

good deal of what I know can only come from experience: you can’t learn

it off as you learn things out of a book. But you are young enough to

lay a foundation yet.” Caleb pronounced the last sentence emphatically,

but paused in some uncertainty. He had been under the impression lately

that Fred had made up his mind to enter the Church.

“You do think I could do some good at it, if I were to try?” said Fred,

more eagerly.

“That depends,” said Caleb, turning his head on one side and lowering

his voice, with the air of a man who felt himself to be saying

something deeply religious. “You must be sure of two things: you must

love your work, and not be always looking over the edge of it, wanting

your play to begin. And the other is, you must not be ashamed of your

work, and think it would be more honorable to you to be doing something

else. You must have a pride in your own work and in learning to do it

well, and not be always saying, There’s this and there’s that—if I had

this or that to do, I might make something of it. No matter what a man

is—I wouldn’t give twopence for him”—here Caleb’s mouth looked bitter,

and he snapped his fingers—“whether he was the prime minister or the

rick-thatcher, if he didn’t do well what he undertook to do.”

“I can never feel that I should do that in being a clergyman,” said

Fred, meaning to take a step in argument.

“Then let it alone, my boy,” said Caleb, abruptly, “else you’ll never

be easy. Or, if you \_are\_ easy, you’ll be a poor stick.”

“That is very nearly what Mary thinks about it,” said Fred, coloring.

“I think you must know what I feel for Mary, Mr. Garth: I hope it does

not displease you that I have always loved her better than any one

else, and that I shall never love any one as I love her.”

The expression of Caleb’s face was visibly softening while Fred spoke.

But he swung his head with a solemn slowness, and said—

“That makes things more serious, Fred, if you want to take Mary’s

happiness into your keeping.”

“I know that, Mr. Garth,” said Fred, eagerly, “and I would do anything

for \_her\_. She says she will never have me if I go into the Church; and

I shall be the most miserable devil in the world if I lose all hope of

Mary. Really, if I could get some other profession, business—anything

that I am at all fit for, I would work hard, I would deserve your good

opinion. I should like to have to do with outdoor things. I know a good

deal about land and cattle already. I used to believe, you know—though

you will think me rather foolish for it—that I should have land of my

own. I am sure knowledge of that sort would come easily to me,

especially if I could be under you in any way.”

“Softly, my boy,” said Caleb, having the image of “Susan” before his

eyes. “What have you said to your father about all this?”

“Nothing, yet; but I must tell him. I am only waiting to know what I

can do instead of entering the Church. I am very sorry to disappoint

him, but a man ought to be allowed to judge for himself when he is

four-and-twenty. How could I know when I was fifteen, what it would be

right for me to do now? My education was a mistake.”

“But hearken to this, Fred,” said Caleb. “Are you sure Mary is fond of

you, or would ever have you?”

“I asked Mr. Farebrother to talk to her, because she had forbidden me—I

didn’t know what else to do,” said Fred, apologetically. “And he says

that I have every reason to hope, if I can put myself in an honorable

position—I mean, out of the Church. I dare say you think it

unwarrantable in me, Mr. Garth, to be troubling you and obtruding my

own wishes about Mary, before I have done anything at all for myself.

Of course I have not the least claim—indeed, I have already a debt to

you which will never be discharged, even when I have been able to pay

it in the shape of money.”

“Yes, my boy, you have a claim,” said Caleb, with much feeling in his

voice. “The young ones have always a claim on the old to help them

forward. I was young myself once and had to do without much help; but

help would have been welcome to me, if it had been only for the

fellow-feeling’s sake. But I must consider. Come to me to-morrow at the

office, at nine o’clock. At the office, mind.”

Mr. Garth would take no important step without consulting Susan, but it

must be confessed that before he reached home he had taken his

resolution. With regard to a large number of matters about which other

men are decided or obstinate, he was the most easily manageable man in

the world. He never knew what meat he would choose, and if Susan had

said that they ought to live in a four-roomed cottage, in order to

save, he would have said, “Let us go,” without inquiring into details.

But where Caleb’s feeling and judgment strongly pronounced, he was a

ruler; and in spite of his mildness and timidity in reproving, every

one about him knew that on the exceptional occasions when he chose, he

was absolute. He never, indeed, chose to be absolute except on some one

else’s behalf. On ninety-nine points Mrs. Garth decided, but on the

hundredth she was often aware that she would have to perform the

singularly difficult task of carrying out her own principle, and to

make herself subordinate.

“It is come round as I thought, Susan,” said Caleb, when they were

seated alone in the evening. He had already narrated the adventure

which had brought about Fred’s sharing in his work, but had kept back

the further result. “The children \_are\_ fond of each other—I mean, Fred

and Mary.”

Mrs. Garth laid her work on her knee, and fixed her penetrating eyes

anxiously on her husband.

“After we’d done our work, Fred poured it all out to me. He can’t bear

to be a clergyman, and Mary says she won’t have him if he is one; and

the lad would like to be under me and give his mind to business. And

I’ve determined to take him and make a man of him.”

“Caleb!” said Mrs. Garth, in a deep contralto, expressive of resigned

astonishment.

“It’s a fine thing to do,” said Mr. Garth, settling himself firmly

against the back of his chair, and grasping the elbows. “I shall have

trouble with him, but I think I shall carry it through. The lad loves

Mary, and a true love for a good woman is a great thing, Susan. It

shapes many a rough fellow.”

“Has Mary spoken to you on the subject?” said Mrs Garth, secretly a

little hurt that she had to be informed on it herself.

“Not a word. I asked her about Fred once; I gave her a bit of a

warning. But she assured me she would never marry an idle

self-indulgent man—nothing since. But it seems Fred set on Mr.

Farebrother to talk to her, because she had forbidden him to speak

himself, and Mr. Farebrother has found out that she is fond of Fred,

but says he must not be a clergyman. Fred’s heart is fixed on Mary,

that I can see: it gives me a good opinion of the lad—and we always

liked him, Susan.”

“It is a pity for Mary, I think,” said Mrs. Garth.

“Why—a pity?”

“Because, Caleb, she might have had a man who is worth twenty Fred

Vincy’s.”

“Ah?” said Caleb, with surprise.

“I firmly believe that Mr. Farebrother is attached to her, and meant to

make her an offer; but of course, now that Fred has used him as an

envoy, there is an end to that better prospect.” There was a severe

precision in Mrs. Garth’s utterance. She was vexed and disappointed,

but she was bent on abstaining from useless words.

Caleb was silent a few moments under a conflict of feelings. He looked

at the floor and moved his head and hands in accompaniment to some

inward argumentation. At last he said—

“That would have made me very proud and happy, Susan, and I should have

been glad for your sake. I’ve always felt that your belongings have

never been on a level with you. But you took me, though I was a plain

man.”

“I took the best and cleverest man I had ever known,” said Mrs. Garth,

convinced that \_she\_ would never have loved any one who came short of

that mark.

“Well, perhaps others thought you might have done better. But it would

have been worse for me. And that is what touches me close about Fred.

The lad is good at bottom, and clever enough to do, if he’s put in the

right way; and he loves and honors my daughter beyond anything, and she

has given him a sort of promise according to what he turns out. I say,

that young man’s soul is in my hand; and I’ll do the best I can for

him, so help me God! It’s my duty, Susan.”

Mrs. Garth was not given to tears, but there was a large one rolling

down her face before her husband had finished. It came from the

pressure of various feelings, in which there was much affection and

some vexation. She wiped it away quickly, saying—

“Few men besides you would think it a duty to add to their anxieties in

that way, Caleb.”

“That signifies nothing—what other men would think. I’ve got a clear

feeling inside me, and that I shall follow; and I hope your heart will

go with me, Susan, in making everything as light as can be to Mary,

poor child.”

Caleb, leaning back in his chair, looked with anxious appeal towards

his wife. She rose and kissed him, saying, “God bless you, Caleb! Our

children have a good father.”

But she went out and had a hearty cry to make up for the suppression of

her words. She felt sure that her husband’s conduct would be

misunderstood, and about Fred she was rational and unhopeful. Which

would turn out to have the more foresight in it—her rationality or

Caleb’s ardent generosity?

When Fred went to the office the next morning, there was a test to be

gone through which he was not prepared for.

“Now Fred,” said Caleb, “you will have some desk-work. I have always

done a good deal of writing myself, but I can’t do without help, and as

I want you to understand the accounts and get the values into your

head, I mean to do without another clerk. So you must buckle to. How

are you at writing and arithmetic?”

Fred felt an awkward movement of the heart; he had not thought of

desk-work; but he was in a resolute mood, and not going to shrink. “I’m

not afraid of arithmetic, Mr. Garth: it always came easily to me. I

think you know my writing.”

“Let us see,” said Caleb, taking up a pen, examining it carefully and

handing it, well dipped, to Fred with a sheet of ruled paper. “Copy me

a line or two of that valuation, with the figures at the end.”

At that time the opinion existed that it was beneath a gentleman to

write legibly, or with a hand in the least suitable to a clerk. Fred

wrote the lines demanded in a hand as gentlemanly as that of any

viscount or bishop of the day: the vowels were all alike and the

consonants only distinguishable as turning up or down, the strokes had

a blotted solidity and the letters disdained to keep the line—in short,

it was a manuscript of that venerable kind easy to interpret when you

know beforehand what the writer means.

As Caleb looked on, his visage showed a growing depression, but when

Fred handed him the paper he gave something like a snarl, and rapped

the paper passionately with the back of his hand. Bad work like this

dispelled all Caleb’s mildness.

“The deuce!” he exclaimed, snarlingly. “To think that this is a country

where a man’s education may cost hundreds and hundreds, and it turns

you out this!” Then in a more pathetic tone, pushing up his spectacles

and looking at the unfortunate scribe, “The Lord have mercy on us,

Fred, I can’t put up with this!”

“What can I do, Mr. Garth?” said Fred, whose spirits had sunk very low,

not only at the estimate of his handwriting, but at the vision of

himself as liable to be ranked with office clerks.

“Do? Why, you must learn to form your letters and keep the line. What’s

the use of writing at all if nobody can understand it?” asked Caleb,

energetically, quite preoccupied with the bad quality of the work. “Is

there so little business in the world that you must be sending puzzles

over the country? But that’s the way people are brought up. I should

lose no end of time with the letters some people send me, if Susan did

not make them out for me. It’s disgusting.” Here Caleb tossed the paper

from him.

Any stranger peeping into the office at that moment might have wondered

what was the drama between the indignant man of business, and the

fine-looking young fellow whose blond complexion was getting rather

patchy as he bit his lip with mortification. Fred was struggling with

many thoughts. Mr. Garth had been so kind and encouraging at the

beginning of their interview, that gratitude and hopefulness had been

at a high pitch, and the downfall was proportionate. He had not thought

of desk-work—in fact, like the majority of young gentlemen, he wanted

an occupation which should be free from disagreeables. I cannot tell

what might have been the consequences if he had not distinctly promised

himself that he would go to Lowick to see Mary and tell her that he was

engaged to work under her father. He did not like to disappoint himself

there.

“I am very sorry,” were all the words that he could muster. But Mr.

Garth was already relenting.

“We must make the best of it, Fred,” he began, with a return to his

usual quiet tone. “Every man can learn to write. I taught myself. Go at

it with a will, and sit up at night if the day-time isn’t enough. We’ll

be patient, my boy. Callum shall go on with the books for a bit, while

you are learning. But now I must be off,” said Caleb, rising. “You must

let your father know our agreement. You’ll save me Callum’s salary, you

know, when you can write; and I can afford to give you eighty pounds

for the first year, and more after.”

When Fred made the necessary disclosure to his parents, the relative

effect on the two was a surprise which entered very deeply into his

memory. He went straight from Mr. Garth’s office to the warehouse,

rightly feeling that the most respectful way in which he could behave

to his father was to make the painful communication as gravely and

formally as possible. Moreover, the decision would be more certainly

understood to be final, if the interview took place in his father’s

gravest hours, which were always those spent in his private room at the

warehouse.

Fred entered on the subject directly, and declared briefly what he had

done and was resolved to do, expressing at the end his regret that he

should be the cause of disappointment to his father, and taking the

blame on his own deficiencies. The regret was genuine, and inspired

Fred with strong, simple words.

Mr. Vincy listened in profound surprise without uttering even an

exclamation, a silence which in his impatient temperament was a sign of

unusual emotion. He had not been in good spirits about trade that

morning, and the slight bitterness in his lips grew intense as he

listened. When Fred had ended, there was a pause of nearly a minute,

during which Mr. Vincy replaced a book in his desk and turned the key

emphatically. Then he looked at his son steadily, and said—

“So you’ve made up your mind at last, sir?”

“Yes, father.”

“Very well; stick to it. I’ve no more to say. You’ve thrown away your

education, and gone down a step in life, when I had given you the means

of rising, that’s all.”

“I am very sorry that we differ, father. I think I can be quite as much

of a gentleman at the work I have undertaken, as if I had been a

curate. But I am grateful to you for wishing to do the best for me.”

“Very well; I have no more to say. I wash my hands of you. I only hope,

when you have a son of your own he will make a better return for the

pains you spend on him.”

This was very cutting to Fred. His father was using that unfair

advantage possessed by us all when we are in a pathetic situation and

see our own past as if it were simply part of the pathos. In reality,

Mr. Vincy’s wishes about his son had had a great deal of pride,

inconsiderateness, and egoistic folly in them. But still the

disappointed father held a strong lever; and Fred felt as if he were

being banished with a malediction.

“I hope you will not object to my remaining at home, sir?” he said,

after rising to go; “I shall have a sufficient salary to pay for my

board, as of course I should wish to do.”

“Board be hanged!” said Mr. Vincy, recovering himself in his disgust at

the notion that Fred’s keep would be missed at his table. “Of course

your mother will want you to stay. But I shall keep no horse for you,

you understand; and you will pay your own tailor. You will do with a

suit or two less, I fancy, when you have to pay for ’em.”

Fred lingered; there was still something to be said. At last it came.

“I hope you will shake hands with me, father, and forgive me the

vexation I have caused you.”

Mr. Vincy from his chair threw a quick glance upward at his son, who

had advanced near to him, and then gave his hand, saying hurriedly,

“Yes, yes, let us say no more.”

Fred went through much more narrative and explanation with his mother,

but she was inconsolable, having before her eyes what perhaps her

husband had never thought of, the certainty that Fred would marry Mary

Garth, that her life would henceforth be spoiled by a perpetual

infusion of Garths and their ways, and that her darling boy, with his

beautiful face and stylish air “beyond anybody else’s son in

Middlemarch,” would be sure to get like that family in plainness of

appearance and carelessness about his clothes. To her it seemed that

there was a Garth conspiracy to get possession of the desirable Fred,

but she dared not enlarge on this opinion, because a slight hint of it

had made him “fly out” at her as he had never done before. Her temper

was too sweet for her to show any anger, but she felt that her

happiness had received a bruise, and for several days merely to look at

Fred made her cry a little as if he were the subject of some baleful

prophecy. Perhaps she was the slower to recover her usual cheerfulness

because Fred had warned her that she must not reopen the sore question

with his father, who had accepted his decision and forgiven him. If her

husband had been vehement against Fred, she would have been urged into

defence of her darling. It was the end of the fourth day when Mr. Vincy

said to her—

“Come, Lucy, my dear, don’t be so down-hearted. You always have spoiled

the boy, and you must go on spoiling him.”

“Nothing ever did cut me so before, Vincy,” said the wife, her fair

throat and chin beginning to tremble again, “only his illness.”

“Pooh, pooh, never mind! We must expect to have trouble with our

children. Don’t make it worse by letting me see you out of spirits.”

“Well, I won’t,” said Mrs. Vincy, roused by this appeal and adjusting

herself with a little shake as of a bird which lays down its ruffled

plumage.

“It won’t do to begin making a fuss about one,” said Mr. Vincy, wishing

to combine a little grumbling with domestic cheerfulness. “There’s

Rosamond as well as Fred.”

“Yes, poor thing. I’m sure I felt for her being disappointed of her

baby; but she got over it nicely.”

“Baby, pooh! I can see Lydgate is making a mess of his practice, and

getting into debt too, by what I hear. I shall have Rosamond coming to

me with a pretty tale one of these days. But they’ll get no money from

me, I know. Let \_his\_ family help him. I never did like that marriage.

But it’s no use talking. Ring the bell for lemons, and don’t look dull

any more, Lucy. I’ll drive you and Louisa to Riverston to-morrow.”

CHAPTER LVII.

They numbered scarce eight summers when a name

Rose on their souls and stirred such motions there

As thrill the buds and shape their hidden frame

At penetration of the quickening air:

His name who told of loyal Evan Dhu,

Of quaint Bradwardine, and Vich Ian Vor,

Making the little world their childhood knew

Large with a land of mountain lake and scaur,

And larger yet with wonder, love, belief

Toward Walter Scott who living far away

Sent them this wealth of joy and noble grief.

The book and they must part, but day by day,

In lines that thwart like portly spiders ran

They wrote the tale, from Tully Veolan.

The evening that Fred Vincy walked to Lowick parsonage (he had begun to

see that this was a world in which even a spirited young man must

sometimes walk for want of a horse to carry him) he set out at five

o’clock and called on Mrs. Garth by the way, wishing to assure himself

that she accepted their new relations willingly.

He found the family group, dogs and cats included, under the great

apple-tree in the orchard. It was a festival with Mrs. Garth, for her

eldest son, Christy, her peculiar joy and pride, had come home for a

short holiday—Christy, who held it the most desirable thing in the

world to be a tutor, to study all literatures and be a regenerate

Porson, and who was an incorporate criticism on poor Fred, a sort of

object-lesson given to him by the educational mother. Christy himself,

a square-browed, broad-shouldered masculine edition of his mother not

much higher than Fred’s shoulder—which made it the harder that he

should be held superior—was always as simple as possible, and thought

no more of Fred’s disinclination to scholarship than of a giraffe’s,

wishing that he himself were more of the same height. He was lying on

the ground now by his mother’s chair, with his straw hat laid flat over

his eyes, while Jim on the other side was reading aloud from that

beloved writer who has made a chief part in the happiness of many young

lives. The volume was “Ivanhoe,” and Jim was in the great archery scene

at the tournament, but suffered much interruption from Ben, who had

fetched his own old bow and arrows, and was making himself dreadfully

disagreeable, Letty thought, by begging all present to observe his

random shots, which no one wished to do except Brownie, the

active-minded but probably shallow mongrel, while the grizzled

Newfoundland lying in the sun looked on with the dull-eyed neutrality

of extreme old age. Letty herself, showing as to her mouth and pinafore

some slight signs that she had been assisting at the gathering of the

cherries which stood in a coral-heap on the tea-table, was now seated

on the grass, listening open-eyed to the reading.

But the centre of interest was changed for all by the arrival of Fred

Vincy. When, seating himself on a garden-stool, he said that he was on

his way to Lowick Parsonage, Ben, who had thrown down his bow, and

snatched up a reluctant half-grown kitten instead, strode across Fred’s

outstretched leg, and said “Take me!”

“Oh, and me too,” said Letty.

“You can’t keep up with Fred and me,” said Ben.

“Yes, I can. Mother, please say that I am to go,” urged Letty, whose

life was much checkered by resistance to her depreciation as a girl.

“I shall stay with Christy,” observed Jim; as much as to say that he

had the advantage of those simpletons; whereupon Letty put her hand up

to her head and looked with jealous indecision from the one to the

other.

“Let us all go and see Mary,” said Christy, opening his arms.

“No, my dear child, we must not go in a swarm to the parsonage. And

that old Glasgow suit of yours would never do. Besides, your father

will come home. We must let Fred go alone. He can tell Mary that you

are here, and she will come back to-morrow.”

Christy glanced at his own threadbare knees, and then at Fred’s

beautiful white trousers. Certainly Fred’s tailoring suggested the

advantages of an English university, and he had a graceful way even of

looking warm and of pushing his hair back with his handkerchief.

“Children, run away,” said Mrs. Garth; “it is too warm to hang about

your friends. Take your brother and show him the rabbits.”

The eldest understood, and led off the children immediately. Fred felt

that Mrs. Garth wished to give him an opportunity of saying anything he

had to say, but he could only begin by observing—

“How glad you must be to have Christy here!”

“Yes; he has come sooner than I expected. He got down from the coach at

nine o’clock, just after his father went out. I am longing for Caleb to

come and hear what wonderful progress Christy is making. He has paid

his expenses for the last year by giving lessons, carrying on hard

study at the same time. He hopes soon to get a private tutorship and go

abroad.”

“He is a great fellow,” said Fred, to whom these cheerful truths had a

medicinal taste, “and no trouble to anybody.” After a slight pause, he

added, “But I fear you will think that I am going to be a great deal of

trouble to Mr. Garth.”

“Caleb likes taking trouble: he is one of those men who always do more

than any one would have thought of asking them to do,” answered Mrs.

Garth. She was knitting, and could either look at Fred or not, as she

chose—always an advantage when one is bent on loading speech with

salutary meaning; and though Mrs. Garth intended to be duly reserved,

she did wish to say something that Fred might be the better for.

“I know you think me very undeserving, Mrs. Garth, and with good

reason,” said Fred, his spirit rising a little at the perception of

something like a disposition to lecture him. “I happen to have behaved

just the worst to the people I can’t help wishing for the most from.

But while two men like Mr. Garth and Mr. Farebrother have not given me

up, I don’t see why I should give myself up.” Fred thought it might be

well to suggest these masculine examples to Mrs. Garth.

“Assuredly,” said she, with gathering emphasis. “A young man for whom

two such elders had devoted themselves would indeed be culpable if he

threw himself away and made their sacrifices vain.”

Fred wondered a little at this strong language, but only said, “I hope

it will not be so with me, Mrs. Garth, since I have some encouragement

to believe that I may win Mary. Mr. Garth has told you about that? You

were not surprised, I dare say?” Fred ended, innocently referring only

to his own love as probably evident enough.

“Not surprised that Mary has given you encouragement?” returned Mrs.

Garth, who thought it would be well for Fred to be more alive to the

fact that Mary’s friends could not possibly have wished this

beforehand, whatever the Vincys might suppose. “Yes, I confess I was

surprised.”

“She never did give me any—not the least in the world, when I talked to

her myself,” said Fred, eager to vindicate Mary. “But when I asked Mr.

Farebrother to speak for me, she allowed him to tell me there was a

hope.”

The power of admonition which had begun to stir in Mrs. Garth had not

yet discharged itself. It was a little too provoking even for \_her\_

self-control that this blooming youngster should flourish on the

disappointments of sadder and wiser people—making a meal of a

nightingale and never knowing it—and that all the while his family

should suppose that hers was in eager need of this sprig; and her

vexation had fermented the more actively because of its total

repression towards her husband. Exemplary wives will sometimes find

scapegoats in this way. She now said with energetic decision, “You made

a great mistake, Fred, in asking Mr. Farebrother to speak for you.”

“Did I?” said Fred, reddening instantaneously. He was alarmed, but at a

loss to know what Mrs. Garth meant, and added, in an apologetic tone,

“Mr. Farebrother has always been such a friend of ours; and Mary, I

knew, would listen to him gravely; and he took it on himself quite

readily.”

“Yes, young people are usually blind to everything but their own

wishes, and seldom imagine how much those wishes cost others,” said

Mrs. Garth. She did not mean to go beyond this salutary general

doctrine, and threw her indignation into a needless unwinding of her

worsted, knitting her brow at it with a grand air.

“I cannot conceive how it could be any pain to Mr. Farebrother,” said

Fred, who nevertheless felt that surprising conceptions were beginning

to form themselves.

“Precisely; you cannot conceive,” said Mrs. Garth, cutting her words as

neatly as possible.

For a moment Fred looked at the horizon with a dismayed anxiety, and

then turning with a quick movement said almost sharply—

“Do you mean to say, Mrs. Garth, that Mr. Farebrother is in love with

Mary?”

“And if it were so, Fred, I think you are the last person who ought to

be surprised,” returned Mrs. Garth, laying her knitting down beside her

and folding her arms. It was an unwonted sign of emotion in her that

she should put her work out of her hands. In fact her feelings were

divided between the satisfaction of giving Fred his discipline and the

sense of having gone a little too far. Fred took his hat and stick and

rose quickly.

“Then you think I am standing in his way, and in Mary’s too?” he said,

in a tone which seemed to demand an answer.

Mrs. Garth could not speak immediately. She had brought herself into

the unpleasant position of being called on to say what she really felt,

yet what she knew there were strong reasons for concealing. And to her

the consciousness of having exceeded in words was peculiarly

mortifying. Besides, Fred had given out unexpected electricity, and he

now added, “Mr. Garth seemed pleased that Mary should be attached to

me. He could not have known anything of this.”

Mrs. Garth felt a severe twinge at this mention of her husband, the

fear that Caleb might think her in the wrong not being easily

endurable. She answered, wanting to check unintended consequences—

“I spoke from inference only. I am not aware that Mary knows anything

of the matter.”

But she hesitated to beg that he would keep entire silence on a subject

which she had herself unnecessarily mentioned, not being used to stoop

in that way; and while she was hesitating there was already a rush of

unintended consequences under the apple-tree where the tea-things

stood. Ben, bouncing across the grass with Brownie at his heels, and

seeing the kitten dragging the knitting by a lengthening line of wool,

shouted and clapped his hands; Brownie barked, the kitten, desperate,

jumped on the tea-table and upset the milk, then jumped down again and

swept half the cherries with it; and Ben, snatching up the half-knitted

sock-top, fitted it over the kitten’s head as a new source of madness,

while Letty arriving cried out to her mother against this cruelty—it

was a history as full of sensation as “This is the house that Jack

built.” Mrs. Garth was obliged to interfere, the other young ones came

up and the \_tête-à-tête\_ with Fred was ended. He got away as soon as he

could, and Mrs. Garth could only imply some retractation of her

severity by saying “God bless you” when she shook hands with him.

She was unpleasantly conscious that she had been on the verge of

speaking as “one of the foolish women speaketh”—telling first and

entreating silence after. But she had not entreated silence, and to

prevent Caleb’s blame she determined to blame herself and confess all

to him that very night. It was curious what an awful tribunal the mild

Caleb’s was to her, whenever he set it up. But she meant to point out

to him that the revelation might do Fred Vincy a great deal of good.

No doubt it was having a strong effect on him as he walked to Lowick.

Fred’s light hopeful nature had perhaps never had so much of a bruise

as from this suggestion that if he had been out of the way Mary might

have made a thoroughly good match. Also he was piqued that he had been

what he called such a stupid lout as to ask that intervention from Mr.

Farebrother. But it was not in a lover’s nature—it was not in Fred’s,

that the new anxiety raised about Mary’s feeling should not surmount

every other. Notwithstanding his trust in Mr. Farebrother’s generosity,

notwithstanding what Mary had said to him, Fred could not help feeling

that he had a rival: it was a new consciousness, and he objected to it

extremely, not being in the least ready to give up Mary for her good,

being ready rather to fight for her with any man whatsoever. But the

fighting with Mr. Farebrother must be of a metaphorical kind, which was

much more difficult to Fred than the muscular. Certainly this

experience was a discipline for Fred hardly less sharp than his

disappointment about his uncle’s will. The iron had not entered into

his soul, but he had begun to imagine what the sharp edge would be. It

did not once occur to Fred that Mrs. Garth might be mistaken about Mr.

Farebrother, but he suspected that she might be wrong about Mary. Mary

had been staying at the parsonage lately, and her mother might know

very little of what had been passing in her mind.

He did not feel easier when he found her looking cheerful with the

three ladies in the drawing-room. They were in animated discussion on

some subject which was dropped when he entered, and Mary was copying

the labels from a heap of shallow cabinet drawers, in a minute

handwriting which she was skilled in. Mr. Farebrother was somewhere in

the village, and the three ladies knew nothing of Fred’s peculiar

relation to Mary: it was impossible for either of them to propose that

they should walk round the garden, and Fred predicted to himself that

he should have to go away without saying a word to her in private. He

told her first of Christy’s arrival and then of his own engagement with

her father; and he was comforted by seeing that this latter news

touched her keenly. She said hurriedly, “I am so glad,” and then bent

over her writing to hinder any one from noticing her face. But here was

a subject which Mrs. Farebrother could not let pass.

“You don’t mean, my dear Miss Garth, that you are glad to hear of a

young man giving up the Church for which he was educated: you only mean

that things being so, you are glad that he should be under an excellent

man like your father.”

“No, really, Mrs. Farebrother, I am glad of both, I fear,” said Mary,

cleverly getting rid of one rebellious tear. “I have a dreadfully

secular mind. I never liked any clergyman except the Vicar of Wakefield

and Mr. Farebrother.”

“Now why, my dear?” said Mrs. Farebrother, pausing on her large wooden

knitting-needles and looking at Mary. “You have always a good reason

for your opinions, but this astonishes me. Of course I put out of the

question those who preach new doctrine. But why should you dislike

clergymen?”

“Oh dear,” said Mary, her face breaking into merriment as she seemed to

consider a moment, “I don’t like their neckcloths.”

“Why, you don’t like Camden’s, then,” said Miss Winifred, in some

anxiety.

“Yes, I do,” said Mary. “I don’t like the other clergymen’s neckcloths,

because it is they who wear them.”

“How very puzzling!” said Miss Noble, feeling that her own intellect

was probably deficient.

“My dear, you are joking. You would have better reasons than these for

slighting so respectable a class of men,” said Mrs. Farebrother,

majestically.

“Miss Garth has such severe notions of what people should be that it is

difficult to satisfy her,” said Fred.

“Well, I am glad at least that she makes an exception in favor of my

son,” said the old lady.

Mary was wondering at Fred’s piqued tone, when Mr. Farebrother came in

and had to hear the news about the engagement under Mr. Garth. At the

end he said with quiet satisfaction, “\_That\_ is right;” and then bent

to look at Mary’s labels and praise her handwriting. Fred felt horribly

jealous—was glad, of course, that Mr. Farebrother was so estimable, but

wished that he had been ugly and fat as men at forty sometimes are. It

was clear what the end would be, since Mary openly placed Farebrother

above everybody, and these women were all evidently encouraging the

affair. He was feeling sure that he should have no chance of speaking

to Mary, when Mr. Farebrother said—

“Fred, help me to carry these drawers back into my study—you have never

seen my fine new study. Pray come too, Miss Garth. I want you to see a

stupendous spider I found this morning.”

Mary at once saw the Vicar’s intention. He had never since the

memorable evening deviated from his old pastoral kindness towards her,

and her momentary wonder and doubt had quite gone to sleep. Mary was

accustomed to think rather rigorously of what was probable, and if a

belief flattered her vanity she felt warned to dismiss it as

ridiculous, having early had much exercise in such dismissals. It was

as she had foreseen: when Fred had been asked to admire the fittings of

the study, and she had been asked to admire the spider, Mr. Farebrother

said—

“Wait here a minute or two. I am going to look out an engraving which

Fred is tall enough to hang for me. I shall be back in a few minutes.”

And then he went out. Nevertheless, the first word Fred said to Mary

was—

“It is of no use, whatever I do, Mary. You are sure to marry

Farebrother at last.” There was some rage in his tone.

“What do you mean, Fred?” Mary exclaimed indignantly, blushing deeply,

and surprised out of all her readiness in reply.

“It is impossible that you should not see it all clearly enough—you who

see everything.”

“I only see that you are behaving very ill, Fred, in speaking so of Mr.

Farebrother after he has pleaded your cause in every way. How can you

have taken up such an idea?”

Fred was rather deep, in spite of his irritation. If Mary had really

been unsuspicious, there was no good in telling her what Mrs. Garth had

said.

“It follows as a matter of course,” he replied. “When you are

continually seeing a man who beats me in everything, and whom you set

up above everybody, I can have no fair chance.”

“You are very ungrateful, Fred,” said Mary. “I wish I had never told

Mr. Farebrother that I cared for you in the least.”

“No, I am not ungrateful; I should be the happiest fellow in the world

if it were not for this. I told your father everything, and he was very

kind; he treated me as if I were his son. I could go at the work with a

will, writing and everything, if it were not for this.”

“For this? for what?” said Mary, imagining now that something specific

must have been said or done.

“This dreadful certainty that I shall be bowled out by Farebrother.”

Mary was appeased by her inclination to laugh.

“Fred,” she said, peeping round to catch his eyes, which were sulkily

turned away from her, “you are too delightfully ridiculous. If you were

not such a charming simpleton, what a temptation this would be to play

the wicked coquette, and let you suppose that somebody besides you has

made love to me.”

“Do you really like me best, Mary?” said Fred, turning eyes full of

affection on her, and trying to take her hand.

“I don’t like you at all at this moment,” said Mary, retreating, and

putting her hands behind her. “I only said that no mortal ever made

love to me besides you. And that is no argument that a very wise man

ever will,” she ended, merrily.

“I wish you would tell me that you could not possibly ever think of

him,” said Fred.

“Never dare to mention this any more to me, Fred,” said Mary, getting

serious again. “I don’t know whether it is more stupid or ungenerous in

you not to see that Mr. Farebrother has left us together on purpose

that we might speak freely. I am disappointed that you should be so

blind to his delicate feeling.”

There was no time to say any more before Mr. Farebrother came back with

the engraving; and Fred had to return to the drawing-room still with a

jealous dread in his heart, but yet with comforting arguments from

Mary’s words and manner. The result of the conversation was on the

whole more painful to Mary: inevitably her attention had taken a new

attitude, and she saw the possibility of new interpretations. She was

in a position in which she seemed to herself to be slighting Mr.

Farebrother, and this, in relation to a man who is much honored, is

always dangerous to the firmness of a grateful woman. To have a reason

for going home the next day was a relief, for Mary earnestly desired to

be always clear that she loved Fred best. When a tender affection has

been storing itself in us through many of our years, the idea that we

could accept any exchange for it seems to be a cheapening of our lives.

And we can set a watch over our affections and our constancy as we can

over other treasures.

“Fred has lost all his other expectations; he must keep this,” Mary

said to herself, with a smile curling her lips. It was impossible to

help fleeting visions of another kind—new dignities and an acknowledged

value of which she had often felt the absence. But these things with

Fred outside them, Fred forsaken and looking sad for the want of her,

could never tempt her deliberate thought.

CHAPTER LVIII.

“For there can live no hatred in thine eye,

Therefore in that I cannot know thy change:

In many’s looks the false heart’s history

Is writ in moods and frowns and wrinkles strange:

But Heaven in thy creation did decree

That in thy face sweet love should ever dwell:

Whate’er thy thoughts or thy heart’s workings be

Thy looks should nothing thence but sweetness tell.”

—SHAKESPEARE: \_Sonnets\_.

At the time when Mr. Vincy uttered that presentiment about Rosamond,

she herself had never had the idea that she should be driven to make

the sort of appeal which he foresaw. She had not yet had any anxiety

about ways and means, although her domestic life had been expensive as

well as eventful. Her baby had been born prematurely, and all the

embroidered robes and caps had to be laid by in darkness. This

misfortune was attributed entirely to her having persisted in going out

on horseback one day when her husband had desired her not to do so; but

it must not be supposed that she had shown temper on the occasion, or

rudely told him that she would do as she liked.

What led her particularly to desire horse-exercise was a visit from

Captain Lydgate, the baronet’s third son, who, I am sorry to say, was

detested by our Tertius of that name as a vapid fop “parting his hair

from brow to nape in a despicable fashion” (not followed by Tertius

himself), and showing an ignorant security that he knew the proper

thing to say on every topic. Lydgate inwardly cursed his own folly that

he had drawn down this visit by consenting to go to his uncle’s on the

wedding-tour, and he made himself rather disagreeable to Rosamond by

saying so in private. For to Rosamond this visit was a source of

unprecedented but gracefully concealed exultation. She was so intensely

conscious of having a cousin who was a baronet’s son staying in the

house, that she imagined the knowledge of what was implied by his

presence to be diffused through all other minds; and when she

introduced Captain Lydgate to her guests, she had a placid sense that

his rank penetrated them as if it had been an odor. The satisfaction

was enough for the time to melt away some disappointment in the

conditions of marriage with a medical man even of good birth: it seemed

now that her marriage was visibly as well as ideally floating her above

the Middlemarch level, and the future looked bright with letters and

visits to and from Quallingham, and vague advancement in consequence

for Tertius. Especially as, probably at the Captain’s suggestion, his

married sister, Mrs. Mengan, had come with her maid, and stayed two

nights on her way from town. Hence it was clearly worth while for

Rosamond to take pains with her music and the careful selection of her

lace.

As to Captain Lydgate himself, his low brow, his aquiline nose bent on

one side, and his rather heavy utterance, might have been

disadvantageous in any young gentleman who had not a military bearing

and mustache to give him what is doted on by some flower-like blond

heads as “style.” He had, moreover, that sort of high-breeding which

consists in being free from the petty solicitudes of middle-class

gentility, and he was a great critic of feminine charms. Rosamond

delighted in his admiration now even more than she had done at

Quallingham, and he found it easy to spend several hours of the day in

flirting with her. The visit altogether was one of the pleasantest

larks he had ever had, not the less so perhaps because he suspected

that his queer cousin Tertius wished him away: though Lydgate, who

would rather (hyperbolically speaking) have died than have failed in

polite hospitality, suppressed his dislike, and only pretended

generally not to hear what the gallant officer said, consigning the

task of answering him to Rosamond. For he was not at all a jealous

husband, and preferred leaving a feather-headed young gentleman alone

with his wife to bearing him company.

“I wish you would talk more to the Captain at dinner, Tertius,” said

Rosamond, one evening when the important guest was gone to Loamford to

see some brother officers stationed there. “You really look so absent

sometimes—you seem to be seeing through his head into something behind

it, instead of looking at him.”

“My dear Rosy, you don’t expect me to talk much to such a conceited ass

as that, I hope,” said Lydgate, brusquely. “If he got his head broken,

I might look at it with interest, not before.”

“I cannot conceive why you should speak of your cousin so

contemptuously,” said Rosamond, her fingers moving at her work while

she spoke with a mild gravity which had a touch of disdain in it.

“Ask Ladislaw if he doesn’t think your Captain the greatest bore he

ever met with. Ladislaw has almost forsaken the house since he came.”

Rosamond thought she knew perfectly well why Mr. Ladislaw disliked the

Captain: he was jealous, and she liked his being jealous.

“It is impossible to say what will suit eccentric persons,” she

answered, “but in my opinion Captain Lydgate is a thorough gentleman,

and I think you ought not, out of respect to Sir Godwin, to treat him

with neglect.”

“No, dear; but we have had dinners for him. And he comes in and goes

out as he likes. He doesn’t want me.”

“Still, when he is in the room, you might show him more attention. He

may not be a phoenix of cleverness in your sense; his profession is

different; but it would be all the better for you to talk a little on

his subjects. \_I\_ think his conversation is quite agreeable. And he is

anything but an unprincipled man.”

“The fact is, you would wish me to be a little more like him, Rosy,”

said Lydgate, in a sort of resigned murmur, with a smile which was not

exactly tender, and certainly not merry. Rosamond was silent and did

not smile again; but the lovely curves of her face looked good-tempered

enough without smiling.

Those words of Lydgate’s were like a sad milestone marking how far he

had travelled from his old dreamland, in which Rosamond Vincy appeared

to be that perfect piece of womanhood who would reverence her husband’s

mind after the fashion of an accomplished mermaid, using her comb and

looking-glass and singing her song for the relaxation of his adored

wisdom alone. He had begun to distinguish between that imagined

adoration and the attraction towards a man’s talent because it gives

him prestige, and is like an order in his button-hole or an Honorable

before his name.

It might have been supposed that Rosamond had travelled too, since she

had found the pointless conversation of Mr. Ned Plymdale perfectly

wearisome; but to most mortals there is a stupidity which is

unendurable and a stupidity which is altogether acceptable—else,

indeed, what would become of social bonds? Captain Lydgate’s stupidity

was delicately scented, carried itself with “style,” talked with a good

accent, and was closely related to Sir Godwin. Rosamond found it quite

agreeable and caught many of its phrases.

Therefore since Rosamond, as we know, was fond of horseback, there were

plenty of reasons why she should be tempted to resume her riding when

Captain Lydgate, who had ordered his man with two horses to follow him

and put up at the “Green Dragon,” begged her to go out on the gray

which he warranted to be gentle and trained to carry a lady—indeed, he

had bought it for his sister, and was taking it to Quallingham.

Rosamond went out the first time without telling her husband, and came

back before his return; but the ride had been so thorough a success,

and she declared herself so much the better in consequence, that he was

informed of it with full reliance on his consent that she should go

riding again.

On the contrary Lydgate was more than hurt—he was utterly confounded

that she had risked herself on a strange horse without referring the

matter to his wish. After the first almost thundering exclamations of

astonishment, which sufficiently warned Rosamond of what was coming, he

was silent for some moments.

“However, you have come back safely,” he said, at last, in a decisive

tone. “You will not go again, Rosy; that is understood. If it were the

quietest, most familiar horse in the world, there would always be the

chance of accident. And you know very well that I wished you to give up

riding the roan on that account.”

“But there is the chance of accident indoors, Tertius.”

“My darling, don’t talk nonsense,” said Lydgate, in an imploring tone;

“surely I am the person to judge for you. I think it is enough that I

say you are not to go again.”

Rosamond was arranging her hair before dinner, and the reflection of

her head in the glass showed no change in its loveliness except a

little turning aside of the long neck. Lydgate had been moving about

with his hands in his pockets, and now paused near her, as if he

awaited some assurance.

“I wish you would fasten up my plaits, dear,” said Rosamond, letting

her arms fall with a little sigh, so as to make a husband ashamed of

standing there like a brute. Lydgate had often fastened the plaits

before, being among the deftest of men with his large finely formed

fingers. He swept up the soft festoons of plaits and fastened in the

tall comb (to such uses do men come!); and what could he do then but

kiss the exquisite nape which was shown in all its delicate curves? But

when we do what we have done before, it is often with a difference.

Lydgate was still angry, and had not forgotten his point.

“I shall tell the Captain that he ought to have known better than offer

you his horse,” he said, as he moved away.

“I beg you will not do anything of the kind, Tertius,” said Rosamond,

looking at him with something more marked than usual in her speech. “It

will be treating me as if I were a child. Promise that you will leave

the subject to me.”

There did seem to be some truth in her objection. Lydgate said, “Very

well,” with a surly obedience, and thus the discussion ended with his

promising Rosamond, and not with her promising him.

In fact, she had been determined not to promise. Rosamond had that

victorious obstinacy which never wastes its energy in impetuous

resistance. What she liked to do was to her the right thing, and all

her cleverness was directed to getting the means of doing it. She meant

to go out riding again on the gray, and she did go on the next

opportunity of her husband’s absence, not intending that he should know

until it was late enough not to signify to her. The temptation was

certainly great: she was very fond of the exercise, and the

gratification of riding on a fine horse, with Captain Lydgate, Sir

Godwin’s son, on another fine horse by her side, and of being met in

this position by any one but her husband, was something as good as her

dreams before marriage: moreover she was riveting the connection with

the family at Quallingham, which must be a wise thing to do.

But the gentle gray, unprepared for the crash of a tree that was being

felled on the edge of Halsell wood, took fright, and caused a worse

fright to Rosamond, leading finally to the loss of her baby. Lydgate

could not show his anger towards her, but he was rather bearish to the

Captain, whose visit naturally soon came to an end.

In all future conversations on the subject, Rosamond was mildly certain

that the ride had made no difference, and that if she had stayed at

home the same symptoms would have come on and would have ended in the

same way, because she had felt something like them before.

Lydgate could only say, “Poor, poor darling!”—but he secretly wondered

over the terrible tenacity of this mild creature. There was gathering

within him an amazed sense of his powerlessness over Rosamond. His

superior knowledge and mental force, instead of being, as he had

imagined, a shrine to consult on all occasions, was simply set aside on

every practical question. He had regarded Rosamond’s cleverness as

precisely of the receptive kind which became a woman. He was now

beginning to find out what that cleverness was—what was the shape into

which it had run as into a close network aloof and independent. No one

quicker than Rosamond to see causes and effects which lay within the

track of her own tastes and interests: she had seen clearly Lydgate’s

preeminence in Middlemarch society, and could go on imaginatively

tracing still more agreeable social effects when his talent should have

advanced him; but for her, his professional and scientific ambition had

no other relation to these desirable effects than if they had been the

fortunate discovery of an ill-smelling oil. And that oil apart, with

which she had nothing to do, of course she believed in her own opinion

more than she did in his. Lydgate was astounded to find in numberless

trifling matters, as well as in this last serious case of the riding,

that affection did not make her compliant. He had no doubt that the

affection was there, and had no presentiment that he had done anything

to repel it. For his own part he said to himself that he loved her as

tenderly as ever, and could make up his mind to her negations;

but—well! Lydgate was much worried, and conscious of new elements in

his life as noxious to him as an inlet of mud to a creature that has

been used to breathe and bathe and dart after its illuminated prey in

the clearest of waters.

Rosamond was soon looking lovelier than ever at her worktable, enjoying

drives in her father’s phaeton and thinking it likely that she might be

invited to Quallingham. She knew that she was a much more exquisite

ornament to the drawing-room there than any daughter of the family, and

in reflecting that the gentlemen were aware of that, did not perhaps

sufficiently consider whether the ladies would be eager to see

themselves surpassed.

Lydgate, relieved from anxiety about her, relapsed into what she

inwardly called his moodiness—a name which to her covered his

thoughtful preoccupation with other subjects than herself, as well as

that uneasy look of the brow and distaste for all ordinary things as if

they were mixed with bitter herbs, which really made a sort of

weather-glass to his vexation and foreboding. These latter states of

mind had one cause amongst others, which he had generously but

mistakenly avoided mentioning to Rosamond, lest it should affect her

health and spirits. Between him and her indeed there was that total

missing of each other’s mental track, which is too evidently possible

even between persons who are continually thinking of each other. To

Lydgate it seemed that he had been spending month after month in

sacrificing more than half of his best intent and best power to his

tenderness for Rosamond; bearing her little claims and interruptions

without impatience, and, above all, bearing without betrayal of

bitterness to look through less and less of interfering illusion at the

blank unreflecting surface her mind presented to his ardor for the more

impersonal ends of his profession and his scientific study, an ardor

which he had fancied that the ideal wife must somehow worship as

sublime, though not in the least knowing why. But his endurance was

mingled with a self-discontent which, if we know how to be candid, we

shall confess to make more than half our bitterness under grievances,

wife or husband included. It always remains true that if we had been

greater, circumstance would have been less strong against us. Lydgate

was aware that his concessions to Rosamond were often little more than

the lapse of slackening resolution, the creeping paralysis apt to seize

an enthusiasm which is out of adjustment to a constant portion of our

lives. And on Lydgate’s enthusiasm there was constantly pressing not a

simple weight of sorrow, but the biting presence of a petty degrading

care, such as casts the blight of irony over all higher effort.

This was the care which he had hitherto abstained from mentioning to

Rosamond; and he believed, with some wonder, that it had never entered

her mind, though certainly no difficulty could be less mysterious. It

was an inference with a conspicuous handle to it, and had been easily

drawn by indifferent observers, that Lydgate was in debt; and he could

not succeed in keeping out of his mind for long together that he was

every day getting deeper into that swamp, which tempts men towards it

with such a pretty covering of flowers and verdure. It is wonderful how

soon a man gets up to his chin there—in a condition in which, in spite

of himself, he is forced to think chiefly of release, though he had a

scheme of the universe in his soul.

Eighteen months ago Lydgate was poor, but had never known the eager

want of small sums, and felt rather a burning contempt for any one who

descended a step in order to gain them. He was now experiencing

something worse than a simple deficit: he was assailed by the vulgar

hateful trials of a man who has bought and used a great many things

which might have been done without, and which he is unable to pay for,

though the demand for payment has become pressing.

How this came about may be easily seen without much arithmetic or

knowledge of prices. When a man in setting up a house and preparing for

marriage finds that his furniture and other initial expenses come to

between four and five hundred pounds more than he has capital to pay

for; when at the end of a year it appears that his household expenses,

horses and et caeteras, amount to nearly a thousand, while the proceeds

of the practice reckoned from the old books to be worth eight hundred

per annum have sunk like a summer pond and make hardly five hundred,

chiefly in unpaid entries, the plain inference is that, whether he

minds it or not, he is in debt. Those were less expensive times than

our own, and provincial life was comparatively modest; but the ease

with which a medical man who had lately bought a practice, who thought

that he was obliged to keep two horses, whose table was supplied

without stint, and who paid an insurance on his life and a high rent

for house and garden, might find his expenses doubling his receipts,

can be conceived by any one who does not think these details beneath

his consideration. Rosamond, accustomed from her childhood to an

extravagant household, thought that good housekeeping consisted simply

in ordering the best of everything—nothing else “answered;” and Lydgate

supposed that “if things were done at all, they must be done

properly”—he did not see how they were to live otherwise. If each head

of household expenditure had been mentioned to him beforehand, he would

have probably observed that “it could hardly come to much,” and if any

one had suggested a saving on a particular article—for example, the

substitution of cheap fish for dear—it would have appeared to him

simply a penny-wise, mean notion. Rosamond, even without such an

occasion as Captain Lydgate’s visit, was fond of giving invitations,

and Lydgate, though he often thought the guests tiresome, did not

interfere. This sociability seemed a necessary part of professional

prudence, and the entertainment must be suitable. It is true Lydgate

was constantly visiting the homes of the poor and adjusting his

prescriptions of diet to their small means; but, dear me! has it not by

this time ceased to be remarkable—is it not rather that we expect in

men, that they should have numerous strands of experience lying side by

side and never compare them with each other? Expenditure—like ugliness

and errors—becomes a totally new thing when we attach our own

personality to it, and measure it by that wide difference which is

manifest (in our own sensations) between ourselves and others. Lydgate

believed himself to be careless about his dress, and he despised a man

who calculated the effects of his costume; it seemed to him only a

matter of course that he had abundance of fresh garments—such things

were naturally ordered in sheaves. It must be remembered that he had

never hitherto felt the check of importunate debt, and he walked by

habit, not by self-criticism. But the check had come.

Its novelty made it the more irritating. He was amazed, disgusted that

conditions so foreign to all his purposes, so hatefully disconnected

with the objects he cared to occupy himself with, should have lain in

ambush and clutched him when he was unaware. And there was not only the

actual debt; there was the certainty that in his present position he

must go on deepening it. Two furnishing tradesmen at Brassing, whose

bills had been incurred before his marriage, and whom uncalculated

current expenses had ever since prevented him from paying, had

repeatedly sent him unpleasant letters which had forced themselves on

his attention. This could hardly have been more galling to any

disposition than to Lydgate’s, with his intense pride—his dislike of

asking a favor or being under an obligation to any one. He had scorned

even to form conjectures about Mr. Vincy’s intentions on money matters,

and nothing but extremity could have induced him to apply to his

father-in-law, even if he had not been made aware in various indirect

ways since his marriage that Mr. Vincy’s own affairs were not

flourishing, and that the expectation of help from him would be

resented. Some men easily trust in the readiness of friends; it had

never in the former part of his life occurred to Lydgate that he should

need to do so: he had never thought what borrowing would be to him; but

now that the idea had entered his mind, he felt that he would rather

incur any other hardship. In the mean time he had no money or prospects

of money; and his practice was not getting more lucrative.

No wonder that Lydgate had been unable to suppress all signs of inward

trouble during the last few months, and now that Rosamond was regaining

brilliant health, he meditated taking her entirely into confidence on

his difficulties. New conversance with tradesmen’s bills had forced his

reasoning into a new channel of comparison: he had begun to consider

from a new point of view what was necessary and unnecessary in goods

ordered, and to see that there must be some change of habits. How could

such a change be made without Rosamond’s concurrence? The immediate

occasion of opening the disagreeable fact to her was forced upon him.

Having no money, and having privately sought advice as to what security

could possibly be given by a man in his position, Lydgate had offered

the one good security in his power to the less peremptory creditor, who

was a silversmith and jeweller, and who consented to take on himself

the upholsterer’s credit also, accepting interest for a given term. The

security necessary was a bill of sale on the furniture of his house,

which might make a creditor easy for a reasonable time about a debt

amounting to less than four hundred pounds; and the silversmith, Mr.

Dover, was willing to reduce it by taking back a portion of the plate

and any other article which was as good as new. “Any other article” was

a phrase delicately implying jewellery, and more particularly some

purple amethysts costing thirty pounds, which Lydgate had bought as a

bridal present.

Opinions may be divided as to his wisdom in making this present: some

may think that it was a graceful attention to be expected from a man

like Lydgate, and that the fault of any troublesome consequences lay in

the pinched narrowness of provincial life at that time, which offered

no conveniences for professional people whose fortune was not

proportioned to their tastes; also, in Lydgate’s ridiculous

fastidiousness about asking his friends for money.

However, it had seemed a question of no moment to him on that fine

morning when he went to give a final order for plate: in the presence

of other jewels enormously expensive, and as an addition to orders of

which the amount had not been exactly calculated, thirty pounds for

ornaments so exquisitely suited to Rosamond’s neck and arms could

hardly appear excessive when there was no ready cash for it to exceed.

But at this crisis Lydgate’s imagination could not help dwelling on the

possibility of letting the amethysts take their place again among Mr.

Dover’s stock, though he shrank from the idea of proposing this to

Rosamond. Having been roused to discern consequences which he had never

been in the habit of tracing, he was preparing to act on this

discernment with some of the rigor (by no means all) that he would have

applied in pursuing experiment. He was nerving himself to this rigor as

he rode from Brassing, and meditated on the representations he must

make to Rosamond.

It was evening when he got home. He was intensely miserable, this

strong man of nine-and-twenty and of many gifts. He was not saying

angrily within himself that he had made a profound mistake; but the

mistake was at work in him like a recognized chronic disease, mingling

its uneasy importunities with every prospect, and enfeebling every

thought. As he went along the passage to the drawing-room, he heard the

piano and singing. Of course, Ladislaw was there. It was some weeks

since Will had parted from Dorothea, yet he was still at the old post

in Middlemarch. Lydgate had no objection in general to Ladislaw’s

coming, but just now he was annoyed that he could not find his hearth

free. When he opened the door the two singers went on towards the

key-note, raising their eyes and looking at him indeed, but not

regarding his entrance as an interruption. To a man galled with his

harness as poor Lydgate was, it is not soothing to see two people

warbling at him, as he comes in with the sense that the painful day has

still pains in store. His face, already paler than usual, took on a

scowl as he walked across the room and flung himself into a chair.

The singers feeling themselves excused by the fact that they had only

three bars to sing, now turned round.

“How are you, Lydgate?” said Will, coming forward to shake hands.

Lydgate took his hand, but did not think it necessary to speak.

“Have you dined, Tertius? I expected you much earlier,” said Rosamond,

who had already seen that her husband was in a “horrible humor.” She

seated herself in her usual place as she spoke.

“I have dined. I should like some tea, please,” said Lydgate, curtly,

still scowling and looking markedly at his legs stretched out before

him.

Will was too quick to need more. “I shall be off,” he said, reaching

his hat.

“Tea is coming,” said Rosamond; “pray don’t go.”

“Yes, Lydgate is bored,” said Will, who had more comprehension of

Lydgate than Rosamond had, and was not offended by his manner, easily

imagining outdoor causes of annoyance.

“There is the more need for you to stay,” said Rosamond, playfully, and

in her lightest accent; “he will not speak to me all the evening.”

“Yes, Rosamond, I shall,” said Lydgate, in his strong baritone. “I have

some serious business to speak to you about.”

No introduction of the business could have been less like that which

Lydgate had intended; but her indifferent manner had been too

provoking.

“There! you see,” said Will. “I’m going to the meeting about the

Mechanics’ Institute. Good-by;” and he went quickly out of the room.

Rosamond did not look at her husband, but presently rose and took her

place before the tea-tray. She was thinking that she had never seen him

so disagreeable. Lydgate turned his dark eyes on her and watched her as

she delicately handled the tea-service with her taper fingers, and

looked at the objects immediately before her with no curve in her face

disturbed, and yet with an ineffable protest in her air against all

people with unpleasant manners. For the moment he lost the sense of his

wound in a sudden speculation about this new form of feminine

impassibility revealing itself in the sylph-like frame which he had

once interpreted as the sign of a ready intelligent sensitiveness. His

mind glancing back to Laure while he looked at Rosamond, he said

inwardly, “Would \_she\_ kill me because I wearied her?” and then, “It is

the way with all women.” But this power of generalizing which gives men

so much the superiority in mistake over the dumb animals, was

immediately thwarted by Lydgate’s memory of wondering impressions from

the behavior of another woman—from Dorothea’s looks and tones of

emotion about her husband when Lydgate began to attend him—from her

passionate cry to be taught what would best comfort that man for whose

sake it seemed as if she must quell every impulse in her except the

yearnings of faithfulness and compassion. These revived impressions

succeeded each other quickly and dreamily in Lydgate’s mind while the

tea was being brewed. He had shut his eyes in the last instant of

reverie while he heard Dorothea saying, “Advise me—think what I can

do—he has been all his life laboring and looking forward. He minds

about nothing else—and I mind about nothing else.”

That voice of deep-souled womanhood had remained within him as the

enkindling conceptions of dead and sceptred genius had remained within

him (is there not a genius for feeling nobly which also reigns over

human spirits and their conclusions?); the tones were a music from

which he was falling away—he had really fallen into a momentary doze,

when Rosamond said in her silvery neutral way, “Here is your tea,

Tertius,” setting it on the small table by his side, and then moved

back to her place without looking at him. Lydgate was too hasty in

attributing insensibility to her; after her own fashion, she was

sensitive enough, and took lasting impressions. Her impression now was

one of offence and repulsion. But then, Rosamond had no scowls and had

never raised her voice: she was quite sure that no one could justly

find fault with her.

Perhaps Lydgate and she had never felt so far off each other before;

but there were strong reasons for not deferring his revelation, even if

he had not already begun it by that abrupt announcement; indeed some of

the angry desire to rouse her into more sensibility on his account

which had prompted him to speak prematurely, still mingled with his

pain in the prospect of her pain. But he waited till the tray was gone,

the candles were lit, and the evening quiet might be counted on: the

interval had left time for repelled tenderness to return into the old

course. He spoke kindly.

“Dear Rosy, lay down your work and come to sit by me,” he said, gently,

pushing away the table, and stretching out his arm to draw a chair near

his own.

Rosamond obeyed. As she came towards him in her drapery of transparent

faintly tinted muslin, her slim yet round figure never looked more

graceful; as she sat down by him and laid one hand on the elbow of his

chair, at last looking at him and meeting his eyes, her delicate neck

and cheek and purely cut lips never had more of that untarnished beauty

which touches as in spring-time and infancy and all sweet freshness. It

touched Lydgate now, and mingled the early moments of his love for her

with all the other memories which were stirred in this crisis of deep

trouble. He laid his ample hand softly on hers, saying—

“Dear!” with the lingering utterance which affection gives to the word.

Rosamond too was still under the power of that same past, and her

husband was still in part the Lydgate whose approval had stirred

delight. She put his hair lightly away from his forehead, then laid her

other hand on his, and was conscious of forgiving him.

“I am obliged to tell you what will hurt you, Rosy. But there are

things which husband and wife must think of together. I dare say it has

occurred to you already that I am short of money.”

Lydgate paused; but Rosamond turned her neck and looked at a vase on

the mantel-piece.

“I was not able to pay for all the things we had to get before we were

married, and there have been expenses since which I have been obliged

to meet. The consequence is, there is a large debt at Brassing—three

hundred and eighty pounds—which has been pressing on me a good while,

and in fact we are getting deeper every day, for people don’t pay me

the faster because others want the money. I took pains to keep it from

you while you were not well; but now we must think together about it,

and you must help me.”

“What can \_I\_ do, Tertius?” said Rosamond, turning her eyes on him

again. That little speech of four words, like so many others in all

languages, is capable by varied vocal inflections of expressing all

states of mind from helpless dimness to exhaustive argumentative

perception, from the completest self-devoting fellowship to the most

neutral aloofness. Rosamond’s thin utterance threw into the words “What

can—I—do!” as much neutrality as they could hold. They fell like a

mortal chill on Lydgate’s roused tenderness. He did not storm in

indignation—he felt too sad a sinking of the heart. And when he spoke

again it was more in the tone of a man who forces himself to fulfil a

task.

“It is necessary for you to know, because I have to give security for a

time, and a man must come to make an inventory of the furniture.”

Rosamond colored deeply. “Have you not asked papa for money?” she said,

as soon as she could speak.

“No.”

“Then I must ask him!” she said, releasing her hands from Lydgate’s,

and rising to stand at two yards’ distance from him.

“No, Rosy,” said Lydgate, decisively. “It is too late to do that. The

inventory will be begun to-morrow. Remember it is a mere security: it

will make no difference: it is a temporary affair. I insist upon it

that your father shall not know, unless I choose to tell him,” added

Lydgate, with a more peremptory emphasis.

This certainly was unkind, but Rosamond had thrown him back on evil

expectation as to what she would do in the way of quiet steady

disobedience. The unkindness seemed unpardonable to her: she was not

given to weeping and disliked it, but now her chin and lips began to

tremble and the tears welled up. Perhaps it was not possible for

Lydgate, under the double stress of outward material difficulty and of

his own proud resistance to humiliating consequences, to imagine fully

what this sudden trial was to a young creature who had known nothing

but indulgence, and whose dreams had all been of new indulgence, more

exactly to her taste. But he did wish to spare her as much as he could,

and her tears cut him to the heart. He could not speak again

immediately; but Rosamond did not go on sobbing: she tried to conquer

her agitation and wiped away her tears, continuing to look before her

at the mantel-piece.

“Try not to grieve, darling,” said Lydgate, turning his eyes up towards

her. That she had chosen to move away from him in this moment of her

trouble made everything harder to say, but he must absolutely go on.

“We must brace ourselves to do what is necessary. It is I who have been

in fault: I ought to have seen that I could not afford to live in this

way. But many things have told against me in my practice, and it really

just now has ebbed to a low point. I may recover it, but in the mean

time we must pull up—we must change our way of living. We shall weather

it. When I have given this security I shall have time to look about me;

and you are so clever that if you turn your mind to managing you will

school me into carefulness. I have been a thoughtless rascal about

squaring prices—but come, dear, sit down and forgive me.”

Lydgate was bowing his neck under the yoke like a creature who had

talons, but who had Reason too, which often reduces us to meekness.

When he had spoken the last words in an imploring tone, Rosamond

returned to the chair by his side. His self-blame gave her some hope

that he would attend to her opinion, and she said—

“Why can you not put off having the inventory made? You can send the

men away to-morrow when they come.”

“I shall not send them away,” said Lydgate, the peremptoriness rising

again. Was it of any use to explain?

“If we left Middlemarch? there would of course be a sale, and that

would do as well.”

“But we are not going to leave Middlemarch.”

“I am sure, Tertius, it would be much better to do so. Why can we not

go to London? Or near Durham, where your family is known?”

“We can go nowhere without money, Rosamond.”

“Your friends would not wish you to be without money. And surely these

odious tradesmen might be made to understand that, and to wait, if you

would make proper representations to them.”

“This is idle Rosamond,” said Lydgate, angrily. “You must learn to take

my judgment on questions you don’t understand. I have made necessary

arrangements, and they must be carried out. As to friends, I have no

expectations whatever from them, and shall not ask them for anything.”

Rosamond sat perfectly still. The thought in her mind was that if she

had known how Lydgate would behave, she would never have married him.

“We have no time to waste now on unnecessary words, dear,” said

Lydgate, trying to be gentle again. “There are some details that I want

to consider with you. Dover says he will take a good deal of the plate

back again, and any of the jewellery we like. He really behaves very

well.”

“Are we to go without spoons and forks then?” said Rosamond, whose very

lips seemed to get thinner with the thinness of her utterance. She was

determined to make no further resistance or suggestions.

“Oh no, dear!” said Lydgate. “But look here,” he continued, drawing a

paper from his pocket and opening it; “here is Dover’s account. See, I

have marked a number of articles, which if we returned them would

reduce the amount by thirty pounds and more. I have not marked any of

the jewellery.” Lydgate had really felt this point of the jewellery

very bitter to himself; but he had overcome the feeling by severe

argument. He could not propose to Rosamond that she should return any

particular present of his, but he had told himself that he was bound to

put Dover’s offer before her, and her inward prompting might make the

affair easy.

“It is useless for me to look, Tertius,” said Rosamond, calmly; “you

will return what you please.” She would not turn her eyes on the paper,

and Lydgate, flushing up to the roots of his hair, drew it back and let

it fall on his knee. Meanwhile Rosamond quietly went out of the room,

leaving Lydgate helpless and wondering. Was she not coming back? It

seemed that she had no more identified herself with him than if they

had been creatures of different species and opposing interests. He

tossed his head and thrust his hands deep into his pockets with a sort

of vengeance. There was still science—there were still good objects to

work for. He must give a tug still—all the stronger because other

satisfactions were going.

But the door opened and Rosamond re-entered. She carried the leather

box containing the amethysts, and a tiny ornamental basket which

contained other boxes, and laying them on the chair where she had been

sitting, she said, with perfect propriety in her air—

“This is all the jewellery you ever gave me. You can return what you

like of it, and of the plate also. You will not, of course, expect me

to stay at home to-morrow. I shall go to papa’s.”

To many women the look Lydgate cast at her would have been more

terrible than one of anger: it had in it a despairing acceptance of the

distance she was placing between them.

“And when shall you come back again?” he said, with a bitter edge on

his accent.

“Oh, in the evening. Of course I shall not mention the subject to

mamma.” Rosamond was convinced that no woman could behave more

irreproachably than she was behaving; and she went to sit down at her

work-table. Lydgate sat meditating a minute or two, and the result was

that he said, with some of the old emotion in his tone—

“Now we have been united, Rosy, you should not leave me to myself in

the first trouble that has come.”

“Certainly not,” said Rosamond; “I shall do everything it becomes me to

do.”

“It is not right that the thing should be left to servants, or that I

should have to speak to them about it. And I shall be obliged to go

out—I don’t know how early. I understand your shrinking from the

humiliation of these money affairs. But, my dear Rosamond, as a

question of pride, which I feel just as much as you can, it is surely

better to manage the thing ourselves, and let the servants see as

little of it as possible; and since you are my wife, there is no

hindering your share in my disgraces—if there were disgraces.”

Rosamond did not answer immediately, but at last she said, “Very well,

I will stay at home.”

“I shall not touch these jewels, Rosy. Take them away again. But I will

write out a list of plate that we may return, and that can be packed up

and sent at once.”

“The servants will know \_that\_,” said Rosamond, with the slightest

touch of sarcasm.

“Well, we must meet some disagreeables as necessities. Where is the

ink, I wonder?” said Lydgate, rising, and throwing the account on the

larger table where he meant to write.

Rosamond went to reach the inkstand, and after setting it on the table

was going to turn away, when Lydgate, who was standing close by, put

his arm round her and drew her towards him, saying—

“Come, darling, let us make the best of things. It will only be for a

time, I hope, that we shall have to be stingy and particular. Kiss me.”

His native warm-heartedness took a great deal of quenching, and it is a

part of manliness for a husband to feel keenly the fact that an

inexperienced girl has got into trouble by marrying him. She received

his kiss and returned it faintly, and in this way an appearance of

accord was recovered for the time. But Lydgate could not help looking

forward with dread to the inevitable future discussions about

expenditure and the necessity for a complete change in their way of

living.

CHAPTER LIX.

“They said of old the Soul had human shape,

But smaller, subtler than the fleshly self,

So wandered forth for airing when it pleased.

And see! beside her cherub-face there floats

A pale-lipped form aerial whispering

Its promptings in that little shell her ear.”

News is often dispersed as thoughtlessly and effectively as that pollen

which the bees carry off (having no idea how powdery they are) when

they are buzzing in search of their particular nectar. This fine

comparison has reference to Fred Vincy, who on that evening at Lowick

Parsonage heard a lively discussion among the ladies on the news which

their old servant had got from Tantripp concerning Mr. Casaubon’s

strange mention of Mr. Ladislaw in a codicil to his will made not long

before his death. Miss Winifred was astounded to find that her brother

had known the fact before, and observed that Camden was the most

wonderful man for knowing things and not telling them; whereupon Mary

Garth said that the codicil had perhaps got mixed up with the habits of

spiders, which Miss Winifred never would listen to. Mrs. Farebrother

considered that the news had something to do with their having only

once seen Mr. Ladislaw at Lowick, and Miss Noble made many small

compassionate mewings.

Fred knew little and cared less about Ladislaw and the Casaubons, and

his mind never recurred to that discussion till one day calling on

Rosamond at his mother’s request to deliver a message as he passed, he

happened to see Ladislaw going away. Fred and Rosamond had little to

say to each other now that marriage had removed her from collision with

the unpleasantness of brothers, and especially now that he had taken

what she held the stupid and even reprehensible step of giving up the

Church to take to such a business as Mr. Garth’s. Hence Fred talked by

preference of what he considered indifferent news, and “a propos of

that young Ladislaw” mentioned what he had heard at Lowick Parsonage.

Now Lydgate, like Mr. Farebrother, knew a great deal more than he told,

and when he had once been set thinking about the relation between Will

and Dorothea his conjectures had gone beyond the fact. He imagined that

there was a passionate attachment on both sides, and this struck him as

much too serious to gossip about. He remembered Will’s irritability

when he had mentioned Mrs. Casaubon, and was the more circumspect. On

the whole his surmises, in addition to what he knew of the fact,

increased his friendliness and tolerance towards Ladislaw, and made him

understand the vacillation which kept him at Middlemarch after he had

said that he should go away. It was significant of the separateness

between Lydgate’s mind and Rosamond’s that he had no impulse to speak

to her on the subject; indeed, he did not quite trust her reticence

towards Will. And he was right there; though he had no vision of the

way in which her mind would act in urging her to speak.

When she repeated Fred’s news to Lydgate, he said, “Take care you don’t

drop the faintest hint to Ladislaw, Rosy. He is likely to fly out as if

you insulted him. Of course it is a painful affair.”

Rosamond turned her neck and patted her hair, looking the image of

placid indifference. But the next time Will came when Lydgate was away,

she spoke archly about his not going to London as he had threatened.

“I know all about it. I have a confidential little bird,” said she,

showing very pretty airs of her head over the bit of work held high

between her active fingers. “There is a powerful magnet in this

neighborhood.”

“To be sure there is. Nobody knows that better than you,” said Will,

with light gallantry, but inwardly prepared to be angry.

“It is really the most charming romance: Mr. Casaubon jealous, and

foreseeing that there was no one else whom Mrs. Casaubon would so much

like to marry, and no one who would so much like to marry her as a

certain gentleman; and then laying a plan to spoil all by making her

forfeit her property if she did marry that gentleman—and then—and

then—and then—oh, I have no doubt the end will be thoroughly romantic.”

“Great God! what do you mean?” said Will, flushing over face and ears,

his features seeming to change as if he had had a violent shake. “Don’t

joke; tell me what you mean.”

“You don’t really know?” said Rosamond, no longer playful, and desiring

nothing better than to tell in order that she might evoke effects.

“No!” he returned, impatiently.

“Don’t know that Mr. Casaubon has left it in his will that if Mrs.

Casaubon marries you she is to forfeit all her property?”

“How do you know that it is true?” said Will, eagerly.

“My brother Fred heard it from the Farebrothers.” Will started up from

his chair and reached his hat.

“I dare say she likes you better than the property,” said Rosamond,

looking at him from a distance.

“Pray don’t say any more about it,” said Will, in a hoarse undertone

extremely unlike his usual light voice. “It is a foul insult to her and

to me.” Then he sat down absently, looking before him, but seeing

nothing.

“Now you are angry with \_me\_,” said Rosamond. “It is too bad to bear

\_me\_ malice. You ought to be obliged to me for telling you.”

“So I am,” said Will, abruptly, speaking with that kind of double soul

which belongs to dreamers who answer questions.

“I expect to hear of the marriage,” said Rosamond, playfully.

“Never! You will never hear of the marriage!”

With those words uttered impetuously, Will rose, put out his hand to

Rosamond, still with the air of a somnambulist, and went away.

When he was gone, Rosamond left her chair and walked to the other end

of the room, leaning when she got there against a chiffonniere, and

looking out of the window wearily. She was oppressed by ennui, and by

that dissatisfaction which in women’s minds is continually turning into

a trivial jealousy, referring to no real claims, springing from no

deeper passion than the vague exactingness of egoism, and yet capable

of impelling action as well as speech. “There really is nothing to care

for much,” said poor Rosamond inwardly, thinking of the family at

Quallingham, who did not write to her; and that perhaps Tertius when he

came home would tease her about expenses. She had already secretly

disobeyed him by asking her father to help them, and he had ended

decisively by saying, “I am more likely to want help myself.”

CHAPTER LX.

Good phrases are surely, and ever were, very commendable.

—\_Justice Shallow\_.

A few days afterwards—it was already the end of August—there was an

occasion which caused some excitement in Middlemarch: the public, if it

chose, was to have the advantage of buying, under the distinguished

auspices of Mr. Borthrop Trumbull, the furniture, books, and pictures

which anybody might see by the handbills to be the best in every kind,

belonging to Edwin Larcher, Esq. This was not one of the sales

indicating the depression of trade; on the contrary, it was due to Mr.

Larcher’s great success in the carrying business, which warranted his

purchase of a mansion near Riverston already furnished in high style by

an illustrious Spa physician—furnished indeed with such large framefuls

of expensive flesh-painting in the dining-room, that Mrs. Larcher was

nervous until reassured by finding the subjects to be Scriptural. Hence

the fine opportunity to purchasers which was well pointed out in the

handbills of Mr. Borthrop Trumbull, whose acquaintance with the history

of art enabled him to state that the hall furniture, to be sold without

reserve, comprised a piece of carving by a contemporary of Gibbons.

At Middlemarch in those times a large sale was regarded as a kind of

festival. There was a table spread with the best cold eatables, as at a

superior funeral; and facilities were offered for that

generous-drinking of cheerful glasses which might lead to generous and

cheerful bidding for undesirable articles. Mr. Larcher’s sale was the

more attractive in the fine weather because the house stood just at the

end of the town, with a garden and stables attached, in that pleasant

issue from Middlemarch called the London Road, which was also the road

to the New Hospital and to Mr. Bulstrode’s retired residence, known as

the Shrubs. In short, the auction was as good as a fair, and drew all

classes with leisure at command: to some, who risked making bids in

order simply to raise prices, it was almost equal to betting at the

races. The second day, when the best furniture was to be sold,

“everybody” was there; even Mr. Thesiger, the rector of St. Peter’s,

had looked in for a short time, wishing to buy the carved table, and

had rubbed elbows with Mr. Bambridge and Mr. Horrock. There was a

wreath of Middlemarch ladies accommodated with seats round the large

table in the dining-room, where Mr. Borthrop Trumbull was mounted with

desk and hammer; but the rows chiefly of masculine faces behind were

often varied by incomings and outgoings both from the door and the

large bow-window opening on to the lawn.

“Everybody” that day did not include Mr. Bulstrode, whose health could

not well endure crowds and draughts. But Mrs. Bulstrode had

particularly wished to have a certain picture—a “Supper at Emmaus,”

attributed in the catalogue to Guido; and at the last moment before the

day of the sale Mr. Bulstrode had called at the office of the

“Pioneer,” of which he was now one of the proprietors, to beg of Mr.

Ladislaw as a great favor that he would obligingly use his remarkable

knowledge of pictures on behalf of Mrs. Bulstrode, and judge of the

value of this particular painting—“if,” added the scrupulously polite

banker, “attendance at the sale would not interfere with the

arrangements for your departure, which I know is imminent.”

This proviso might have sounded rather satirically in Will’s ear if he

had been in a mood to care about such satire. It referred to an

understanding entered into many weeks before with the proprietors of

the paper, that he should be at liberty any day he pleased to hand over

the management to the subeditor whom he had been training; since he

wished finally to quit Middlemarch. But indefinite visions of ambition

are weak against the ease of doing what is habitual or beguilingly

agreeable; and we all know the difficulty of carrying out a resolve

when we secretly long that it may turn out to be unnecessary. In such

states of mind the most incredulous person has a private leaning

towards miracle: impossible to conceive how our wish could be

fulfilled, still—very wonderful things have happened! Will did not

confess this weakness to himself, but he lingered. What was the use of

going to London at that time of the year? The Rugby men who would

remember him were not there; and so far as political writing was

concerned, he would rather for a few weeks go on with the “Pioneer.” At

the present moment, however, when Mr. Bulstrode was speaking to him, he

had both a strengthened resolve to go and an equally strong resolve not

to go till he had once more seen Dorothea. Hence he replied that he had

reasons for deferring his departure a little, and would be happy to go

to the sale.

Will was in a defiant mood, his consciousness being deeply stung with

the thought that the people who looked at him probably knew a fact

tantamount to an accusation against him as a fellow with low designs

which were to be frustrated by a disposal of property. Like most people

who assert their freedom with regard to conventional distinction, he

was prepared to be sudden and quick at quarrel with any one who might

hint that he had personal reasons for that assertion—that there was

anything in his blood, his bearing, or his character to which he gave

the mask of an opinion. When he was under an irritating impression of

this kind he would go about for days with a defiant look, the color

changing in his transparent skin as if he were on the \_qui vive\_,

watching for something which he had to dart upon.

This expression was peculiarly noticeable in him at the sale, and those

who had only seen him in his moods of gentle oddity or of bright

enjoyment would have been struck with a contrast. He was not sorry to

have this occasion for appearing in public before the Middlemarch

tribes of Toller, Hackbutt, and the rest, who looked down on him as an

adventurer, and were in a state of brutal ignorance about Dante—who

sneered at his Polish blood, and were themselves of a breed very much

in need of crossing. He stood in a conspicuous place not far from the

auctioneer, with a fore-finger in each side-pocket and his head thrown

backward, not caring to speak to anybody, though he had been cordially

welcomed as a connoiss\_ure\_ by Mr. Trumbull, who was enjoying the

utmost activity of his great faculties.

And surely among all men whose vocation requires them to exhibit their

powers of speech, the happiest is a prosperous provincial auctioneer

keenly alive to his own jokes and sensible of his encyclopedic

knowledge. Some saturnine, sour-blooded persons might object to be

constantly insisting on the merits of all articles from boot-jacks to

“Berghems;” but Mr. Borthrop Trumbull had a kindly liquid in his veins;

he was an admirer by nature, and would have liked to have the universe

under his hammer, feeling that it would go at a higher figure for his

recommendation.

Meanwhile Mrs. Larcher’s drawing-room furniture was enough for him.

When Will Ladislaw had come in, a second fender, said to have been

forgotten in its right place, suddenly claimed the auctioneer’s

enthusiasm, which he distributed on the equitable principle of praising

those things most which were most in need of praise. The fender was of

polished steel, with much lancet-shaped open-work and a sharp edge.

“Now, ladies,” said he, “I shall appeal to you. Here is a fender which

at any other sale would hardly be offered with out reserve, being, as I

may say, for quality of steel and quaintness of design, a kind of

thing”—here Mr. Trumbull dropped his voice and became slightly nasal,

trimming his outlines with his left finger—“that might not fall in with

ordinary tastes. Allow me to tell you that by-and-by this style of

workmanship will be the only one in vogue—half-a-crown, you said? thank

you—going at half-a-crown, this characteristic fender; and I have

particular information that the antique style is very much sought after

in high quarters. Three shillings—three-and-sixpence—hold it well up,

Joseph! Look, ladies, at the chastity of the design—I have no doubt

myself that it was turned out in the last century! Four shillings, Mr.

Mawmsey?—four shillings.”

“It’s not a thing I would put in \_my\_ drawing-room,” said Mrs. Mawmsey,

audibly, for the warning of the rash husband. “I wonder \_at\_ Mrs.

Larcher. Every blessed child’s head that fell against it would be cut

in two. The edge is like a knife.”

“Quite true,” rejoined Mr. Trumbull, quickly, “and most uncommonly

useful to have a fender at hand that will cut, if you have a leather

shoe-tie or a bit of string that wants cutting and no knife at hand:

many a man has been left hanging because there was no knife to cut him

down. Gentlemen, here’s a fender that if you had the misfortune to hang

yourselves would cut you down in no time—with astonishing

celerity—four-and-sixpence—five—five-and-sixpence—an appropriate thing

for a spare bedroom where there was a four-poster and a guest a little

out of his mind—six shillings—thank you, Mr. Clintup—going at six

shillings—going—gone!” The auctioneer’s glance, which had been

searching round him with a preternatural susceptibility to all signs of

bidding, here dropped on the paper before him, and his voice too

dropped into a tone of indifferent despatch as he said, “Mr. Clintup.

Be handy, Joseph.”

“It was worth six shillings to have a fender you could always tell that

joke on,” said Mr. Clintup, laughing low and apologetically to his next

neighbor. He was a diffident though distinguished nurseryman, and

feared that the audience might regard his bid as a foolish one.

Meanwhile Joseph had brought a trayful of small articles. “Now,

ladies,” said Mr. Trumbull, taking up one of the articles, “this tray

contains a very recherchy lot—a collection of trifles for the

drawing-room table—and trifles make the sum \_of\_ human things—nothing

more important than trifles—(yes, Mr. Ladislaw, yes, by-and-by)—but

pass the tray round, Joseph—these bijoux must be examined, ladies. This

I have in my hand is an ingenious contrivance—a sort of practical

rebus, I may call it: here, you see, it looks like an elegant

heart-shaped box, portable—for the pocket; there, again, it becomes

like a splendid double flower—an ornament for the table; and now”—Mr.

Trumbull allowed the flower to fall alarmingly into strings of

heart-shaped leaves—“a book of riddles! No less than five hundred

printed in a beautiful red. Gentlemen, if I had less of a conscience, I

should not wish you to bid high for this lot—I have a longing for it

myself. What can promote innocent mirth, and I may say virtue, more

than a good riddle?—it hinders profane language, and attaches a man to

the society of refined females. This ingenious article itself, without

the elegant domino-box, card-basket, &c., ought alone to give a high

price to the lot. Carried in the pocket it might make an individual

welcome in any society. Four shillings, sir?—four shillings for this

remarkable collection of riddles with the et caeteras. Here is a

sample: ‘How must you spell honey to make it catch lady-birds?

Answer—money.’ You hear?—lady-birds—honey money. This is an amusement

to sharpen the intellect; it has a sting—it has what we call satire,

and wit without indecency. Four-and-sixpence—five shillings.”

The bidding ran on with warming rivalry. Mr. Bowyer was a bidder, and

this was too exasperating. Bowyer couldn’t afford it, and only wanted

to hinder every other man from making a figure. The current carried

even Mr. Horrock with it, but this committal of himself to an opinion

fell from him with so little sacrifice of his neutral expression, that

the bid might not have been detected as his but for the friendly oaths

of Mr. Bambridge, who wanted to know what Horrock would do with blasted

stuff only fit for haberdashers given over to that state of perdition

which the horse-dealer so cordially recognized in the majority of

earthly existences. The lot was finally knocked down at a guinea to Mr.

Spilkins, a young Slender of the neighborhood, who was reckless with

his pocket-money and felt his want of memory for riddles.

“Come, Trumbull, this is too bad—you’ve been putting some old maid’s

rubbish into the sale,” murmured Mr. Toller, getting close to the

auctioneer. “I want to see how the prints go, and I must be off soon.”

“\_Im\_mediately, Mr. Toller. It was only an act of benevolence which

your noble heart would approve. Joseph! quick with the prints—Lot 235.

Now, gentlemen, you who are connoiss\_ures\_, you are going to have a

treat. Here is an engraving of the Duke of Wellington surrounded by his

staff on the Field of Waterloo; and notwithstanding recent events which

have, as it were, enveloped our great Hero in a cloud, I will be bold

to say—for a man in my line must not be blown about by political

winds—that a finer subject—of the modern order, belonging to our own

time and epoch—the understanding of man could hardly conceive: angels

might, perhaps, but not men, sirs, not men.”

“Who painted it?” said Mr. Powderell, much impressed.

“It is a proof before the letter, Mr. Powderell—the painter is not

known,” answered Trumbull, with a certain gaspingness in his last

words, after which he pursed up his lips and stared round him.

“I’ll bid a pound!” said Mr. Powderell, in a tone of resolved emotion,

as of a man ready to put himself in the breach. Whether from awe or

pity, nobody raised the price on him.

Next came two Dutch prints which Mr. Toller had been eager for, and

after he had secured them he went away. Other prints, and afterwards

some paintings, were sold to leading Middlemarchers who had come with a

special desire for them, and there was a more active movement of the

audience in and out; some, who had bought what they wanted, going away,

others coming in either quite newly or from a temporary visit to the

refreshments which were spread under the marquee on the lawn. It was

this marquee that Mr. Bambridge was bent on buying, and he appeared to

like looking inside it frequently, as a foretaste of its possession. On

the last occasion of his return from it he was observed to bring with

him a new companion, a stranger to Mr. Trumbull and every one else,

whose appearance, however, led to the supposition that he might be a

relative of the horse-dealer’s—also “given to indulgence.” His large

whiskers, imposing swagger, and swing of the leg, made him a striking

figure; but his suit of black, rather shabby at the edges, caused the

prejudicial inference that he was not able to afford himself as much

indulgence as he liked.

“Who is it you’ve picked up, Bam?” said Mr. Horrock, aside.

“Ask him yourself,” returned Mr. Bambridge. “He said he’d just turned

in from the road.”

Mr. Horrock eyed the stranger, who was leaning back against his stick

with one hand, using his toothpick with the other, and looking about

him with a certain restlessness apparently under the silence imposed on

him by circumstances.

At length the “Supper at Emmaus” was brought forward, to Will’s immense

relief, for he was getting so tired of the proceedings that he had

drawn back a little and leaned his shoulder against the wall just

behind the auctioneer. He now came forward again, and his eye caught

the conspicuous stranger, who, rather to his surprise, was staring at

him markedly. But Will was immediately appealed to by Mr. Trumbull.

“Yes, Mr. Ladislaw, yes; this interests you as a connoiss\_ure\_, I

think. It is some pleasure,” the auctioneer went on with a rising

fervor, “to have a picture like this to show to a company of ladies and

gentlemen—a picture worth any sum to an individual whose means were on

a level with his judgment. It is a painting of the Italian school—by

the celebrated \_Guydo\_, the greatest painter in the world, the chief of

the Old Masters, as they are called—I take it, because they were up to

a thing or two beyond most of us—in possession of secrets now lost to

the bulk of mankind. Let me tell you, gentlemen, I have seen a great

many pictures by the Old Masters, and they are not all up to this

mark—some of them are darker than you might like and not family

subjects. But here is a \_Guydo\_—the frame alone is worth pounds—which

any lady might be proud to hang up—a suitable thing for what we call a

refectory in a charitable institution, if any gentleman of the

Corporation wished to show his munifi\_cence\_. Turn it a little, sir?

yes. Joseph, turn it a little towards Mr. Ladislaw—Mr. Ladislaw, having

been abroad, understands the merit of these things, you observe.”

All eyes were for a moment turned towards Will, who said, coolly, “Five

pounds.” The auctioneer burst out in deep remonstrance.

“Ah! Mr. Ladislaw! the frame alone is worth that. Ladies and gentlemen,

for the credit of the town! Suppose it should be discovered hereafter

that a gem of art has been amongst us in this town, and nobody in

Middlemarch awake to it. Five guineas—five seven-six—five ten. Still,

ladies, still! It is a gem, and ‘Full many a gem,’ as the poet says,

has been allowed to go at a nominal price because the public knew no

better, because it was offered in circles where there was—I was going

to say a low feeling, but no!—Six pounds—six guineas—a \_Guydo\_ of the

first order going at six guineas—it is an insult to religion, ladies;

it touches us all as Christians, gentlemen, that a subject like this

should go at such a low figure—six pounds ten—seven—”

The bidding was brisk, and Will continued to share in it, remembering

that Mrs. Bulstrode had a strong wish for the picture, and thinking

that he might stretch the price to twelve pounds. But it was knocked

down to him at ten guineas, whereupon he pushed his way towards the

bow-window and went out. He chose to go under the marquee to get a

glass of water, being hot and thirsty: it was empty of other visitors,

and he asked the woman in attendance to fetch him some fresh water; but

before she was well gone he was annoyed to see entering the florid

stranger who had stared at him. It struck Will at this moment that the

man might be one of those political parasitic insects of the bloated

kind who had once or twice claimed acquaintance with him as having

heard him speak on the Reform question, and who might think of getting

a shilling by news. In this light his person, already rather heating to

behold on a summer’s day, appeared the more disagreeable; and Will,

half-seated on the elbow of a garden-chair, turned his eyes carefully

away from the comer. But this signified little to our acquaintance Mr.

Raffles, who never hesitated to thrust himself on unwilling

observation, if it suited his purpose to do so. He moved a step or two

till he was in front of Will, and said with full-mouthed haste, “Excuse

me, Mr. Ladislaw—was your mother’s name Sarah Dunkirk?”

Will, starting to his feet, moved backward a step, frowning, and saying

with some fierceness, “Yes, sir, it was. And what is that to you?”

It was in Will’s nature that the first spark it threw out was a direct

answer of the question and a challenge of the consequences. To have

said, “What is that to you?” in the first instance, would have seemed

like shuffling—as if he minded who knew anything about his origin!

Raffles on his side had not the same eagerness for a collision which

was implied in Ladislaw’s threatening air. The slim young fellow with

his girl’s complexion looked like a tiger-cat ready to spring on him.

Under such circumstances Mr. Raffles’s pleasure in annoying his company

was kept in abeyance.

“No offence, my good sir, no offence! I only remember your mother—knew

her when she was a girl. But it is your father that you feature, sir. I

had the pleasure of seeing your father too. Parents alive, Mr.

Ladislaw?”

“No!” thundered Will, in the same attitude as before.

“Should be glad to do you a service, Mr. Ladislaw—by Jove, I should!

Hope to meet again.”

Hereupon Raffles, who had lifted his hat with the last words, turned

himself round with a swing of his leg and walked away. Will looked

after him a moment, and could see that he did not re-enter the

auction-room, but appeared to be walking towards the road. For an

instant he thought that he had been foolish not to let the man go on

talking;—but no! on the whole he preferred doing without knowledge from

that source.

Later in the evening, however, Raffles overtook him in the street, and

appearing either to have forgotten the roughness of his former

reception or to intend avenging it by a forgiving familiarity, greeted

him jovially and walked by his side, remarking at first on the

pleasantness of the town and neighborhood. Will suspected that the man

had been drinking and was considering how to shake him off when Raffles

said—

“I’ve been abroad myself, Mr. Ladislaw—I’ve seen the world—used to

parley-vous a little. It was at Boulogne I saw your father—a most

uncommon likeness you are of him, by Jove! mouth—nose—eyes—hair turned

off your brow just like his—a little in the foreign style. John Bull

doesn’t do much of that. But your father was very ill when I saw him.

Lord, lord! hands you might see through. You were a small youngster

then. Did he get well?”

“No,” said Will, curtly.

“Ah! Well! I’ve often wondered what became of your mother. She ran away

from her friends when she was a young lass—a proud-spirited lass, and

pretty, by Jove! I knew the reason why she ran away,” said Raffles,

winking slowly as he looked sideways at Will.

“You know nothing dishonorable of her, sir,” said Will, turning on him

rather savagely. But Mr. Raffles just now was not sensitive to shades

of manner.

“Not a bit!” said he, tossing his head decisively. “She was a little

too honorable to like her friends—that was it!” Here Raffles again

winked slowly. “Lord bless you, I knew all about ’em—a little in what

you may call the respectable thieving line—the high style of

receiving-house—none of your holes and corners—first-rate. Slap-up

shop, high profits and no mistake. But Lord! Sarah would have known

nothing about it—a dashing young lady she was—fine boarding-school—fit

for a lord’s wife—only Archie Duncan threw it at her out of spite,

because she would have nothing to do with him. And so she ran away from

the whole concern. I travelled for ’em, sir, in a gentlemanly way—at a

high salary. They didn’t mind her running away at first—godly folks,

sir, very godly—and she was for the stage. The son was alive then, and

the daughter was at a discount. Hallo! here we are at the Blue Bull.

What do you say, Mr. Ladislaw?—shall we turn in and have a glass?”

“No, I must say good evening,” said Will, dashing up a passage which

led into Lowick Gate, and almost running to get out of Raffles’s reach.

He walked a long while on the Lowick road away from the town, glad of

the starlit darkness when it came. He felt as if he had had dirt cast

on him amidst shouts of scorn. There was this to confirm the fellow’s

statement—that his mother never would tell him the reason why she had

run away from her family.

Well! what was he, Will Ladislaw, the worse, supposing the truth about

that family to be the ugliest? His mother had braved hardship in order

to separate herself from it. But if Dorothea’s friends had known this

story—if the Chettams had known it—they would have had a fine color to

give their suspicions a welcome ground for thinking him unfit to come

near her. However, let them suspect what they pleased, they would find

themselves in the wrong. They would find out that the blood in his

veins was as free from the taint of meanness as theirs.

CHAPTER LXI.

“Inconsistencies,” answered Imlac, “cannot both be right, but imputed

to man they may both be true.”—\_Rasselas\_.

The same night, when Mr. Bulstrode returned from a journey to Brassing

on business, his good wife met him in the entrance-hall and drew him

into his private sitting-room.

“Nicholas,” she said, fixing her honest eyes upon him anxiously, “there

has been such a disagreeable man here asking for you—it has made me

quite uncomfortable.”

“What kind of man, my dear,” said Mr. Bulstrode, dreadfully certain of

the answer.

“A red-faced man with large whiskers, and most impudent in his manner.

He declared he was an old friend of yours, and said you would be sorry

not to see him. He wanted to wait for you here, but I told him he could

see you at the Bank to-morrow morning. Most impudent he was!—stared at

me, and said his friend Nick had luck in wives. I don’t believe he

would have gone away, if Blucher had not happened to break his chain

and come running round on the gravel—for I was in the garden; so I

said, ‘You’d better go away—the dog is very fierce, and I can’t hold

him.’ Do you really know anything of such a man?”

“I believe I know who he is, my dear,” said Mr. Bulstrode, in his usual

subdued voice, “an unfortunate dissolute wretch, whom I helped too much

in days gone by. However, I presume you will not be troubled by him

again. He will probably come to the Bank—to beg, doubtless.”

No more was said on the subject until the next day, when Mr. Bulstrode

had returned from the town and was dressing for dinner. His wife, not

sure that he was come home, looked into his dressing-room and saw him

with his coat and cravat off, leaning one arm on a chest of drawers and

staring absently at the ground. He started nervously and looked up as

she entered.

“You look very ill, Nicholas. Is there anything the matter?”

“I have a good deal of pain in my head,” said Mr. Bulstrode, who was so

frequently ailing that his wife was always ready to believe in this

cause of depression.

“Sit down and let me sponge it with vinegar.”

Physically Mr. Bulstrode did not want the vinegar, but morally the

affectionate attention soothed him. Though always polite, it was his

habit to receive such services with marital coolness, as his wife’s

duty. But to-day, while she was bending over him, he said, “You are

very good, Harriet,” in a tone which had something new in it to her

ear; she did not know exactly what the novelty was, but her woman’s

solicitude shaped itself into a darting thought that he might be going

to have an illness.

“Has anything worried you?” she said. “Did that man come to you at the

Bank?”

“Yes; it was as I had supposed. He is a man who at one time might have

done better. But he has sunk into a drunken debauched creature.”

“Is he quite gone away?” said Mrs. Bulstrode, anxiously; but for

certain reasons she refrained from adding, “It was very disagreeable to

hear him calling himself a friend of yours.” At that moment she would

not have liked to say anything which implied her habitual consciousness

that her husband’s earlier connections were not quite on a level with

her own. Not that she knew much about them. That her husband had at

first been employed in a bank, that he had afterwards entered into what

he called city business and gained a fortune before he was

three-and-thirty, that he had married a widow who was much older than

himself—a Dissenter, and in other ways probably of that disadvantageous

quality usually perceptible in a first wife if inquired into with the

dispassionate judgment of a second—was almost as much as she had cared

to learn beyond the glimpses which Mr. Bulstrode’s narrative

occasionally gave of his early bent towards religion, his inclination

to be a preacher, and his association with missionary and philanthropic

efforts. She believed in him as an excellent man whose piety carried a

peculiar eminence in belonging to a layman, whose influence had turned

her own mind toward seriousness, and whose share of perishable good had

been the means of raising her own position. But she also liked to think

that it was well in every sense for Mr. Bulstrode to have won the hand

of Harriet Vincy; whose family was undeniable in a Middlemarch light—a

better light surely than any thrown in London thoroughfares or

dissenting chapel-yards. The unreformed provincial mind distrusted

London; and while true religion was everywhere saving, honest Mrs.

Bulstrode was convinced that to be saved in the Church was more

respectable. She so much wished to ignore towards others that her

husband had ever been a London Dissenter, that she liked to keep it out

of sight even in talking to him. He was quite aware of this; indeed in

some respects he was rather afraid of this ingenuous wife, whose

imitative piety and native worldliness were equally sincere, who had

nothing to be ashamed of, and whom he had married out of a thorough

inclination still subsisting. But his fears were such as belong to a

man who cares to maintain his recognized supremacy: the loss of high

consideration from his wife, as from every one else who did not clearly

hate him out of enmity to the truth, would be as the beginning of death

to him. When she said—

“Is he quite gone away?”

“Oh, I trust so,” he answered, with an effort to throw as much sober

unconcern into his tone as possible!

But in truth Mr. Bulstrode was very far from a state of quiet trust. In

the interview at the Bank, Raffles had made it evident that his

eagerness to torment was almost as strong in him as any other greed. He

had frankly said that he had turned out of the way to come to

Middlemarch, just to look about him and see whether the neighborhood

would suit him to live in. He had certainly had a few debts to pay more

than he expected, but the two hundred pounds were not gone yet: a cool

five-and-twenty would suffice him to go away with for the present. What

he had wanted chiefly was to see his friend Nick and family, and know

all about the prosperity of a man to whom he was so much attached.

By-and-by he might come back for a longer stay. This time Raffles

declined to be “seen off the premises,” as he expressed it—declined to

quit Middlemarch under Bulstrode’s eyes. He meant to go by coach the

next day—if he chose.

Bulstrode felt himself helpless. Neither threats nor coaxing could

avail: he could not count on any persistent fear nor on any promise. On

the contrary, he felt a cold certainty at his heart that Raffles—unless

providence sent death to hinder him—would come back to Middlemarch

before long. And that certainty was a terror.

It was not that he was in danger of legal punishment or of beggary: he

was in danger only of seeing disclosed to the judgment of his neighbors

and the mournful perception of his wife certain facts of his past life

which would render him an object of scorn and an opprobrium of the

religion with which he had diligently associated himself. The terror of

being judged sharpens the memory: it sends an inevitable glare over

that long-unvisited past which has been habitually recalled only in

general phrases. Even without memory, the life is bound into one by a

zone of dependence in growth and decay; but intense memory forces a man

to own his blameworthy past. With memory set smarting like a reopened

wound, a man’s past is not simply a dead history, an outworn

preparation of the present: it is not a repented error shaken loose

from the life: it is a still quivering part of himself, bringing

shudders and bitter flavors and the tinglings of a merited shame.

Into this second life Bulstrode’s past had now risen, only the

pleasures of it seeming to have lost their quality. Night and day,

without interruption save of brief sleep which only wove retrospect and

fear into a fantastic present, he felt the scenes of his earlier life

coming between him and everything else, as obstinately as when we look

through the window from a lighted room, the objects we turn our backs

on are still before us, instead of the grass and the trees. The

successive events inward and outward were there in one view: though

each might be dwelt on in turn, the rest still kept their hold in the

consciousness.

Once more he saw himself the young banker’s clerk, with an agreeable

person, as clever in figures as he was fluent in speech and fond of

theological definition: an eminent though young member of a Calvinistic

dissenting church at Highbury, having had striking experience in

conviction of sin and sense of pardon. Again he heard himself called

for as Brother Bulstrode in prayer meetings, speaking on religious

platforms, preaching in private houses. Again he felt himself thinking

of the ministry as possibly his vocation, and inclined towards

missionary labor. That was the happiest time of his life: that was the

spot he would have chosen now to awake in and find the rest a dream.

The people among whom Brother Bulstrode was distinguished were very

few, but they were very near to him, and stirred his satisfaction the

more; his power stretched through a narrow space, but he felt its

effect the more intensely. He believed without effort in the peculiar

work of grace within him, and in the signs that God intended him for

special instrumentality.

Then came the moment of transition; it was with the sense of promotion

he had when he, an orphan educated at a commercial charity-school, was

invited to a fine villa belonging to Mr. Dunkirk, the richest man in

the congregation. Soon he became an intimate there, honored for his

piety by the wife, marked out for his ability by the husband, whose

wealth was due to a flourishing city and west-end trade. That was the

setting-in of a new current for his ambition, directing his prospects

of “instrumentality” towards the uniting of distinguished religious

gifts with successful business.

By-and-by came a decided external leading: a confidential subordinate

partner died, and nobody seemed to the principal so well fitted to fill

the severely felt vacancy as his young friend Bulstrode, if he would

become confidential accountant. The offer was accepted. The business

was a pawnbroker’s, of the most magnificent sort both in extent and

profits; and on a short acquaintance with it Bulstrode became aware

that one source of magnificent profit was the easy reception of any

goods offered, without strict inquiry as to where they came from. But

there was a branch house at the west end, and no pettiness or dinginess

to give suggestions of shame.

He remembered his first moments of shrinking. They were private, and

were filled with arguments; some of these taking the form of prayer.

The business was established and had old roots; is it not one thing to

set up a new gin-palace and another to accept an investment in an old

one? The profits made out of lost souls—where can the line be drawn at

which they begin in human transactions? Was it not even God’s way of

saving His chosen? “Thou knowest,”—the young Bulstrode had said then,

as the older Bulstrode was saying now—“Thou knowest how loose my soul

sits from these things—how I view them all as implements for tilling

Thy garden rescued here and there from the wilderness.”

Metaphors and precedents were not wanting; peculiar spiritual

experiences were not wanting which at last made the retention of his

position seem a service demanded of him: the vista of a fortune had

already opened itself, and Bulstrode’s shrinking remained private. Mr.

Dunkirk had never expected that there would be any shrinking at all: he

had never conceived that trade had anything to do with the scheme of

salvation. And it was true that Bulstrode found himself carrying on two

distinct lives; his religious activity could not be incompatible with

his business as soon as he had argued himself into not feeling it

incompatible.

Mentally surrounded with that past again, Bulstrode had the same

pleas—indeed, the years had been perpetually spinning them into

intricate thickness, like masses of spider-web, padding the moral

sensibility; nay, as age made egoism more eager but less enjoying, his

soul had become more saturated with the belief that he did everything

for God’s sake, being indifferent to it for his own. And yet—if he

could be back in that far-off spot with his youthful poverty—why, then

he would choose to be a missionary.

But the train of causes in which he had locked himself went on. There

was trouble in the fine villa at Highbury. Years before, the only

daughter had run away, defied her parents, and gone on the stage; and

now the only boy died, and after a short time Mr. Dunkirk died also.

The wife, a simple pious woman, left with all the wealth in and out of

the magnificent trade, of which she never knew the precise nature, had

come to believe in Bulstrode, and innocently adore him as women often

adore their priest or “man-made” minister. It was natural that after a

time marriage should have been thought of between them. But Mrs.

Dunkirk had qualms and yearnings about her daughter, who had long been

regarded as lost both to God and her parents. It was known that the

daughter had married, but she was utterly gone out of sight. The

mother, having lost her boy, imagined a grandson, and wished in a

double sense to reclaim her daughter. If she were found, there would be

a channel for property—perhaps a wide one—in the provision for several

grandchildren. Efforts to find her must be made before Mrs. Dunkirk

would marry again. Bulstrode concurred; but after advertisement as well

as other modes of inquiry had been tried, the mother believed that her

daughter was not to be found, and consented to marry without

reservation of property.

The daughter had been found; but only one man besides Bulstrode knew

it, and he was paid for keeping silence and carrying himself away.

That was the bare fact which Bulstrode was now forced to see in the

rigid outline with which acts present themselves to onlookers. But for

himself at that distant time, and even now in burning memory, the fact

was broken into little sequences, each justified as it came by

reasonings which seemed to prove it righteous. Bulstrode’s course up to

that time had, he thought, been sanctioned by remarkable providences,

appearing to point the way for him to be the agent in making the best

use of a large property and withdrawing it from perversion. Death and

other striking dispositions, such as feminine trustfulness, had come;

and Bulstrode would have adopted Cromwell’s words—“Do you call these

bare events? The Lord pity you!” The events were comparatively small,

but the essential condition was there—namely, that they were in favor

of his own ends. It was easy for him to settle what was due from him to

others by inquiring what were God’s intentions with regard to himself.

Could it be for God’s service that this fortune should in any

considerable proportion go to a young woman and her husband who were

given up to the lightest pursuits, and might scatter it abroad in

triviality—people who seemed to lie outside the path of remarkable

providences? Bulstrode had never said to himself beforehand, “The

daughter shall not be found”—nevertheless when the moment came he kept

her existence hidden; and when other moments followed, he soothed the

mother with consolation in the probability that the unhappy young woman

might be no more.

There were hours in which Bulstrode felt that his action was

unrighteous; but how could he go back? He had mental exercises, called

himself nought, laid hold on redemption, and went on in his course of

instrumentality. And after five years Death again came to widen his

path, by taking away his wife. He did gradually withdraw his capital,

but he did not make the sacrifices requisite to put an end to the

business, which was carried on for thirteen years afterwards before it

finally collapsed. Meanwhile Nicholas Bulstrode had used his hundred

thousand discreetly, and was become provincially, solidly important—a

banker, a Churchman, a public benefactor; also a sleeping partner in

trading concerns, in which his ability was directed to economy in the

raw material, as in the case of the dyes which rotted Mr. Vincy’s silk.

And now, when this respectability had lasted undisturbed for nearly

thirty years—when all that preceded it had long lain benumbed in the

consciousness—that past had risen and immersed his thought as if with

the terrible irruption of a new sense overburthening the feeble being.

Meanwhile, in his conversation with Raffles, he had learned something

momentous, something which entered actively into the struggle of his

longings and terrors. There, he thought, lay an opening towards

spiritual, perhaps towards material rescue.

The spiritual kind of rescue was a genuine need with him. There may be

coarse hypocrites, who consciously affect beliefs and emotions for the

sake of gulling the world, but Bulstrode was not one of them. He was

simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic

beliefs, and who had gradually explained the gratification of his

desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs. If this be

hypocrisy, it is a process which shows itself occasionally in us all,

to whatever confession we belong, and whether we believe in the future

perfection of our race or in the nearest date fixed for the end of the

world; whether we regard the earth as a putrefying nidus for a saved

remnant, including ourselves, or have a passionate belief in the

solidarity of mankind.

The service he could do to the cause of religion had been through life

the ground he alleged to himself for his choice of action: it had been

the motive which he had poured out in his prayers. Who would use money

and position better than he meant to use them? Who could surpass him in

self-abhorrence and exaltation of God’s cause? And to Mr. Bulstrode

God’s cause was something distinct from his own rectitude of conduct:

it enforced a discrimination of God’s enemies, who were to be used

merely as instruments, and whom it would be as well if possible to keep

out of money and consequent influence. Also, profitable investments in

trades where the power of the prince of this world showed its most

active devices, became sanctified by a right application of the profits

in the hands of God’s servant.

This implicit reasoning is essentially no more peculiar to evangelical

belief than the use of wide phrases for narrow motives is peculiar to

Englishmen. There is no general doctrine which is not capable of eating

out our morality if unchecked by the deep-seated habit of direct

fellow-feeling with individual fellow-men.

But a man who believes in something else than his own greed, has

necessarily a conscience or standard to which he more or less adapts

himself. Bulstrode’s standard had been his serviceableness to God’s

cause: “I am sinful and nought—a vessel to be consecrated by use—but

use me!”—had been the mould into which he had constrained his immense

need of being something important and predominating. And now had come a

moment in which that mould seemed in danger of being broken and utterly

cast away.

What if the acts he had reconciled himself to because they made him a

stronger instrument of the divine glory, were to become the pretext of

the scoffer, and a darkening of that glory? If this were to be the

ruling of Providence, he was cast out from the temple as one who had

brought unclean offerings.

He had long poured out utterances of repentance. But today a repentance

had come which was of a bitterer flavor, and a threatening Providence

urged him to a kind of propitiation which was not simply a doctrinal

transaction. The divine tribunal had changed its aspect for him;

self-prostration was no longer enough, and he must bring restitution in

his hand. It was really before his God that Bulstrode was about to

attempt such restitution as seemed possible: a great dread had seized

his susceptible frame, and the scorching approach of shame wrought in

him a new spiritual need. Night and day, while the resurgent

threatening past was making a conscience within him, he was thinking by

what means he could recover peace and trust—by what sacrifice he could

stay the rod. His belief in these moments of dread was, that if he

spontaneously did something right, God would save him from the

consequences of wrong-doing. For religion can only change when the

emotions which fill it are changed; and the religion of personal fear

remains nearly at the level of the savage.

He had seen Raffles actually going away on the Brassing coach, and this

was a temporary relief; it removed the pressure of an immediate dread,

but did not put an end to the spiritual conflict and the need to win

protection. At last he came to a difficult resolve, and wrote a letter

to Will Ladislaw, begging him to be at the Shrubs that evening for a

private interview at nine o’clock. Will had felt no particular surprise

at the request, and connected it with some new notions about the

“Pioneer;” but when he was shown into Mr. Bulstrode’s private room, he

was struck with the painfully worn look on the banker’s face, and was

going to say, “Are you ill?” when, checking himself in that abruptness,

he only inquired after Mrs. Bulstrode, and her satisfaction with the

picture bought for her.

“Thank you, she is quite satisfied; she has gone out with her daughters

this evening. I begged you to come, Mr. Ladislaw, because I have a

communication of a very private—indeed, I will say, of a sacredly

confidential nature, which I desire to make to you. Nothing, I dare

say, has been farther from your thoughts than that there had been

important ties in the past which could connect your history with mine.”

Will felt something like an electric shock. He was already in a state

of keen sensitiveness and hardly allayed agitation on the subject of

ties in the past, and his presentiments were not agreeable. It seemed

like the fluctuations of a dream—as if the action begun by that loud

bloated stranger were being carried on by this pale-eyed sickly looking

piece of respectability, whose subdued tone and glib formality of

speech were at this moment almost as repulsive to him as their

remembered contrast. He answered, with a marked change of color—

“No, indeed, nothing.”

“You see before you, Mr. Ladislaw, a man who is deeply stricken. But

for the urgency of conscience and the knowledge that I am before the

bar of One who seeth not as man seeth, I should be under no compulsion

to make the disclosure which has been my object in asking you to come

here to-night. So far as human laws go, you have no claim on me

whatever.”

Will was even more uncomfortable than wondering. Mr. Bulstrode had

paused, leaning his head on his hand, and looking at the floor. But he

now fixed his examining glance on Will and said—

“I am told that your mother’s name was Sarah Dunkirk, and that she ran

away from her friends to go on the stage. Also, that your father was at

one time much emaciated by illness. May I ask if you can confirm these

statements?”

“Yes, they are all true,” said Will, struck with the order in which an

inquiry had come, that might have been expected to be preliminary to

the banker’s previous hints. But Mr. Bulstrode had to-night followed

the order of his emotions; he entertained no doubt that the opportunity

for restitution had come, and he had an overpowering impulse towards

the penitential expression by which he was deprecating chastisement.

“Do you know any particulars of your mother’s family?” he continued.

“No; she never liked to speak of them. She was a very generous,

honorable woman,” said Will, almost angrily.

“I do not wish to allege anything against her. Did she never mention

her mother to you at all?”

“I have heard her say that she thought her mother did not know the

reason of her running away. She said ‘poor mother’ in a pitying tone.”

“That mother became my wife,” said Bulstrode, and then paused a moment

before he added, “you have a claim on me, Mr. Ladislaw: as I said

before, not a legal claim, but one which my conscience recognizes. I

was enriched by that marriage—a result which would probably not have

taken place—certainly not to the same extent—if your grandmother could

have discovered her daughter. That daughter, I gather, is no longer

living!”

“No,” said Will, feeling suspicion and repugnance rising so strongly

within him, that without quite knowing what he did, he took his hat

from the floor and stood up. The impulse within him was to reject the

disclosed connection.

“Pray be seated, Mr. Ladislaw,” said Bulstrode, anxiously. “Doubtless

you are startled by the suddenness of this discovery. But I entreat

your patience with one who is already bowed down by inward trial.”

Will reseated himself, feeling some pity which was half contempt for

this voluntary self-abasement of an elderly man.

“It is my wish, Mr. Ladislaw, to make amends for the deprivation which

befell your mother. I know that you are without fortune, and I wish to

supply you adequately from a store which would have probably already

been yours had your grandmother been certain of your mother’s existence

and been able to find her.”

Mr. Bulstrode paused. He felt that he was performing a striking piece

of scrupulosity in the judgment of his auditor, and a penitential act

in the eyes of God. He had no clew to the state of Will Ladislaw’s

mind, smarting as it was from the clear hints of Raffles, and with its

natural quickness in construction stimulated by the expectation of

discoveries which he would have been glad to conjure back into

darkness. Will made no answer for several moments, till Mr. Bulstrode,

who at the end of his speech had cast his eyes on the floor, now raised

them with an examining glance, which Will met fully, saying—

“I suppose you did know of my mother’s existence, and knew where she

might have been found.”

Bulstrode shrank—there was a visible quivering in his face and hands.

He was totally unprepared to have his advances met in this way, or to

find himself urged into more revelation than he had beforehand set down

as needful. But at that moment he dared not tell a lie, and he felt

suddenly uncertain of his ground which he had trodden with some

confidence before.

“I will not deny that you conjecture rightly,” he answered, with a

faltering in his tone. “And I wish to make atonement to you as the one

still remaining who has suffered a loss through me. You enter, I trust,

into my purpose, Mr. Ladislaw, which has a reference to higher than

merely human claims, and as I have already said, is entirely

independent of any legal compulsion. I am ready to narrow my own

resources and the prospects of my family by binding myself to allow you

five hundred pounds yearly during my life, and to leave you a

proportional capital at my death—nay, to do still more, if more should

be definitely necessary to any laudable project on your part.” Mr.

Bulstrode had gone on to particulars in the expectation that these

would work strongly on Ladislaw, and merge other feelings in grateful

acceptance.

But Will was looking as stubborn as possible, with his lip pouting and

his fingers in his side-pockets. He was not in the least touched, and

said firmly,—

“Before I make any reply to your proposition, Mr. Bulstrode, I must beg

you to answer a question or two. Were you connected with the business

by which that fortune you speak of was originally made?”

Mr. Bulstrode’s thought was, “Raffles has told him.” How could he

refuse to answer when he had volunteered what drew forth the question?

He answered, “Yes.”

“And was that business—or was it not—a thoroughly dishonorable one—nay,

one that, if its nature had been made public, might have ranked those

concerned in it with thieves and convicts?”

Will’s tone had a cutting bitterness: he was moved to put his question

as nakedly as he could.

Bulstrode reddened with irrepressible anger. He had been prepared for a

scene of self-abasement, but his intense pride and his habit of

supremacy overpowered penitence, and even dread, when this young man,

whom he had meant to benefit, turned on him with the air of a judge.

“The business was established before I became connected with it, sir;

nor is it for you to institute an inquiry of that kind,” he answered,

not raising his voice, but speaking with quick defiantness.

“Yes, it is,” said Will, starting up again with his hat in his hand.

“It is eminently mine to ask such questions, when I have to decide

whether I will have transactions with you and accept your money. My

unblemished honor is important to me. It is important to me to have no

stain on my birth and connections. And now I find there is a stain

which I can’t help. My mother felt it, and tried to keep as clear of it

as she could, and so will I. You shall keep your ill-gotten money. If I

had any fortune of my own, I would willingly pay it to any one who

could disprove what you have told me. What I have to thank you for is

that you kept the money till now, when I can refuse it. It ought to lie

with a man’s self that he is a gentleman. Good-night, sir.”

Bulstrode was going to speak, but Will, with determined quickness, was

out of the room in an instant, and in another the hall-door had closed

behind him. He was too strongly possessed with passionate rebellion

against this inherited blot which had been thrust on his knowledge to

reflect at present whether he had not been too hard on Bulstrode—too

arrogantly merciless towards a man of sixty, who was making efforts at

retrieval when time had rendered them vain.

No third person listening could have thoroughly understood the

impetuosity of Will’s repulse or the bitterness of his words. No one

but himself then knew how everything connected with the sentiment of

his own dignity had an immediate bearing for him on his relation to

Dorothea and to Mr. Casaubon’s treatment of him. And in the rush of

impulses by which he flung back that offer of Bulstrode’s there was

mingled the sense that it would have been impossible for him ever to

tell Dorothea that he had accepted it.

As for Bulstrode—when Will was gone he suffered a violent reaction, and

wept like a woman. It was the first time he had encountered an open

expression of scorn from any man higher than Raffles; and with that

scorn hurrying like venom through his system, there was no sensibility

left to consolations. But the relief of weeping had to be checked. His

wife and daughters soon came home from hearing the address of an

Oriental missionary, and were full of regret that papa had not heard,

in the first instance, the interesting things which they tried to

repeat to him.

Perhaps, through all other hidden thoughts, the one that breathed most

comfort was, that Will Ladislaw at least was not likely to publish what

had taken place that evening.

CHAPTER LXII.

He was a squyer of lowe degre,

That loved the king’s daughter of Hungrie.

—\_Old Romance\_.

Will Ladislaw’s mind was now wholly bent on seeing Dorothea again, and

forthwith quitting Middlemarch. The morning after his agitating scene

with Bulstrode he wrote a brief letter to her, saying that various

causes had detained him in the neighborhood longer than he had

expected, and asking her permission to call again at Lowick at some

hour which she would mention on the earliest possible day, he being

anxious to depart, but unwilling to do so until she had granted him an

interview. He left the letter at the office, ordering the messenger to

carry it to Lowick Manor, and wait for an answer.

Ladislaw felt the awkwardness of asking for more last words. His former

farewell had been made in the hearing of Sir James Chettam, and had

been announced as final even to the butler. It is certainly trying to a

man’s dignity to reappear when he is not expected to do so: a first

farewell has pathos in it, but to come back for a second lends an

opening to comedy, and it was possible even that there might be bitter

sneers afloat about Will’s motives for lingering. Still it was on the

whole more satisfactory to his feeling to take the directest means of

seeing Dorothea, than to use any device which might give an air of

chance to a meeting of which he wished her to understand that it was

what he earnestly sought. When he had parted from her before, he had

been in ignorance of facts which gave a new aspect to the relation

between them, and made a more absolute severance than he had then

believed in. He knew nothing of Dorothea’s private fortune, and being

little used to reflect on such matters, took it for granted that

according to Mr. Casaubon’s arrangement marriage to him, Will Ladislaw,

would mean that she consented to be penniless. That was not what he

could wish for even in his secret heart, or even if she had been ready

to meet such hard contrast for his sake. And then, too, there was the

fresh smart of that disclosure about his mother’s family, which if

known would be an added reason why Dorothea’s friends should look down

upon him as utterly below her. The secret hope that after some years he

might come back with the sense that he had at least a personal value

equal to her wealth, seemed now the dreamy continuation of a dream.

This change would surely justify him in asking Dorothea to receive him

once more.

But Dorothea on that morning was not at home to receive Will’s note. In

consequence of a letter from her uncle announcing his intention to be

at home in a week, she had driven first to Freshitt to carry the news,

meaning to go on to the Grange to deliver some orders with which her

uncle had intrusted her—thinking, as he said, “a little mental

occupation of this sort good for a widow.”

If Will Ladislaw could have overheard some of the talk at Freshitt that

morning, he would have felt all his suppositions confirmed as to the

readiness of certain people to sneer at his lingering in the

neighborhood. Sir James, indeed, though much relieved concerning

Dorothea, had been on the watch to learn Ladislaw’s movements, and had

an instructed informant in Mr. Standish, who was necessarily in his

confidence on this matter. That Ladislaw had stayed in Middlemarch

nearly two months after he had declared that he was going immediately,

was a fact to embitter Sir James’s suspicions, or at least to justify

his aversion to a “young fellow” whom he represented to himself as

slight, volatile, and likely enough to show such recklessness as

naturally went along with a position unriveted by family ties or a

strict profession. But he had just heard something from Standish which,

while it justified these surmises about Will, offered a means of

nullifying all danger with regard to Dorothea.

Unwonted circumstances may make us all rather unlike ourselves: there

are conditions under which the most majestic person is obliged to

sneeze, and our emotions are liable to be acted on in the same

incongruous manner. Good Sir James was this morning so far unlike

himself that he was irritably anxious to say something to Dorothea on a

subject which he usually avoided as if it had been a matter of shame to

them both. He could not use Celia as a medium, because he did not

choose that she should know the kind of gossip he had in his mind; and

before Dorothea happened to arrive he had been trying to imagine how,

with his shyness and unready tongue, he could ever manage to introduce

his communication. Her unexpected presence brought him to utter

hopelessness in his own power of saying anything unpleasant; but

desperation suggested a resource; he sent the groom on an unsaddled

horse across the park with a pencilled note to Mrs. Cadwallader, who

already knew the gossip, and would think it no compromise of herself to

repeat it as often as required.

Dorothea was detained on the good pretext that Mr. Garth, whom she

wanted to see, was expected at the hall within the hour, and she was

still talking to Caleb on the gravel when Sir James, on the watch for

the rector’s wife, saw her coming and met her with the needful hints.

“Enough! I understand,”—said Mrs. Cadwallader. “You shall be innocent.

I am such a blackamoor that I cannot smirch myself.”

“I don’t mean that it’s of any consequence,” said Sir James, disliking

that Mrs. Cadwallader should understand too much. “Only it is desirable

that Dorothea should know there are reasons why she should not receive

him again; and I really can’t say so to her. It will come lightly from

you.”

It came very lightly indeed. When Dorothea quitted Caleb and turned to

meet them, it appeared that Mrs. Cadwallader had stepped across the

park by the merest chance in the world, just to chat with Celia in a

matronly way about the baby. And so Mr. Brooke was coming back?

Delightful!—coming back, it was to be hoped, quite cured of

Parliamentary fever and pioneering. Apropos of the “Pioneer”—somebody

had prophesied that it would soon be like a dying dolphin, and turn all

colors for want of knowing how to help itself, because Mr. Brooke’s

protege, the brilliant young Ladislaw, was gone or going. Had Sir James

heard that?

The three were walking along the gravel slowly, and Sir James, turning

aside to whip a shrub, said he had heard something of that sort.

“All false!” said Mrs. Cadwallader. “He is not gone, or going,

apparently; the ‘Pioneer’ keeps its color, and Mr. Orlando Ladislaw is

making a sad dark-blue scandal by warbling continually with your Mr.

Lydgate’s wife, who they tell me is as pretty as pretty can be. It

seems nobody ever goes into the house without finding this young

gentleman lying on the rug or warbling at the piano. But the people in

manufacturing towns are always disreputable.”

“You began by saying that one report was false, Mrs. Cadwallader, and I

believe this is false too,” said Dorothea, with indignant energy; “at

least, I feel sure it is a misrepresentation. I will not hear any evil

spoken of Mr. Ladislaw; he has already suffered too much injustice.”

Dorothea when thoroughly moved cared little what any one thought of her

feelings; and even if she had been able to reflect, she would have held

it petty to keep silence at injurious words about Will from fear of

being herself misunderstood. Her face was flushed and her lip trembled.

Sir James, glancing at her, repented of his stratagem; but Mrs.

Cadwallader, equal to all occasions, spread the palms of her hands

outward and said—“Heaven grant it, my dear!—I mean that all bad tales

about anybody may be false. But it is a pity that young Lydgate should

have married one of these Middlemarch girls. Considering he’s a son of

somebody, he might have got a woman with good blood in her veins, and

not too young, who would have put up with his profession. There’s Clara

Harfager, for instance, whose friends don’t know what to do with her;

and she has a portion. Then we might have had her among us.

However!—it’s no use being wise for other people. Where is Celia? Pray

let us go in.”

“I am going on immediately to Tipton,” said Dorothea, rather haughtily.

“Good-by.”

Sir James could say nothing as he accompanied her to the carriage. He

was altogether discontented with the result of a contrivance which had

cost him some secret humiliation beforehand.

Dorothea drove along between the berried hedgerows and the shorn

corn-fields, not seeing or hearing anything around. The tears came and

rolled down her cheeks, but she did not know it. The world, it seemed,

was turning ugly and hateful, and there was no place for her

trustfulness. “It is not true—it is not true!” was the voice within her

that she listened to; but all the while a remembrance to which there

had always clung a vague uneasiness would thrust itself on her

attention—the remembrance of that day when she had found Will Ladislaw

with Mrs. Lydgate, and had heard his voice accompanied by the piano.

“He said he would never do anything that I disapproved—I wish I could

have told him that I disapproved of that,” said poor Dorothea,

inwardly, feeling a strange alternation between anger with Will and the

passionate defence of him. “They all try to blacken him before me; but

I will care for no pain, if he is not to blame. I always believed he

was good.”—These were her last thoughts before she felt that the

carriage was passing under the archway of the lodge-gate at the Grange,

when she hurriedly pressed her handkerchief to her face and began to

think of her errands. The coachman begged leave to take out the horses

for half an hour as there was something wrong with a shoe; and

Dorothea, having the sense that she was going to rest, took off her

gloves and bonnet, while she was leaning against a statue in the

entrance-hall, and talking to the housekeeper. At last she said—

“I must stay here a little, Mrs. Kell. I will go into the library and

write you some memoranda from my uncle’s letter, if you will open the

shutters for me.”

“The shutters are open, madam,” said Mrs. Kell, following Dorothea, who

had walked along as she spoke. “Mr. Ladislaw is there, looking for

something.”

(Will had come to fetch a portfolio of his own sketches which he had

missed in the act of packing his movables, and did not choose to leave

behind.)

Dorothea’s heart seemed to turn over as if it had had a blow, but she

was not perceptibly checked: in truth, the sense that Will was there

was for the moment all-satisfying to her, like the sight of something

precious that one has lost. When she reached the door she said to Mrs.

Kell—

“Go in first, and tell him that I am here.”

Will had found his portfolio, and had laid it on the table at the far

end of the room, to turn over the sketches and please himself by

looking at the memorable piece of art which had a relation to nature

too mysterious for Dorothea. He was smiling at it still, and shaking

the sketches into order with the thought that he might find a letter

from her awaiting him at Middlemarch, when Mrs. Kell close to his elbow

said—

“Mrs. Casaubon is coming in, sir.”

Will turned round quickly, and the next moment Dorothea was entering.

As Mrs. Kell closed the door behind her they met: each was looking at

the other, and consciousness was overflowed by something that

suppressed utterance. It was not confusion that kept them silent, for

they both felt that parting was near, and there is no shamefacedness in

a sad parting.

She moved automatically towards her uncle’s chair against the

writing-table, and Will, after drawing it out a little for her, went a

few paces off and stood opposite to her.

“Pray sit down,” said Dorothea, crossing her hands on her lap; “I am

very glad you were here.” Will thought that her face looked just as it

did when she first shook hands with him in Rome; for her widow’s cap,

fixed in her bonnet, had gone off with it, and he could see that she

had lately been shedding tears. But the mixture of anger in her

agitation had vanished at the sight of him; she had been used, when

they were face to face, always to feel confidence and the happy freedom

which comes with mutual understanding, and how could other people’s

words hinder that effect on a sudden? Let the music which can take

possession of our frame and fill the air with joy for us, sound once

more—what does it signify that we heard it found fault with in its

absence?

“I have sent a letter to Lowick Manor to-day, asking leave to see you,”

said Will, seating himself opposite to her. “I am going away

immediately, and I could not go without speaking to you again.”

“I thought we had parted when you came to Lowick many weeks ago—you

thought you were going then,” said Dorothea, her voice trembling a

little.

“Yes; but I was in ignorance then of things which I know now—things

which have altered my feelings about the future. When I saw you before,

I was dreaming that I might come back some day. I don’t think I ever

shall—now.” Will paused here.

“You wished me to know the reasons?” said Dorothea, timidly.

“Yes,” said Will, impetuously, shaking his head backward, and looking

away from her with irritation in his face. “Of course I must wish it. I

have been grossly insulted in your eyes and in the eyes of others.

There has been a mean implication against my character. I wish you to

know that under no circumstances would I have lowered myself by—under

no circumstances would I have given men the chance of saying that I

sought money under the pretext of seeking—something else. There was no

need of other safeguard against me—the safeguard of wealth was enough.”

Will rose from his chair with the last word and went—he hardly knew

where; but it was to the projecting window nearest him, which had been

open as now about the same season a year ago, when he and Dorothea had

stood within it and talked together. Her whole heart was going out at

this moment in sympathy with Will’s indignation: she only wanted to

convince him that she had never done him injustice, and he seemed to

have turned away from her as if she too had been part of the unfriendly

world.

“It would be very unkind of you to suppose that I ever attributed any

meanness to you,” she began. Then in her ardent way, wanting to plead

with him, she moved from her chair and went in front of him to her old

place in the window, saying, “Do you suppose that I ever disbelieved in

you?”

When Will saw her there, he gave a start and moved backward out of the

window, without meeting her glance. Dorothea was hurt by this movement

following up the previous anger of his tone. She was ready to say that

it was as hard on her as on him, and that she was helpless; but those

strange particulars of their relation which neither of them could

explicitly mention kept her always in dread of saying too much. At this

moment she had no belief that Will would in any case have wanted to

marry her, and she feared using words which might imply such a belief.

She only said earnestly, recurring to his last word—

“I am sure no safeguard was ever needed against you.”

Will did not answer. In the stormy fluctuation of his feelings these

words of hers seemed to him cruelly neutral, and he looked pale and

miserable after his angry outburst. He went to the table and fastened

up his portfolio, while Dorothea looked at him from the distance. They

were wasting these last moments together in wretched silence. What

could he say, since what had got obstinately uppermost in his mind was

the passionate love for her which he forbade himself to utter? What

could she say, since she might offer him no help—since she was forced

to keep the money that ought to have been his?—since to-day he seemed

not to respond as he used to do to her thorough trust and liking?

But Will at last turned away from his portfolio and approached the

window again.

“I must go,” he said, with that peculiar look of the eyes which

sometimes accompanies bitter feeling, as if they had been tired and

burned with gazing too close at a light.

“What shall you do in life?” said Dorothea, timidly. “Have your

intentions remained just the same as when we said good-by before?”

“Yes,” said Will, in a tone that seemed to waive the subject as

uninteresting. “I shall work away at the first thing that offers. I

suppose one gets a habit of doing without happiness or hope.”

“Oh, what sad words!” said Dorothea, with a dangerous tendency to sob.

Then trying to smile, she added, “We used to agree that we were alike

in speaking too strongly.”

“I have not spoken too strongly now,” said Will, leaning back against

the angle of the wall. “There are certain things which a man can only

go through once in his life; and he must know some time or other that

the best is over with him. This experience has happened to me while I

am very young—that is all. What I care more for than I can ever care

for anything else is absolutely forbidden to me—I don’t mean merely by

being out of my reach, but forbidden me, even if it were within my

reach, by my own pride and honor—by everything I respect myself for. Of

course I shall go on living as a man might do who had seen heaven in a

trance.”

Will paused, imagining that it would be impossible for Dorothea to

misunderstand this; indeed he felt that he was contradicting himself

and offending against his self-approval in speaking to her so plainly;

but still—it could not be fairly called wooing a woman to tell her that

he would never woo her. It must be admitted to be a ghostly kind of

wooing.

But Dorothea’s mind was rapidly going over the past with quite another

vision than his. The thought that she herself might be what Will most

cared for did throb through her an instant, but then came doubt: the

memory of the little they had lived through together turned pale and

shrank before the memory which suggested how much fuller might have

been the intercourse between Will and some one else with whom he had

had constant companionship. Everything he had said might refer to that

other relation, and whatever had passed between him and herself was

thoroughly explained by what she had always regarded as their simple

friendship and the cruel obstruction thrust upon it by her husband’s

injurious act. Dorothea stood silent, with her eyes cast down dreamily,

while images crowded upon her which left the sickening certainty that

Will was referring to Mrs. Lydgate. But why sickening? He wanted her to

know that here too his conduct should be above suspicion.

Will was not surprised at her silence. His mind also was tumultuously

busy while he watched her, and he was feeling rather wildly that

something must happen to hinder their parting—some miracle, clearly

nothing in their own deliberate speech. Yet, after all, had she any

love for him?—he could not pretend to himself that he would rather

believe her to be without that pain. He could not deny that a secret

longing for the assurance that she loved him was at the root of all his

words.

Neither of them knew how long they stood in that way. Dorothea was

raising her eyes, and was about to speak, when the door opened and her

footman came to say—

“The horses are ready, madam, whenever you like to start.”

“Presently,” said Dorothea. Then turning to Will, she said, “I have

some memoranda to write for the housekeeper.”

“I must go,” said Will, when the door had closed again—advancing

towards her. “The day after to-morrow I shall leave Middlemarch.”

“You have acted in every way rightly,” said Dorothea, in a low tone,

feeling a pressure at her heart which made it difficult to speak.

She put out her hand, and Will took it for an instant without speaking,

for her words had seemed to him cruelly cold and unlike herself. Their

eyes met, but there was discontent in his, and in hers there was only

sadness. He turned away and took his portfolio under his arm.

“I have never done you injustice. Please remember me,” said Dorothea,

repressing a rising sob.

“Why should you say that?” said Will, with irritation. “As if I were

not in danger of forgetting everything else.”

He had really a movement of anger against her at that moment, and it

impelled him to go away without pause. It was all one flash to

Dorothea—his last words—his distant bow to her as he reached the

door—the sense that he was no longer there. She sank into the chair,

and for a few moments sat like a statue, while images and emotions were

hurrying upon her. Joy came first, in spite of the threatening train

behind it—joy in the impression that it was really herself whom Will

loved and was renouncing, that there was really no other love less

permissible, more blameworthy, which honor was hurrying him away from.

They were parted all the same, but—Dorothea drew a deep breath and felt

her strength return—she could think of him unrestrainedly. At that

moment the parting was easy to bear: the first sense of loving and

being loved excluded sorrow. It was as if some hard icy pressure had

melted, and her consciousness had room to expand: her past was come

back to her with larger interpretation. The joy was not the

less—perhaps it was the more complete just then—because of the

irrevocable parting; for there was no reproach, no contemptuous wonder

to imagine in any eye or from any lips. He had acted so as to defy

reproach, and make wonder respectful.

Any one watching her might have seen that there was a fortifying

thought within her. Just as when inventive power is working with glad

ease some small claim on the attention is fully met as if it were only

a cranny opened to the sunlight, it was easy now for Dorothea to write

her memoranda. She spoke her last words to the housekeeper in cheerful

tones, and when she seated herself in the carriage her eyes were bright

and her cheeks blooming under the dismal bonnet. She threw back the

heavy “weepers,” and looked before her, wondering which road Will had

taken. It was in her nature to be proud that he was blameless, and

through all her feelings there ran this vein—“I was right to defend

him.”

The coachman was used to drive his grays at a good pace, Mr. Casaubon

being unenjoying and impatient in everything away from his desk, and

wanting to get to the end of all journeys; and Dorothea was now bowled

along quickly. Driving was pleasant, for rain in the night had laid the

dust, and the blue sky looked far off, away from the region of the

great clouds that sailed in masses. The earth looked like a happy place

under the vast heavens, and Dorothea was wishing that she might

overtake Will and see him once more.

After a turn of the road, there he was with the portfolio under his

arm; but the next moment she was passing him while he raised his hat,

and she felt a pang at being seated there in a sort of exaltation,

leaving him behind. She could not look back at him. It was as if a

crowd of indifferent objects had thrust them asunder, and forced them

along different paths, taking them farther and farther away from each

other, and making it useless to look back. She could no more make any

sign that would seem to say, “Need we part?” than she could stop the

carriage to wait for him. Nay, what a world of reasons crowded upon her

against any movement of her thought towards a future that might reverse

the decision of this day!

“I only wish I had known before—I wish he knew—then we could be quite

happy in thinking of each other, though we are forever parted. And if I

could but have given him the money, and made things easier for

him!”—were the longings that came back the most persistently. And yet,

so heavily did the world weigh on her in spite of her independent

energy, that with this idea of Will as in need of such help and at a

disadvantage with the world, there came always the vision of that

unfittingness of any closer relation between them which lay in the

opinion of every one connected with her. She felt to the full all the

imperativeness of the motives which urged Will’s conduct. How could he

dream of her defying the barrier that her husband had placed between

them?—how could she ever say to herself that she would defy it?

Will’s certainty as the carriage grew smaller in the distance, had much

more bitterness in it. Very slight matters were enough to gall him in

his sensitive mood, and the sight of Dorothea driving past him while he

felt himself plodding along as a poor devil seeking a position in a

world which in his present temper offered him little that he coveted,

made his conduct seem a mere matter of necessity, and took away the

sustainment of resolve. After all, he had no assurance that she loved

him: could any man pretend that he was simply glad in such a case to

have the suffering all on his own side?

That evening Will spent with the Lydgates; the next evening he was

gone.

BOOK VII.

TWO TEMPTATIONS.

CHAPTER LXIII.

These little things are great to little man.—GOLDSMITH.

“Have you seen much of your scientific phoenix, Lydgate, lately?” said

Mr. Toller at one of his Christmas dinner-parties, speaking to Mr.

Farebrother on his right hand.

“Not much, I am sorry to say,” answered the Vicar, accustomed to parry

Mr. Toller’s banter about his belief in the new medical light. “I am

out of the way and he is too busy.”

“Is he? I am glad to hear it,” said Dr. Minchin, with mingled suavity

and surprise.

“He gives a great deal of time to the New Hospital,” said Mr.

Farebrother, who had his reasons for continuing the subject: “I hear of

that from my neighbor, Mrs. Casaubon, who goes there often. She says

Lydgate is indefatigable, and is making a fine thing of Bulstrode’s

institution. He is preparing a new ward in case of the cholera coming

to us.”

“And preparing theories of treatment to try on the patients, I

suppose,” said Mr. Toller.

“Come, Toller, be candid,” said Mr. Farebrother. “You are too clever

not to see the good of a bold fresh mind in medicine, as well as in

everything else; and as to cholera, I fancy, none of you are very sure

what you ought to do. If a man goes a little too far along a new road,

it is usually himself that he harms more than any one else.”

“I am sure you and Wrench ought to be obliged to him,” said Dr.

Minchin, looking towards Toller, “for he has sent you the cream of

Peacock’s patients.”

“Lydgate has been living at a great rate for a young beginner,” said

Mr. Harry Toller, the brewer. “I suppose his relations in the North

back him up.”

“I hope so,” said Mr. Chichely, “else he ought not to have married that

nice girl we were all so fond of. Hang it, one has a grudge against a

man who carries off the prettiest girl in the town.”

“Ay, by God! and the best too,” said Mr. Standish.

“My friend Vincy didn’t half like the marriage, I know that,” said Mr.

Chichely. “\_He\_ wouldn’t do much. How the relations on the other side

may have come down I can’t say.” There was an emphatic kind of

reticence in Mr. Chichely’s manner of speaking.

“Oh, I shouldn’t think Lydgate ever looked to practice for a living,”

said Mr. Toller, with a slight touch of sarcasm, and there the subject

was dropped.

This was not the first time that Mr. Farebrother had heard hints of

Lydgate’s expenses being obviously too great to be met by his practice,

but he thought it not unlikely that there were resources or

expectations which excused the large outlay at the time of Lydgate’s

marriage, and which might hinder any bad consequences from the

disappointment in his practice. One evening, when he took the pains to

go to Middlemarch on purpose to have a chat with Lydgate as of old, he

noticed in him an air of excited effort quite unlike his usual easy way

of keeping silence or breaking it with abrupt energy whenever he had

anything to say. Lydgate talked persistently when they were in his

work-room, putting arguments for and against the probability of certain

biological views; but he had none of those definite things to say or to

show which give the waymarks of a patient uninterrupted pursuit, such

as he used himself to insist on, saying that “there must be a systole

and diastole in all inquiry,” and that “a man’s mind must be

continually expanding and shrinking between the whole human horizon and

the horizon of an object-glass.” That evening he seemed to be talking

widely for the sake of resisting any personal bearing; and before long

they went into the drawing room, where Lydgate, having asked Rosamond

to give them music, sank back in his chair in silence, but with a

strange light in his eyes. “He may have been taking an opiate,” was a

thought that crossed Mr. Farebrother’s mind—“tic-douloureux perhaps—or

medical worries.”

It did not occur to him that Lydgate’s marriage was not delightful: he

believed, as the rest did, that Rosamond was an amiable, docile

creature, though he had always thought her rather uninteresting—a

little too much the pattern-card of the finishing-school; and his

mother could not forgive Rosamond because she never seemed to see that

Henrietta Noble was in the room. “However, Lydgate fell in love with

her,” said the Vicar to himself, “and she must be to his taste.”

Mr. Farebrother was aware that Lydgate was a proud man, but having very

little corresponding fibre in himself, and perhaps too little care

about personal dignity, except the dignity of not being mean or

foolish, he could hardly allow enough for the way in which Lydgate

shrank, as from a burn, from the utterance of any word about his

private affairs. And soon after that conversation at Mr. Toller’s, the

Vicar learned something which made him watch the more eagerly for an

opportunity of indirectly letting Lydgate know that if he wanted to

open himself about any difficulty there was a friendly ear ready.

The opportunity came at Mr. Vincy’s, where, on New Year’s Day, there

was a party, to which Mr. Farebrother was irresistibly invited, on the

plea that he must not forsake his old friends on the first new year of

his being a greater man, and Rector as well as Vicar. And this party

was thoroughly friendly: all the ladies of the Farebrother family were

present; the Vincy children all dined at the table, and Fred had

persuaded his mother that if she did not invite Mary Garth, the

Farebrothers would regard it as a slight to themselves, Mary being

their particular friend. Mary came, and Fred was in high spirits,

though his enjoyment was of a checkered kind—triumph that his mother

should see Mary’s importance with the chief personages in the party

being much streaked with jealousy when Mr. Farebrother sat down by her.

Fred used to be much more easy about his own accomplishments in the

days when he had not begun to dread being “bowled out by Farebrother,”

and this terror was still before him. Mrs. Vincy, in her fullest

matronly bloom, looked at Mary’s little figure, rough wavy hair, and

visage quite without lilies and roses, and wondered; trying

unsuccessfully to fancy herself caring about Mary’s appearance in

wedding clothes, or feeling complacency in grandchildren who would

“feature” the Garths. However, the party was a merry one, and Mary was

particularly bright; being glad, for Fred’s sake, that his friends were

getting kinder to her, and being also quite willing that they should

see how much she was valued by others whom they must admit to be

judges.

Mr. Farebrother noticed that Lydgate seemed bored, and that Mr. Vincy

spoke as little as possible to his son-in-law. Rosamond was perfectly

graceful and calm, and only a subtle observation such as the Vicar had

not been roused to bestow on her would have perceived the total absence

of that interest in her husband’s presence which a loving wife is sure

to betray, even if etiquette keeps her aloof from him. When Lydgate was

taking part in the conversation, she never looked towards him any more

than if she had been a sculptured Psyche modelled to look another way:

and when, after being called out for an hour or two, he re-entered the

room, she seemed unconscious of the fact, which eighteen months before

would have had the effect of a numeral before ciphers. In reality,

however, she was intensely aware of Lydgate’s voice and movements; and

her pretty good-tempered air of unconsciousness was a studied negation

by which she satisfied her inward opposition to him without compromise

of propriety. When the ladies were in the drawing-room after Lydgate

had been called away from the dessert, Mrs. Farebrother, when Rosamond

happened to be near her, said—“You have to give up a great deal of your

husband’s society, Mrs. Lydgate.”

“Yes, the life of a medical man is very arduous: especially when he is

so devoted to his profession as Mr. Lydgate is,” said Rosamond, who was

standing, and moved easily away at the end of this correct little

speech.

“It is dreadfully dull for her when there is no company,” said Mrs.

Vincy, who was seated at the old lady’s side. “I am sure I thought so

when Rosamond was ill, and I was staying with her. You know, Mrs.

Farebrother, ours is a cheerful house. I am of a cheerful disposition

myself, and Mr. Vincy always likes something to be going on. That is

what Rosamond has been used to. Very different from a husband out at

odd hours, and never knowing when he will come home, and of a close,

proud disposition, \_I\_ think”—indiscreet Mrs. Vincy did lower her tone

slightly with this parenthesis. “But Rosamond always had an angel of a

temper; her brothers used very often not to please her, but she was

never the girl to show temper; from a baby she was always as good as

good, and with a complexion beyond anything. But my children are all

good-tempered, thank God.”

This was easily credible to any one looking at Mrs. Vincy as she threw

back her broad cap-strings, and smiled towards her three little girls,

aged from seven to eleven. But in that smiling glance she was obliged

to include Mary Garth, whom the three girls had got into a corner to

make her tell them stories. Mary was just finishing the delicious tale

of Rumpelstiltskin, which she had well by heart, because Letty was

never tired of communicating it to her ignorant elders from a favorite

red volume. Louisa, Mrs. Vincy’s darling, now ran to her with wide-eyed

serious excitement, crying, “Oh mamma, mamma, the little man stamped so

hard on the floor he couldn’t get his leg out again!”

“Bless you, my cherub!” said mamma; “you shall tell me all about it

to-morrow. Go and listen!” and then, as her eyes followed Louisa back

towards the attractive corner, she thought that if Fred wished her to

invite Mary again she would make no objection, the children being so

pleased with her.

But presently the corner became still more animated, for Mr.

Farebrother came in, and seating himself behind Louisa, took her on his

lap; whereupon the girls all insisted that he must hear

Rumpelstiltskin, and Mary must tell it over again. He insisted too, and

Mary, without fuss, began again in her neat fashion, with precisely the

same words as before. Fred, who had also seated himself near, would

have felt unmixed triumph in Mary’s effectiveness if Mr. Farebrother

had not been looking at her with evident admiration, while he

dramatized an intense interest in the tale to please the children.

“You will never care any more about my one-eyed giant, Loo,” said Fred

at the end.

“Yes, I shall. Tell about him now,” said Louisa.

“Oh, I dare say; I am quite cut out. Ask Mr. Farebrother.”

“Yes,” added Mary; “ask Mr. Farebrother to tell you about the ants

whose beautiful house was knocked down by a giant named Tom, and he

thought they didn’t mind because he couldn’t hear them cry, or see them

use their pocket-handkerchiefs.”

“Please,” said Louisa, looking up at the Vicar.

“No, no, I am a grave old parson. If I try to draw a story out of my

bag a sermon comes instead. Shall I preach you a sermon?” said he,

putting on his short-sighted glasses, and pursing up his lips.

“Yes,” said Louisa, falteringly.

“Let me see, then. Against cakes: how cakes are bad things, especially

if they are sweet and have plums in them.”

Louisa took the affair rather seriously, and got down from the Vicar’s

knee to go to Fred.

“Ah, I see it will not do to preach on New Year’s Day,” said Mr.

Farebrother, rising and walking away. He had discovered of late that

Fred had become jealous of him, and also that he himself was not losing

his preference for Mary above all other women.

“A delightful young person is Miss Garth,” said Mrs. Farebrother, who

had been watching her son’s movements.

“Yes,” said Mrs. Vincy, obliged to reply, as the old lady turned to her

expectantly. “It is a pity she is not better-looking.”

“I cannot say that,” said Mrs. Farebrother, decisively. “I like her

countenance. We must not always ask for beauty, when a good God has

seen fit to make an excellent young woman without it. I put good

manners first, and Miss Garth will know how to conduct herself in any

station.”

The old lady was a little sharp in her tone, having a prospective

reference to Mary’s becoming her daughter-in-law; for there was this

inconvenience in Mary’s position with regard to Fred, that it was not

suitable to be made public, and hence the three ladies at Lowick

Parsonage were still hoping that Camden would choose Miss Garth.

New visitors entered, and the drawing-room was given up to music and

games, while whist-tables were prepared in the quiet room on the other

side of the hall. Mr. Farebrother played a rubber to satisfy his

mother, who regarded her occasional whist as a protest against scandal

and novelty of opinion, in which light even a revoke had its dignity.

But at the end he got Mr. Chichely to take his place, and left the

room. As he crossed the hall, Lydgate had just come in and was taking

off his great-coat.

“You are the man I was going to look for,” said the Vicar; and instead

of entering the drawing-room, they walked along the hall and stood

against the fireplace, where the frosty air helped to make a glowing

bank. “You see, I can leave the whist-table easily enough,” he went on,

smiling at Lydgate, “now I don’t play for money. I owe that to you,

Mrs. Casaubon says.”

“How?” said Lydgate, coldly.

“Ah, you didn’t mean me to know it; I call that ungenerous reticence.

You should let a man have the pleasure of feeling that you have done

him a good turn. I don’t enter into some people’s dislike of being

under an obligation: upon my word, I prefer being under an obligation

to everybody for behaving well to me.”

“I can’t tell what you mean,” said Lydgate, “unless it is that I once

spoke of you to Mrs. Casaubon. But I did not think that she would break

her promise not to mention that I had done so,” said Lydgate, leaning

his back against the corner of the mantel-piece, and showing no

radiance in his face.

“It was Brooke who let it out, only the other day. He paid me the

compliment of saying that he was very glad I had the living though you

had come across his tactics, and had praised me up as a Ken and a

Tillotson, and that sort of thing, till Mrs. Casaubon would hear of no

one else.”

“Oh, Brooke is such a leaky-minded fool,” said Lydgate, contemptuously.

“Well, I was glad of the leakiness then. I don’t see why you shouldn’t

like me to know that you wished to do me a service, my dear fellow. And

you certainly have done me one. It’s rather a strong check to one’s

self-complacency to find how much of one’s right doing depends on not

being in want of money. A man will not be tempted to say the Lord’s

Prayer backward to please the devil, if he doesn’t want the devil’s

services. I have no need to hang on the smiles of chance now.”

“I don’t see that there’s any money-getting without chance,” said

Lydgate; “if a man gets it in a profession, it’s pretty sure to come by

chance.”

Mr. Farebrother thought he could account for this speech, in striking

contrast with Lydgate’s former way of talking, as the perversity which

will often spring from the moodiness of a man ill at ease in his

affairs. He answered in a tone of good-humored admission—

“Ah, there’s enormous patience wanted with the way of the world. But it

is the easier for a man to wait patiently when he has friends who love

him, and ask for nothing better than to help him through, so far as it

lies in their power.”

“Oh yes,” said Lydgate, in a careless tone, changing his attitude and

looking at his watch. “People make much more of their difficulties than

they need to do.”

He knew as distinctly as possible that this was an offer of help to

himself from Mr. Farebrother, and he could not bear it. So strangely

determined are we mortals, that, after having been long gratified with

the sense that he had privately done the Vicar a service, the

suggestion that the Vicar discerned his need of a service in return

made him shrink into unconquerable reticence. Besides, behind all

making of such offers what else must come?—that he should “mention his

case,” imply that he wanted specific things. At that moment, suicide

seemed easier.

Mr. Farebrother was too keen a man not to know the meaning of that

reply, and there was a certain massiveness in Lydgate’s manner and

tone, corresponding with his physique, which if he repelled your

advances in the first instance seemed to put persuasive devices out of

question.

“What time are you?” said the Vicar, devouring his wounded feeling.

“After eleven,” said Lydgate. And they went into the drawing-room.

CHAPTER LXIV.

1\_st Gent\_. Where lies the power, there let the blame lie too.

2\_d Gent\_. Nay, power is relative; you cannot fright

The coming pest with border fortresses,

Or catch your carp with subtle argument.

All force is twain in one: cause is not cause

Unless effect be there; and action’s self

Must needs contain a passive. So command

Exists but with obedience.

Even if Lydgate had been inclined to be quite open about his affairs,

he knew that it would have hardly been in Mr. Farebrother’s power to

give him the help he immediately wanted. With the year’s bills coming

in from his tradesmen, with Dover’s threatening hold on his furniture,

and with nothing to depend on but slow dribbling payments from patients

who must not be offended—for the handsome fees he had had from Freshitt

Hall and Lowick Manor had been easily absorbed—nothing less than a

thousand pounds would have freed him from actual embarrassment, and

left a residue which, according to the favorite phrase of hopefulness

in such circumstances, would have given him “time to look about him.”

Naturally, the merry Christmas bringing the happy New Year, when

fellow-citizens expect to be paid for the trouble and goods they have

smilingly bestowed on their neighbors, had so tightened the pressure of

sordid cares on Lydgate’s mind that it was hardly possible for him to

think unbrokenly of any other subject, even the most habitual and

soliciting. He was not an ill-tempered man; his intellectual activity,

the ardent kindness of his heart, as well as his strong frame, would

always, under tolerably easy conditions, have kept him above the petty

uncontrolled susceptibilities which make bad temper. But he was now a

prey to that worst irritation which arises not simply from annoyances,

but from the second consciousness underlying those annoyances, of

wasted energy and a degrading preoccupation, which was the reverse of

all his former purposes. “\_This\_ is what I am thinking of; and \_that\_

is what I might have been thinking of,” was the bitter incessant murmur

within him, making every difficulty a double goad to impatience.

Some gentlemen have made an amazing figure in literature by general

discontent with the universe as a trap of dulness into which their

great souls have fallen by mistake; but the sense of a stupendous self

and an insignificant world may have its consolations. Lydgate’s

discontent was much harder to bear: it was the sense that there was a

grand existence in thought and effective action lying around him, while

his self was being narrowed into the miserable isolation of egoistic

fears, and vulgar anxieties for events that might allay such fears. His

troubles will perhaps appear miserably sordid, and beneath the

attention of lofty persons who can know nothing of debt except on a

magnificent scale. Doubtless they were sordid; and for the majority,

who are not lofty, there is no escape from sordidness but by being free

from money-craving, with all its base hopes and temptations, its

watching for death, its hinted requests, its horse-dealer’s desire to

make bad work pass for good, its seeking for function which ought to be

another’s, its compulsion often to long for Luck in the shape of a wide

calamity.

It was because Lydgate writhed under the idea of getting his neck

beneath this vile yoke that he had fallen into a bitter moody state

which was continually widening Rosamond’s alienation from him. After

the first disclosure about the bill of sale, he had made many efforts

to draw her into sympathy with him about possible measures for

narrowing their expenses, and with the threatening approach of

Christmas his propositions grew more and more definite. “We two can do

with only one servant, and live on very little,” he said, “and I shall

manage with one horse.” For Lydgate, as we have seen, had begun to

reason, with a more distinct vision, about the expenses of living, and

any share of pride he had given to appearances of that sort was meagre

compared with the pride which made him revolt from exposure as a

debtor, or from asking men to help him with their money.

“Of course you can dismiss the other two servants, if you like,” said

Rosamond; “but I should have thought it would be very injurious to your

position for us to live in a poor way. You must expect your practice to

be lowered.”

“My dear Rosamond, it is not a question of choice. We have begun too

expensively. Peacock, you know, lived in a much smaller house than

this. It is my fault: I ought to have known better, and I deserve a

thrashing—if there were anybody who had a right to give it me—for

bringing you into the necessity of living in a poorer way than you have

been used to. But we married because we loved each other, I suppose.

And that may help us to pull along till things get better. Come, dear,

put down that work and come to me.”

He was really in chill gloom about her at that moment, but he dreaded a

future without affection, and was determined to resist the oncoming of

division between them. Rosamond obeyed him, and he took her on his

knee, but in her secret soul she was utterly aloof from him. The poor

thing saw only that the world was not ordered to her liking, and

Lydgate was part of that world. But he held her waist with one hand and

laid the other gently on both of hers; for this rather abrupt man had

much tenderness in his manners towards women, seeming to have always

present in his imagination the weakness of their frames and the

delicate poise of their health both in body and mind. And he began

again to speak persuasively.

“I find, now I look into things a little, Rosy, that it is wonderful

what an amount of money slips away in our housekeeping. I suppose the

servants are careless, and we have had a great many people coming. But

there must be many in our rank who manage with much less: they must do

with commoner things, I suppose, and look after the scraps. It seems,

money goes but a little way in these matters, for Wrench has everything

as plain as possible, and he has a very large practice.”

“Oh, if you think of living as the Wrenches do!” said Rosamond, with a

little turn of her neck. “But I have heard you express your disgust at

that way of living.”

“Yes, they have bad taste in everything—they make economy look ugly. We

needn’t do that. I only meant that they avoid expenses, although Wrench

has a capital practice.”

“Why should not you have a good practice, Tertius? Mr. Peacock had. You

should be more careful not to offend people, and you should send out

medicines as the others do. I am sure you began well, and you got

several good houses. It cannot answer to be eccentric; you should think

what will be generally liked,” said Rosamond, in a decided little tone

of admonition.

Lydgate’s anger rose: he was prepared to be indulgent towards feminine

weakness, but not towards feminine dictation. The shallowness of a

waternixie’s soul may have a charm until she becomes didactic. But he

controlled himself, and only said, with a touch of despotic firmness—

“What I am to do in my practice, Rosy, it is for me to judge. That is

not the question between us. It is enough for you to know that our

income is likely to be a very narrow one—hardly four hundred, perhaps

less, for a long time to come, and we must try to re-arrange our lives

in accordance with that fact.”

Rosamond was silent for a moment or two, looking before her, and then

said, “My uncle Bulstrode ought to allow you a salary for the time you

give to the Hospital: it is not right that you should work for

nothing.”

“It was understood from the beginning that my services would be

gratuitous. That, again, need not enter into our discussion. I have

pointed out what is the only probability,” said Lydgate, impatiently.

Then checking himself, he went on more quietly—

“I think I see one resource which would free us from a good deal of the

present difficulty. I hear that young Ned Plymdale is going to be

married to Miss Sophy Toller. They are rich, and it is not often that a

good house is vacant in Middlemarch. I feel sure that they would be

glad to take this house from us with most of our furniture, and they

would be willing to pay handsomely for the lease. I can employ Trumbull

to speak to Plymdale about it.”

Rosamond left her husband’s knee and walked slowly to the other end of

the room; when she turned round and walked towards him it was evident

that the tears had come, and that she was biting her under-lip and

clasping her hands to keep herself from crying. Lydgate was

wretched—shaken with anger and yet feeling that it would be unmanly to

vent the anger just now.

“I am very sorry, Rosamond; I know this is painful.”

“I thought, at least, when I had borne to send the plate back and have

that man taking an inventory of the furniture—I should have thought

\_that\_ would suffice.”

“I explained it to you at the time, dear. That was only a security and

behind that security there is a debt. And that debt must be paid within

the next few months, else we shall have our furniture sold. If young

Plymdale will take our house and most of our furniture, we shall be

able to pay that debt, and some others too, and we shall be quit of a

place too expensive for us. We might take a smaller house: Trumbull, I

know, has a very decent one to let at thirty pounds a-year, and this is

ninety.” Lydgate uttered this speech in the curt hammering way with

which we usually try to nail down a vague mind to imperative facts.

Tears rolled silently down Rosamond’s cheeks; she just pressed her

handkerchief against them, and stood looking at the large vase on the

mantel-piece. It was a moment of more intense bitterness than she had

ever felt before. At last she said, without hurry and with careful

emphasis—

“I never could have believed that you would like to act in that way.”

“Like it?” burst out Lydgate, rising from his chair, thrusting his

hands in his pockets and stalking away from the hearth; “it’s not a

question of liking. Of course, I don’t like it; it’s the only thing I

can do.” He wheeled round there, and turned towards her.

“I should have thought there were many other means than that,” said

Rosamond. “Let us have a sale and leave Middlemarch altogether.”

“To do what? What is the use of my leaving my work in Middlemarch to go

where I have none? We should be just as penniless elsewhere as we are

here,” said Lydgate still more angrily.

“If we are to be in that position it will be entirely your own doing,

Tertius,” said Rosamond, turning round to speak with the fullest

conviction. “You will not behave as you ought to do to your own family.

You offended Captain Lydgate. Sir Godwin was very kind to me when we

were at Quallingham, and I am sure if you showed proper regard to him

and told him your affairs, he would do anything for you. But rather

than that, you like giving up our house and furniture to Mr. Ned

Plymdale.”

There was something like fierceness in Lydgate’s eyes, as he answered

with new violence, “Well, then, if you will have it so, I do like it. I

admit that I like it better than making a fool of myself by going to

beg where it’s of no use. Understand then, that it is what I \_like to

do.\_”

There was a tone in the last sentence which was equivalent to the

clutch of his strong hand on Rosamond’s delicate arm. But for all that,

his will was not a whit stronger than hers. She immediately walked out

of the room in silence, but with an intense determination to hinder

what Lydgate liked to do.

He went out of the house, but as his blood cooled he felt that the

chief result of the discussion was a deposit of dread within him at the

idea of opening with his wife in future subjects which might again urge

him to violent speech. It was as if a fracture in delicate crystal had

begun, and he was afraid of any movement that might make it fatal. His

marriage would be a mere piece of bitter irony if they could not go on

loving each other. He had long ago made up his mind to what he thought

was her negative character—her want of sensibility, which showed itself

in disregard both of his specific wishes and of his general aims. The

first great disappointment had been borne: the tender devotedness and

docile adoration of the ideal wife must be renounced, and life must be

taken up on a lower stage of expectation, as it is by men who have lost

their limbs. But the real wife had not only her claims, she had still a

hold on his heart, and it was his intense desire that the hold should

remain strong. In marriage, the certainty, “She will never love me

much,” is easier to bear than the fear, “I shall love her no more.”

Hence, after that outburst, his inward effort was entirely to excuse

her, and to blame the hard circumstances which were partly his fault.

He tried that evening, by petting her, to heal the wound he had made in

the morning, and it was not in Rosamond’s nature to be repellent or

sulky; indeed, she welcomed the signs that her husband loved her and

was under control. But this was something quite distinct from loving

\_him\_. Lydgate would not have chosen soon to recur to the plan of

parting with the house; he was resolved to carry it out, and say as

little more about it as possible. But Rosamond herself touched on it at

breakfast by saying, mildly—

“Have you spoken to Trumbull yet?”

“No,” said Lydgate, “but I shall call on him as I go by this morning.

No time must be lost.” He took Rosamond’s question as a sign that she

withdrew her inward opposition, and kissed her head caressingly when he

got up to go away.

As soon as it was late enough to make a call, Rosamond went to Mrs.

Plymdale, Mr. Ned’s mother, and entered with pretty congratulations

into the subject of the coming marriage. Mrs. Plymdale’s maternal view

was, that Rosamond might possibly now have retrospective glimpses of

her own folly; and feeling the advantages to be at present all on the

side of her son, was too kind a woman not to behave graciously.

“Yes, Ned is most happy, I must say. And Sophy Toller is all I could

desire in a daughter-in-law. Of course her father is able to do

something handsome for her—that is only what would be expected with a

brewery like his. And the connection is everything we should desire.

But that is not what I look at. She is such a very nice girl—no airs,

no pretensions, though on a level with the first. I don’t mean with the

titled aristocracy. I see very little good in people aiming out of

their own sphere. I mean that Sophy is equal to the best in the town,

and she is contented with that.”

“I have always thought her very agreeable,” said Rosamond.

“I look upon it as a reward for Ned, who never held his head too high,

that he should have got into the very best connection,” continued Mrs.

Plymdale, her native sharpness softened by a fervid sense that she was

taking a correct view. “And such particular people as the Tollers are,

they might have objected because some of our friends are not theirs. It

is well known that your aunt Bulstrode and I have been intimate from

our youth, and Mr. Plymdale has been always on Mr. Bulstrode’s side.

And I myself prefer serious opinions. But the Tollers have welcomed Ned

all the same.”

“I am sure he is a very deserving, well-principled young man,” said

Rosamond, with a neat air of patronage in return for Mrs. Plymdale’s

wholesome corrections.

“Oh, he has not the style of a captain in the army, or that sort of

carriage as if everybody was beneath him, or that showy kind of

talking, and singing, and intellectual talent. But I am thankful he has

not. It is a poor preparation both for here and Hereafter.”

“Oh dear, yes; appearances have very little to do with happiness,” said

Rosamond. “I think there is every prospect of their being a happy

couple. What house will they take?”

“Oh, as for that, they must put up with what they can get. They have

been looking at the house in St. Peter’s Place, next to Mr. Hackbutt’s;

it belongs to him, and he is putting it nicely in repair. I suppose

they are not likely to hear of a better. Indeed, I think Ned will

decide the matter to-day.”

“I should think it is a nice house; I like St. Peter’s Place.”

“Well, it is near the Church, and a genteel situation. But the windows

are narrow, and it is all ups and downs. You don’t happen to know of

any other that would be at liberty?” said Mrs. Plymdale, fixing her

round black eyes on Rosamond with the animation of a sudden thought in

them.

“Oh no; I hear so little of those things.”

Rosamond had not foreseen that question and answer in setting out to

pay her visit; she had simply meant to gather any information which

would help her to avert the parting with her own house under

circumstances thoroughly disagreeable to her. As to the untruth in her

reply, she no more reflected on it than she did on the untruth there

was in her saying that appearances had very little to do with

happiness. Her object, she was convinced, was thoroughly justifiable:

it was Lydgate whose intention was inexcusable; and there was a plan in

her mind which, when she had carried it out fully, would prove how very

false a step it would have been for him to have descended from his

position.

She returned home by Mr. Borthrop Trumbull’s office, meaning to call

there. It was the first time in her life that Rosamond had thought of

doing anything in the form of business, but she felt equal to the

occasion. That she should be obliged to do what she intensely disliked,

was an idea which turned her quiet tenacity into active invention. Here

was a case in which it could not be enough simply to disobey and be

serenely, placidly obstinate: she must act according to her judgment,

and she said to herself that her judgment was right—“indeed, if it had

not been, she would not have wished to act on it.”

Mr. Trumbull was in the back-room of his office, and received Rosamond

with his finest manners, not only because he had much sensibility to

her charms, but because the good-natured fibre in him was stirred by

his certainty that Lydgate was in difficulties, and that this

uncommonly pretty woman—this young lady with the highest personal

attractions—was likely to feel the pinch of trouble—to find herself

involved in circumstances beyond her control. He begged her to do him

the honor to take a seat, and stood before her trimming and comporting

himself with an eager solicitude, which was chiefly benevolent.

Rosamond’s first question was, whether her husband had called on Mr.

Trumbull that morning, to speak about disposing of their house.

“Yes, ma’am, yes, he did; he did so,” said the good auctioneer, trying

to throw something soothing into his iteration. “I was about to fulfil

his order, if possible, this afternoon. He wished me not to

procrastinate.”

“I called to tell you not to go any further, Mr. Trumbull; and I beg of

you not to mention what has been said on the subject. Will you oblige

me?”

“Certainly I will, Mrs. Lydgate, certainly. Confidence is sacred with

me on business or any other topic. I am then to consider the commission

withdrawn?” said Mr. Trumbull, adjusting the long ends of his blue

cravat with both hands, and looking at Rosamond deferentially.

“Yes, if you please. I find that Mr. Ned Plymdale has taken a house—the

one in St. Peter’s Place next to Mr. Hackbutt’s. Mr. Lydgate would be

annoyed that his orders should be fulfilled uselessly. And besides

that, there are other circumstances which render the proposal

unnecessary.”

“Very good, Mrs. Lydgate, very good. I am at your commands, whenever

you require any service of me,” said Mr. Trumbull, who felt pleasure in

conjecturing that some new resources had been opened. “Rely on me, I

beg. The affair shall go no further.”

That evening Lydgate was a little comforted by observing that Rosamond

was more lively than she had usually been of late, and even seemed

interested in doing what would please him without being asked. He

thought, “If she will be happy and I can rub through, what does it all

signify? It is only a narrow swamp that we have to pass in a long

journey. If I can get my mind clear again, I shall do.”

He was so much cheered that he began to search for an account of

experiments which he had long ago meant to look up, and had neglected

out of that creeping self-despair which comes in the train of petty

anxieties. He felt again some of the old delightful absorption in a

far-reaching inquiry, while Rosamond played the quiet music which was

as helpful to his meditation as the plash of an oar on the evening

lake. It was rather late; he had pushed away all the books, and was

looking at the fire with his hands clasped behind his head in

forgetfulness of everything except the construction of a new

controlling experiment, when Rosamond, who had left the piano and was

leaning back in her chair watching him, said—

“Mr. Ned Plymdale has taken a house already.”

Lydgate, startled and jarred, looked up in silence for a moment, like a

man who has been disturbed in his sleep. Then flushing with an

unpleasant consciousness, he asked—

“How do you know?”

“I called at Mrs. Plymdale’s this morning, and she told me that he had

taken the house in St. Peter’s Place, next to Mr. Hackbutt’s.”

Lydgate was silent. He drew his hands from behind his head and pressed

them against the hair which was hanging, as it was apt to do, in a mass

on his forehead, while he rested his elbows on his knees. He was

feeling bitter disappointment, as if he had opened a door out of a

suffocating place and had found it walled up; but he also felt sure

that Rosamond was pleased with the cause of his disappointment. He

preferred not looking at her and not speaking, until he had got over

the first spasm of vexation. After all, he said in his bitterness, what

can a woman care about so much as house and furniture? a husband

without them is an absurdity. When he looked up and pushed his hair

aside, his dark eyes had a miserable blank non-expectance of sympathy

in them, but he only said, coolly—

“Perhaps some one else may turn up. I told Trumbull to be on the

look-out if he failed with Plymdale.”

Rosamond made no remark. She trusted to the chance that nothing more

would pass between her husband and the auctioneer until some issue

should have justified her interference; at any rate, she had hindered

the event which she immediately dreaded. After a pause, she said—

“How much money is it that those disagreeable people want?”

“What disagreeable people?”

“Those who took the list—and the others. I mean, how much money would

satisfy them so that you need not be troubled any more?”

Lydgate surveyed her for a moment, as if he were looking for symptoms,

and then said, “Oh, if I could have got six hundred from Plymdale for

furniture and as premium, I might have managed. I could have paid off

Dover, and given enough on account to the others to make them wait

patiently, if we contracted our expenses.”

“But I mean how much should you want if we stayed in this house?”

“More than I am likely to get anywhere,” said Lydgate, with rather a

grating sarcasm in his tone. It angered him to perceive that Rosamond’s

mind was wandering over impracticable wishes instead of facing possible

efforts.

“Why should you not mention the sum?” said Rosamond, with a mild

indication that she did not like his manners.

“Well,” said Lydgate in a guessing tone, “it would take at least a

thousand to set me at ease. But,” he added, incisively, “I have to

consider what I shall do without it, not with it.”

Rosamond said no more.

But the next day she carried out her plan of writing to Sir Godwin

Lydgate. Since the Captain’s visit, she had received a letter from him,

and also one from Mrs. Mengan, his married sister, condoling with her

on the loss of her baby, and expressing vaguely the hope that they

should see her again at Quallingham. Lydgate had told her that this

politeness meant nothing; but she was secretly convinced that any

backwardness in Lydgate’s family towards him was due to his cold and

contemptuous behavior, and she had answered the letters in her most

charming manner, feeling some confidence that a specific invitation

would follow. But there had been total silence. The Captain evidently

was not a great penman, and Rosamond reflected that the sisters might

have been abroad. However, the season was come for thinking of friends

at home, and at any rate Sir Godwin, who had chucked her under the

chin, and pronounced her to be like the celebrated beauty, Mrs. Croly,

who had made a conquest of him in 1790, would be touched by any appeal

from her, and would find it pleasant for her sake to behave as he ought

to do towards his nephew. Rosamond was naively convinced of what an old

gentleman ought to do to prevent her from suffering annoyance. And she

wrote what she considered the most judicious letter possible—one which

would strike Sir Godwin as a proof of her excellent sense—pointing out

how desirable it was that Tertius should quit such a place as

Middlemarch for one more fitted to his talents, how the unpleasant

character of the inhabitants had hindered his professional success, and

how in consequence he was in money difficulties, from which it would

require a thousand pounds thoroughly to extricate him. She did not say

that Tertius was unaware of her intention to write; for she had the

idea that his supposed sanction of her letter would be in accordance

with what she did say of his great regard for his uncle Godwin as the

relative who had always been his best friend. Such was the force of

Poor Rosamond’s tactics now she applied them to affairs.

This had happened before the party on New Year’s Day, and no answer had

yet come from Sir Godwin. But on the morning of that day Lydgate had to

learn that Rosamond had revoked his order to Borthrop Trumbull. Feeling

it necessary that she should be gradually accustomed to the idea of

their quitting the house in Lowick Gate, he overcame his reluctance to

speak to her again on the subject, and when they were breakfasting

said—

“I shall try to see Trumbull this morning, and tell him to advertise

the house in the ‘Pioneer’ and the ‘Trumpet.’ If the thing were

advertised, some one might be inclined to take it who would not

otherwise have thought of a change. In these country places many people

go on in their old houses when their families are too large for them,

for want of knowing where they can find another. And Trumbull seems to

have got no bite at all.”

Rosamond knew that the inevitable moment was come. “I ordered Trumbull

not to inquire further,” she said, with a careful calmness which was

evidently defensive.

Lydgate stared at her in mute amazement. Only half an hour before he

had been fastening up her plaits for her, and talking the “little

language” of affection, which Rosamond, though not returning it,

accepted as if she had been a serene and lovely image, now and then

miraculously dimpling towards her votary. With such fibres still astir

in him, the shock he received could not at once be distinctly anger; it

was confused pain. He laid down the knife and fork with which he was

carving, and throwing himself back in his chair, said at last, with a

cool irony in his tone—

“May I ask when and why you did so?”

“When I knew that the Plymdales had taken a house, I called to tell him

not to mention ours to them; and at the same time I told him not to let

the affair go on any further. I knew that it would be very injurious to

you if it were known that you wished to part with your house and

furniture, and I had a very strong objection to it. I think that was

reason enough.”

“It was of no consequence then that I had told you imperative reasons

of another kind; of no consequence that I had come to a different

conclusion, and given an order accordingly?” said Lydgate, bitingly,

the thunder and lightning gathering about his brow and eyes.

The effect of any one’s anger on Rosamond had always been to make her

shrink in cold dislike, and to become all the more calmly correct, in

the conviction that she was not the person to misbehave whatever others

might do. She replied—

“I think I had a perfect right to speak on a subject which concerns me

at least as much as you.”

“Clearly—you had a right to speak, but only to me. You had no right to

contradict my orders secretly, and treat me as if I were a fool,” said

Lydgate, in the same tone as before. Then with some added scorn, “Is it

possible to make you understand what the consequences will be? Is it of

any use for me to tell you again why we must try to part with the

house?”

“It is not necessary for you to tell me again,” said Rosamond, in a

voice that fell and trickled like cold water-drops. “I remembered what

you said. You spoke just as violently as you do now. But that does not

alter my opinion that you ought to try every other means rather than

take a step which is so painful to me. And as to advertising the house,

I think it would be perfectly degrading to you.”

“And suppose I disregard your opinion as you disregard mine?”

“You can do so, of course. But I think you ought to have told me before

we were married that you would place me in the worst position, rather

than give up your own will.”

Lydgate did not speak, but tossed his head on one side, and twitched

the corners of his mouth in despair. Rosamond, seeing that he was not

looking at her, rose and set his cup of coffee before him; but he took

no notice of it, and went on with an inward drama and argument,

occasionally moving in his seat, resting one arm on the table, and

rubbing his hand against his hair. There was a conflux of emotions and

thoughts in him that would not let him either give thorough way to his

anger or persevere with simple rigidity of resolve. Rosamond took

advantage of his silence.

“When we were married everyone felt that your position was very high. I

could not have imagined then that you would want to sell our furniture,

and take a house in Bride Street, where the rooms are like cages. If we

are to live in that way let us at least leave Middlemarch.”

“These would be very strong considerations,” said Lydgate, half

ironically—still there was a withered paleness about his lips as he

looked at his coffee, and did not drink—“these would be very strong

considerations if I did not happen to be in debt.”

“Many persons must have been in debt in the same way, but if they are

respectable, people trust them. I am sure I have heard papa say that

the Torbits were in debt, and they went on very well. It cannot be good

to act rashly,” said Rosamond, with serene wisdom.

Lydgate sat paralyzed by opposing impulses: since no reasoning he could

apply to Rosamond seemed likely to conquer her assent, he wanted to

smash and grind some object on which he could at least produce an

impression, or else to tell her brutally that he was master, and she

must obey. But he not only dreaded the effect of such extremities on

their mutual life—he had a growing dread of Rosamond’s quiet elusive

obstinacy, which would not allow any assertion of power to be final;

and again, she had touched him in a spot of keenest feeling by implying

that she had been deluded with a false vision of happiness in marrying

him. As to saying that he was master, it was not the fact. The very

resolution to which he had wrought himself by dint of logic and

honorable pride was beginning to relax under her torpedo contact. He

swallowed half his cup of coffee, and then rose to go.

“I may at least request that you will not go to Trumbull at

present—until it has been seen that there are no other means,” said

Rosamond. Although she was not subject to much fear, she felt it safer

not to betray that she had written to Sir Godwin. “Promise me that you

will not go to him for a few weeks, or without telling me.”

Lydgate gave a short laugh. “I think it is I who should exact a promise

that you will do nothing without telling me,” he said, turning his eyes

sharply upon her, and then moving to the door.

“You remember that we are going to dine at papa’s,” said Rosamond,

wishing that he should turn and make a more thorough concession to her.

But he only said “Oh yes,” impatiently, and went away. She held it to

be very odious in him that he did not think the painful propositions he

had had to make to her were enough, without showing so unpleasant a

temper. And when she put the moderate request that he would defer going

to Trumbull again, it was cruel in him not to assure her of what he

meant to do. She was convinced of her having acted in every way for the

best; and each grating or angry speech of Lydgate’s served only as an

addition to the register of offences in her mind. Poor Rosamond for

months had begun to associate her husband with feelings of

disappointment, and the terribly inflexible relation of marriage had

lost its charm of encouraging delightful dreams. It had freed her from

the disagreeables of her father’s house, but it had not given her

everything that she had wished and hoped. The Lydgate with whom she had

been in love had been a group of airy conditions for her, most of which

had disappeared, while their place had been taken by every-day details

which must be lived through slowly from hour to hour, not floated

through with a rapid selection of favorable aspects. The habits of

Lydgate’s profession, his home preoccupation with scientific subjects,

which seemed to her almost like a morbid vampire’s taste, his peculiar

views of things which had never entered into the dialogue of

courtship—all these continually alienating influences, even without the

fact of his having placed himself at a disadvantage in the town, and

without that first shock of revelation about Dover’s debt, would have

made his presence dull to her. There was another presence which ever

since the early days of her marriage, until four months ago, had been

an agreeable excitement, but that was gone: Rosamond would not confess

to herself how much the consequent blank had to do with her utter

ennui; and it seemed to her (perhaps she was right) that an invitation

to Quallingham, and an opening for Lydgate to settle elsewhere than in

Middlemarch—in London, or somewhere likely to be free from

unpleasantness—would satisfy her quite well, and make her indifferent

to the absence of Will Ladislaw, towards whom she felt some resentment

for his exaltation of Mrs. Casaubon.

That was the state of things with Lydgate and Rosamond on the New

Year’s Day when they dined at her father’s, she looking mildly neutral

towards him in remembrance of his ill-tempered behavior at breakfast,

and he carrying a much deeper effect from the inward conflict in which

that morning scene was only one of many epochs. His flushed effort

while talking to Mr. Farebrother—his effort after the cynical pretence

that all ways of getting money are essentially the same, and that

chance has an empire which reduces choice to a fool’s illusion—was but

the symptom of a wavering resolve, a benumbed response to the old

stimuli of enthusiasm.

What was he to do? He saw even more keenly than Rosamond did the

dreariness of taking her into the small house in Bride Street, where

she would have scanty furniture around her and discontent within: a

life of privation and life with Rosamond were two images which had

become more and more irreconcilable ever since the threat of privation

had disclosed itself. But even if his resolves had forced the two

images into combination, the useful preliminaries to that hard change

were not visibly within reach. And though he had not given the promise

which his wife had asked for, he did not go again to Trumbull. He even

began to think of taking a rapid journey to the North and seeing Sir

Godwin. He had once believed that nothing would urge him into making an

application for money to his uncle, but he had not then known the full

pressure of alternatives yet more disagreeable. He could not depend on

the effect of a letter; it was only in an interview, however

disagreeable this might be to himself, that he could give a thorough

explanation and could test the effectiveness of kinship. No sooner had

Lydgate begun to represent this step to himself as the easiest than

there was a reaction of anger that he—he who had long ago determined to

live aloof from such abject calculations, such self-interested anxiety

about the inclinations and the pockets of men with whom he had been

proud to have no aims in common—should have fallen not simply to their

level, but to the level of soliciting them.

CHAPTER LXV.

One of us two must bowen douteless,

And, sith a man is more reasonable

Than woman is, ye [men] moste be suffrable.

—CHAUCER: \_Canterbury Tales\_.

The bias of human nature to be slow in correspondence triumphs even

over the present quickening in the general pace of things: what wonder

then that in 1832 old Sir Godwin Lydgate was slow to write a letter

which was of consequence to others rather than to himself? Nearly three

weeks of the new year were gone, and Rosamond, awaiting an answer to

her winning appeal, was every day disappointed. Lydgate, in total

ignorance of her expectations, was seeing the bills come in, and

feeling that Dover’s use of his advantage over other creditors was

imminent. He had never mentioned to Rosamond his brooding purpose of

going to Quallingham: he did not want to admit what would appear to her

a concession to her wishes after indignant refusal, until the last

moment; but he was really expecting to set off soon. A slice of the

railway would enable him to manage the whole journey and back in four

days.

But one morning after Lydgate had gone out, a letter came addressed to

him, which Rosamond saw clearly to be from Sir Godwin. She was full of

hope. Perhaps there might be a particular note to her enclosed; but

Lydgate was naturally addressed on the question of money or other aid,

and the fact that he was written to, nay, the very delay in writing at

all, seemed to certify that the answer was thoroughly compliant. She

was too much excited by these thoughts to do anything but light

stitching in a warm corner of the dining-room, with the outside of this

momentous letter lying on the table before her. About twelve she heard

her husband’s step in the passage, and tripping to open the door, she

said in her lightest tones, “Tertius, come in here—here is a letter for

you.”

“Ah?” he said, not taking off his hat, but just turning her round

within his arm to walk towards the spot where the letter lay. “My uncle

Godwin!” he exclaimed, while Rosamond reseated herself, and watched him

as he opened the letter. She had expected him to be surprised.

While Lydgate’s eyes glanced rapidly over the brief letter, she saw his

face, usually of a pale brown, taking on a dry whiteness; with nostrils

and lips quivering he tossed down the letter before her, and said

violently—

“It will be impossible to endure life with you, if you will always be

acting secretly—acting in opposition to me and hiding your actions.”

He checked his speech and turned his back on her—then wheeled round and

walked about, sat down, and got up again restlessly, grasping hard the

objects deep down in his pockets. He was afraid of saying something

irremediably cruel.

Rosamond too had changed color as she read. The letter ran in this

way:—

“DEAR TERTIUS,—Don’t set your wife to write to me when you have

anything to ask. It is a roundabout wheedling sort of thing which I

should not have credited you with. I never choose to write to a woman

on matters of business. As to my supplying you with a thousand pounds,

or only half that sum, I can do nothing of the sort. My own family

drains me to the last penny. With two younger sons and three daughters,

I am not likely to have cash to spare. You seem to have got through

your own money pretty quickly, and to have made a mess where you are;

the sooner you go somewhere else the better. But I have nothing to do

with men of your profession, and can’t help you there. I did the best I

could for you as guardian, and let you have your own way in taking to

medicine. You might have gone into the army or the Church. Your money

would have held out for that, and there would have been a surer ladder

before you. Your uncle Charles has had a grudge against you for not

going into his profession, but not I. I have always wished you well,

but you must consider yourself on your own legs entirely now.

Your affectionate uncle,

GODWIN LYDGATE.”

When Rosamond had finished reading the letter she sat quite still, with

her hands folded before her, restraining any show of her keen

disappointment, and intrenching herself in quiet passivity under her

husband’s wrath. Lydgate paused in his movements, looked at her again,

and said, with biting severity—

“Will this be enough to convince you of the harm you may do by secret

meddling? Have you sense enough to recognize now your incompetence to

judge and act for me—to interfere with your ignorance in affairs which

it belongs to me to decide on?”

The words were hard; but this was not the first time that Lydgate had

been frustrated by her. She did not look at him, and made no reply.

“I had nearly resolved on going to Quallingham. It would have cost me

pain enough to do it, yet it might have been of some use. But it has

been of no use for me to think of anything. You have always been

counteracting me secretly. You delude me with a false assent, and then

I am at the mercy of your devices. If you mean to resist every wish I

express, say so and defy me. I shall at least know what I am doing

then.”

It is a terrible moment in young lives when the closeness of love’s

bond has turned to this power of galling. In spite of Rosamond’s

self-control a tear fell silently and rolled over her lips. She still

said nothing; but under that quietude was hidden an intense effect: she

was in such entire disgust with her husband that she wished she had

never seen him. Sir Godwin’s rudeness towards her and utter want of

feeling ranged him with Dover and all other creditors—disagreeable

people who only thought of themselves, and did not mind how annoying

they were to her. Even her father was unkind, and might have done more

for them. In fact there was but one person in Rosamond’s world whom she

did not regard as blameworthy, and that was the graceful creature with

blond plaits and with little hands crossed before her, who had never

expressed herself unbecomingly, and had always acted for the best—the

best naturally being what she best liked.

Lydgate pausing and looking at her began to feel that half-maddening

sense of helplessness which comes over passionate people when their

passion is met by an innocent-looking silence whose meek victimized air

seems to put them in the wrong, and at last infects even the justest

indignation with a doubt of its justice. He needed to recover the full

sense that he was in the right by moderating his words.

“Can you not see, Rosamond,” he began again, trying to be simply grave

and not bitter, “that nothing can be so fatal as a want of openness and

confidence between us? It has happened again and again that I have

expressed a decided wish, and you have seemed to assent, yet after that

you have secretly disobeyed my wish. In that way I can never know what

I have to trust to. There would be some hope for us if you would admit

this. Am I such an unreasonable, furious brute? Why should you not be

open with me?” Still silence.

“Will you only say that you have been mistaken, and that I may depend

on your not acting secretly in future?” said Lydgate, urgently, but

with something of request in his tone which Rosamond was quick to

perceive. She spoke with coolness.

“I cannot possibly make admissions or promises in answer to such words

as you have used towards me. I have not been accustomed to language of

that kind. You have spoken of my ‘secret meddling,’ and my ‘interfering

ignorance,’ and my ‘false assent.’ I have never expressed myself in

that way to you, and I think that you ought to apologize. You spoke of

its being impossible to live with me. Certainly you have not made my

life pleasant to me of late. I think it was to be expected that I

should try to avert some of the hardships which our marriage has

brought on me.” Another tear fell as Rosamond ceased speaking, and she

pressed it away as quietly as the first.

Lydgate flung himself into a chair, feeling checkmated. What place was

there in her mind for a remonstrance to lodge in? He laid down his hat,

flung an arm over the back of his chair, and looked down for some

moments without speaking. Rosamond had the double purchase over him of

insensibility to the point of justice in his reproach, and of

sensibility to the undeniable hardships now present in her married

life. Although her duplicity in the affair of the house had exceeded

what he knew, and had really hindered the Plymdales from knowing of it,

she had no consciousness that her action could rightly be called false.

We are not obliged to identify our own acts according to a strict

classification, any more than the materials of our grocery and clothes.

Rosamond felt that she was aggrieved, and that this was what Lydgate

had to recognize.

As for him, the need of accommodating himself to her nature, which was

inflexible in proportion to its negations, held him as with pincers. He

had begun to have an alarmed foresight of her irrevocable loss of love

for him, and the consequent dreariness of their life. The ready fulness

of his emotions made this dread alternate quickly with the first

violent movements of his anger. It would assuredly have been a vain

boast in him to say that he was her master.

“You have not made my life pleasant to me of late”—“the hardships which

our marriage has brought on me”—these words were stinging his

imagination as a pain makes an exaggerated dream. If he were not only

to sink from his highest resolve, but to sink into the hideous

fettering of domestic hate?

“Rosamond,” he said, turning his eyes on her with a melancholy look,

“you should allow for a man’s words when he is disappointed and

provoked. You and I cannot have opposite interests. I cannot part my

happiness from yours. If I am angry with you, it is that you seem not

to see how any concealment divides us. How could I wish to make

anything hard to you either by my words or conduct? When I hurt you, I

hurt part of my own life. I should never be angry with you if you would

be quite open with me.”

“I have only wished to prevent you from hurrying us into wretchedness

without any necessity,” said Rosamond, the tears coming again from a

softened feeling now that her husband had softened. “It is so very hard

to be disgraced here among all the people we know, and to live in such

a miserable way. I wish I had died with the baby.”

She spoke and wept with that gentleness which makes such words and

tears omnipotent over a loving-hearted man. Lydgate drew his chair near

to hers and pressed her delicate head against his cheek with his

powerful tender hand. He only caressed her; he did not say anything;

for what was there to say? He could not promise to shield her from the

dreaded wretchedness, for he could see no sure means of doing so. When

he left her to go out again, he told himself that it was ten times

harder for her than for him: he had a life away from home, and constant

appeals to his activity on behalf of others. He wished to excuse

everything in her if he could—but it was inevitable that in that

excusing mood he should think of her as if she were an animal of

another and feebler species. Nevertheless she had mastered him.

CHAPTER LXVI.

’Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,

Another thing to fall.

—\_Measure for Measure\_.

Lydgate certainly had good reason to reflect on the service his

practice did him in counteracting his personal cares. He had no longer

free energy enough for spontaneous research and speculative thinking,

but by the bedside of patients, the direct external calls on his

judgment and sympathies brought the added impulse needed to draw him

out of himself. It was not simply that beneficent harness of routine

which enables silly men to live respectably and unhappy men to live

calmly—it was a perpetual claim on the immediate fresh application of

thought, and on the consideration of another’s need and trial. Many of

us looking back through life would say that the kindest man we have

ever known has been a medical man, or perhaps that surgeon whose fine

tact, directed by deeply informed perception, has come to us in our

need with a more sublime beneficence than that of miracle-workers. Some

of that twice-blessed mercy was always with Lydgate in his work at the

Hospital or in private houses, serving better than any opiate to quiet

and sustain him under his anxieties and his sense of mental degeneracy.

Mr. Farebrother’s suspicion as to the opiate was true, however. Under

the first galling pressure of foreseen difficulties, and the first

perception that his marriage, if it were not to be a yoked loneliness,

must be a state of effort to go on loving without too much care about

being loved, he had once or twice tried a dose of opium. But he had no

hereditary constitutional craving after such transient escapes from the

hauntings of misery. He was strong, could drink a great deal of wine,

but did not care about it; and when the men round him were drinking

spirits, he took sugar and water, having a contemptuous pity even for

the earliest stages of excitement from drink. It was the same with

gambling. He had looked on at a great deal of gambling in Paris,

watching it as if it had been a disease. He was no more tempted by such

winning than he was by drink. He had said to himself that the only

winning he cared for must be attained by a conscious process of high,

difficult combination tending towards a beneficent result. The power he

longed for could not be represented by agitated fingers clutching a

heap of coin, or by the half-barbarous, half-idiotic triumph in the

eyes of a man who sweeps within his arms the ventures of twenty

chapfallen companions.

But just as he had tried opium, so his thought now began to turn upon

gambling—not with appetite for its excitement, but with a sort of

wistful inward gaze after that easy way of getting money, which implied

no asking and brought no responsibility. If he had been in London or

Paris at that time, it is probable that such thoughts, seconded by

opportunity, would have taken him into a gambling-house, no longer to

watch the gamblers, but to watch with them in kindred eagerness.

Repugnance would have been surmounted by the immense need to win, if

chance would be kind enough to let him. An incident which happened not

very long after that airy notion of getting aid from his uncle had been

excluded, was a strong sign of the effect that might have followed any

extant opportunity of gambling.

The billiard-room at the Green Dragon was the constant resort of a

certain set, most of whom, like our acquaintance Mr. Bambridge, were

regarded as men of pleasure. It was here that poor Fred Vincy had made

part of his memorable debt, having lost money in betting, and been

obliged to borrow of that gay companion. It was generally known in

Middlemarch that a good deal of money was lost and won in this way; and

the consequent repute of the Green Dragon as a place of dissipation

naturally heightened in some quarters the temptation to go there.

Probably its regular visitants, like the initiates of freemasonry,

wished that there were something a little more tremendous to keep to

themselves concerning it; but they were not a closed community, and

many decent seniors as well as juniors occasionally turned into the

billiard-room to see what was going on. Lydgate, who had the muscular

aptitude for billiards, and was fond of the game, had once or twice in

the early days after his arrival in Middlemarch taken his turn with the

cue at the Green Dragon; but afterwards he had no leisure for the game,

and no inclination for the socialities there. One evening, however, he

had occasion to seek Mr. Bambridge at that resort. The horsedealer had

engaged to get him a customer for his remaining good horse, for which

Lydgate had determined to substitute a cheap hack, hoping by this

reduction of style to get perhaps twenty pounds; and he cared now for

every small sum, as a help towards feeding the patience of his

tradesmen. To run up to the billiard-room, as he was passing, would

save time.

Mr. Bambridge was not yet come, but would be sure to arrive by-and-by,

said his friend Mr. Horrock; and Lydgate stayed, playing a game for the

sake of passing the time. That evening he had the peculiar light in the

eyes and the unusual vivacity which had been once noticed in him by Mr.

Farebrother. The exceptional fact of his presence was much noticed in

the room, where there was a good deal of Middlemarch company; and

several lookers-on, as well as some of the players, were betting with

animation. Lydgate was playing well, and felt confident; the bets were

dropping round him, and with a swift glancing thought of the probable

gain which might double the sum he was saving from his horse, he began

to bet on his own play, and won again and again. Mr. Bambridge had come

in, but Lydgate did not notice him. He was not only excited with his

play, but visions were gleaming on him of going the next day to

Brassing, where there was gambling on a grander scale to be had, and

where, by one powerful snatch at the devil’s bait, he might carry it

off without the hook, and buy his rescue from his daily solicitings.

He was still winning when two new visitors entered. One of them was a

young Hawley, just come from his law studies in town, and the other was

Fred Vincy, who had spent several evenings of late at this old haunt of

his. Young Hawley, an accomplished billiard-player, brought a cool

fresh hand to the cue. But Fred Vincy, startled at seeing Lydgate, and

astonished to see him betting with an excited air, stood aside, and

kept out of the circle round the table.

Fred had been rewarding resolution by a little laxity of late. He had

been working heartily for six months at all outdoor occupations under

Mr. Garth, and by dint of severe practice had nearly mastered the

defects of his handwriting, this practice being, perhaps, a little the

less severe that it was often carried on in the evening at Mr. Garth’s

under the eyes of Mary. But the last fortnight Mary had been staying at

Lowick Parsonage with the ladies there, during Mr. Farebrother’s

residence in Middlemarch, where he was carrying out some parochial

plans; and Fred, not seeing anything more agreeable to do, had turned

into the Green Dragon, partly to play at billiards, partly to taste the

old flavor of discourse about horses, sport, and things in general,

considered from a point of view which was not strenuously correct. He

had not been out hunting once this season, had had no horse of his own

to ride, and had gone from place to place chiefly with Mr. Garth in his

gig, or on the sober cob which Mr. Garth could lend him. It was a

little too bad, Fred began to think, that he should be kept in the

traces with more severity than if he had been a clergyman. “I will tell

you what, Mistress Mary—it will be rather harder work to learn

surveying and drawing plans than it would have been to write sermons,”

he had said, wishing her to appreciate what he went through for her

sake; “and as to Hercules and Theseus, they were nothing to me. They

had sport, and never learned to write a bookkeeping hand.” And now,

Mary being out of the way for a little while, Fred, like any other

strong dog who cannot slip his collar, had pulled up the staple of his

chain and made a small escape, not of course meaning to go fast or far.

There could be no reason why he should not play at billiards, but he

was determined not to bet. As to money just now, Fred had in his mind

the heroic project of saving almost all of the eighty pounds that Mr.

Garth offered him, and returning it, which he could easily do by giving

up all futile money-spending, since he had a superfluous stock of

clothes, and no expense in his board. In that way he could, in one

year, go a good way towards repaying the ninety pounds of which he had

deprived Mrs. Garth, unhappily at a time when she needed that sum more

than she did now. Nevertheless, it must be acknowledged that on this

evening, which was the fifth of his recent visits to the billiard-room,

Fred had, not in his pocket, but in his mind, the ten pounds which he

meant to reserve for himself from his half-year’s salary (having before

him the pleasure of carrying thirty to Mrs. Garth when Mary was likely

to be come home again)—he had those ten pounds in his mind as a fund

from which he might risk something, if there were a chance of a good

bet. Why? Well, when sovereigns were flying about, why shouldn’t he

catch a few? He would never go far along that road again; but a man

likes to assure himself, and men of pleasure generally, what he could

do in the way of mischief if he chose, and that if he abstains from

making himself ill, or beggaring himself, or talking with the utmost

looseness which the narrow limits of human capacity will allow, it is

not because he is a spooney. Fred did not enter into formal reasons,

which are a very artificial, inexact way of representing the tingling

returns of old habit, and the caprices of young blood: but there was

lurking in him a prophetic sense that evening, that when he began to

play he should also begin to bet—that he should enjoy some

punch-drinking, and in general prepare himself for feeling “rather

seedy” in the morning. It is in such indefinable movements that action

often begins.

But the last thing likely to have entered Fred’s expectation was that

he should see his brother-in-law Lydgate—of whom he had never quite

dropped the old opinion that he was a prig, and tremendously conscious

of his superiority—looking excited and betting, just as he himself

might have done. Fred felt a shock greater than he could quite account

for by the vague knowledge that Lydgate was in debt, and that his

father had refused to help him; and his own inclination to enter into

the play was suddenly checked. It was a strange reversal of attitudes:

Fred’s blond face and blue eyes, usually bright and careless, ready to

give attention to anything that held out a promise of amusement,

looking involuntarily grave and almost embarrassed as if by the sight

of something unfitting; while Lydgate, who had habitually an air of

self-possessed strength, and a certain meditativeness that seemed to

lie behind his most observant attention, was acting, watching, speaking

with that excited narrow consciousness which reminds one of an animal

with fierce eyes and retractile claws.

Lydgate, by betting on his own strokes, had won sixteen pounds; but

young Hawley’s arrival had changed the poise of things. He made

first-rate strokes himself, and began to bet against Lydgate’s strokes,

the strain of whose nerves was thus changed from simple confidence in

his own movements to defying another person’s doubt in them. The

defiance was more exciting than the confidence, but it was less sure.

He continued to bet on his own play, but began often to fail. Still he

went on, for his mind was as utterly narrowed into that precipitous

crevice of play as if he had been the most ignorant lounger there. Fred

observed that Lydgate was losing fast, and found himself in the new

situation of puzzling his brains to think of some device by which,

without being offensive, he could withdraw Lydgate’s attention, and

perhaps suggest to him a reason for quitting the room. He saw that

others were observing Lydgate’s strange unlikeness to himself, and it

occurred to him that merely to touch his elbow and call him aside for a

moment might rouse him from his absorption. He could think of nothing

cleverer than the daring improbability of saying that he wanted to see

Rosy, and wished to know if she were at home this evening; and he was

going desperately to carry out this weak device, when a waiter came up

to him with a message, saying that Mr. Farebrother was below, and

begged to speak with him.

Fred was surprised, not quite comfortably, but sending word that he

would be down immediately, he went with a new impulse up to Lydgate,

said, “Can I speak to you a moment?” and drew him aside.

“Farebrother has just sent up a message to say that he wants to speak

to me. He is below. I thought you might like to know he was there, if

you had anything to say to him.”

Fred had simply snatched up this pretext for speaking, because he could

not say, “You are losing confoundedly, and are making everybody stare

at you; you had better come away.” But inspiration could hardly have

served him better. Lydgate had not before seen that Fred was present,

and his sudden appearance with an announcement of Mr. Farebrother had

the effect of a sharp concussion.

“No, no,” said Lydgate; “I have nothing particular to say to him.

But—the game is up—I must be going—I came in just to see Bambridge.”

“Bambridge is over there, but he is making a row—I don’t think he’s

ready for business. Come down with me to Farebrother. I expect he is

going to blow me up, and you will shield me,” said Fred, with some

adroitness.

Lydgate felt shame, but could not bear to act as if he felt it, by

refusing to see Mr. Farebrother; and he went down. They merely shook

hands, however, and spoke of the frost; and when all three had turned

into the street, the Vicar seemed quite willing to say good-by to

Lydgate. His present purpose was clearly to talk with Fred alone, and

he said, kindly, “I disturbed you, young gentleman, because I have some

pressing business with you. Walk with me to St. Botolph’s, will you?”

It was a fine night, the sky thick with stars, and Mr. Farebrother

proposed that they should make a circuit to the old church by the

London road. The next thing he said was—

“I thought Lydgate never went to the Green Dragon?”

“So did I,” said Fred. “But he said that he went to see Bambridge.”

“He was not playing, then?”

Fred had not meant to tell this, but he was obliged now to say, “Yes,

he was. But I suppose it was an accidental thing. I have never seen him

there before.”

“You have been going often yourself, then, lately?”

“Oh, about five or six times.”

“I think you had some good reason for giving up the habit of going

there?”

“Yes. You know all about it,” said Fred, not liking to be catechised in

this way. “I made a clean breast to you.”

“I suppose that gives me a warrant to speak about the matter now. It is

understood between us, is it not?—that we are on a footing of open

friendship: I have listened to you, and you will be willing to listen

to me. I may take my turn in talking a little about myself?”

“I am under the deepest obligation to you, Mr. Farebrother,” said Fred,

in a state of uncomfortable surmise.

“I will not affect to deny that you are under some obligation to me.

But I am going to confess to you, Fred, that I have been tempted to

reverse all that by keeping silence with you just now. When somebody

said to me, ‘Young Vincy has taken to being at the billiard-table every

night again—he won’t bear the curb long;’ I was tempted to do the

opposite of what I am doing—to hold my tongue and wait while you went

down the ladder again, betting first and then—”

“I have not made any bets,” said Fred, hastily.

“Glad to hear it. But I say, my prompting was to look on and see you

take the wrong turning, wear out Garth’s patience, and lose the best

opportunity of your life—the opportunity which you made some rather

difficult effort to secure. You can guess the feeling which raised that

temptation in me—I am sure you know it. I am sure you know that the

satisfaction of your affections stands in the way of mine.”

There was a pause. Mr. Farebrother seemed to wait for a recognition of

the fact; and the emotion perceptible in the tones of his fine voice

gave solemnity to his words. But no feeling could quell Fred’s alarm.

“I could not be expected to give her up,” he said, after a moment’s

hesitation: it was not a case for any pretence of generosity.

“Clearly not, when her affection met yours. But relations of this sort,

even when they are of long standing, are always liable to change. I can

easily conceive that you might act in a way to loosen the tie she feels

towards you—it must be remembered that she is only conditionally bound

to you—and that in that case, another man, who may flatter himself that

he has a hold on her regard, might succeed in winning that firm place

in her love as well as respect which you had let slip. I can easily

conceive such a result,” repeated Mr. Farebrother, emphatically. “There

is a companionship of ready sympathy, which might get the advantage

even over the longest associations.” It seemed to Fred that if Mr.

Farebrother had had a beak and talons instead of his very capable

tongue, his mode of attack could hardly be more cruel. He had a

horrible conviction that behind all this hypothetic statement there was

a knowledge of some actual change in Mary’s feeling.

“Of course I know it might easily be all up with me,” he said, in a

troubled voice. “If she is beginning to compare—” He broke off, not

liking to betray all he felt, and then said, by the help of a little

bitterness, “But I thought you were friendly to me.”

“So I am; that is why we are here. But I have had a strong disposition

to be otherwise. I have said to myself, ‘If there is a likelihood of

that youngster doing himself harm, why should you interfere? Aren’t you

worth as much as he is, and don’t your sixteen years over and above

his, in which you have gone rather hungry, give you more right to

satisfaction than he has? If there’s a chance of his going to the dogs,

let him—perhaps you could nohow hinder it—and do you take the

benefit.’”

There was a pause, in which Fred was seized by a most uncomfortable

chill. What was coming next? He dreaded to hear that something had been

said to Mary—he felt as if he were listening to a threat rather than a

warning. When the Vicar began again there was a change in his tone like

the encouraging transition to a major key.

“But I had once meant better than that, and I am come back to my old

intention. I thought that I could hardly \_secure myself\_ in it better,

Fred, than by telling you just what had gone on in me. And now, do you

understand me? I want you to make the happiness of her life and your

own, and if there is any chance that a word of warning from me may turn

aside any risk to the contrary—well, I have uttered it.”

There was a drop in the Vicar’s voice when he spoke the last words. He

paused—they were standing on a patch of green where the road diverged

towards St. Botolph’s, and he put out his hand, as if to imply that the

conversation was closed. Fred was moved quite newly. Some one highly

susceptible to the contemplation of a fine act has said, that it

produces a sort of regenerating shudder through the frame, and makes

one feel ready to begin a new life. A good degree of that effect was

just then present in Fred Vincy.

“I will try to be worthy,” he said, breaking off before he could say

“of you as well as of her.” And meanwhile Mr. Farebrother had gathered

the impulse to say something more.

“You must not imagine that I believe there is at present any decline in

her preference of you, Fred. Set your heart at rest, that if you keep

right, other things will keep right.”

“I shall never forget what you have done,” Fred answered. “I can’t say

anything that seems worth saying—only I will try that your goodness

shall not be thrown away.”

“That’s enough. Good-by, and God bless you.”

In that way they parted. But both of them walked about a long while

before they went out of the starlight. Much of Fred’s rumination might

be summed up in the words, “It certainly would have been a fine thing

for her to marry Farebrother—but if she loves me best and I am a good

husband?”

Perhaps Mr. Farebrother’s might be concentrated into a single shrug and

one little speech. “To think of the part one little woman can play in

the life of a man, so that to renounce her may be a very good imitation

of heroism, and to win her may be a discipline!”

CHAPTER LXVII.

Now is there civil war within the soul:

Resolve is thrust from off the sacred throne

By clamorous Needs, and Pride the grand-vizier

Makes humble compact, plays the supple part

Of envoy and deft-tongued apologist

For hungry rebels.

Happily Lydgate had ended by losing in the billiard-room, and brought

away no encouragement to make a raid on luck. On the contrary, he felt

unmixed disgust with himself the next day when he had to pay four or

five pounds over and above his gains, and he carried about with him a

most unpleasant vision of the figure he had made, not only rubbing

elbows with the men at the Green Dragon but behaving just as they did.

A philosopher fallen to betting is hardly distinguishable from a

Philistine under the same circumstances: the difference will chiefly be

found in his subsequent reflections, and Lydgate chewed a very

disagreeable cud in that way. His reason told him how the affair might

have been magnified into ruin by a slight change of scenery—if it had

been a gambling-house that he had turned into, where chance could be

clutched with both hands instead of being picked up with thumb and

fore-finger. Nevertheless, though reason strangled the desire to

gamble, there remained the feeling that, with an assurance of luck to

the needful amount, he would have liked to gamble, rather than take the

alternative which was beginning to urge itself as inevitable.

That alternative was to apply to Mr. Bulstrode. Lydgate had so many

times boasted both to himself and others that he was totally

independent of Bulstrode, to whose plans he had lent himself solely

because they enabled him to carry out his own ideas of professional

work and public benefit—he had so constantly in their personal

intercourse had his pride sustained by the sense that he was making a

good social use of this predominating banker, whose opinions he thought

contemptible and whose motives often seemed to him an absurd mixture of

contradictory impressions—that he had been creating for himself strong

ideal obstacles to the proffering of any considerable request to him on

his own account.

Still, early in March his affairs were at that pass in which men begin

to say that their oaths were delivered in ignorance, and to perceive

that the act which they had called impossible to them is becoming

manifestly possible. With Dover’s ugly security soon to be put in

force, with the proceeds of his practice immediately absorbed in paying

back debts, and with the chance, if the worst were known, of daily

supplies being refused on credit, above all with the vision of

Rosamond’s hopeless discontent continually haunting him, Lydgate had

begun to see that he should inevitably bend himself to ask help from

somebody or other. At first he had considered whether he should write

to Mr. Vincy; but on questioning Rosamond he found that, as he had

suspected, she had already applied twice to her father, the last time

being since the disappointment from Sir Godwin; and papa had said that

Lydgate must look out for himself. “Papa said he had come, with one bad

year after another, to trade more and more on borrowed capital, and had

had to give up many indulgences; he could not spare a single hundred

from the charges of his family. He said, let Lydgate ask Bulstrode:

they have always been hand and glove.”

Indeed, Lydgate himself had come to the conclusion that if he must end

by asking for a free loan, his relations with Bulstrode, more at least

than with any other man, might take the shape of a claim which was not

purely personal. Bulstrode had indirectly helped to cause the failure

of his practice, and had also been highly gratified by getting a

medical partner in his plans:—but who among us ever reduced himself to

the sort of dependence in which Lydgate now stood, without trying to

believe that he had claims which diminished the humiliation of asking?

It was true that of late there had seemed to be a new languor of

interest in Bulstrode about the Hospital; but his health had got worse,

and showed signs of a deep-seated nervous affection. In other respects

he did not appear to be changed: he had always been highly polite, but

Lydgate had observed in him from the first a marked coldness about his

marriage and other private circumstances, a coldness which he had

hitherto preferred to any warmth of familiarity between them. He

deferred the intention from day to day, his habit of acting on his

conclusions being made infirm by his repugnance to every possible

conclusion and its consequent act. He saw Mr. Bulstrode often, but he

did not try to use any occasion for his private purpose. At one moment

he thought, “I will write a letter: I prefer that to any circuitous

talk;” at another he thought, “No; if I were talking to him, I could

make a retreat before any signs of disinclination.”

Still the days passed and no letter was written, no special interview

sought. In his shrinking from the humiliation of a dependent attitude

towards Bulstrode, he began to familiarize his imagination with another

step even more unlike his remembered self. He began spontaneously to

consider whether it would be possible to carry out that puerile notion

of Rosamond’s which had often made him angry, namely, that they should

quit Middlemarch without seeing anything beyond that preface. The

question came—“Would any man buy the practice of me even now, for as

little as it is worth? Then the sale might happen as a necessary

preparation for going away.”

But against his taking this step, which he still felt to be a

contemptible relinquishment of present work, a guilty turning aside

from what was a real and might be a widening channel for worthy

activity, to start again without any justified destination, there was

this obstacle, that the purchaser, if procurable at all, might not be

quickly forthcoming. And afterwards? Rosamond in a poor lodging, though

in the largest city or most distant town, would not find the life that

could save her from gloom, and save him from the reproach of having

plunged her into it. For when a man is at the foot of the hill in his

fortunes, he may stay a long while there in spite of professional

accomplishment. In the British climate there is no incompatibility

between scientific insight and furnished lodgings: the incompatibility

is chiefly between scientific ambition and a wife who objects to that

kind of residence.

But in the midst of his hesitation, opportunity came to decide him. A

note from Mr. Bulstrode requested Lydgate to call on him at the Bank. A

hypochondriacal tendency had shown itself in the banker’s constitution

of late; and a lack of sleep, which was really only a slight

exaggeration of an habitual dyspeptic symptom, had been dwelt on by him

as a sign of threatening insanity. He wanted to consult Lydgate without

delay on that particular morning, although he had nothing to tell

beyond what he had told before. He listened eagerly to what Lydgate had

to say in dissipation of his fears, though this too was only

repetition; and this moment in which Bulstrode was receiving a medical

opinion with a sense of comfort, seemed to make the communication of a

personal need to him easier than it had been in Lydgate’s contemplation

beforehand. He had been insisting that it would be well for Mr.

Bulstrode to relax his attention to business.

“One sees how any mental strain, however slight, may affect a delicate

frame,” said Lydgate at that stage of the consultation when the remarks

tend to pass from the personal to the general, “by the deep stamp which

anxiety will make for a time even on the young and vigorous. I am

naturally very strong; yet I have been thoroughly shaken lately by an

accumulation of trouble.”

“I presume that a constitution in the susceptible state in which mine

at present is, would be especially liable to fall a victim to cholera,

if it visited our district. And since its appearance near London, we

may well besiege the Mercy-seat for our protection,” said Mr.

Bulstrode, not intending to evade Lydgate’s allusion, but really

preoccupied with alarms about himself.

“You have at all events taken your share in using good practical

precautions for the town, and that is the best mode of asking for

protection,” said Lydgate, with a strong distaste for the broken

metaphor and bad logic of the banker’s religion, somewhat increased by

the apparent deafness of his sympathy. But his mind had taken up its

long-prepared movement towards getting help, and was not yet arrested.

He added, “The town has done well in the way of cleansing, and finding

appliances; and I think that if the cholera should come, even our

enemies will admit that the arrangements in the Hospital are a public

good.”

“Truly,” said Mr. Bulstrode, with some coldness. “With regard to what

you say, Mr. Lydgate, about the relaxation of my mental labor, I have

for some time been entertaining a purpose to that effect—a purpose of a

very decided character. I contemplate at least a temporary withdrawal

from the management of much business, whether benevolent or commercial.

Also I think of changing my residence for a time: probably I shall

close or let ‘The Shrubs,’ and take some place near the coast—under

advice of course as to salubrity. That would be a measure which you

would recommend?”

“Oh yes,” said Lydgate, falling backward in his chair, with

ill-repressed impatience under the banker’s pale earnest eyes and

intense preoccupation with himself.

“I have for some time felt that I should open this subject with you in

relation to our Hospital,” continued Bulstrode. “Under the

circumstances I have indicated, of course I must cease to have any

personal share in the management, and it is contrary to my views of

responsibility to continue a large application of means to an

institution which I cannot watch over and to some extent regulate. I

shall therefore, in case of my ultimate decision to leave Middlemarch,

consider that I withdraw other support to the New Hospital than that

which will subsist in the fact that I chiefly supplied the expenses of

building it, and have contributed further large sums to its successful

working.”

Lydgate’s thought, when Bulstrode paused according to his wont, was,

“He has perhaps been losing a good deal of money.” This was the most

plausible explanation of a speech which had caused rather a startling

change in his expectations. He said in reply—

“The loss to the Hospital can hardly be made up, I fear.”

“Hardly,” returned Bulstrode, in the same deliberate, silvery tone;

“except by some changes of plan. The only person who may be certainly

counted on as willing to increase her contributions is Mrs. Casaubon. I

have had an interview with her on the subject, and I have pointed out

to her, as I am about to do to you, that it will be desirable to win a

more general support to the New Hospital by a change of system.”

Another pause, but Lydgate did not speak.

“The change I mean is an amalgamation with the Infirmary, so that the

New Hospital shall be regarded as a special addition to the elder

institution, having the same directing board. It will be necessary,

also, that the medical management of the two shall be combined. In this

way any difficulty as to the adequate maintenance of our new

establishment will be removed; the benevolent interests of the town

will cease to be divided.”

Mr. Bulstrode had lowered his eyes from Lydgate’s face to the buttons

of his coat as he again paused.

“No doubt that is a good device as to ways and means,” said Lydgate,

with an edge of irony in his tone. “But I can’t be expected to rejoice

in it at once, since one of the first results will be that the other

medical men will upset or interrupt my methods, if it were only because

they are mine.”

“I myself, as you know, Mr. Lydgate, highly valued the opportunity of

new and independent procedure which you have diligently employed: the

original plan, I confess, was one which I had much at heart, under

submission to the Divine Will. But since providential indications

demand a renunciation from me, I renounce.”

Bulstrode showed a rather exasperating ability in this conversation.

The broken metaphor and bad logic of motive which had stirred his

hearer’s contempt were quite consistent with a mode of putting the

facts which made it difficult for Lydgate to vent his own indignation

and disappointment. After some rapid reflection, he only asked—

“What did Mrs. Casaubon say?”

“That was the further statement which I wished to make to you,” said

Bulstrode, who had thoroughly prepared his ministerial explanation.

“She is, you are aware, a woman of most munificent disposition, and

happily in possession—not I presume of great wealth, but of funds which

she can well spare. She has informed me that though she has destined

the chief part of those funds to another purpose, she is willing to

consider whether she cannot fully take my place in relation to the

Hospital. But she wishes for ample time to mature her thoughts on the

subject, and I have told her that there is no need for haste—that, in

fact, my own plans are not yet absolute.”

Lydgate was ready to say, “If Mrs. Casaubon would take your place,

there would be gain, instead of loss.” But there was still a weight on

his mind which arrested this cheerful candor. He replied, “I suppose,

then, that I may enter into the subject with Mrs. Casaubon.”

“Precisely; that is what she expressly desires. Her decision, she says,

will much depend on what you can tell her. But not at present: she is,

I believe, just setting out on a journey. I have her letter here,” said

Mr. Bulstrode, drawing it out, and reading from it. “‘I am immediately

otherwise engaged,’ she says. ‘I am going into Yorkshire with Sir James

and Lady Chettam; and the conclusions I come to about some land which I

am to see there may affect my power of contributing to the Hospital.’

Thus, Mr. Lydgate, there is no haste necessary in this matter; but I

wished to apprise you beforehand of what may possibly occur.”

Mr. Bulstrode returned the letter to his side-pocket, and changed his

attitude as if his business were closed. Lydgate, whose renewed hope

about the Hospital only made him more conscious of the facts which

poisoned his hope, felt that his effort after help, if made at all,

must be made now and vigorously.

“I am much obliged to you for giving me full notice,” he said, with a

firm intention in his tone, yet with an interruptedness in his delivery

which showed that he spoke unwillingly. “The highest object to me is my

profession, and I had identified the Hospital with the best use I can

at present make of my profession. But the best use is not always the

same with monetary success. Everything which has made the Hospital

unpopular has helped with other causes—I think they are all connected

with my professional zeal—to make me unpopular as a practitioner. I get

chiefly patients who can’t pay me. I should like them best, if I had

nobody to pay on my own side.” Lydgate waited a little, but Bulstrode

only bowed, looking at him fixedly, and he went on with the same

interrupted enunciation—as if he were biting an objectional leek.

“I have slipped into money difficulties which I can see no way out of,

unless some one who trusts me and my future will advance me a sum

without other security. I had very little fortune left when I came

here. I have no prospects of money from my own family. My expenses, in

consequence of my marriage, have been very much greater than I had

expected. The result at this moment is that it would take a thousand

pounds to clear me. I mean, to free me from the risk of having all my

goods sold in security of my largest debt—as well as to pay my other

debts—and leave anything to keep us a little beforehand with our small

income. I find that it is out of the question that my wife’s father

should make such an advance. That is why I mention my position to—to

the only other man who may be held to have some personal connection

with my prosperity or ruin.”

Lydgate hated to hear himself. But he had spoken now, and had spoken

with unmistakable directness. Mr. Bulstrode replied without haste, but

also without hesitation.

“I am grieved, though, I confess, not surprised by this information,

Mr. Lydgate. For my own part, I regretted your alliance with my

brother-in-law’s family, which has always been of prodigal habits, and

which has already been much indebted to me for sustainment in its

present position. My advice to you, Mr. Lydgate, would be, that instead

of involving yourself in further obligations, and continuing a doubtful

struggle, you should simply become a bankrupt.”

“That would not improve my prospect,” said Lydgate, rising and speaking

bitterly, “even if it were a more agreeable thing in itself.”

“It is always a trial,” said Mr. Bulstrode; “but trial, my dear sir, is

our portion here, and is a needed corrective. I recommend you to weigh

the advice I have given.”

“Thank you,” said Lydgate, not quite knowing what he said. “I have

occupied you too long. Good-day.”

CHAPTER LXVIII.

What suit of grace hath Virtue to put on

If Vice shall wear as good, and do as well?

If Wrong, if Craft, if Indiscretion

Act as fair parts with ends as laudable?

Which all this mighty volume of events

The world, the universal map of deeds,

Strongly controls, and proves from all descents,

That the directest course still best succeeds.

For should not grave and learn’d Experience

That looks with the eyes of all the world beside,

And with all ages holds intelligence,

Go safer than Deceit without a guide!

—DANIEL: \_Musophilus\_.

That change of plan and shifting of interest which Bulstrode stated or

betrayed in his conversation with Lydgate, had been determined in him

by some severe experience which he had gone through since the epoch of

Mr. Larcher’s sale, when Raffles had recognized Will Ladislaw, and when

the banker had in vain attempted an act of restitution which might move

Divine Providence to arrest painful consequences.

His certainty that Raffles, unless he were dead, would return to

Middlemarch before long, had been justified. On Christmas Eve he had

reappeared at The Shrubs. Bulstrode was at home to receive him, and

hinder his communication with the rest of the family, but he could not

altogether hinder the circumstances of the visit from compromising

himself and alarming his wife. Raffles proved more unmanageable than he

had shown himself to be in his former appearances, his chronic state of

mental restlessness, the growing effect of habitual intemperance,

quickly shaking off every impression from what was said to him. He

insisted on staying in the house, and Bulstrode, weighing two sets of

evils, felt that this was at least not a worse alternative than his

going into the town. He kept him in his own room for the evening and

saw him to bed, Raffles all the while amusing himself with the

annoyance he was causing this decent and highly prosperous

fellow-sinner, an amusement which he facetiously expressed as sympathy

with his friend’s pleasure in entertaining a man who had been

serviceable to him, and who had not had all his earnings. There was a

cunning calculation under this noisy joking—a cool resolve to extract

something the handsomer from Bulstrode as payment for release from this

new application of torture. But his cunning had a little overcast its

mark.

Bulstrode was indeed more tortured than the coarse fibre of Raffles

could enable him to imagine. He had told his wife that he was simply

taking care of this wretched creature, the victim of vice, who might

otherwise injure himself; he implied, without the direct form of

falsehood, that there was a family tie which bound him to this care,

and that there were signs of mental alienation in Raffles which urged

caution. He would himself drive the unfortunate being away the next

morning. In these hints he felt that he was supplying Mrs. Bulstrode

with precautionary information for his daughters and servants, and

accounting for his allowing no one but himself to enter the room even

with food and drink. But he sat in an agony of fear lest Raffles should

be overheard in his loud and plain references to past facts—lest Mrs.

Bulstrode should be even tempted to listen at the door. How could he

hinder her, how betray his terror by opening the door to detect her?

She was a woman of honest direct habits, and little likely to take so

low a course in order to arrive at painful knowledge; but fear was

stronger than the calculation of probabilities.

In this way Raffles had pushed the torture too far, and produced an

effect which had not been in his plan. By showing himself hopelessly

unmanageable he had made Bulstrode feel that a strong defiance was the

only resource left. After taking Raffles to bed that night the banker

ordered his closed carriage to be ready at half-past seven the next

morning. At six o’clock he had already been long dressed, and had spent

some of his wretchedness in prayer, pleading his motives for averting

the worst evil if in anything he had used falsity and spoken what was

not true before God. For Bulstrode shrank from a direct lie with an

intensity disproportionate to the number of his more indirect misdeeds.

But many of these misdeeds were like the subtle muscular movements

which are not taken account of in the consciousness, though they bring

about the end that we fix our mind on and desire. And it is only what

we are vividly conscious of that we can vividly imagine to be seen by

Omniscience.

Bulstrode carried his candle to the bedside of Raffles, who was

apparently in a painful dream. He stood silent, hoping that the

presence of the light would serve to waken the sleeper gradually and

gently, for he feared some noise as the consequence of a too sudden

awakening. He had watched for a couple of minutes or more the

shudderings and pantings which seemed likely to end in waking, when

Raffles, with a long half-stifled moan, started up and stared round him

in terror, trembling and gasping. But he made no further noise, and

Bulstrode, setting down the candle, awaited his recovery.

It was a quarter of an hour later before Bulstrode, with a cold

peremptoriness of manner which he had not before shown, said, “I came

to call you thus early, Mr. Raffles, because I have ordered the

carriage to be ready at half-past seven, and intend myself to conduct

you as far as Ilsely, where you can either take the railway or await a

coach.” Raffles was about to speak, but Bulstrode anticipated him

imperiously with the words, “Be silent, sir, and hear what I have to

say. I shall supply you with money now, and I will furnish you with a

reasonable sum from time to time, on your application to me by letter;

but if you choose to present yourself here again, if you return to

Middlemarch, if you use your tongue in a manner injurious to me, you

will have to live on such fruits as your malice can bring you, without

help from me. Nobody will pay you well for blasting my name: I know the

worst you can do against me, and I shall brave it if you dare to thrust

yourself upon me again. Get up, sir, and do as I order you, without

noise, or I will send for a policeman to take you off my premises, and

you may carry your stories into every pothouse in the town, but you

shall have no sixpence from me to pay your expenses there.”

Bulstrode had rarely in his life spoken with such nervous energy: he

had been deliberating on this speech and its probable effects through a

large part of the night; and though he did not trust to its ultimately

saving him from any return of Raffles, he had concluded that it was the

best throw he could make. It succeeded in enforcing submission from the

jaded man this morning: his empoisoned system at this moment quailed

before Bulstrode’s cold, resolute bearing, and he was taken off quietly

in the carriage before the family breakfast time. The servants imagined

him to be a poor relation, and were not surprised that a strict man

like their master, who held his head high in the world, should be

ashamed of such a cousin and want to get rid of him. The banker’s drive

of ten miles with his hated companion was a dreary beginning of the

Christmas day; but at the end of the drive, Raffles had recovered his

spirits, and parted in a contentment for which there was the good

reason that the banker had given him a hundred pounds. Various motives

urged Bulstrode to this open-handedness, but he did not himself inquire

closely into all of them. As he had stood watching Raffles in his

uneasy sleep, it had certainly entered his mind that the man had been

much shattered since the first gift of two hundred pounds.

He had taken care to repeat the incisive statement of his resolve not

to be played on any more; and had tried to penetrate Raffles with the

fact that he had shown the risks of bribing him to be quite equal to

the risks of defying him. But when, freed from his repulsive presence,

Bulstrode returned to his quiet home, he brought with him no confidence

that he had secured more than a respite. It was as if he had had a

loathsome dream, and could not shake off its images with their hateful

kindred of sensations—as if on all the pleasant surroundings of his

life a dangerous reptile had left his slimy traces.

Who can know how much of his most inward life is made up of the

thoughts he believes other men to have about him, until that fabric of

opinion is threatened with ruin?

Bulstrode was only the more conscious that there was a deposit of

uneasy presentiment in his wife’s mind, because she carefully avoided

any allusion to it. He had been used every day to taste the flavor of

supremacy and the tribute of complete deference: and the certainty that

he was watched or measured with a hidden suspicion of his having some

discreditable secret, made his voice totter when he was speaking to

edification. Foreseeing, to men of Bulstrode’s anxious temperament, is

often worse than seeing; and his imagination continually heightened the

anguish of an imminent disgrace. Yes, imminent; for if his defiance of

Raffles did not keep the man away—and though he prayed for this result

he hardly hoped for it—the disgrace was certain. In vain he said to

himself that, if permitted, it would be a divine visitation, a

chastisement, a preparation; he recoiled from the imagined burning; and

he judged that it must be more for the Divine glory that he should

escape dishonor. That recoil had at last urged him to make preparations

for quitting Middlemarch. If evil truth must be reported of him, he

would then be at a less scorching distance from the contempt of his old

neighbors; and in a new scene, where his life would not have gathered

the same wide sensibility, the tormentor, if he pursued him, would be

less formidable. To leave the place finally would, he knew, be

extremely painful to his wife, and on other grounds he would have

preferred to stay where he had struck root. Hence he made his

preparations at first in a conditional way, wishing to leave on all

sides an opening for his return after brief absence, if any favorable

intervention of Providence should dissipate his fears. He was preparing

to transfer his management of the Bank, and to give up any active

control of other commercial affairs in the neighborhood, on the ground

of his failing health, but without excluding his future resumption of

such work. The measure would cause him some added expense and some

diminution of income beyond what he had already undergone from the

general depression of trade; and the Hospital presented itself as a

principal object of outlay on which he could fairly economize.

This was the experience which had determined his conversation with

Lydgate. But at this time his arrangements had most of them gone no

farther than a stage at which he could recall them if they proved to be

unnecessary. He continually deferred the final steps; in the midst of

his fears, like many a man who is in danger of shipwreck or of being

dashed from his carriage by runaway horses, he had a clinging

impression that something would happen to hinder the worst, and that to

spoil his life by a late transplantation might be over-hasty—especially

since it was difficult to account satisfactorily to his wife for the

project of their indefinite exile from the only place where she would

like to live.

Among the affairs Bulstrode had to care for, was the management of the

farm at Stone Court in case of his absence; and on this as well as on

all other matters connected with any houses and land he possessed in or

about Middlemarch, he had consulted Caleb Garth. Like every one else

who had business of that sort, he wanted to get the agent who was more

anxious for his employer’s interests than his own. With regard to Stone

Court, since Bulstrode wished to retain his hold on the stock, and to

have an arrangement by which he himself could, if he chose, resume his

favorite recreation of superintendence, Caleb had advised him not to

trust to a mere bailiff, but to let the land, stock, and implements

yearly, and take a proportionate share of the proceeds.

“May I trust to you to find me a tenant on these terms, Mr. Garth?”

said Bulstrode. “And will you mention to me the yearly sum which would

repay you for managing these affairs which we have discussed together?”

“I’ll think about it,” said Caleb, in his blunt way. “I’ll see how I

can make it out.”

If it had not been that he had to consider Fred Vincy’s future, Mr.

Garth would not probably have been glad of any addition to his work, of

which his wife was always fearing an excess for him as he grew older.

But on quitting Bulstrode after that conversation, a very alluring idea

occurred to him about this said letting of Stone Court. What if

Bulstrode would agree to his placing Fred Vincy there on the

understanding that he, Caleb Garth, should be responsible for the

management? It would be an excellent schooling for Fred; he might make

a modest income there, and still have time left to get knowledge by

helping in other business. He mentioned his notion to Mrs. Garth with

such evident delight that she could not bear to chill his pleasure by

expressing her constant fear of his undertaking too much.

“The lad would be as happy as two,” he said, throwing himself back in

his chair, and looking radiant, “if I could tell him it was all

settled. Think; Susan! His mind had been running on that place for

years before old Featherstone died. And it would be as pretty a turn of

things as could be that he should hold the place in a good industrious

way after all—by his taking to business. For it’s likely enough

Bulstrode might let him go on, and gradually buy the stock. He hasn’t

made up his mind, I can see, whether or not he shall settle somewhere

else as a lasting thing. I never was better pleased with a notion in my

life. And then the children might be married by-and-by, Susan.”

“You will not give any hint of the plan to Fred, until you are sure

that Bulstrode would agree to the plan?” said Mrs. Garth, in a tone of

gentle caution. “And as to marriage, Caleb, we old people need not help

to hasten it.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” said Caleb, swinging his head aside. “Marriage is a

taming thing. Fred would want less of my bit and bridle. However, I

shall say nothing till I know the ground I’m treading on. I shall speak

to Bulstrode again.”

He took his earliest opportunity of doing so. Bulstrode had anything

but a warm interest in his nephew Fred Vincy, but he had a strong wish

to secure Mr. Garth’s services on many scattered points of business at

which he was sure to be a considerable loser, if they were under less

conscientious management. On that ground he made no objection to Mr.

Garth’s proposal; and there was also another reason why he was not

sorry to give a consent which was to benefit one of the Vincy family.

It was that Mrs. Bulstrode, having heard of Lydgate’s debts, had been

anxious to know whether her husband could not do something for poor

Rosamond, and had been much troubled on learning from him that

Lydgate’s affairs were not easily remediable, and that the wisest plan

was to let them “take their course.” Mrs. Bulstrode had then said for

the first time, “I think you are always a little hard towards my

family, Nicholas. And I am sure I have no reason to deny any of my

relatives. Too worldly they may be, but no one ever had to say that

they were not respectable.”

“My dear Harriet,” said Mr. Bulstrode, wincing under his wife’s eyes,

which were filling with tears, “I have supplied your brother with a

great deal of capital. I cannot be expected to take care of his married

children.”

That seemed to be true, and Mrs. Bulstrode’s remonstrance subsided into

pity for poor Rosamond, whose extravagant education she had always

foreseen the fruits of.

But remembering that dialogue, Mr. Bulstrode felt that when he had to

talk to his wife fully about his plan of quitting Middlemarch, he

should be glad to tell her that he had made an arrangement which might

be for the good of her nephew Fred. At present he had merely mentioned

to her that he thought of shutting up The Shrubs for a few months, and

taking a house on the Southern Coast.

Hence Mr. Garth got the assurance he desired, namely, that in case of

Bulstrode’s departure from Middlemarch for an indefinite time, Fred

Vincy should be allowed to have the tenancy of Stone Court on the terms

proposed.

Caleb was so elated with his hope of this “neat turn” being given to

things, that if his self-control had not been braced by a little

affectionate wifely scolding, he would have betrayed everything to

Mary, wanting “to give the child comfort.” However, he restrained

himself, and kept in strict privacy from Fred certain visits which he

was making to Stone Court, in order to look more thoroughly into the

state of the land and stock, and take a preliminary estimate. He was

certainly more eager in these visits than the probable speed of events

required him to be; but he was stimulated by a fatherly delight in

occupying his mind with this bit of probable happiness which he held in

store like a hidden birthday gift for Fred and Mary.

“But suppose the whole scheme should turn out to be a castle in the

air?” said Mrs. Garth.

“Well, well,” replied Caleb; “the castle will tumble about nobody’s

head.”

CHAPTER LXIX.

“If thou hast heard a word, let it die with thee.”

—\_Ecclesiasticus\_.

Mr. Bulstrode was still seated in his manager’s room at the Bank, about

three o’clock of the same day on which he had received Lydgate there,

when the clerk entered to say that his horse was waiting, and also that

Mr. Garth was outside and begged to speak with him.

“By all means,” said Bulstrode; and Caleb entered. “Pray sit down, Mr.

Garth,” continued the banker, in his suavest tone.

“I am glad that you arrived just in time to find me here. I know you

count your minutes.”

“Oh,” said Caleb, gently, with a slow swing of his head on one side, as

he seated himself and laid his hat on the floor.

He looked at the ground, leaning forward and letting his long fingers

droop between his legs, while each finger moved in succession, as if it

were sharing some thought which filled his large quiet brow.

Mr. Bulstrode, like every one else who knew Caleb, was used to his

slowness in beginning to speak on any topic which he felt to be

important, and rather expected that he was about to recur to the buying

of some houses in Blindman’s Court, for the sake of pulling them down,

as a sacrifice of property which would be well repaid by the influx of

air and light on that spot. It was by propositions of this kind that

Caleb was sometimes troublesome to his employers; but he had usually

found Bulstrode ready to meet him in projects of improvement, and they

had got on well together. When he spoke again, however, it was to say,

in rather a subdued voice—

“I have just come away from Stone Court, Mr. Bulstrode.”

“You found nothing wrong there, I hope,” said the banker; “I was there

myself yesterday. Abel has done well with the lambs this year.”

“Why, yes,” said Caleb, looking up gravely, “there is something wrong—a

stranger, who is very ill, I think. He wants a doctor, and I came to

tell you of that. His name is Raffles.”

He saw the shock of his words passing through Bulstrode’s frame. On

this subject the banker had thought that his fears were too constantly

on the watch to be taken by surprise; but he had been mistaken.

“Poor wretch!” he said in a compassionate tone, though his lips

trembled a little. “Do you know how he came there?”

“I took him myself,” said Caleb, quietly—“took him up in my gig. He had

got down from the coach, and was walking a little beyond the turning

from the toll-house, and I overtook him. He remembered seeing me with

you once before, at Stone Court, and he asked me to take him on. I saw

he was ill: it seemed to me the right thing to do, to carry him under

shelter. And now I think you should lose no time in getting advice for

him.” Caleb took up his hat from the floor as he ended, and rose slowly

from his seat.

“Certainly,” said Bulstrode, whose mind was very active at this moment.

“Perhaps you will yourself oblige me, Mr. Garth, by calling at Mr.

Lydgate’s as you pass—or stay! he may at this hour probably be at the

Hospital. I will first send my man on the horse there with a note this

instant, and then I will myself ride to Stone Court.”

Bulstrode quickly wrote a note, and went out himself to give the

commission to his man. When he returned, Caleb was standing as before

with one hand on the back of the chair, holding his hat with the other.

In Bulstrode’s mind the dominant thought was, “Perhaps Raffles only

spoke to Garth of his illness. Garth may wonder, as he must have done

before, at this disreputable fellow’s claiming intimacy with me; but he

will know nothing. And he is friendly to me—I can be of use to him.”

He longed for some confirmation of this hopeful conjecture, but to have

asked any question as to what Raffles had said or done would have been

to betray fear.

“I am exceedingly obliged to you, Mr. Garth,” he said, in his usual

tone of politeness. “My servant will be back in a few minutes, and I

shall then go myself to see what can be done for this unfortunate man.

Perhaps you had some other business with me? If so, pray be seated.”

“Thank you,” said Caleb, making a slight gesture with his right hand to

waive the invitation. “I wish to say, Mr. Bulstrode, that I must

request you to put your business into some other hands than mine. I am

obliged to you for your handsome way of meeting me—about the letting of

Stone Court, and all other business. But I must give it up.” A sharp

certainty entered like a stab into Bulstrode’s soul.

“This is sudden, Mr. Garth,” was all he could say at first.

“It is,” said Caleb; “but it is quite fixed. I must give it up.”

He spoke with a firmness which was very gentle, and yet he could see

that Bulstrode seemed to cower under that gentleness, his face looking

dried and his eyes swerving away from the glance which rested on him.

Caleb felt a deep pity for him, but he could have used no pretexts to

account for his resolve, even if they would have been of any use.

“You have been led to this, I apprehend, by some slanders concerning me

uttered by that unhappy creature,” said Bulstrode, anxious now to know

the utmost.

“That is true. I can’t deny that I act upon what I heard from him.”

“You are a conscientious man, Mr. Garth—a man, I trust, who feels

himself accountable to God. You would not wish to injure me by being

too ready to believe a slander,” said Bulstrode, casting about for

pleas that might be adapted to his hearer’s mind. “That is a poor

reason for giving up a connection which I think I may say will be

mutually beneficial.”

“I would injure no man if I could help it,” said Caleb; “even if I

thought God winked at it. I hope I should have a feeling for my

fellow-creature. But, sir—I am obliged to believe that this Raffles has

told me the truth. And I can’t be happy in working with you, or

profiting by you. It hurts my mind. I must beg you to seek another

agent.”

“Very well, Mr. Garth. But I must at least claim to know the worst that

he has told you. I must know what is the foul speech that I am liable

to be the victim of,” said Bulstrode, a certain amount of anger

beginning to mingle with his humiliation before this quiet man who

renounced his benefits.

“That’s needless,” said Caleb, waving his hand, bowing his head

slightly, and not swerving from the tone which had in it the merciful

intention to spare this pitiable man. “What he has said to me will

never pass from my lips, unless something now unknown forces it from

me. If you led a harmful life for gain, and kept others out of their

rights by deceit, to get the more for yourself, I dare say you

repent—you would like to go back, and can’t: that must be a bitter

thing”—Caleb paused a moment and shook his head—“it is not for me to

make your life harder to you.”

“But you do—you do make it harder to me,” said Bulstrode constrained

into a genuine, pleading cry. “You make it harder to me by turning your

back on me.”

“That I’m forced to do,” said Caleb, still more gently, lifting up his

hand. “I am sorry. I don’t judge you and say, he is wicked, and I am

righteous. God forbid. I don’t know everything. A man may do wrong, and

his will may rise clear out of it, though he can’t get his life clear.

That’s a bad punishment. If it is so with you,—well, I’m very sorry for

you. But I have that feeling inside me, that I can’t go on working with

you. That’s all, Mr. Bulstrode. Everything else is buried, so far as my

will goes. And I wish you good-day.”

“One moment, Mr. Garth!” said Bulstrode, hurriedly. “I may trust then

to your solemn assurance that you will not repeat either to man or

woman what—even if it have any degree of truth in it—is yet a malicious

representation?” Caleb’s wrath was stirred, and he said, indignantly—

“Why should I have said it if I didn’t mean it? I am in no fear of you.

Such tales as that will never tempt my tongue.”

“Excuse me—I am agitated—I am the victim of this abandoned man.”

“Stop a bit! you have got to consider whether you didn’t help to make

him worse, when you profited by his vices.”

“You are wronging me by too readily believing him,” said Bulstrode,

oppressed, as by a nightmare, with the inability to deny flatly what

Raffles might have said; and yet feeling it an escape that Caleb had

not so stated it to him as to ask for that flat denial.

“No,” said Caleb, lifting his hand deprecatingly; “I am ready to

believe better, when better is proved. I rob you of no good chance. As

to speaking, I hold it a crime to expose a man’s sin unless I’m clear

it must be done to save the innocent. That is my way of thinking, Mr.

Bulstrode, and what I say, I’ve no need to swear. I wish you good-day.”

Some hours later, when he was at home, Caleb said to his wife,

incidentally, that he had had some little differences with Bulstrode,

and that in consequence, he had given up all notion of taking Stone

Court, and indeed had resigned doing further business for him.

“He was disposed to interfere too much, was he?” said Mrs. Garth,

imagining that her husband had been touched on his sensitive point, and

not been allowed to do what he thought right as to materials and modes

of work.

“Oh,” said Caleb, bowing his head and waving his hand gravely. And Mrs.

Garth knew that this was a sign of his not intending to speak further

on the subject.

As for Bulstrode, he had almost immediately mounted his horse and set

off for Stone Court, being anxious to arrive there before Lydgate.

His mind was crowded with images and conjectures, which were a language

to his hopes and fears, just as we hear tones from the vibrations which

shake our whole system. The deep humiliation with which he had winced

under Caleb Garth’s knowledge of his past and rejection of his

patronage, alternated with and almost gave way to the sense of safety

in the fact that Garth, and no other, had been the man to whom Raffles

had spoken. It seemed to him a sort of earnest that Providence intended

his rescue from worse consequences; the way being thus left open for

the hope of secrecy. That Raffles should be afflicted with illness,

that he should have been led to Stone Court rather than

elsewhere—Bulstrode’s heart fluttered at the vision of probabilities

which these events conjured up. If it should turn out that he was freed

from all danger of disgrace—if he could breathe in perfect liberty—his

life should be more consecrated than it had ever been before. He

mentally lifted up this vow as if it would urge the result he longed

for—he tried to believe in the potency of that prayerful resolution—its

potency to determine death. He knew that he ought to say, “Thy will be

done;” and he said it often. But the intense desire remained that the

will of God might be the death of that hated man.

Yet when he arrived at Stone Court he could not see the change in

Raffles without a shock. But for his pallor and feebleness, Bulstrode

would have called the change in him entirely mental. Instead of his

loud tormenting mood, he showed an intense, vague terror, and seemed to

deprecate Bulstrode’s anger, because the money was all gone—he had been

robbed—it had half of it been taken from him. He had only come here

because he was ill and somebody was hunting him—somebody was after him,

he had told nobody anything, he had kept his mouth shut. Bulstrode, not

knowing the significance of these symptoms, interpreted this new

nervous susceptibility into a means of alarming Raffles into true

confessions, and taxed him with falsehood in saying that he had not

told anything, since he had just told the man who took him up in his

gig and brought him to Stone Court. Raffles denied this with solemn

adjurations; the fact being that the links of consciousness were

interrupted in him, and that his minute terror-stricken narrative to

Caleb Garth had been delivered under a set of visionary impulses which

had dropped back into darkness.

Bulstrode’s heart sank again at this sign that he could get no grasp

over the wretched man’s mind, and that no word of Raffles could be

trusted as to the fact which he most wanted to know, namely, whether or

not he had really kept silence to every one in the neighborhood except

Caleb Garth. The housekeeper had told him without the least constraint

of manner that since Mr. Garth left, Raffles had asked her for beer,

and after that had not spoken, seeming very ill. On that side it might

be concluded that there had been no betrayal. Mrs. Abel thought, like

the servants at The Shrubs, that the strange man belonged to the

unpleasant “kin” who are among the troubles of the rich; she had at

first referred the kinship to Mr. Rigg, and where there was property

left, the buzzing presence of such large blue-bottles seemed natural

enough. How he could be “kin” to Bulstrode as well was not so clear,

but Mrs. Abel agreed with her husband that there was “no knowing,” a

proposition which had a great deal of mental food for her, so that she

shook her head over it without further speculation.

In less than an hour Lydgate arrived. Bulstrode met him outside the

wainscoted parlor, where Raffles was, and said—

“I have called you in, Mr. Lydgate, to an unfortunate man who was once

in my employment, many years ago. Afterwards he went to America, and

returned I fear to an idle dissolute life. Being destitute, he has a

claim on me. He was slightly connected with Rigg, the former owner of

this place, and in consequence found his way here. I believe he is

seriously ill: apparently his mind is affected. I feel bound to do the

utmost for him.”

Lydgate, who had the remembrance of his last conversation with

Bulstrode strongly upon him, was not disposed to say an unnecessary

word to him, and bowed slightly in answer to this account; but just

before entering the room he turned automatically and said, “What is his

name?”—to know names being as much a part of the medical man’s

accomplishment as of the practical politician’s.

“Raffles, John Raffles,” said Bulstrode, who hoped that whatever became

of Raffles, Lydgate would never know any more of him.

When he had thoroughly examined and considered the patient, Lydgate

ordered that he should go to bed, and be kept there in as complete

quiet as possible, and then went with Bulstrode into another room.

“It is a serious case, I apprehend,” said the banker, before Lydgate

began to speak.

“No—and yes,” said Lydgate, half dubiously. “It is difficult to decide

as to the possible effect of long-standing complications; but the man

had a robust constitution to begin with. I should not expect this

attack to be fatal, though of course the system is in a ticklish state.

He should be well watched and attended to.”

“I will remain here myself,” said Bulstrode. “Mrs. Abel and her husband

are inexperienced. I can easily remain here for the night, if you will

oblige me by taking a note for Mrs. Bulstrode.”

“I should think that is hardly necessary,” said Lydgate. “He seems tame

and terrified enough. He might become more unmanageable. But there is a

man here—is there not?”

“I have more than once stayed here a few nights for the sake of

seclusion,” said Bulstrode, indifferently; “I am quite disposed to do

so now. Mrs. Abel and her husband can relieve or aid me, if necessary.”

“Very well. Then I need give my directions only to you,” said Lydgate,

not feeling surprised at a little peculiarity in Bulstrode.

“You think, then, that the case is hopeful?” said Bulstrode, when

Lydgate had ended giving his orders.

“Unless there turn out to be further complications, such as I have not

at present detected—yes,” said Lydgate. “He may pass on to a worse

stage; but I should not wonder if he got better in a few days, by

adhering to the treatment I have prescribed. There must be firmness.

Remember, if he calls for liquors of any sort, not to give them to him.

In my opinion, men in his condition are oftener killed by treatment

than by the disease. Still, new symptoms may arise. I shall come again

to-morrow morning.”

After waiting for the note to be carried to Mrs. Bulstrode, Lydgate

rode away, forming no conjectures, in the first instance, about the

history of Raffles, but rehearsing the whole argument, which had lately

been much stirred by the publication of Dr. Ware’s abundant experience

in America, as to the right way of treating cases of alcoholic

poisoning such as this. Lydgate, when abroad, had already been

interested in this question: he was strongly convinced against the

prevalent practice of allowing alcohol and persistently administering

large doses of opium; and he had repeatedly acted on this conviction

with a favorable result.

“The man is in a diseased state,” he thought, “but there’s a good deal

of wear in him still. I suppose he is an object of charity to

Bulstrode. It is curious what patches of hardness and tenderness lie

side by side in men’s dispositions. Bulstrode seems the most

unsympathetic fellow I ever saw about some people, and yet he has taken

no end of trouble, and spent a great deal of money, on benevolent

objects. I suppose he has some test by which he finds out whom Heaven

cares for—he has made up his mind that it doesn’t care for me.”

This streak of bitterness came from a plenteous source, and kept

widening in the current of his thought as he neared Lowick Gate. He had

not been there since his first interview with Bulstrode in the morning,

having been found at the Hospital by the banker’s messenger; and for

the first time he was returning to his home without the vision of any

expedient in the background which left him a hope of raising money

enough to deliver him from the coming destitution of everything which

made his married life tolerable—everything which saved him and Rosamond

from that bare isolation in which they would be forced to recognize how

little of a comfort they could be to each other. It was more bearable

to do without tenderness for himself than to see that his own

tenderness could make no amends for the lack of other things to her.

The sufferings of his own pride from humiliations past and to come were

keen enough, yet they were hardly distinguishable to himself from that

more acute pain which dominated them—the pain of foreseeing that

Rosamond would come to regard him chiefly as the cause of

disappointment and unhappiness to her. He had never liked the

makeshifts of poverty, and they had never before entered into his

prospects for himself; but he was beginning now to imagine how two

creatures who loved each other, and had a stock of thoughts in common,

might laugh over their shabby furniture, and their calculations how far

they could afford butter and eggs. But the glimpse of that poetry

seemed as far off from him as the carelessness of the golden age; in

poor Rosamond’s mind there was not room enough for luxuries to look

small in. He got down from his horse in a very sad mood, and went into

the house, not expecting to be cheered except by his dinner, and

reflecting that before the evening closed it would be wise to tell

Rosamond of his application to Bulstrode and its failure. It would be

well not to lose time in preparing her for the worst.

But his dinner waited long for him before he was able to eat it. For on

entering he found that Dover’s agent had already put a man in the

house, and when he asked where Mrs. Lydgate was, he was told that she

was in her bedroom. He went up and found her stretched on the bed pale

and silent, without an answer even in her face to any word or look of

his. He sat down by the bed and leaning over her said with almost a cry

of prayer—

“Forgive me for this misery, my poor Rosamond! Let us only love one

another.”

She looked at him silently, still with the blank despair on her face;

but then the tears began to fill her blue eyes, and her lip trembled.

The strong man had had too much to bear that day. He let his head fall

beside hers and sobbed.

He did not hinder her from going to her father early in the morning—it

seemed now that he ought not to hinder her from doing as she pleased.

In half an hour she came back, and said that papa and mamma wished her

to go and stay with them while things were in this miserable state.

Papa said he could do nothing about the debt—if he paid this, there

would be half-a-dozen more. She had better come back home again till

Lydgate had got a comfortable home for her. “Do you object, Tertius?”

“Do as you like,” said Lydgate. “But things are not coming to a crisis

immediately. There is no hurry.”

“I should not go till to-morrow,” said Rosamond; “I shall want to pack

my clothes.”

“Oh, I would wait a little longer than to-morrow—there is no knowing

what may happen,” said Lydgate, with bitter irony. “I may get my neck

broken, and that may make things easier to you.”

It was Lydgate’s misfortune and Rosamond’s too, that his tenderness

towards her, which was both an emotional prompting and a

well-considered resolve, was inevitably interrupted by these outbursts

of indignation either ironical or remonstrant. She thought them totally

unwarranted, and the repulsion which this exceptional severity excited

in her was in danger of making the more persistent tenderness

unacceptable.

“I see you do not wish me to go,” she said, with chill mildness; “why

can you not say so, without that kind of violence? I shall stay until

you request me to do otherwise.”

Lydgate said no more, but went out on his rounds. He felt bruised and

shattered, and there was a dark line under his eyes which Rosamond had

not seen before. She could not bear to look at him. Tertius had a way

of taking things which made them a great deal worse for her.

CHAPTER LXX.

“Our deeds still travel with us from afar,

And what we have been makes us what we are.”

Bulstrode’s first object after Lydgate had left Stone Court was to

examine Raffles’s pockets, which he imagined were sure to carry signs

in the shape of hotel-bills of the places he had stopped in, if he had

not told the truth in saying that he had come straight from Liverpool

because he was ill and had no money. There were various bills crammed

into his pocketbook, but none of a later date than Christmas at any

other place, except one, which bore date that morning. This was

crumpled up with a hand-bill about a horse-fair in one of his

tail-pockets, and represented the cost of three days’ stay at an inn at

Bilkley, where the fair was held—a town at least forty miles from

Middlemarch. The bill was heavy, and since Raffles had no luggage with

him, it seemed probable that he had left his portmanteau behind in

payment, in order to save money for his travelling fare; for his purse

was empty, and he had only a couple of sixpences and some loose pence

in his pockets.

Bulstrode gathered a sense of safety from these indications that

Raffles had really kept at a distance from Middlemarch since his

memorable visit at Christmas. At a distance and among people who were

strangers to Bulstrode, what satisfaction could there be to Raffles’s

tormenting, self-magnifying vein in telling old scandalous stories

about a Middlemarch banker? And what harm if he did talk? The chief

point now was to keep watch over him as long as there was any danger of

that intelligible raving, that unaccountable impulse to tell, which

seemed to have acted towards Caleb Garth; and Bulstrode felt much

anxiety lest some such impulse should come over him at the sight of

Lydgate. He sat up alone with him through the night, only ordering the

housekeeper to lie down in her clothes, so as to be ready when he

called her, alleging his own indisposition to sleep, and his anxiety to

carry out the doctor’s orders. He did carry them out faithfully,

although Raffles was incessantly asking for brandy, and declaring that

he was sinking away—that the earth was sinking away from under him. He

was restless and sleepless, but still quailing and manageable. On the

offer of the food ordered by Lydgate, which he refused, and the denial

of other things which he demanded, he seemed to concentrate all his

terror on Bulstrode, imploringly deprecating his anger, his revenge on

him by starvation, and declaring with strong oaths that he had never

told any mortal a word against him. Even this Bulstrode felt that he

would not have liked Lydgate to hear; but a more alarming sign of

fitful alternation in his delirium was, that in-the morning twilight

Raffles suddenly seemed to imagine a doctor present, addressing him and

declaring that Bulstrode wanted to starve him to death out of revenge

for telling, when he never had told.

Bulstrode’s native imperiousness and strength of determination served

him well. This delicate-looking man, himself nervously perturbed, found

the needed stimulus in his strenuous circumstances, and through that

difficult night and morning, while he had the air of an animated corpse

returned to movement without warmth, holding the mastery by its chill

impassibility, his mind was intensely at work thinking of what he had

to guard against and what would win him security. Whatever prayers he

might lift up, whatever statements he might inwardly make of this man’s

wretched spiritual condition, and the duty he himself was under to

submit to the punishment divinely appointed for him rather than to wish

for evil to another—through all this effort to condense words into a

solid mental state, there pierced and spread with irresistible

vividness the images of the events he desired. And in the train of

those images came their apology. He could not but see the death of

Raffles, and see in it his own deliverance. What was the removal of

this wretched creature? He was impenitent—but were not public criminals

impenitent?—yet the law decided on their fate. Should Providence in

this case award death, there was no sin in contemplating death as the

desirable issue—if he kept his hands from hastening it—if he

scrupulously did what was prescribed. Even here there might be a

mistake: human prescriptions were fallible things: Lydgate had said

that treatment had hastened death,—why not his own method of treatment?

But of course intention was everything in the question of right and

wrong.

And Bulstrode set himself to keep his intention separate from his

desire. He inwardly declared that he intended to obey orders. Why

should he have got into any argument about the validity of these

orders? It was only the common trick of desire—which avails itself of

any irrelevant scepticism, finding larger room for itself in all

uncertainty about effects, in every obscurity that looks like the

absence of law. Still, he did obey the orders.

His anxieties continually glanced towards Lydgate, and his remembrance

of what had taken place between them the morning before was accompanied

with sensibilities which had not been roused at all during the actual

scene. He had then cared but little about Lydgate’s painful impressions

with regard to the suggested change in the Hospital, or about the

disposition towards himself which what he held to be his justifiable

refusal of a rather exorbitant request might call forth. He recurred to

the scene now with a perception that he had probably made Lydgate his

enemy, and with an awakened desire to propitiate him, or rather to

create in him a strong sense of personal obligation. He regretted that

he had not at once made even an unreasonable money-sacrifice. For in

case of unpleasant suspicions, or even knowledge gathered from the

raving of Raffles, Bulstrode would have felt that he had a defence in

Lydgate’s mind by having conferred a momentous benefit on him. But the

regret had perhaps come too late.

Strange, piteous conflict in the soul of this unhappy man, who had

longed for years to be better than he was—who had taken his selfish

passions into discipline and clad them in severe robes, so that he had

walked with them as a devout choir, till now that a terror had risen

among them, and they could chant no longer, but threw out their common

cries for safety.

It was nearly the middle of the day before Lydgate arrived: he had

meant to come earlier, but had been detained, he said; and his

shattered looks were noticed by Balstrode. But he immediately threw

himself into the consideration of the patient, and inquired strictly

into all that had occurred. Raffles was worse, would take hardly any

food, was persistently wakeful and restlessly raving; but still not

violent. Contrary to Bulstrode’s alarmed expectation, he took little

notice of Lydgate’s presence, and continued to talk or murmur

incoherently.

“What do you think of him?” said Bulstrode, in private.

“The symptoms are worse.”

“You are less hopeful?”

“No; I still think he may come round. Are you going to stay here

yourself?” said Lydgate, looking at Bulstrode with an abrupt question,

which made him uneasy, though in reality it was not due to any

suspicious conjecture.

“Yes, I think so,” said Bulstrode, governing himself and speaking with

deliberation. “Mrs. Bulstrode is advised of the reasons which detain

me. Mrs. Abel and her husband are not experienced enough to be left

quite alone, and this kind of responsibility is scarcely included in

their service of me. You have some fresh instructions, I presume.”

The chief new instruction that Lydgate had to give was on the

administration of extremely moderate doses of opium, in case of the

sleeplessness continuing after several hours. He had taken the

precaution of bringing opium in his pocket, and he gave minute

directions to Bulstrode as to the doses, and the point at which they

should cease. He insisted on the risk of not ceasing; and repeated his

order that no alcohol should be given.

“From what I see of the case,” he ended, “narcotism is the only thing I

should be much afraid of. He may wear through even without much food.

There’s a good deal of strength in him.”

“You look ill yourself, Mr. Lydgate—a most unusual, I may say

unprecedented thing in my knowledge of you,” said Bulstrode, showing a

solicitude as unlike his indifference the day before, as his present

recklessness about his own fatigue was unlike his habitual

self-cherishing anxiety. “I fear you are harassed.”

“Yes, I am,” said Lydgate, brusquely, holding his hat, and ready to go.

“Something new, I fear,” said Bulstrode, inquiringly. “Pray be seated.”

“No, thank you,” said Lydgate, with some hauteur. “I mentioned to you

yesterday what was the state of my affairs. There is nothing to add,

except that the execution has since then been actually put into my

house. One can tell a good deal of trouble in a short sentence. I will

say good morning.”

“Stay, Mr. Lydgate, stay,” said Bulstrode; “I have been reconsidering

this subject. I was yesterday taken by surprise, and saw it

superficially. Mrs. Bulstrode is anxious for her niece, and I myself

should grieve at a calamitous change in your position. Claims on me are

numerous, but on reconsideration, I esteem it right that I should incur

a small sacrifice rather than leave you unaided. You said, I think,

that a thousand pounds would suffice entirely to free you from your

burthens, and enable you to recover a firm stand?”

“Yes,” said Lydgate, a great leap of joy within him surmounting every

other feeling; “that would pay all my debts, and leave me a little on

hand. I could set about economizing in our way of living. And by-and-by

my practice might look up.”

“If you will wait a moment, Mr. Lydgate, I will draw a check to that

amount. I am aware that help, to be effectual in these cases, should be

thorough.”

While Bulstrode wrote, Lydgate turned to the window thinking of his

home—thinking of his life with its good start saved from frustration,

its good purposes still unbroken.

“You can give me a note of hand for this, Mr. Lydgate,” said the

banker, advancing towards him with the check. “And by-and-by, I hope,

you may be in circumstances gradually to repay me. Meanwhile, I have

pleasure in thinking that you will be released from further

difficulty.”

“I am deeply obliged to you,” said Lydgate. “You have restored to me

the prospect of working with some happiness and some chance of good.”

It appeared to him a very natural movement in Bulstrode that he should

have reconsidered his refusal: it corresponded with the more munificent

side of his character. But as he put his hack into a canter, that he

might get the sooner home, and tell the good news to Rosamond, and get

cash at the bank to pay over to Dover’s agent, there crossed his mind,

with an unpleasant impression, as from a dark-winged flight of evil

augury across his vision, the thought of that contrast in himself which

a few months had brought—that he should be overjoyed at being under a

strong personal obligation—that he should be overjoyed at getting money

for himself from Bulstrode.

The banker felt that he had done something to nullify one cause of

uneasiness, and yet he was scarcely the easier. He did not measure the

quantity of diseased motive which had made him wish for Lydgate’s

good-will, but the quantity was none the less actively there, like an

irritating agent in his blood. A man vows, and yet will not cast away

the means of breaking his vow. Is it that he distinctly means to break

it? Not at all; but the desires which tend to break it are at work in

him dimly, and make their way into his imagination, and relax his

muscles in the very moments when he is telling himself over again the

reasons for his vow. Raffles, recovering quickly, returning to the free

use of his odious powers—how could Bulstrode wish for that? Raffles

dead was the image that brought release, and indirectly he prayed for

that way of release, beseeching that, if it were possible, the rest of

his days here below might be freed from the threat of an ignominy which

would break him utterly as an instrument of God’s service. Lydgate’s

opinion was not on the side of promise that this prayer would be

fulfilled; and as the day advanced, Bulstrode felt himself getting

irritated at the persistent life in this man, whom he would fain have

seen sinking into the silence of death: imperious will stirred

murderous impulses towards this brute life, over which will, by itself,

had no power. He said inwardly that he was getting too much worn; he

would not sit up with the patient to-night, but leave him to Mrs. Abel,

who, if necessary, could call her husband.

At six o’clock, Raffles, having had only fitful perturbed snatches of

sleep, from which he waked with fresh restlessness and perpetual cries

that he was sinking away, Bulstrode began to administer the opium

according to Lydgate’s directions. At the end of half an hour or more

he called Mrs. Abel and told her that he found himself unfit for

further watching. He must now consign the patient to her care; and he

proceeded to repeat to her Lydgate’s directions as to the quantity of

each dose. Mrs. Abel had not before known anything of Lydgate’s

prescriptions; she had simply prepared and brought whatever Bulstrode

ordered, and had done what he pointed out to her. She began now to ask

what else she should do besides administering the opium.

“Nothing at present, except the offer of the soup or the soda-water:

you can come to me for further directions. Unless there is any

important change, I shall not come into the room again to-night. You

will ask your husband for help if necessary. I must go to bed early.”

“You’ve much need, sir, I’m sure,” said Mrs. Abel, “and to take

something more strengthening than what you’ve done.”

Bulstrode went away now without anxiety as to what Raffles might say in

his raving, which had taken on a muttering incoherence not likely to

create any dangerous belief. At any rate he must risk this. He went

down into the wainscoted parlor first, and began to consider whether he

would not have his horse saddled and go home by the moonlight, and give

up caring for earthly consequences. Then, he wished that he had begged

Lydgate to come again that evening. Perhaps he might deliver a

different opinion, and think that Raffles was getting into a less

hopeful state. Should he send for Lydgate? If Raffles were really

getting worse, and slowly dying, Bulstrode felt that he could go to bed

and sleep in gratitude to Providence. But was he worse? Lydgate might

come and simply say that he was going on as he expected, and predict

that he would by-and-by fall into a good sleep, and get well. What was

the use of sending for him? Bulstrode shrank from that result. No ideas

or opinions could hinder him from seeing the one probability to be,

that Raffles recovered would be just the same man as before, with his

strength as a tormentor renewed, obliging him to drag away his wife to

spend her years apart from her friends and native place, carrying an

alienating suspicion against him in her heart.

He had sat an hour and a half in this conflict by the firelight only,

when a sudden thought made him rise and light the bed-candle, which he

had brought down with him. The thought was, that he had not told Mrs.

Abel when the doses of opium must cease.

He took hold of the candlestick, but stood motionless for a long while.

She might already have given him more than Lydgate had prescribed. But

it was excusable in him, that he should forget part of an order, in his

present wearied condition. He walked up-stairs, candle in hand, not

knowing whether he should straightway enter his own room and go to bed,

or turn to the patient’s room and rectify his omission. He paused in

the passage, with his face turned towards Raffles’s room, and he could

hear him moaning and murmuring. He was not asleep, then. Who could know

that Lydgate’s prescription would not be better disobeyed than

followed, since there was still no sleep?

He turned into his own room. Before he had quite undressed, Mrs. Abel

rapped at the door; he opened it an inch, so that he could hear her

speak low.

“If you please, sir, should I have no brandy nor nothing to give the

poor creetur? He feels sinking away, and nothing else will he

swaller—and but little strength in it, if he did—only the opium. And he

says more and more he’s sinking down through the earth.”

To her surprise, Mr. Bulstrode did not answer. A struggle was going on

within him.

“I think he must die for want o’ support, if he goes on in that way.

When I nursed my poor master, Mr. Robisson, I had to give him port-wine

and brandy constant, and a big glass at a time,” added Mrs. Abel, with

a touch of remonstrance in her tone.

But again Mr. Bulstrode did not answer immediately, and she continued,

“It’s not a time to spare when people are at death’s door, nor would

you wish it, sir, I’m sure. Else I should give him our own bottle o’

rum as we keep by us. But a sitter-up so as you’ve been, and doing

everything as laid in your power—”

Here a key was thrust through the inch of doorway, and Mr. Bulstrode

said huskily, “That is the key of the wine-cooler. You will find plenty

of brandy there.”

Early in the morning—about six—Mr. Bulstrode rose and spent some time

in prayer. Does any one suppose that private prayer is necessarily

candid—necessarily goes to the roots of action? Private prayer is

inaudible speech, and speech is representative: who can represent

himself just as he is, even in his own reflections? Bulstrode had not

yet unravelled in his thought the confused promptings of the last

four-and-twenty hours.

He listened in the passage, and could hear hard stertorous breathing.

Then he walked out in the garden, and looked at the early rime on the

grass and fresh spring leaves. When he re-entered the house, he felt

startled at the sight of Mrs. Abel.

“How is your patient—asleep, I think?” he said, with an attempt at

cheerfulness in his tone.

“He’s gone very deep, sir,” said Mrs. Abel. “He went off gradual

between three and four o’clock. Would you please to go and look at him?

I thought it no harm to leave him. My man’s gone afield, and the little

girl’s seeing to the kettles.”

Bulstrode went up. At a glance he knew that Raffles was not in the

sleep which brings revival, but in the sleep which streams deeper and

deeper into the gulf of death.

He looked round the room and saw a bottle with some brandy in it, and

the almost empty opium phial. He put the phial out of sight, and

carried the brandy-bottle down-stairs with him, locking it again in the

wine-cooler.

While breakfasting he considered whether he should ride to Middlemarch

at once, or wait for Lydgate’s arrival. He decided to wait, and told

Mrs. Abel that she might go about her work—he could watch in the

bed-chamber.

As he sat there and beheld the enemy of his peace going irrevocably

into silence, he felt more at rest than he had done for many months.

His conscience was soothed by the enfolding wing of secrecy, which

seemed just then like an angel sent down for his relief. He drew out

his pocket-book to review various memoranda there as to the

arrangements he had projected and partly carried out in the prospect of

quitting Middlemarch, and considered how far he would let them stand or

recall them, now that his absence would be brief. Some economies which

he felt desirable might still find a suitable occasion in his temporary

withdrawal from management, and he hoped still that Mrs. Casaubon would

take a large share in the expenses of the Hospital. In that way the

moments passed, until a change in the stertorous breathing was marked

enough to draw his attention wholly to the bed, and forced him to think

of the departing life, which had once been subservient to his own—which

he had once been glad to find base enough for him to act on as he

would. It was his gladness then which impelled him now to be glad that

the life was at an end.

And who could say that the death of Raffles had been hastened? Who knew

what would have saved him?

Lydgate arrived at half-past ten, in time to witness the final pause of

the breath. When he entered the room Bulstrode observed a sudden

expression in his face, which was not so much surprise as a recognition

that he had not judged correctly. He stood by the bed in silence for

some time, with his eyes turned on the dying man, but with that subdued

activity of expression which showed that he was carrying on an inward

debate.

“When did this change begin?” said he, looking at Bulstrode.

“I did not watch by him last night,” said Bulstrode. “I was over-worn,

and left him under Mrs. Abel’s care. She said that he sank into sleep

between three and four o’clock. When I came in before eight he was

nearly in this condition.”

Lydgate did not ask another question, but watched in silence until he

said, “It’s all over.”

This morning Lydgate was in a state of recovered hope and freedom. He

had set out on his work with all his old animation, and felt himself

strong enough to bear all the deficiencies of his married life. And he

was conscious that Bulstrode had been a benefactor to him. But he was

uneasy about this case. He had not expected it to terminate as it had

done. Yet he hardly knew how to put a question on the subject to

Bulstrode without appearing to insult him; and if he examined the

housekeeper—why, the man was dead. There seemed to be no use in

implying that somebody’s ignorance or imprudence had killed him. And

after all, he himself might be wrong.

He and Bulstrode rode back to Middlemarch together, talking of many

things—chiefly cholera and the chances of the Reform Bill in the House

of Lords, and the firm resolve of the political Unions. Nothing was

said about Raffles, except that Bulstrode mentioned the necessity of

having a grave for him in Lowick churchyard, and observed that, so far

as he knew, the poor man had no connections, except Rigg, whom he had

stated to be unfriendly towards him.

On returning home Lydgate had a visit from Mr. Farebrother. The Vicar

had not been in the town the day before, but the news that there was an

execution in Lydgate’s house had got to Lowick by the evening, having

been carried by Mr. Spicer, shoemaker and parish-clerk, who had it from

his brother, the respectable bell-hanger in Lowick Gate. Since that

evening when Lydgate had come down from the billiard room with Fred

Vincy, Mr. Farebrother’s thoughts about him had been rather gloomy.

Playing at the Green Dragon once or oftener might have been a trifle in

another man; but in Lydgate it was one of several signs that he was

getting unlike his former self. He was beginning to do things for which

he had formerly even an excessive scorn. Whatever certain

dissatisfactions in marriage, which some silly tinklings of gossip had

given him hints of, might have to do with this change, Mr. Farebrother

felt sure that it was chiefly connected with the debts which were being

more and more distinctly reported, and he began to fear that any notion

of Lydgate’s having resources or friends in the background must be

quite illusory. The rebuff he had met with in his first attempt to win

Lydgate’s confidence, disinclined him to a second; but this news of the

execution being actually in the house, determined the Vicar to overcome

his reluctance.

Lydgate had just dismissed a poor patient, in whom he was much

interested, and he came forward to put out his hand—with an open

cheerfulness which surprised Mr. Farebrother. Could this too be a proud

rejection of sympathy and help? Never mind; the sympathy and help

should be offered.

“How are you, Lydgate? I came to see you because I had heard something

which made me anxious about you,” said the Vicar, in the tone of a good

brother, only that there was no reproach in it. They were both seated

by this time, and Lydgate answered immediately—

“I think I know what you mean. You had heard that there was an

execution in the house?”

“Yes; is it true?”

“It was true,” said Lydgate, with an air of freedom, as if he did not

mind talking about the affair now. “But the danger is over; the debt is

paid. I am out of my difficulties now: I shall be freed from debts, and

able, I hope, to start afresh on a better plan.”

“I am very thankful to hear it,” said the Vicar, falling back in his

chair, and speaking with that low-toned quickness which often follows

the removal of a load. “I like that better than all the news in the

‘Times.’ I confess I came to you with a heavy heart.”

“Thank you for coming,” said Lydgate, cordially. “I can enjoy the

kindness all the more because I am happier. I have certainly been a

good deal crushed. I’m afraid I shall find the bruises still painful

by-and by,” he added, smiling rather sadly; “but just now I can only

feel that the torture-screw is off.”

Mr. Farebrother was silent for a moment, and then said earnestly, “My

dear fellow, let me ask you one question. Forgive me if I take a

liberty.”

“I don’t believe you will ask anything that ought to offend me.”

“Then—this is necessary to set my heart quite at rest—you have not—have

you?—in order to pay your debts, incurred another debt which may harass

you worse hereafter?”

“No,” said Lydgate, coloring slightly. “There is no reason why I should

not tell you—since the fact is so—that the person to whom I am indebted

is Bulstrode. He has made me a very handsome advance—a thousand

pounds—and he can afford to wait for repayment.”

“Well, that is generous,” said Mr. Farebrother, compelling himself to

approve of the man whom he disliked. His delicate feeling shrank from

dwelling even in his thought on the fact that he had always urged

Lydgate to avoid any personal entanglement with Bulstrode. He added

immediately, “And Bulstrode must naturally feel an interest in your

welfare, after you have worked with him in a way which has probably

reduced your income instead of adding to it. I am glad to think that he

has acted accordingly.”

Lydgate felt uncomfortable under these kindly suppositions. They made

more distinct within him the uneasy consciousness which had shown its

first dim stirrings only a few hours before, that Bulstrode’s motives

for his sudden beneficence following close upon the chillest

indifference might be merely selfish. He let the kindly suppositions

pass. He could not tell the history of the loan, but it was more

vividly present with him than ever, as well as the fact which the Vicar

delicately ignored—that this relation of personal indebtedness to

Bulstrode was what he had once been most resolved to avoid.

He began, instead of answering, to speak of his projected economies,

and of his having come to look at his life from a different point of

view.

“I shall set up a surgery,” he said. “I really think I made a mistaken

effort in that respect. And if Rosamond will not mind, I shall take an

apprentice. I don’t like these things, but if one carries them out

faithfully they are not really lowering. I have had a severe galling to

begin with: that will make the small rubs seem easy.”

Poor Lydgate! the “if Rosamond will not mind,” which had fallen from

him involuntarily as part of his thought, was a significant mark of the

yoke he bore. But Mr. Farebrother, whose hopes entered strongly into

the same current with Lydgate’s, and who knew nothing about him that

could now raise a melancholy presentiment, left him with affectionate

congratulation.

CHAPTER LXXI.

\_Clown\_. . . . ’Twas in the Bunch of Grapes, where, indeed,

you have a delight to sit, have you not?

\_Froth\_. I have so: because it is an open room, and good for winter.

\_Clo\_. Why, very well then: I hope here be truths.

—\_Measure for Measure\_.

Five days after the death of Raffles, Mr. Bambridge was standing at his

leisure under the large archway leading into the yard of the Green

Dragon. He was not fond of solitary contemplation, but he had only just

come out of the house, and any human figure standing at ease under the

archway in the early afternoon was as certain to attract companionship

as a pigeon which has found something worth pecking at. In this case

there was no material object to feed upon, but the eye of reason saw a

probability of mental sustenance in the shape of gossip. Mr. Hopkins,

the meek-mannered draper opposite, was the first to act on this inward

vision, being the more ambitious of a little masculine talk because his

customers were chiefly women. Mr. Bambridge was rather curt to the

draper, feeling that Hopkins was of course glad to talk to \_him\_, but

that he was not going to waste much of his talk on Hopkins. Soon,

however, there was a small cluster of more important listeners, who

were either deposited from the passers-by, or had sauntered to the spot

expressly to see if there were anything going on at the Green Dragon;

and Mr. Bambridge was finding it worth his while to say many impressive

things about the fine studs he had been seeing and the purchases he had

made on a journey in the north from which he had just returned.

Gentlemen present were assured that when they could show him anything

to cut out a blood mare, a bay, rising four, which was to be seen at

Doncaster if they chose to go and look at it, Mr. Bambridge would

gratify them by being shot “from here to Hereford.” Also, a pair of

blacks which he was going to put into the break recalled vividly to his

mind a pair which he had sold to Faulkner in ’19, for a hundred

guineas, and which Faulkner had sold for a hundred and sixty two months

later—any gent who could disprove this statement being offered the

privilege of calling Mr. Bambridge by a very ugly name until the

exercise made his throat dry.

When the discourse was at this point of animation, came up Mr. Frank

Hawley. He was not a man to compromise his dignity by lounging at the

Green Dragon, but happening to pass along the High Street and seeing

Bambridge on the other side, he took some of his long strides across to

ask the horsedealer whether he had found the first-rate gig-horse which

he had engaged to look for. Mr. Hawley was requested to wait until he

had seen a gray selected at Bilkley: if that did not meet his wishes to

a hair, Bambridge did not know a horse when he saw it, which seemed to

be the highest conceivable unlikelihood. Mr. Hawley, standing with his

back to the street, was fixing a time for looking at the gray and

seeing it tried, when a horseman passed slowly by.

“Bulstrode!” said two or three voices at once in a low tone, one of

them, which was the draper’s, respectfully prefixing the “Mr.;” but

nobody having more intention in this interjectural naming than if they

had said “the Riverston coach” when that vehicle appeared in the

distance. Mr. Hawley gave a careless glance round at Bulstrode’s back,

but as Bambridge’s eyes followed it he made a sarcastic grimace.

“By jingo! that reminds me,” he began, lowering his voice a little, “I

picked up something else at Bilkley besides your gig-horse, Mr. Hawley.

I picked up a fine story about Bulstrode. Do you know how he came by

his fortune? Any gentleman wanting a bit of curious information, I can

give it him free of expense. If everybody got their deserts, Bulstrode

might have had to say his prayers at Botany Bay.”

“What do you mean?” said Mr. Hawley, thrusting his hands into his

pockets, and pushing a little forward under the archway. If Bulstrode

should turn out to be a rascal, Frank Hawley had a prophetic soul.

“I had it from a party who was an old chum of Bulstrode’s. I’ll tell

you where I first picked him up,” said Bambridge, with a sudden gesture

of his fore-finger. “He was at Larcher’s sale, but I knew nothing of

him then—he slipped through my fingers—was after Bulstrode, no doubt.

He tells me he can tap Bulstrode to any amount, knows all his secrets.

However, he blabbed to me at Bilkley: he takes a stiff glass. Damme if

I think he meant to turn king’s evidence; but he’s that sort of

bragging fellow, the bragging runs over hedge and ditch with him, till

he’d brag of a spavin as if it ’ud fetch money. A man should know when

to pull up.” Mr. Bambridge made this remark with an air of disgust,

satisfied that his own bragging showed a fine sense of the marketable.

“What’s the man’s name? Where can he be found?” said Mr. Hawley.

“As to where he is to be found, I left him to it at the Saracen’s Head;

but his name is Raffles.”

“Raffles!” exclaimed Mr. Hopkins. “I furnished his funeral yesterday.

He was buried at Lowick. Mr. Bulstrode followed him. A very decent

funeral.” There was a strong sensation among the listeners. Mr.

Bambridge gave an ejaculation in which “brimstone” was the mildest

word, and Mr. Hawley, knitting his brows and bending his head forward,

exclaimed, “What?—where did the man die?”

“At Stone Court,” said the draper. “The housekeeper said he was a

relation of the master’s. He came there ill on Friday.”

“Why, it was on Wednesday I took a glass with him,” interposed

Bambridge.

“Did any doctor attend him?” said Mr. Hawley

“Yes. Mr. Lydgate. Mr. Bulstrode sat up with him one night. He died the

third morning.”

“Go on, Bambridge,” said Mr. Hawley, insistently. “What did this fellow

say about Bulstrode?”

The group had already become larger, the town-clerk’s presence being a

guarantee that something worth listening to was going on there; and Mr.

Bambridge delivered his narrative in the hearing of seven. It was

mainly what we know, including the fact about Will Ladislaw, with some

local color and circumstance added: it was what Bulstrode had dreaded

the betrayal of—and hoped to have buried forever with the corpse of

Raffles—it was that haunting ghost of his earlier life which as he rode

past the archway of the Green Dragon he was trusting that Providence

had delivered him from. Yes, Providence. He had not confessed to

himself yet that he had done anything in the way of contrivance to this

end; he had accepted what seemed to have been offered. It was

impossible to prove that he had done anything which hastened the

departure of that man’s soul.

But this gossip about Bulstrode spread through Middlemarch like the

smell of fire. Mr. Frank Hawley followed up his information by sending

a clerk whom he could trust to Stone Court on a pretext of inquiring

about hay, but really to gather all that could be learned about Raffles

and his illness from Mrs. Abel. In this way it came to his knowledge

that Mr. Garth had carried the man to Stone Court in his gig; and Mr.

Hawley in consequence took an opportunity of seeing Caleb, calling at

his office to ask whether he had time to undertake an arbitration if it

were required, and then asking him incidentally about Raffles. Caleb

was betrayed into no word injurious to Bulstrode beyond the fact which

he was forced to admit, that he had given up acting for him within the

last week. Mr Hawley drew his inferences, and feeling convinced that

Raffles had told his story to Garth, and that Garth had given up

Bulstrode’s affairs in consequence, said so a few hours later to Mr.

Toller. The statement was passed on until it had quite lost the stamp

of an inference, and was taken as information coming straight from

Garth, so that even a diligent historian might have concluded Caleb to

be the chief publisher of Bulstrode’s misdemeanors.

Mr. Hawley was not slow to perceive that there was no handle for the

law either in the revelations made by Raffles or in the circumstances

of his death. He had himself ridden to Lowick village that he might

look at the register and talk over the whole matter with Mr.

Farebrother, who was not more surprised than the lawyer that an ugly

secret should have come to light about Bulstrode, though he had always

had justice enough in him to hinder his antipathy from turning into

conclusions. But while they were talking another combination was

silently going forward in Mr. Farebrother’s mind, which foreshadowed

what was soon to be loudly spoken of in Middlemarch as a necessary

“putting of two and two together.” With the reasons which kept

Bulstrode in dread of Raffles there flashed the thought that the dread

might have something to do with his munificence towards his medical

man; and though he resisted the suggestion that it had been consciously

accepted in any way as a bribe, he had a foreboding that this

complication of things might be of malignant effect on Lydgate’s

reputation. He perceived that Mr. Hawley knew nothing at present of the

sudden relief from debt, and he himself was careful to glide away from

all approaches towards the subject.

“Well,” he said, with a deep breath, wanting to wind up the illimitable

discussion of what might have been, though nothing could be legally

proven, “it is a strange story. So our mercurial Ladislaw has a queer

genealogy! A high-spirited young lady and a musical Polish patriot made

a likely enough stock for him to spring from, but I should never have

suspected a grafting of the Jew pawnbroker. However, there’s no knowing

what a mixture will turn out beforehand. Some sorts of dirt serve to

clarify.”

“It’s just what I should have expected,” said Mr. Hawley, mounting his

horse. “Any cursed alien blood, Jew, Corsican, or Gypsy.”

“I know he’s one of your black sheep, Hawley. But he is really a

disinterested, unworldly fellow,” said Mr. Farebrother, smiling.

“Ay, ay, that is your Whiggish twist,” said Mr. Hawley, who had been in

the habit of saying apologetically that Farebrother was such a damned

pleasant good-hearted fellow you would mistake him for a Tory.

Mr. Hawley rode home without thinking of Lydgate’s attendance on

Raffles in any other light than as a piece of evidence on the side of

Bulstrode. But the news that Lydgate had all at once become able not

only to get rid of the execution in his house but to pay all his debts

in Middlemarch was spreading fast, gathering round it conjectures and

comments which gave it new body and impetus, and soon filling the ears

of other persons besides Mr. Hawley, who were not slow to see a

significant relation between this sudden command of money and

Bulstrode’s desire to stifle the scandal of Raffles. That the money

came from Bulstrode would infallibly have been guessed even if there

had been no direct evidence of it; for it had beforehand entered into

the gossip about Lydgate’s affairs, that neither his father-in-law nor

his own family would do anything for him, and direct evidence was

furnished not only by a clerk at the Bank, but by innocent Mrs.

Bulstrode herself, who mentioned the loan to Mrs. Plymdale, who

mentioned it to her daughter-in-law of the house of Toller, who

mentioned it generally. The business was felt to be so public and

important that it required dinners to feed it, and many invitations

were just then issued and accepted on the strength of this scandal

concerning Bulstrode and Lydgate; wives, widows, and single ladies took

their work and went out to tea oftener than usual; and all public

conviviality, from the Green Dragon to Dollop’s, gathered a zest which

could not be won from the question whether the Lords would throw out

the Reform Bill.

For hardly anybody doubted that some scandalous reason or other was at

the bottom of Bulstrode’s liberality to Lydgate. Mr. Hawley indeed, in

the first instance, invited a select party, including the two

physicians, with Mr Toller and Mr. Wrench, expressly to hold a close

discussion as to the probabilities of Raffles’s illness, reciting to

them all the particulars which had been gathered from Mrs. Abel in

connection with Lydgate’s certificate, that the death was due to

delirium tremens; and the medical gentlemen, who all stood

undisturbedly on the old paths in relation to this disease, declared

that they could see nothing in these particulars which could be

transformed into a positive ground of suspicion. But the moral grounds

of suspicion remained: the strong motives Bulstrode clearly had for

wishing to be rid of Raffles, and the fact that at this critical moment

he had given Lydgate the help which he must for some time have known

the need for; the disposition, moreover, to believe that Bulstrode

would be unscrupulous, and the absence of any indisposition to believe

that Lydgate might be as easily bribed as other haughty-minded men when

they have found themselves in want of money. Even if the money had been

given merely to make him hold his tongue about the scandal of

Bulstrode’s earlier life, the fact threw an odious light on Lydgate,

who had long been sneered at as making himself subservient to the

banker for the sake of working himself into predominance, and

discrediting the elder members of his profession. Hence, in spite of

the negative as to any direct sign of guilt in relation to the death at

Stone Court, Mr. Hawley’s select party broke up with the sense that the

affair had “an ugly look.”

But this vague conviction of indeterminable guilt, which was enough to

keep up much head-shaking and biting innuendo even among substantial

professional seniors, had for the general mind all the superior power

of mystery over fact. Everybody liked better to conjecture how the

thing was, than simply to know it; for conjecture soon became more

confident than knowledge, and had a more liberal allowance for the

incompatible. Even the more definite scandal concerning Bulstrode’s

earlier life was, for some minds, melted into the mass of mystery, as

so much lively metal to be poured out in dialogue, and to take such

fantastic shapes as heaven pleased.

This was the tone of thought chiefly sanctioned by Mrs. Dollop, the

spirited landlady of the Tankard in Slaughter Lane, who had often to

resist the shallow pragmatism of customers disposed to think that their

reports from the outer world were of equal force with what had “come

up” in her mind. How it had been brought to her she didn’t know, but it

was there before her as if it had been “scored with the chalk on the

chimney-board—” as Bulstrode should say, “his inside was \_that black\_

as if the hairs of his head knowed the thoughts of his heart, he’d tear

’em up by the roots.”

“That’s odd,” said Mr. Limp, a meditative shoemaker, with weak eyes and

a piping voice. “Why, I read in the ‘Trumpet’ that was what the Duke of

Wellington said when he turned his coat and went over to the Romans.”

“Very like,” said Mrs. Dollop. “If one raskill said it, it’s more

reason why another should. But hypo\_crite\_ as he’s been, and holding

things with that high hand, as there was no parson i’ the country good

enough for him, he was forced to take Old Harry into his counsel, and

Old Harry’s been too many for him.”

“Ay, ay, he’s a ’complice you can’t send out o’ the country,” said Mr.

Crabbe, the glazier, who gathered much news and groped among it dimly.

“But by what I can make out, there’s them says Bulstrode was for

running away, for fear o’ being found out, before now.”

“He’ll be drove away, whether or no,” said Mr. Dill, the barber, who

had just dropped in. “I shaved Fletcher, Hawley’s clerk, this

morning—he’s got a bad finger—and he says they’re all of one mind to

get rid of Bulstrode. Mr. Thesiger is turned against him, and wants him

out o’ the parish. And there’s gentlemen in this town says they’d as

soon dine with a fellow from the hulks. ‘And a deal sooner I would,’

says Fletcher; ‘for what’s more against one’s stomach than a man coming

and making himself bad company with his religion, and giving out as the

Ten Commandments are not enough for him, and all the while he’s worse

than half the men at the tread-mill?’ Fletcher said so himself.”

“It’ll be a bad thing for the town though, if Bulstrode’s money goes

out of it,” said Mr. Limp, quaveringly.

“Ah, there’s better folks spend their money worse,” said a firm-voiced

dyer, whose crimson hands looked out of keeping with his good-natured

face.

“But he won’t keep his money, by what I can make out,” said the

glazier. “Don’t they say as there’s somebody can strip it off him? By

what I can understan’, they could take every penny off him, if they

went to lawing.”

“No such thing!” said the barber, who felt himself a little above his

company at Dollop’s, but liked it none the worse. “Fletcher says it’s

no such thing. He says they might prove over and over again whose child

this young Ladislaw was, and they’d do no more than if they proved I

came out of the Fens—he couldn’t touch a penny.”

“Look you there now!” said Mrs. Dollop, indignantly. “I thank the Lord

he took my children to Himself, if that’s all the law can do for the

motherless. Then by that, it’s o’ no use who your father and mother is.

But as to listening to what one lawyer says without asking another—I

wonder at a man o’ your cleverness, Mr. Dill. It’s well known there’s

always two sides, if no more; else who’d go to law, I should like to

know? It’s a poor tale, with all the law as there is up and down, if

it’s no use proving whose child you are. Fletcher may say that if he

likes, but I say, don’t Fletcher \_me\_!”

Mr. Dill affected to laugh in a complimentary way at Mrs. Dollop, as a

woman who was more than a match for the lawyers; being disposed to

submit to much twitting from a landlady who had a long score against

him.

“If they come to lawing, and it’s all true as folks say, there’s more

to be looked to nor money,” said the glazier. “There’s this poor

creetur as is dead and gone; by what I can make out, he’d seen the day

when he was a deal finer gentleman nor Bulstrode.”

“Finer gentleman! I’ll warrant him,” said Mrs. Dollop; “and a far

personabler man, by what I can hear. As I said when Mr. Baldwin, the

tax-gatherer, comes in, a-standing where you sit, and says, ‘Bulstrode

got all his money as he brought into this town by thieving and

swindling,’—I said, ‘You don’t make me no wiser, Mr. Baldwin: it’s set

my blood a-creeping to look at him ever sin’ here he came into

Slaughter Lane a-wanting to buy the house over my head: folks don’t

look the color o’ the dough-tub and stare at you as if they wanted to

see into your backbone for nothingk.’ That was what I said, and Mr.

Baldwin can bear me witness.”

“And in the rights of it too,” said Mr. Crabbe. “For by what I can make

out, this Raffles, as they call him, was a lusty, fresh-colored man as

you’d wish to see, and the best o’ company—though dead he lies in

Lowick churchyard sure enough; and by what I can understan’, there’s

them knows more than they \_should\_ know about how he got there.”

“I’ll believe you!” said Mrs. Dollop, with a touch of scorn at Mr.

Crabbe’s apparent dimness. “When a man’s been ’ticed to a lone house,

and there’s them can pay for hospitals and nurses for half the

country-side choose to be sitters-up night and day, and nobody to come

near but a doctor as is known to stick at nothingk, and as poor as he

can hang together, and after that so flush o’ money as he can pay off

Mr. Byles the butcher as his bill has been running on for the best o’

joints since last Michaelmas was a twelvemonth—I don’t want anybody to

come and tell me as there’s been more going on nor the Prayer-book’s

got a service for—I don’t want to stand winking and blinking and

thinking.”

Mrs. Dollop looked round with the air of a landlady accustomed to

dominate her company. There was a chorus of adhesion from the more

courageous; but Mr. Limp, after taking a draught, placed his flat hands

together and pressed them hard between his knees, looking down at them

with blear-eyed contemplation, as if the scorching power of Mrs.

Dollop’s speech had quite dried up and nullified his wits until they

could be brought round again by further moisture.

“Why shouldn’t they dig the man up and have the Crowner?” said the

dyer. “It’s been done many and many’s the time. If there’s been foul

play they might find it out.”

“Not they, Mr. Jonas!” said Mrs Dollop, emphatically. “I know what

doctors are. They’re a deal too cunning to be found out. And this

Doctor Lydgate that’s been for cutting up everybody before the breath

was well out o’ their body—it’s plain enough what use he wanted to make

o’ looking into respectable people’s insides. He knows drugs, you may

be sure, as you can neither smell nor see, neither before they’re

swallowed nor after. Why, I’ve seen drops myself ordered by Doctor

Gambit, as is our club doctor and a good charikter, and has brought

more live children into the world nor ever another i’ Middlemarch—I say

I’ve seen drops myself as made no difference whether they was in the

glass or out, and yet have griped you the next day. So I’ll leave your

own sense to judge. Don’t tell me! All I say is, it’s a mercy they

didn’t take this Doctor Lydgate on to our club. There’s many a mother’s

child might ha’ rued it.”

The heads of this discussion at “Dollop’s” had been the common theme

among all classes in the town, had been carried to Lowick Parsonage on

one side and to Tipton Grange on the other, had come fully to the ears

of the Vincy family, and had been discussed with sad reference to “poor

Harriet” by all Mrs. Bulstrode’s friends, before Lydgate knew

distinctly why people were looking strangely at him, and before

Bulstrode himself suspected the betrayal of his secrets. He had not

been accustomed to very cordial relations with his neighbors, and hence

he could not miss the signs of cordiality; moreover, he had been taking

journeys on business of various kinds, having now made up his mind that

he need not quit Middlemarch, and feeling able consequently to

determine on matters which he had before left in suspense.

“We will make a journey to Cheltenham in the course of a month or two,”

he had said to his wife. “There are great spiritual advantages to be

had in that town along with the air and the waters, and six weeks there

will be eminently refreshing to us.”

He really believed in the spiritual advantages, and meant that his life

henceforth should be the more devoted because of those later sins which

he represented to himself as hypothetic, praying hypothetically for

their pardon:—“if I have herein transgressed.”

As to the Hospital, he avoided saying anything further to Lydgate,

fearing to manifest a too sudden change of plans immediately on the

death of Raffles. In his secret soul he believed that Lydgate suspected

his orders to have been intentionally disobeyed, and suspecting this he

must also suspect a motive. But nothing had been betrayed to him as to

the history of Raffles, and Bulstrode was anxious not to do anything

which would give emphasis to his undefined suspicions. As to any

certainty that a particular method of treatment would either save or

kill, Lydgate himself was constantly arguing against such dogmatism; he

had no right to speak, and he had every motive for being silent. Hence

Bulstrode felt himself providentially secured. The only incident he had

strongly winced under had been an occasional encounter with Caleb

Garth, who, however, had raised his hat with mild gravity.

Meanwhile, on the part of the principal townsmen a strong determination

was growing against him.

A meeting was to be held in the Town-Hall on a sanitary question which

had risen into pressing importance by the occurrence of a cholera case

in the town. Since the Act of Parliament, which had been hurriedly

passed, authorizing assessments for sanitary measures, there had been a

Board for the superintendence of such measures appointed in

Middlemarch, and much cleansing and preparation had been concurred in

by Whigs and Tories. The question now was, whether a piece of ground

outside the town should be secured as a burial-ground by means of

assessment or by private subscription. The meeting was to be open, and

almost everybody of importance in the town was expected to be there.

Mr. Bulstrode was a member of the Board, and just before twelve o’clock

he started from the Bank with the intention of urging the plan of

private subscription. Under the hesitation of his projects, he had for

some time kept himself in the background, and he felt that he should

this morning resume his old position as a man of action and influence

in the public affairs of the town where he expected to end his days.

Among the various persons going in the same direction, he saw Lydgate;

they joined, talked over the object of the meeting, and entered it

together.

It seemed that everybody of mark had been earlier than they. But there

were still spaces left near the head of the large central table, and

they made their way thither. Mr. Farebrother sat opposite, not far from

Mr. Hawley; all the medical men were there; Mr. Thesiger was in the

chair, and Mr. Brooke of Tipton was on his right hand.

Lydgate noticed a peculiar interchange of glances when he and Bulstrode

took their seats.

After the business had been fully opened by the chairman, who pointed

out the advantages of purchasing by subscription a piece of ground

large enough to be ultimately used as a general cemetery, Mr.

Bulstrode, whose rather high-pitched but subdued and fluent voice the

town was used to at meetings of this sort, rose and asked leave to

deliver his opinion. Lydgate could see again the peculiar interchange

of glances before Mr. Hawley started up, and said in his firm resonant

voice, “Mr. Chairman, I request that before any one delivers his

opinion on this point I may be permitted to speak on a question of

public feeling, which not only by myself, but by many gentlemen

present, is regarded as preliminary.”

Mr. Hawley’s mode of speech, even when public decorum repressed his

“awful language,” was formidable in its curtness and self-possession.

Mr. Thesiger sanctioned the request, Mr. Bulstrode sat down, and Mr.

Hawley continued.

“In what I have to say, Mr. Chairman, I am not speaking simply on my

own behalf: I am speaking with the concurrence and at the express

request of no fewer than eight of my fellow-townsmen, who are

immediately around us. It is our united sentiment that Mr. Bulstrode

should be called upon—and I do now call upon him—to resign public

positions which he holds not simply as a tax-payer, but as a gentleman

among gentlemen. There are practices and there are acts which, owing to

circumstances, the law cannot visit, though they may be worse than many

things which are legally punishable. Honest men and gentlemen, if they

don’t want the company of people who perpetrate such acts, have got to

defend themselves as they best can, and that is what I and the friends

whom I may call my clients in this affair are determined to do. I don’t

say that Mr. Bulstrode has been guilty of shameful acts, but I call

upon him either publicly to deny and confute the scandalous statements

made against him by a man now dead, and who died in his house—the

statement that he was for many years engaged in nefarious practices,

and that he won his fortune by dishonest procedures—or else to withdraw

from positions which could only have been allowed him as a gentleman

among gentlemen.”

All eyes in the room were turned on Mr. Bulstrode, who, since the first

mention of his name, had been going through a crisis of feeling almost

too violent for his delicate frame to support. Lydgate, who himself was

undergoing a shock as from the terrible practical interpretation of

some faint augury, felt, nevertheless, that his own movement of

resentful hatred was checked by that instinct of the Healer which

thinks first of bringing rescue or relief to the sufferer, when he

looked at the shrunken misery of Bulstrode’s livid face.

The quick vision that his life was after all a failure, that he was a

dishonored man, and must quail before the glance of those towards whom

he had habitually assumed the attitude of a reprover—that God had

disowned him before men and left him unscreened to the triumphant scorn

of those who were glad to have their hatred justified—the sense of

utter futility in that equivocation with his conscience in dealing with

the life of his accomplice, an equivocation which now turned venomously

upon him with the full-grown fang of a discovered lie:—all this rushed

through him like the agony of terror which fails to kill, and leaves

the ears still open to the returning wave of execration. The sudden

sense of exposure after the re-established sense of safety came—not to

the coarse organization of a criminal, but to the susceptible nerve of

a man whose intensest being lay in such mastery and predominance as the

conditions of his life had shaped for him.

But in that intense being lay the strength of reaction. Through all his

bodily infirmity there ran a tenacious nerve of ambitious

self-preserving will, which had continually leaped out like a flame,

scattering all doctrinal fears, and which, even while he sat an object

of compassion for the merciful, was beginning to stir and glow under

his ashy paleness. Before the last words were out of Mr. Hawley’s

mouth, Bulstrode felt that he should answer, and that his answer would

be a retort. He dared not get up and say, “I am not guilty, the whole

story is false”—even if he had dared this, it would have seemed to him,

under his present keen sense of betrayal, as vain as to pull, for

covering to his nakedness, a frail rag which would rend at every little

strain.

For a few moments there was total silence, while every man in the room

was looking at Bulstrode. He sat perfectly still, leaning hard against

the back of his chair; he could not venture to rise, and when he began

to speak he pressed his hands upon the seat on each side of him. But

his voice was perfectly audible, though hoarser than usual, and his

words were distinctly pronounced, though he paused between sentence as

if short of breath. He said, turning first toward Mr. Thesiger, and

then looking at Mr. Hawley—

“I protest before you, sir, as a Christian minister, against the

sanction of proceedings towards me which are dictated by virulent

hatred. Those who are hostile to me are glad to believe any libel

uttered by a loose tongue against me. And their consciences become

strict against me. Say that the evil-speaking of which I am to be made

the victim accuses me of malpractices—” here Bulstrode’s voice rose and

took on a more biting accent, till it seemed a low cry—“who shall be my

accuser? Not men whose own lives are unchristian, nay, scandalous—not

men who themselves use low instruments to carry out their ends—whose

profession is a tissue of chicanery—who have been spending their income

on their own sensual enjoyments, while I have been devoting mine to

advance the best objects with regard to this life and the next.”

After the word chicanery there was a growing noise, half of murmurs and

half of hisses, while four persons started up at once—Mr. Hawley, Mr.

Toller, Mr. Chichely, and Mr. Hackbutt; but Mr. Hawley’s outburst was

instantaneous, and left the others behind in silence.

“If you mean me, sir, I call you and every one else to the inspection

of my professional life. As to Christian or unchristian, I repudiate

your canting palavering Christianity; and as to the way in which I

spend my income, it is not my principle to maintain thieves and cheat

offspring of their due inheritance in order to support religion and set

myself up as a saintly Killjoy. I affect no niceness of conscience—I

have not found any nice standards necessary yet to measure your actions

by, sir. And I again call upon you to enter into satisfactory

explanations concerning the scandals against you, or else to withdraw

from posts in which we at any rate decline you as a colleague. I say,

sir, we decline to co-operate with a man whose character is not cleared

from infamous lights cast upon it, not only by reports but by recent

actions.”

“Allow me, Mr. Hawley,” said the chairman; and Mr. Hawley, still

fuming, bowed half impatiently, and sat down with his hands thrust deep

in his pockets.

“Mr. Bulstrode, it is not desirable, I think, to prolong the present

discussion,” said Mr. Thesiger, turning to the pallid trembling man; “I

must so far concur with what has fallen from Mr. Hawley in expression

of a general feeling, as to think it due to your Christian profession

that you should clear yourself, if possible, from unhappy aspersions. I

for my part should be willing to give you full opportunity and hearing.

But I must say that your present attitude is painfully inconsistent

with those principles which you have sought to identify yourself with,

and for the honor of which I am bound to care. I recommend you at

present, as your clergyman, and one who hopes for your reinstatement in

respect, to quit the room, and avoid further hindrance to business.”

Bulstrode, after a moment’s hesitation, took his hat from the floor and

slowly rose, but he grasped the corner of the chair so totteringly that

Lydgate felt sure there was not strength enough in him to walk away

without support. What could he do? He could not see a man sink close to

him for want of help. He rose and gave his arm to Bulstrode, and in

that way led him out of the room; yet this act, which might have been

one of gentle duty and pure compassion, was at this moment unspeakably

bitter to him. It seemed as if he were putting his sign-manual to that

association of himself with Bulstrode, of which he now saw the full

meaning as it must have presented itself to other minds. He now felt

the conviction that this man who was leaning tremblingly on his arm,

had given him the thousand pounds as a bribe, and that somehow the

treatment of Raffles had been tampered with from an evil motive. The

inferences were closely linked enough; the town knew of the loan,

believed it to be a bribe, and believed that he took it as a bribe.

Poor Lydgate, his mind struggling under the terrible clutch of this

revelation, was all the while morally forced to take Mr. Bulstrode to

the Bank, send a man off for his carriage, and wait to accompany him

home.

Meanwhile the business of the meeting was despatched, and fringed off

into eager discussion among various groups concerning this affair of

Bulstrode—and Lydgate.

Mr. Brooke, who had before heard only imperfect hints of it, and was

very uneasy that he had “gone a little too far” in countenancing

Bulstrode, now got himself fully informed, and felt some benevolent

sadness in talking to Mr. Farebrother about the ugly light in which

Lydgate had come to be regarded. Mr. Farebrother was going to walk back

to Lowick.

“Step into my carriage,” said Mr. Brooke. “I am going round to see Mrs.

Casaubon. She was to come back from Yorkshire last night. She will like

to see me, you know.”

So they drove along, Mr. Brooke chatting with good-natured hope that

there had not really been anything black in Lydgate’s behavior—a young

fellow whom he had seen to be quite above the common mark, when he

brought a letter from his uncle Sir Godwin. Mr. Farebrother said

little: he was deeply mournful: with a keen perception of human

weakness, he could not be confident that under the pressure of

humiliating needs Lydgate had not fallen below himself.

When the carriage drove up to the gate of the Manor, Dorothea was out

on the gravel, and came to greet them.

“Well, my dear,” said Mr. Brooke, “we have just come from a meeting—a

sanitary meeting, you know.”

“Was Mr. Lydgate there?” said Dorothea, who looked full of health and

animation, and stood with her head bare under the gleaming April

lights. “I want to see him and have a great consultation with him about

the Hospital. I have engaged with Mr. Bulstrode to do so.”

“Oh, my dear,” said Mr. Brooke, “we have been hearing bad news—bad

news, you know.”

They walked through the garden towards the churchyard gate, Mr.

Farebrother wanting to go on to the parsonage; and Dorothea heard the

whole sad story.

She listened with deep interest, and begged to hear twice over the

facts and impressions concerning Lydgate. After a short silence,

pausing at the churchyard gate, and addressing Mr. Farebrother, she

said energetically—

“You don’t believe that Mr. Lydgate is guilty of anything base? I will

not believe it. Let us find out the truth and clear him!”

BOOK VIII.

SUNSET AND SUNRISE.

CHAPTER LXXII.

Full souls are double mirrors, making still

An endless vista of fair things before,

Repeating things behind.

Dorothea’s impetuous generosity, which would have leaped at once to the

vindication of Lydgate from the suspicion of having accepted money as a

bribe, underwent a melancholy check when she came to consider all the

circumstances of the case by the light of Mr. Farebrother’s experience.

“It is a delicate matter to touch,” he said. “How can we begin to

inquire into it? It must be either publicly by setting the magistrate

and coroner to work, or privately by questioning Lydgate. As to the

first proceeding there is no solid ground to go upon, else Hawley would

have adopted it; and as to opening the subject with Lydgate, I confess

I should shrink from it. He would probably take it as a deadly insult.

I have more than once experienced the difficulty of speaking to him on

personal matters. And—one should know the truth about his conduct

beforehand, to feel very confident of a good result.”

“I feel convinced that his conduct has not been guilty: I believe that

people are almost always better than their neighbors think they are,”

said Dorothea. Some of her intensest experience in the last two years

had set her mind strongly in opposition to any unfavorable construction

of others; and for the first time she felt rather discontented with Mr.

Farebrother. She disliked this cautious weighing of consequences,

instead of an ardent faith in efforts of justice and mercy, which would

conquer by their emotional force. Two days afterwards, he was dining at

the Manor with her uncle and the Chettams, and when the dessert was

standing uneaten, the servants were out of the room, and Mr. Brooke was

nodding in a nap, she returned to the subject with renewed vivacity.

“Mr. Lydgate would understand that if his friends hear a calumny about

him their first wish must be to justify him. What do we live for, if it

is not to make life less difficult to each other? I cannot be

indifferent to the troubles of a man who advised me in \_my\_ trouble,

and attended me in my illness.”

Dorothea’s tone and manner were not more energetic than they had been

when she was at the head of her uncle’s table nearly three years

before, and her experience since had given her more right to express a

decided opinion. But Sir James Chettam was no longer the diffident and

acquiescent suitor: he was the anxious brother-in-law, with a devout

admiration for his sister, but with a constant alarm lest she should

fall under some new illusion almost as bad as marrying Casaubon. He

smiled much less; when he said “Exactly” it was more often an

introduction to a dissentient opinion than in those submissive bachelor

days; and Dorothea found to her surprise that she had to resolve not to

be afraid of him—all the more because he was really her best friend. He

disagreed with her now.

“But, Dorothea,” he said, remonstrantly, “you can’t undertake to manage

a man’s life for him in that way. Lydgate must know—at least he will

soon come to know how he stands. If he can clear himself, he will. He

must act for himself.”

“I think his friends must wait till they find an opportunity,” added

Mr. Farebrother. “It is possible—I have often felt so much weakness in

myself that I can conceive even a man of honorable disposition, such as

I have always believed Lydgate to be, succumbing to such a temptation

as that of accepting money which was offered more or less indirectly as

a bribe to insure his silence about scandalous facts long gone by. I

say, I can conceive this, if he were under the pressure of hard

circumstances—if he had been harassed as I feel sure Lydgate has been.

I would not believe anything worse of him except under stringent proof.

But there is the terrible Nemesis following on some errors, that it is

always possible for those who like it to interpret them into a crime:

there is no proof in favor of the man outside his own consciousness and

assertion.”

“Oh, how cruel!” said Dorothea, clasping her hands. “And would you not

like to be the one person who believed in that man’s innocence, if the

rest of the world belied him? Besides, there is a man’s character

beforehand to speak for him.”

“But, my dear Mrs. Casaubon,” said Mr. Farebrother, smiling gently at

her ardor, “character is not cut in marble—it is not something solid

and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become

diseased as our bodies do.”

“Then it may be rescued and healed,” said Dorothea “I should not be

afraid of asking Mr. Lydgate to tell me the truth, that I might help

him. Why should I be afraid? Now that I am not to have the land, James,

I might do as Mr. Bulstrode proposed, and take his place in providing

for the Hospital; and I have to consult Mr. Lydgate, to know thoroughly

what are the prospects of doing good by keeping up the present plans.

There is the best opportunity in the world for me to ask for his

confidence; and he would be able to tell me things which might make all

the circumstances clear. Then we would all stand by him and bring him

out of his trouble. People glorify all sorts of bravery except the

bravery they might show on behalf of their nearest neighbors.”

Dorothea’s eyes had a moist brightness in them, and the changed tones

of her voice roused her uncle, who began to listen.

“It is true that a woman may venture on some efforts of sympathy which

would hardly succeed if we men undertook them,” said Mr. Farebrother,

almost converted by Dorothea’s ardor.

“Surely, a woman is bound to be cautious and listen to those who know

the world better than she does.” said Sir James, with his little frown.

“Whatever you do in the end, Dorothea, you should really keep back at

present, and not volunteer any meddling with this Bulstrode business.

We don’t know yet what may turn up. You must agree with me?” he ended,

looking at Mr. Farebrother.

“I do think it would be better to wait,” said the latter.

“Yes, yes, my dear,” said Mr. Brooke, not quite knowing at what point

the discussion had arrived, but coming up to it with a contribution

which was generally appropriate. “It is easy to go too far, you know.

You must not let your ideas run away with you. And as to being in a

hurry to put money into schemes—it won’t do, you know. Garth has drawn

me in uncommonly with repairs, draining, that sort of thing: I’m

uncommonly out of pocket with one thing or another. I must pull up. As

for you, Chettam, you are spending a fortune on those oak fences round

your demesne.”

Dorothea, submitting uneasily to this discouragement, went with Celia

into the library, which was her usual drawing-room.

“Now, Dodo, do listen to what James says,” said Celia, “else you will

be getting into a scrape. You always did, and you always will, when you

set about doing as you please. And I think it is a mercy now after all

that you have got James to think for you. He lets you have your plans,

only he hinders you from being taken in. And that is the good of having

a brother instead of a husband. A husband would not let you have your

plans.”

“As if I wanted a husband!” said Dorothea. “I only want not to have my

feelings checked at every turn.” Mrs. Casaubon was still undisciplined

enough to burst into angry tears.

“Now, really, Dodo,” said Celia, with rather a deeper guttural than

usual, “you \_are\_ contradictory: first one thing and then another. You

used to submit to Mr. Casaubon quite shamefully: I think you would have

given up ever coming to see me if he had asked you.”

“Of course I submitted to him, because it was my duty; it was my

feeling for him,” said Dorothea, looking through the prism of her

tears.

“Then why can’t you think it your duty to submit a little to what James

wishes?” said Celia, with a sense of stringency in her argument.

“Because he only wishes what is for your own good. And, of course, men

know best about everything, except what women know better.” Dorothea

laughed and forgot her tears.

“Well, I mean about babies and those things,” explained Celia. “I

should not give up to James when I knew he was wrong, as you used to do

to Mr. Casaubon.”

CHAPTER LXXIII.

Pity the laden one; this wandering woe

May visit you and me.

When Lydgate had allayed Mrs. Bulstrode’s anxiety by telling her that

her husband had been seized with faintness at the meeting, but that he

trusted soon to see him better and would call again the next day,

unless she sent for him earlier, he went directly home, got on his

horse, and rode three miles out of the town for the sake of being out

of reach.

He felt himself becoming violent and unreasonable as if raging under

the pain of stings: he was ready to curse the day on which he had come

to Middlemarch. Everything that had happened to him there seemed a mere

preparation for this hateful fatality, which had come as a blight on

his honorable ambition, and must make even people who had only vulgar

standards regard his reputation as irrevocably damaged. In such moments

a man can hardly escape being unloving. Lydgate thought of himself as

the sufferer, and of others as the agents who had injured his lot. He

had meant everything to turn out differently; and others had thrust

themselves into his life and thwarted his purposes. His marriage seemed

an unmitigated calamity; and he was afraid of going to Rosamond before

he had vented himself in this solitary rage, lest the mere sight of her

should exasperate him and make him behave unwarrantably. There are

episodes in most men’s lives in which their highest qualities can only

cast a deterring shadow over the objects that fill their inward vision:

Lydgate’s tenderheartedness was present just then only as a dread lest

he should offend against it, not as an emotion that swayed him to

tenderness. For he was very miserable. Only those who know the

supremacy of the intellectual life—the life which has a seed of

ennobling thought and purpose within it—can understand the grief of one

who falls from that serene activity into the absorbing soul-wasting

struggle with worldly annoyances.

How was he to live on without vindicating himself among people who

suspected him of baseness? How could he go silently away from

Middlemarch as if he were retreating before a just condemnation? And

yet how was he to set about vindicating himself?

For that scene at the meeting, which he had just witnessed, although it

had told him no particulars, had been enough to make his own situation

thoroughly clear to him. Bulstrode had been in dread of scandalous

disclosures on the part of Raffles. Lydgate could now construct all the

probabilities of the case. “He was afraid of some betrayal in my

hearing: all he wanted was to bind me to him by a strong obligation:

that was why he passed on a sudden from hardness to liberality. And he

may have tampered with the patient—he may have disobeyed my orders. I

fear he did. But whether he did or not, the world believes that he

somehow or other poisoned the man and that I winked at the crime, if I

didn’t help in it. And yet—and yet he may not be guilty of the last

offence; and it is just possible that the change towards me may have

been a genuine relenting—the effect of second thoughts such as he

alleged. What we call the ‘just possible’ is sometimes true and the

thing we find it easier to believe is grossly false. In his last

dealings with this man Bulstrode may have kept his hands pure, in spite

of my suspicion to the contrary.”

There was a benumbing cruelty in his position. Even if he renounced

every other consideration than that of justifying himself—if he met

shrugs, cold glances, and avoidance as an accusation, and made a public

statement of all the facts as he knew them, who would be convinced? It

would be playing the part of a fool to offer his own testimony on

behalf of himself, and say, “I did not take the money as a bribe.” The

circumstances would always be stronger than his assertion. And besides,

to come forward and tell everything about himself must include

declarations about Bulstrode which would darken the suspicions of

others against him. He must tell that he had not known of Raffles’s

existence when he first mentioned his pressing need of money to

Bulstrode, and that he took the money innocently as a result of that

communication, not knowing that a new motive for the loan might have

arisen on his being called in to this man. And after all, the suspicion

of Bulstrode’s motives might be unjust.

But then came the question whether he should have acted in precisely

the same way if he had not taken the money? Certainly, if Raffles had

continued alive and susceptible of further treatment when he arrived,

and he had then imagined any disobedience to his orders on the part of

Bulstrode, he would have made a strict inquiry, and if his conjecture

had been verified he would have thrown up the case, in spite of his

recent heavy obligation. But if he had not received any money—if

Bulstrode had never revoked his cold recommendation of bankruptcy—would

he, Lydgate, have abstained from all inquiry even on finding the man

dead?—would the shrinking from an insult to Bulstrode—would the

dubiousness of all medical treatment and the argument that his own

treatment would pass for the wrong with most members of his

profession—have had just the same force or significance with him?

That was the uneasy corner of Lydgate’s consciousness while he was

reviewing the facts and resisting all reproach. If he had been

independent, this matter of a patient’s treatment and the distinct rule

that he must do or see done that which he believed best for the life

committed to him, would have been the point on which he would have been

the sturdiest. As it was, he had rested in the consideration that

disobedience to his orders, however it might have arisen, could not be

considered a crime, that in the dominant opinion obedience to his

orders was just as likely to be fatal, and that the affair was simply

one of etiquette. Whereas, again and again, in his time of freedom, he

had denounced the perversion of pathological doubt into moral doubt and

had said—“the purest experiment in treatment may still be

conscientious: my business is to take care of life, and to do the best

I can think of for it. Science is properly more scrupulous than dogma.

Dogma gives a charter to mistake, but the very breath of science is a

contest with mistake, and must keep the conscience alive.” Alas! the

scientific conscience had got into the debasing company of money

obligation and selfish respects.

“Is there a medical man of them all in Middlemarch who would question

himself as I do?” said poor Lydgate, with a renewed outburst of

rebellion against the oppression of his lot. “And yet they will all

feel warranted in making a wide space between me and them, as if I were

a leper! My practice and my reputation are utterly damned—I can see

that. Even if I could be cleared by valid evidence, it would make

little difference to the blessed world here. I have been set down as

tainted and should be cheapened to them all the same.”

Already there had been abundant signs which had hitherto puzzled him,

that just when he had been paying off his debts and getting cheerfully

on his feet, the townsmen were avoiding him or looking strangely at

him, and in two instances it came to his knowledge that patients of his

had called in another practitioner. The reasons were too plain now. The

general black-balling had begun.

No wonder that in Lydgate’s energetic nature the sense of a hopeless

misconstruction easily turned into a dogged resistance. The scowl which

occasionally showed itself on his square brow was not a meaningless

accident. Already when he was re-entering the town after that ride

taken in the first hours of stinging pain, he was setting his mind on

remaining in Middlemarch in spite of the worst that could be done

against him. He would not retreat before calumny, as if he submitted to

it. He would face it to the utmost, and no act of his should show that

he was afraid. It belonged to the generosity as well as defiant force

of his nature that he resolved not to shrink from showing to the full

his sense of obligation to Bulstrode. It was true that the association

with this man had been fatal to him—true that if he had had the

thousand pounds still in his hands with all his debts unpaid he would

have returned the money to Bulstrode, and taken beggary rather than the

rescue which had been sullied with the suspicion of a bribe (for,

remember, he was one of the proudest among the sons of

men)—nevertheless, he would not turn away from this crushed

fellow-mortal whose aid he had used, and make a pitiful effort to get

acquittal for himself by howling against another. “I shall do as I

think right, and explain to nobody. They will try to starve me out,

but—” he was going on with an obstinate resolve, but he was getting

near home, and the thought of Rosamond urged itself again into that

chief place from which it had been thrust by the agonized struggles of

wounded honor and pride.

How would Rosamond take it all? Here was another weight of chain to

drag, and poor Lydgate was in a bad mood for bearing her dumb mastery.

He had no impulse to tell her the trouble which must soon be common to

them both. He preferred waiting for the incidental disclosure which

events must soon bring about.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

“Mercifully grant that we may grow aged together.”

—BOOK OF TOBIT: \_Marriage Prayer\_.

In Middlemarch a wife could not long remain ignorant that the town held

a bad opinion of her husband. No feminine intimate might carry her

friendship so far as to make a plain statement to the wife of the

unpleasant fact known or believed about her husband; but when a woman

with her thoughts much at leisure got them suddenly employed on

something grievously disadvantageous to her neighbors, various moral

impulses were called into play which tended to stimulate utterance.

Candor was one. To be candid, in Middlemarch phraseology, meant, to use

an early opportunity of letting your friends know that you did not take

a cheerful view of their capacity, their conduct, or their position;

and a robust candor never waited to be asked for its opinion. Then,

again, there was the love of truth—a wide phrase, but meaning in this

relation, a lively objection to seeing a wife look happier than her

husband’s character warranted, or manifest too much satisfaction in her

lot—the poor thing should have some hint given her that if she knew the

truth she would have less complacency in her bonnet, and in light

dishes for a supper-party. Stronger than all, there was the regard for

a friend’s moral improvement, sometimes called her soul, which was

likely to be benefited by remarks tending to gloom, uttered with the

accompaniment of pensive staring at the furniture and a manner implying

that the speaker would not tell what was on her mind, from regard to

the feelings of her hearer. On the whole, one might say that an ardent

charity was at work setting the virtuous mind to make a neighbor

unhappy for her good.

There were hardly any wives in Middlemarch whose matrimonial

misfortunes would in different ways be likely to call forth more of

this moral activity than Rosamond and her aunt Bulstrode. Mrs.

Bulstrode was not an object of dislike, and had never consciously

injured any human being. Men had always thought her a handsome

comfortable woman, and had reckoned it among the signs of Bulstrode’s

hypocrisy that he had chosen a red-blooded Vincy, instead of a ghastly

and melancholy person suited to his low esteem for earthly pleasure.

When the scandal about her husband was disclosed they remarked of

her—“Ah, poor woman! She’s as honest as the day—\_she\_ never suspected

anything wrong in him, you may depend on it.” Women, who were intimate

with her, talked together much of “poor Harriet,” imagined what her

feelings must be when she came to know everything, and conjectured how

much she had already come to know. There was no spiteful disposition

towards her; rather, there was a busy benevolence anxious to ascertain

what it would be well for her to feel and do under the circumstances,

which of course kept the imagination occupied with her character and

history from the times when she was Harriet Vincy till now. With the

review of Mrs. Bulstrode and her position it was inevitable to

associate Rosamond, whose prospects were under the same blight with her

aunt’s. Rosamond was more severely criticised and less pitied, though

she too, as one of the good old Vincy family who had always been known

in Middlemarch, was regarded as a victim to marriage with an

interloper. The Vincys had their weaknesses, but then they lay on the

surface: there was never anything bad to be “found out” concerning

them. Mrs. Bulstrode was vindicated from any resemblance to her

husband. Harriet’s faults were her own.

“She has always been showy,” said Mrs. Hackbutt, making tea for a small

party, “though she has got into the way of putting her religion

forward, to conform to her husband; she has tried to hold her head up

above Middlemarch by making it known that she invites clergymen and

heaven-knows-who from Riverston and those places.”

“We can hardly blame her for that,” said Mrs. Sprague; “because few of

the best people in the town cared to associate with Bulstrode, and she

must have somebody to sit down at her table.”

“Mr. Thesiger has always countenanced him,” said Mrs. Hackbutt. “I

think he must be sorry now.”

“But he was never fond of him in his heart—that every one knows,” said

Mrs. Tom Toller. “Mr. Thesiger never goes into extremes. He keeps to

the truth in what is evangelical. It is only clergymen like Mr. Tyke,

who want to use Dissenting hymn-books and that low kind of religion,

who ever found Bulstrode to their taste.”

“I understand, Mr. Tyke is in great distress about him,” said Mrs.

Hackbutt. “And well he may be: they say the Bulstrodes have half kept

the Tyke family.”

“And of course it is a discredit to his doctrines,” said Mrs. Sprague,

who was elderly, and old-fashioned in her opinions.

“People will not make a boast of being methodistical in Middlemarch for

a good while to come.”

“I think we must not set down people’s bad actions to their religion,”

said falcon-faced Mrs. Plymdale, who had been listening hitherto.

“Oh, my dear, we are forgetting,” said Mrs. Sprague. “We ought not to

be talking of this before you.”

“I am sure I have no reason to be partial,” said Mrs. Plymdale,

coloring. “It’s true Mr. Plymdale has always been on good terms with

Mr. Bulstrode, and Harriet Vincy was my friend long before she married

him. But I have always kept my own opinions and told her where she was

wrong, poor thing. Still, in point of religion, I must say, Mr.

Bulstrode might have done what he has, and worse, and yet have been a

man of no religion. I don’t say that there has not been a little too

much of that—I like moderation myself. But truth is truth. The men

tried at the assizes are not all over-religious, I suppose.”

“Well,” said Mrs. Hackbutt, wheeling adroitly, “all I can say is, that

I think she ought to separate from him.”

“I can’t say that,” said Mrs. Sprague. “She took him for better or

worse, you know.”

“But ‘worse’ can never mean finding out that your husband is fit for

Newgate,” said Mrs. Hackbutt. “Fancy living with such a man! I should

expect to be poisoned.”

“Yes, I think myself it is an encouragement to crime if such men are to

be taken care of and waited on by good wives,” said Mrs. Tom Toller.

“And a good wife poor Harriet has been,” said Mrs. Plymdale. “She

thinks her husband the first of men. It’s true he has never denied her

anything.”

“Well, we shall see what she will do,” said Mrs. Hackbutt. “I suppose

she knows nothing yet, poor creature. I do hope and trust I shall not

see her, for I should be frightened to death lest I should say anything

about her husband. Do you think any hint has reached her?”

“I should hardly think so,” said Mrs. Tom Toller. “We hear that \_he\_ is

ill, and has never stirred out of the house since the meeting on

Thursday; but she was with her girls at church yesterday, and they had

new Tuscan bonnets. Her own had a feather in it. I have never seen that

her religion made any difference in her dress.”

“She wears very neat patterns always,” said Mrs. Plymdale, a little

stung. “And that feather I know she got dyed a pale lavender on purpose

to be consistent. I must say it of Harriet that she wishes to do

right.”

“As to her knowing what has happened, it can’t be kept from her long,”

said Mrs. Hackbutt. “The Vincys know, for Mr. Vincy was at the meeting.

It will be a great blow to him. There is his daughter as well as his

sister.”

“Yes, indeed,” said Mrs. Sprague. “Nobody supposes that Mr. Lydgate can

go on holding up his head in Middlemarch, things look so black about

the thousand pounds he took just at that man’s death. It really makes

one shudder.”

“Pride must have a fall,” said Mrs. Hackbutt.

“I am not so sorry for Rosamond Vincy that was as I am for her aunt,”

said Mrs. Plymdale. “She needed a lesson.”

“I suppose the Bulstrodes will go and live abroad somewhere,” said Mrs.

Sprague. “That is what is generally done when there is anything

disgraceful in a family.”

“And a most deadly blow it will be to Harriet,” said Mrs. Plymdale. “If

ever a woman was crushed, she will be. I pity her from my heart. And

with all her faults, few women are better. From a girl she had the

neatest ways, and was always good-hearted, and as open as the day. You

might look into her drawers when you would—always the same. And so she

has brought up Kate and Ellen. You may think how hard it will be for

her to go among foreigners.”

“The doctor says that is what he should recommend the Lydgates to do,”

said Mrs. Sprague. “He says Lydgate ought to have kept among the

French.”

“That would suit \_her\_ well enough, I dare say,” said Mrs. Plymdale;

“there is that kind of lightness about her. But she got that from her

mother; she never got it from her aunt Bulstrode, who always gave her

good advice, and to my knowledge would rather have had her marry

elsewhere.”

Mrs. Plymdale was in a situation which caused her some complication of

feeling. There had been not only her intimacy with Mrs. Bulstrode, but

also a profitable business relation of the great Plymdale dyeing house

with Mr. Bulstrode, which on the one hand would have inclined her to

desire that the mildest view of his character should be the true one,

but on the other, made her the more afraid of seeming to palliate his

culpability. Again, the late alliance of her family with the Tollers

had brought her in connection with the best circle, which gratified her

in every direction except in the inclination to those serious views

which she believed to be the best in another sense. The sharp little

woman’s conscience was somewhat troubled in the adjustment of these

opposing “bests,” and of her griefs and satisfactions under late

events, which were likely to humble those who needed humbling, but also

to fall heavily on her old friend whose faults she would have preferred

seeing on a background of prosperity.

Poor Mrs. Bulstrode, meanwhile, had been no further shaken by the

oncoming tread of calamity than in the busier stirring of that secret

uneasiness which had always been present in her since the last visit of

Raffles to The Shrubs. That the hateful man had come ill to Stone

Court, and that her husband had chosen to remain there and watch over

him, she allowed to be explained by the fact that Raffles had been

employed and aided in earlier-days, and that this made a tie of

benevolence towards him in his degraded helplessness; and she had been

since then innocently cheered by her husband’s more hopeful speech

about his own health and ability to continue his attention to business.

The calm was disturbed when Lydgate had brought him home ill from the

meeting, and in spite of comforting assurances during the next few

days, she cried in private from the conviction that her husband was not

suffering from bodily illness merely, but from something that afflicted

his mind. He would not allow her to read to him, and scarcely to sit

with him, alleging nervous susceptibility to sounds and movements; yet

she suspected that in shutting himself up in his private room he wanted

to be busy with his papers. Something, she felt sure, had happened.

Perhaps it was some great loss of money; and she was kept in the dark.

Not daring to question her husband, she said to Lydgate, on the fifth

day after the meeting, when she had not left home except to go to

church—

“Mr. Lydgate, pray be open with me: I like to know the truth. Has

anything happened to Mr. Bulstrode?”

“Some little nervous shock,” said Lydgate, evasively. He felt that it

was not for him to make the painful revelation.

“But what brought it on?” said Mrs. Bulstrode, looking directly at him

with her large dark eyes.

“There is often something poisonous in the air of public rooms,” said

Lydgate. “Strong men can stand it, but it tells on people in proportion

to the delicacy of their systems. It is often impossible to account for

the precise moment of an attack—or rather, to say why the strength

gives way at a particular moment.”

Mrs. Bulstrode was not satisfied with this answer. There remained in

her the belief that some calamity had befallen her husband, of which

she was to be kept in ignorance; and it was in her nature strongly to

object to such concealment. She begged leave for her daughters to sit

with their father, and drove into the town to pay some visits,

conjecturing that if anything were known to have gone wrong in Mr.

Bulstrode’s affairs, she should see or hear some sign of it.

She called on Mrs. Thesiger, who was not at home, and then drove to

Mrs. Hackbutt’s on the other side of the churchyard. Mrs. Hackbutt saw

her coming from an up-stairs window, and remembering her former alarm

lest she should meet Mrs. Bulstrode, felt almost bound in consistency

to send word that she was not at home; but against that, there was a

sudden strong desire within her for the excitement of an interview in

which she was quite determined not to make the slightest allusion to

what was in her mind.

Hence Mrs. Bulstrode was shown into the drawing-room, and Mrs. Hackbutt

went to her, with more tightness of lip and rubbing of her hands than

was usually observable in her, these being precautions adopted against

freedom of speech. She was resolved not to ask how Mr. Bulstrode was.

“I have not been anywhere except to church for nearly a week,” said

Mrs. Bulstrode, after a few introductory remarks. “But Mr. Bulstrode

was taken so ill at the meeting on Thursday that I have not liked to

leave the house.”

Mrs. Hackbutt rubbed the back of one hand with the palm of the other

held against her chest, and let her eyes ramble over the pattern on the

rug.

“Was Mr. Hackbutt at the meeting?” persevered Mrs. Bulstrode.

“Yes, he was,” said Mrs. Hackbutt, with the same attitude. “The land is

to be bought by subscription, I believe.”

“Let us hope that there will be no more cases of cholera to be buried

in it,” said Mrs. Bulstrode. “It is an awful visitation. But I always

think Middlemarch a very healthy spot. I suppose it is being used to it

from a child; but I never saw the town I should like to live at better,

and especially our end.”

“I am sure I should be glad that you always should live at Middlemarch,

Mrs. Bulstrode,” said Mrs. Hackbutt, with a slight sigh. “Still, we

must learn to resign ourselves, wherever our lot may be cast. Though I

am sure there will always be people in this town who will wish you

well.”

Mrs. Hackbutt longed to say, “if you take my advice you will part from

your husband,” but it seemed clear to her that the poor woman knew

nothing of the thunder ready to bolt on her head, and she herself could

do no more than prepare her a little. Mrs. Bulstrode felt suddenly

rather chill and trembling: there was evidently something unusual

behind this speech of Mrs. Hackbutt’s; but though she had set out with

the desire to be fully informed, she found herself unable now to pursue

her brave purpose, and turning the conversation by an inquiry about the

young Hackbutts, she soon took her leave saying that she was going to

see Mrs. Plymdale. On her way thither she tried to imagine that there

might have been some unusually warm sparring at the meeting between Mr.

Bulstrode and some of his frequent opponents—perhaps Mr. Hackbutt might

have been one of them. That would account for everything.

But when she was in conversation with Mrs. Plymdale that comforting

explanation seemed no longer tenable. “Selina” received her with a

pathetic affectionateness and a disposition to give edifying answers on

the commonest topics, which could hardly have reference to an ordinary

quarrel of which the most important consequence was a perturbation of

Mr. Bulstrode’s health. Beforehand Mrs. Bulstrode had thought that she

would sooner question Mrs. Plymdale than any one else; but she found to

her surprise that an old friend is not always the person whom it is

easiest to make a confidant of: there was the barrier of remembered

communication under other circumstances—there was the dislike of being

pitied and informed by one who had been long wont to allow her the

superiority. For certain words of mysterious appropriateness that Mrs.

Plymdale let fall about her resolution never to turn her back on her

friends, convinced Mrs. Bulstrode that what had happened must be some

kind of misfortune, and instead of being able to say with her native

directness, “What is it that you have in your mind?” she found herself

anxious to get away before she had heard anything more explicit. She

began to have an agitating certainty that the misfortune was something

more than the mere loss of money, being keenly sensitive to the fact

that Selina now, just as Mrs. Hackbutt had done before, avoided

noticing what she said about her husband, as they would have avoided

noticing a personal blemish.

She said good-by with nervous haste, and told the coachman to drive to

Mr. Vincy’s warehouse. In that short drive her dread gathered so much

force from the sense of darkness, that when she entered the private

counting-house where her brother sat at his desk, her knees trembled

and her usually florid face was deathly pale. Something of the same

effect was produced in him by the sight of her: he rose from his seat

to meet her, took her by the hand, and said, with his impulsive

rashness—

“God help you, Harriet! you know all.”

That moment was perhaps worse than any which came after. It contained

that concentrated experience which in great crises of emotion reveals

the bias of a nature, and is prophetic of the ultimate act which will

end an intermediate struggle. Without that memory of Raffles she might

still have thought only of monetary ruin, but now along with her

brother’s look and words there darted into her mind the idea of some

guilt in her husband—then, under the working of terror came the image

of her husband exposed to disgrace—and then, after an instant of

scorching shame in which she felt only the eyes of the world, with one

leap of her heart she was at his side in mournful but unreproaching

fellowship with shame and isolation. All this went on within her in a

mere flash of time—while she sank into the chair, and raised her eyes

to her brother, who stood over her. “I know nothing, Walter. What is

it?” she said, faintly.

He told her everything, very inartificially, in slow fragments, making

her aware that the scandal went much beyond proof, especially as to the

end of Raffles.

“People will talk,” he said. “Even if a man has been acquitted by a

jury, they’ll talk, and nod and wink—and as far as the world goes, a

man might often as well be guilty as not. It’s a breakdown blow, and it

damages Lydgate as much as Bulstrode. I don’t pretend to say what is

the truth. I only wish we had never heard the name of either Bulstrode

or Lydgate. You’d better have been a Vincy all your life, and so had

Rosamond.” Mrs. Bulstrode made no reply.

“But you must bear up as well as you can, Harriet. People don’t blame

\_you\_. And I’ll stand by you whatever you make up your mind to do,”

said the brother, with rough but well-meaning affectionateness.

“Give me your arm to the carriage, Walter,” said Mrs. Bulstrode. “I

feel very weak.”

And when she got home she was obliged to say to her daughter, “I am not

well, my dear; I must go and lie down. Attend to your papa. Leave me in

quiet. I shall take no dinner.”

She locked herself in her room. She needed time to get used to her

maimed consciousness, her poor lopped life, before she could walk

steadily to the place allotted her. A new searching light had fallen on

her husband’s character, and she could not judge him leniently: the

twenty years in which she had believed in him and venerated him by

virtue of his concealments came back with particulars that made them

seem an odious deceit. He had married her with that bad past life

hidden behind him, and she had no faith left to protest his innocence

of the worst that was imputed to him. Her honest ostentatious nature

made the sharing of a merited dishonor as bitter as it could be to any

mortal.

But this imperfectly taught woman, whose phrases and habits were an odd

patchwork, had a loyal spirit within her. The man whose prosperity she

had shared through nearly half a life, and who had unvaryingly

cherished her—now that punishment had befallen him it was not possible

to her in any sense to forsake him. There is a forsaking which still

sits at the same board and lies on the same couch with the forsaken

soul, withering it the more by unloving proximity. She knew, when she

locked her door, that she should unlock it ready to go down to her

unhappy husband and espouse his sorrow, and say of his guilt, I will

mourn and not reproach. But she needed time to gather up her strength;

she needed to sob out her farewell to all the gladness and pride of her

life. When she had resolved to go down, she prepared herself by some

little acts which might seem mere folly to a hard onlooker; they were

her way of expressing to all spectators visible or invisible that she

had begun a new life in which she embraced humiliation. She took off

all her ornaments and put on a plain black gown, and instead of wearing

her much-adorned cap and large bows of hair, she brushed her hair down

and put on a plain bonnet-cap, which made her look suddenly like an

early Methodist.

Bulstrode, who knew that his wife had been out and had come in saying

that she was not well, had spent the time in an agitation equal to

hers. He had looked forward to her learning the truth from others, and

had acquiesced in that probability, as something easier to him than any

confession. But now that he imagined the moment of her knowledge come,

he awaited the result in anguish. His daughters had been obliged to

consent to leave him, and though he had allowed some food to be brought

to him, he had not touched it. He felt himself perishing slowly in

unpitied misery. Perhaps he should never see his wife’s face with

affection in it again. And if he turned to God there seemed to be no

answer but the pressure of retribution.

It was eight o’clock in the evening before the door opened and his wife

entered. He dared not look up at her. He sat with his eyes bent down,

and as she went towards him she thought he looked smaller—he seemed so

withered and shrunken. A movement of new compassion and old tenderness

went through her like a great wave, and putting one hand on his which

rested on the arm of the chair, and the other on his shoulder, she

said, solemnly but kindly—

“Look up, Nicholas.”

He raised his eyes with a little start and looked at her half amazed

for a moment: her pale face, her changed, mourning dress, the trembling

about her mouth, all said, “I know;” and her hands and eyes rested

gently on him. He burst out crying and they cried together, she sitting

at his side. They could not yet speak to each other of the shame which

she was bearing with him, or of the acts which had brought it down on

them. His confession was silent, and her promise of faithfulness was

silent. Open-minded as she was, she nevertheless shrank from the words

which would have expressed their mutual consciousness, as she would

have shrunk from flakes of fire. She could not say, “How much is only

slander and false suspicion?” and he did not say, “I am innocent.”

CHAPTER LXXV.

“Le sentiment de la fausseté des plaisirs présents, et l’ignorance de

la vanité des plaisirs absents causent l’inconstance.”—PASCAL.

Rosamond had a gleam of returning cheerfulness when the house was freed

from the threatening figure, and when all the disagreeable creditors

were paid. But she was not joyous: her married life had fulfilled none

of her hopes, and had been quite spoiled for her imagination. In this

brief interval of calm, Lydgate, remembering that he had often been

stormy in his hours of perturbation, and mindful of the pain Rosamond

had had to bear, was carefully gentle towards her; but he, too, had

lost some of his old spirit, and he still felt it necessary to refer to

an economical change in their way of living as a matter of course,

trying to reconcile her to it gradually, and repressing his anger when

she answered by wishing that he would go to live in London. When she

did not make this answer, she listened languidly, and wondered what she

had that was worth living for. The hard and contemptuous words which

had fallen from her husband in his anger had deeply offended that

vanity which he had at first called into active enjoyment; and what she

regarded as his perverse way of looking at things, kept up a secret

repulsion, which made her receive all his tenderness as a poor

substitute for the happiness he had failed to give her. They were at a

disadvantage with their neighbors, and there was no longer any outlook

towards Quallingham—there was no outlook anywhere except in an

occasional letter from Will Ladislaw. She had felt stung and

disappointed by Will’s resolution to quit Middlemarch, for in spite of

what she knew and guessed about his admiration for Dorothea, she

secretly cherished the belief that he had, or would necessarily come to

have, much more admiration for herself; Rosamond being one of those

women who live much in the idea that each man they meet would have

preferred them if the preference had not been hopeless. Mrs. Casaubon

was all very well; but Will’s interest in her dated before he knew Mrs.

Lydgate. Rosamond took his way of talking to herself, which was a

mixture of playful fault-finding and hyperbolical gallantry, as the

disguise of a deeper feeling; and in his presence she felt that

agreeable titillation of vanity and sense of romantic drama which

Lydgate’s presence had no longer the magic to create. She even

fancied—what will not men and women fancy in these matters?—that Will

exaggerated his admiration for Mrs. Casaubon in order to pique herself.

In this way poor Rosamond’s brain had been busy before Will’s

departure. He would have made, she thought, a much more suitable

husband for her than she had found in Lydgate. No notion could have

been falser than this, for Rosamond’s discontent in her marriage was

due to the conditions of marriage itself, to its demand for

self-suppression and tolerance, and not to the nature of her husband;

but the easy conception of an unreal Better had a sentimental charm

which diverted her ennui. She constructed a little romance which was to

vary the flatness of her life: Will Ladislaw was always to be a

bachelor and live near her, always to be at her command, and have an

understood though never fully expressed passion for her, which would be

sending out lambent flames every now and then in interesting scenes.

His departure had been a proportionate disappointment, and had sadly

increased her weariness of Middlemarch; but at first she had the

alternative dream of pleasures in store from her intercourse with the

family at Quallingham. Since then the troubles of her married life had

deepened, and the absence of other relief encouraged her regretful

rumination over that thin romance which she had once fed on. Men and

women make sad mistakes about their own symptoms, taking their vague

uneasy longings, sometimes for genius, sometimes for religion, and

oftener still for a mighty love. Will Ladislaw had written chatty

letters, half to her and half to Lydgate, and she had replied: their

separation, she felt, was not likely to be final, and the change she

now most longed for was that Lydgate should go to live in London;

everything would be agreeable in London; and she had set to work with

quiet determination to win this result, when there came a sudden,

delightful promise which inspirited her.

It came shortly before the memorable meeting at the town-hall, and was

nothing less than a letter from Will Ladislaw to Lydgate, which turned

indeed chiefly on his new interest in plans of colonization, but

mentioned incidentally, that he might find it necessary to pay a visit

to Middlemarch within the next few weeks—a very pleasant necessity, he

said, almost as good as holidays to a schoolboy. He hoped there was his

old place on the rug, and a great deal of music in store for him. But

he was quite uncertain as to the time. While Lydgate was reading the

letter to Rosamond, her face looked like a reviving flower—it grew

prettier and more blooming. There was nothing unendurable now: the

debts were paid, Mr. Ladislaw was coming, and Lydgate would be

persuaded to leave Middlemarch and settle in London, which was “so

different from a provincial town.”

That was a bright bit of morning. But soon the sky became black over

poor Rosamond. The presence of a new gloom in her husband, about which

he was entirely reserved towards her—for he dreaded to expose his

lacerated feeling to her neutrality and misconception—soon received a

painfully strange explanation, alien to all her previous notions of

what could affect her happiness. In the new gayety of her spirits,

thinking that Lydgate had merely a worse fit of moodiness than usual,

causing him to leave her remarks unanswered, and evidently to keep out

of her way as much as possible, she chose, a few days after the

meeting, and without speaking to him on the subject, to send out notes

of invitation for a small evening party, feeling convinced that this

was a judicious step, since people seemed to have been keeping aloof

from them, and wanted restoring to the old habit of intercourse. When

the invitations had been accepted, she would tell Lydgate, and give him

a wise admonition as to how a medical man should behave to his

neighbors; for Rosamond had the gravest little airs possible about

other people’s duties. But all the invitations were declined, and the

last answer came into Lydgate’s hands.

“This is Chichely’s scratch. What is he writing to you about?” said

Lydgate, wonderingly, as he handed the note to her. She was obliged to

let him see it, and, looking at her severely, he said—

“Why on earth have you been sending out invitations without telling me,

Rosamond? I beg, I insist that you will not invite any one to this

house. I suppose you have been inviting others, and they have refused

too.” She said nothing.

“Do you hear me?” thundered Lydgate.

“Yes, certainly I hear you,” said Rosamond, turning her head aside with

the movement of a graceful long-necked bird.

Lydgate tossed his head without any grace and walked out of the room,

feeling himself dangerous. Rosamond’s thought was, that he was getting

more and more unbearable—not that there was any new special reason for

this peremptoriness. His indisposition to tell her anything in which he

was sure beforehand that she would not be interested was growing into

an unreflecting habit, and she was in ignorance of everything connected

with the thousand pounds except that the loan had come from her uncle

Bulstrode. Lydgate’s odious humors and their neighbors’ apparent

avoidance of them had an unaccountable date for her in their relief

from money difficulties. If the invitations had been accepted she would

have gone to invite her mamma and the rest, whom she had seen nothing

of for several days; and she now put on her bonnet to go and inquire

what had become of them all, suddenly feeling as if there were a

conspiracy to leave her in isolation with a husband disposed to offend

everybody. It was after the dinner hour, and she found her father and

mother seated together alone in the drawing-room. They greeted her with

sad looks, saying “Well, my dear!” and no more. She had never seen her

father look so downcast; and seating herself near him she said—

“Is there anything the matter, papa?”

He did not answer, but Mrs. Vincy said, “Oh, my dear, have you heard

nothing? It won’t be long before it reaches you.”

“Is it anything about Tertius?” said Rosamond, turning pale. The idea

of trouble immediately connected itself with what had been

unaccountable to her in him.

“Oh, my dear, yes. To think of your marrying into this trouble. Debt

was bad enough, but this will be worse.”

“Stay, stay, Lucy,” said Mr. Vincy. “Have you heard nothing about your

uncle Bulstrode, Rosamond?”

“No, papa,” said the poor thing, feeling as if trouble were not

anything she had before experienced, but some invisible power with an

iron grasp that made her soul faint within her.

Her father told her everything, saying at the end, “It’s better for you

to know, my dear. I think Lydgate must leave the town. Things have gone

against him. I dare say he couldn’t help it. I don’t accuse him of any

harm,” said Mr. Vincy. He had always before been disposed to find the

utmost fault with Lydgate.

The shock to Rosamond was terrible. It seemed to her that no lot could

be so cruelly hard as hers to have married a man who had become the

centre of infamous suspicions. In many cases it is inevitable that the

shame is felt to be the worst part of crime; and it would have required

a great deal of disentangling reflection, such as had never entered

into Rosamond’s life, for her in these moments to feel that her trouble

was less than if her husband had been certainly known to have done

something criminal. All the shame seemed to be there. And she had

innocently married this man with the belief that he and his family were

a glory to her! She showed her usual reticence to her parents, and only

said, that if Lydgate had done as she wished he would have left

Middlemarch long ago.

“She bears it beyond anything,” said her mother when she was gone.

“Ah, thank God!” said Mr. Vincy, who was much broken down.

But Rosamond went home with a sense of justified repugnance towards her

husband. What had he really done—how had he really acted? She did not

know. Why had he not told her everything? He did not speak to her on

the subject, and of course she could not speak to him. It came into her

mind once that she would ask her father to let her go home again; but

dwelling on that prospect made it seem utter dreariness to her: a

married woman gone back to live with her parents—life seemed to have no

meaning for her in such a position: she could not contemplate herself

in it.

The next two days Lydgate observed a change in her, and believed that

she had heard the bad news. Would she speak to him about it, or would

she go on forever in the silence which seemed to imply that she

believed him guilty? We must remember that he was in a morbid state of

mind, in which almost all contact was pain. Certainly Rosamond in this

case had equal reason to complain of reserve and want of confidence on

his part; but in the bitterness of his soul he excused himself;—was he

not justified in shrinking from the task of telling her, since now she

knew the truth she had no impulse to speak to him? But a deeper-lying

consciousness that he was in fault made him restless, and the silence

between them became intolerable to him; it was as if they were both

adrift on one piece of wreck and looked away from each other.

He thought, “I am a fool. Haven’t I given up expecting anything? I have

married care, not help.” And that evening he said—

“Rosamond, have you heard anything that distresses you?”

“Yes,” she answered, laying down her work, which she had been carrying

on with a languid semi-consciousness, most unlike her usual self.

“What have you heard?”

“Everything, I suppose. Papa told me.”

“That people think me disgraced?”

“Yes,” said Rosamond, faintly, beginning to sew again automatically.

There was silence. Lydgate thought, “If she has any trust in me—any

notion of what I am, she ought to speak now and say that she does not

believe I have deserved disgrace.”

But Rosamond on her side went on moving her fingers languidly. Whatever

was to be said on the subject she expected to come from Tertius. What

did she know? And if he were innocent of any wrong, why did he not do

something to clear himself?

This silence of hers brought a new rush of gall to that bitter mood in

which Lydgate had been saying to himself that nobody believed in

him—even Farebrother had not come forward. He had begun to question her

with the intent that their conversation should disperse the chill fog

which had gathered between them, but he felt his resolution checked by

despairing resentment. Even this trouble, like the rest, she seemed to

regard as if it were hers alone. He was always to her a being apart,

doing what she objected to. He started from his chair with an angry

impulse, and thrusting his hands in his pockets, walked up and down the

room. There was an underlying consciousness all the while that he

should have to master this anger, and tell her everything, and convince

her of the facts. For he had almost learned the lesson that he must

bend himself to her nature, and that because she came short in her

sympathy, he must give the more. Soon he recurred to his intention of

opening himself: the occasion must not be lost. If he could bring her

to feel with some solemnity that here was a slander which must be met

and not run away from, and that the whole trouble had come out of his

desperate want of money, it would be a moment for urging powerfully on

her that they should be one in the resolve to do with as little money

as possible, so that they might weather the bad time and keep

themselves independent. He would mention the definite measures which he

desired to take, and win her to a willing spirit. He was bound to try

this—and what else was there for him to do?

He did not know how long he had been walking uneasily backwards and

forwards, but Rosamond felt that it was long, and wished that he would

sit down. She too had begun to think this an opportunity for urging on

Tertius what he ought to do. Whatever might be the truth about all this

misery, there was one dread which asserted itself.

Lydgate at last seated himself, not in his usual chair, but in one

nearer to Rosamond, leaning aside in it towards her, and looking at her

gravely before he reopened the sad subject. He had conquered himself so

far, and was about to speak with a sense of solemnity, as on an

occasion which was not to be repeated. He had even opened his lips,

when Rosamond, letting her hands fall, looked at him and said—

“Surely, Tertius—”

“Well?”

“Surely now at last you have given up the idea of staying in

Middlemarch. I cannot go on living here. Let us go to London. Papa, and

every one else, says you had better go. Whatever misery I have to put

up with, it will be easier away from here.”

Lydgate felt miserably jarred. Instead of that critical outpouring for

which he had prepared himself with effort, here was the old round to be

gone through again. He could not bear it. With a quick change of

countenance he rose and went out of the room.

Perhaps if he had been strong enough to persist in his determination to

be the more because she was less, that evening might have had a better

issue. If his energy could have borne down that check, he might still

have wrought on Rosamond’s vision and will. We cannot be sure that any

natures, however inflexible or peculiar, will resist this effect from a

more massive being than their own. They may be taken by storm and for

the moment converted, becoming part of the soul which enwraps them in

the ardor of its movement. But poor Lydgate had a throbbing pain within

him, and his energy had fallen short of its task.

The beginning of mutual understanding and resolve seemed as far off as

ever; nay, it seemed blocked out by the sense of unsuccessful effort.

They lived on from day to day with their thoughts still apart, Lydgate

going about what work he had in a mood of despair, and Rosamond

feeling, with some justification, that he was behaving cruelly. It was

of no use to say anything to Tertius; but when Will Ladislaw came, she

was determined to tell him everything. In spite of her general

reticence, she needed some one who would recognize her wrongs.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

To mercy, pity, peace, and love

All pray in their distress,

And to these virtues of delight,

Return their thankfulness.

. . . . . .

For Mercy has a human heart,

Pity a human face;

And Love, the human form divine;

And Peace, the human dress.

—WILLIAM BLAKE: \_Songs of Innocence\_.

Some days later, Lydgate was riding to Lowick Manor, in consequence of

a summons from Dorothea. The summons had not been unexpected, since it

had followed a letter from Mr. Bulstrode, in which he stated that he

had resumed his arrangements for quitting Middlemarch, and must remind

Lydgate of his previous communications about the Hospital, to the

purport of which he still adhered. It had been his duty, before taking

further steps, to reopen the subject with Mrs. Casaubon, who now

wished, as before, to discuss the question with Lydgate. “Your views

may possibly have undergone some change,” wrote Mr. Bulstrode; “but, in

that case also, it is desirable that you should lay them before her.”

Dorothea awaited his arrival with eager interest. Though, in deference

to her masculine advisers, she had refrained from what Sir James had

called “interfering in this Bulstrode business,” the hardship of

Lydgate’s position was continually in her mind, and when Bulstrode

applied to her again about the hospital, she felt that the opportunity

was come to her which she had been hindered from hastening. In her

luxurious home, wandering under the boughs of her own great trees, her

thought was going out over the lot of others, and her emotions were

imprisoned. The idea of some active good within her reach, “haunted her

like a passion,” and another’s need having once come to her as a

distinct image, preoccupied her desire with the yearning to give

relief, and made her own ease tasteless. She was full of confident hope

about this interview with Lydgate, never heeding what was said of his

personal reserve; never heeding that she was a very young woman.

Nothing could have seemed more irrelevant to Dorothea than insistence

on her youth and sex when she was moved to show her human fellowship.

As she sat waiting in the library, she could do nothing but live

through again all the past scenes which had brought Lydgate into her

memories. They all owed their significance to her marriage and its

troubles—but no; there were two occasions in which the image of Lydgate

had come painfully in connection with his wife and some one else. The

pain had been allayed for Dorothea, but it had left in her an awakened

conjecture as to what Lydgate’s marriage might be to him, a

susceptibility to the slightest hint about Mrs. Lydgate. These thoughts

were like a drama to her, and made her eyes bright, and gave an

attitude of suspense to her whole frame, though she was only looking

out from the brown library on to the turf and the bright green buds

which stood in relief against the dark evergreens.

When Lydgate came in, she was almost shocked at the change in his face,

which was strikingly perceptible to her who had not seen him for two

months. It was not the change of emaciation, but that effect which even

young faces will very soon show from the persistent presence of

resentment and despondency. Her cordial look, when she put out her hand

to him, softened his expression, but only with melancholy.

“I have wished very much to see you for a long while, Mr. Lydgate,”

said Dorothea when they were seated opposite each other; “but I put off

asking you to come until Mr. Bulstrode applied to me again about the

Hospital. I know that the advantage of keeping the management of it

separate from that of the Infirmary depends on you, or, at least, on

the good which you are encouraged to hope for from having it under your

control. And I am sure you will not refuse to tell me exactly what you

think.”

“You want to decide whether you should give a generous support to the

Hospital,” said Lydgate. “I cannot conscientiously advise you to do it

in dependence on any activity of mine. I may be obliged to leave the

town.”

He spoke curtly, feeling the ache of despair as to his being able to

carry out any purpose that Rosamond had set her mind against.

“Not because there is no one to believe in you?” said Dorothea, pouring

out her words in clearness from a full heart. “I know the unhappy

mistakes about you. I knew them from the first moment to be mistakes.

You have never done anything vile. You would not do anything

dishonorable.”

It was the first assurance of belief in him that had fallen on

Lydgate’s ears. He drew a deep breath, and said, “Thank you.” He could

say no more: it was something very new and strange in his life that

these few words of trust from a woman should be so much to him.

“I beseech you to tell me how everything was,” said Dorothea,

fearlessly. “I am sure that the truth would clear you.”

Lydgate started up from his chair and went towards the window,

forgetting where he was. He had so often gone over in his mind the

possibility of explaining everything without aggravating appearances

that would tell, perhaps unfairly, against Bulstrode, and had so often

decided against it—he had so often said to himself that his assertions

would not change people’s impressions—that Dorothea’s words sounded

like a temptation to do something which in his soberness he had

pronounced to be unreasonable.

“Tell me, pray,” said Dorothea, with simple earnestness; “then we can

consult together. It is wicked to let people think evil of any one

falsely, when it can be hindered.”

Lydgate turned, remembering where he was, and saw Dorothea’s face

looking up at him with a sweet trustful gravity. The presence of a

noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes

the lights for us: we begin to see things again in their larger,

quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in

the wholeness of our character. That influence was beginning to act on

Lydgate, who had for many days been seeing all life as one who is

dragged and struggling amid the throng. He sat down again, and felt

that he was recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was

with one who believed in it.

“I don’t want,” he said, “to bear hard on Bulstrode, who has lent me

money of which I was in need—though I would rather have gone without it

now. He is hunted down and miserable, and has only a poor thread of

life in him. But I should like to tell you everything. It will be a

comfort to me to speak where belief has gone beforehand, and where I

shall not seem to be offering assertions of my own honesty. You will

feel what is fair to another, as you feel what is fair to me.”

“Do trust me,” said Dorothea; “I will not repeat anything without your

leave. But at the very least, I could say that you have made all the

circumstances clear to me, and that I know you are not in any way

guilty. Mr. Farebrother would believe me, and my uncle, and Sir James

Chettam. Nay, there are persons in Middlemarch to whom I could go;

although they don’t know much of me, they would believe me. They would

know that I could have no other motive than truth and justice. I would

take any pains to clear you. I have very little to do. There is nothing

better that I can do in the world.”

Dorothea’s voice, as she made this childlike picture of what she would

do, might have been almost taken as a proof that she could do it

effectively. The searching tenderness of her woman’s tones seemed made

for a defence against ready accusers. Lydgate did not stay to think

that she was Quixotic: he gave himself up, for the first time in his

life, to the exquisite sense of leaning entirely on a generous

sympathy, without any check of proud reserve. And he told her

everything, from the time when, under the pressure of his difficulties,

he unwillingly made his first application to Bulstrode; gradually, in

the relief of speaking, getting into a more thorough utterance of what

had gone on in his mind—entering fully into the fact that his treatment

of the patient was opposed to the dominant practice, into his doubts at

the last, his ideal of medical duty, and his uneasy consciousness that

the acceptance of the money had made some difference in his private

inclination and professional behavior, though not in his fulfilment of

any publicly recognized obligation.

“It has come to my knowledge since,” he added, “that Hawley sent some

one to examine the housekeeper at Stone Court, and she said that she

gave the patient all the opium in the phial I left, as well as a good

deal of brandy. But that would not have been opposed to ordinary

prescriptions, even of first-rate men. The suspicions against me had no

hold there: they are grounded on the knowledge that I took money, that

Bulstrode had strong motives for wishing the man to die, and that he

gave me the money as a bribe to concur in some malpractices or other

against the patient—that in any case I accepted a bribe to hold my

tongue. They are just the suspicions that cling the most obstinately,

because they lie in people’s inclination and can never be disproved.

How my orders came to be disobeyed is a question to which I don’t know

the answer. It is still possible that Bulstrode was innocent of any

criminal intention—even possible that he had nothing to do with the

disobedience, and merely abstained from mentioning it. But all that has

nothing to do with the public belief. It is one of those cases on which

a man is condemned on the ground of his character—it is believed that

he has committed a crime in some undefined way, because he had the

motive for doing it; and Bulstrode’s character has enveloped me,

because I took his money. I am simply blighted—like a damaged ear of

corn—the business is done and can’t be undone.”

“Oh, it is hard!” said Dorothea. “I understand the difficulty there is

in your vindicating yourself. And that all this should have come to you

who had meant to lead a higher life than the common, and to find out

better ways—I cannot bear to rest in this as unchangeable. I know you

meant that. I remember what you said to me when you first spoke to me

about the hospital. There is no sorrow I have thought more about than

that—to love what is great, and try to reach it, and yet to fail.”

“Yes,” said Lydgate, feeling that here he had found room for the full

meaning of his grief. “I had some ambition. I meant everything to be

different with me. I thought I had more strength and mastery. But the

most terrible obstacles are such as nobody can see except oneself.”

“Suppose,” said Dorothea, meditatively,—“suppose we kept on the

Hospital according to the present plan, and you stayed here though only

with the friendship and support of a few, the evil feeling towards you

would gradually die out; there would come opportunities in which people

would be forced to acknowledge that they had been unjust to you,

because they would see that your purposes were pure. You may still win

a great fame like the Louis and Laennec I have heard you speak of, and

we shall all be proud of you,” she ended, with a smile.

“That might do if I had my old trust in myself,” said Lydgate,

mournfully. “Nothing galls me more than the notion of turning round and

running away before this slander, leaving it unchecked behind me.

Still, I can’t ask any one to put a great deal of money into a plan

which depends on me.”

“It would be quite worth my while,” said Dorothea, simply. “Only think.

I am very uncomfortable with my money, because they tell me I have too

little for any great scheme of the sort I like best, and yet I have too

much. I don’t know what to do. I have seven hundred a-year of my own

fortune, and nineteen hundred a-year that Mr. Casaubon left me, and

between three and four thousand of ready money in the bank. I wished to

raise money and pay it off gradually out of my income which I don’t

want, to buy land with and found a village which should be a school of

industry; but Sir James and my uncle have convinced me that the risk

would be too great. So you see that what I should most rejoice at would

be to have something good to do with my money: I should like it to make

other people’s lives better to them. It makes me very uneasy—coming all

to me who don’t want it.”

A smile broke through the gloom of Lydgate’s face. The childlike

grave-eyed earnestness with which Dorothea said all this was

irresistible—blent into an adorable whole with her ready understanding

of high experience. (Of lower experience such as plays a great part in

the world, poor Mrs. Casaubon had a very blurred shortsighted

knowledge, little helped by her imagination.) But she took the smile as

encouragement of her plan.

“I think you see now that you spoke too scrupulously,” she said, in a

tone of persuasion. “The hospital would be one good; and making your

life quite whole and well again would be another.”

Lydgate’s smile had died away. “You have the goodness as well as the

money to do all that; if it could be done,” he said. “But—”

He hesitated a little while, looking vaguely towards the window; and

she sat in silent expectation. At last he turned towards her and said

impetuously—

“Why should I not tell you?—you know what sort of bond marriage is. You

will understand everything.”

Dorothea felt her heart beginning to beat faster. Had he that sorrow

too? But she feared to say any word, and he went on immediately.

“It is impossible for me now to do anything—to take any step without

considering my wife’s happiness. The thing that I might like to do if I

were alone, is become impossible to me. I can’t see her miserable. She

married me without knowing what she was going into, and it might have

been better for her if she had not married me.”

“I know, I know—you could not give her pain, if you were not obliged to

do it,” said Dorothea, with keen memory of her own life.

“And she has set her mind against staying. She wishes to go. The

troubles she has had here have wearied her,” said Lydgate, breaking off

again, lest he should say too much.

“But when she saw the good that might come of staying—” said Dorothea,

remonstrantly, looking at Lydgate as if he had forgotten the reasons

which had just been considered. He did not speak immediately.

“She would not see it,” he said at last, curtly, feeling at first that

this statement must do without explanation. “And, indeed, I have lost

all spirit about carrying on my life here.” He paused a moment and

then, following the impulse to let Dorothea see deeper into the

difficulty of his life, he said, “The fact is, this trouble has come

upon her confusedly. We have not been able to speak to each other about

it. I am not sure what is in her mind about it: she may fear that I

have really done something base. It is my fault; I ought to be more

open. But I have been suffering cruelly.”

“May I go and see her?” said Dorothea, eagerly. “Would she accept my

sympathy? I would tell her that you have not been blamable before any

one’s judgment but your own. I would tell her that you shall be cleared

in every fair mind. I would cheer her heart. Will you ask her if I may

go to see her? I did see her once.”

“I am sure you may,” said Lydgate, seizing the proposition with some

hope. “She would feel honored—cheered, I think, by the proof that you

at least have some respect for me. I will not speak to her about your

coming—that she may not connect it with my wishes at all. I know very

well that I ought not to have left anything to be told her by others,

but—”

He broke off, and there was a moment’s silence. Dorothea refrained from

saying what was in her mind—how well she knew that there might be

invisible barriers to speech between husband and wife. This was a point

on which even sympathy might make a wound. She returned to the more

outward aspect of Lydgate’s position, saying cheerfully—

“And if Mrs. Lydgate knew that there were friends who would believe in

you and support you, she might then be glad that you should stay in

your place and recover your hopes—and do what you meant to do. Perhaps

then you would see that it was right to agree with what I proposed

about your continuing at the Hospital. Surely you would, if you still

have faith in it as a means of making your knowledge useful?”

Lydgate did not answer, and she saw that he was debating with himself.

“You need not decide immediately,” she said, gently. “A few days hence

it will be early enough for me to send my answer to Mr. Bulstrode.”

Lydgate still waited, but at last turned to speak in his most decisive

tones.

“No; I prefer that there should be no interval left for wavering. I am

no longer sure enough of myself—I mean of what it would be possible for

me to do under the changed circumstances of my life. It would be

dishonorable to let others engage themselves to anything serious in

dependence on me. I might be obliged to go away after all; I see little

chance of anything else. The whole thing is too problematic; I cannot

consent to be the cause of your goodness being wasted. No—let the new

Hospital be joined with the old Infirmary, and everything go on as it

might have done if I had never come. I have kept a valuable register

since I have been there; I shall send it to a man who will make use of

it,” he ended bitterly. “I can think of nothing for a long while but

getting an income.”

“It hurts me very much to hear you speak so hopelessly,” said Dorothea.

“It would be a happiness to your friends, who believe in your future,

in your power to do great things, if you would let them save you from

that. Think how much money I have; it would be like taking a burthen

from me if you took some of it every year till you got free from this

fettering want of income. Why should not people do these things? It is

so difficult to make shares at all even. This is one way.”

“God bless you, Mrs. Casaubon!” said Lydgate, rising as if with the

same impulse that made his words energetic, and resting his arm on the

back of the great leather chair he had been sitting in. “It is good

that you should have such feelings. But I am not the man who ought to

allow himself to benefit by them. I have not given guarantees enough. I

must not at least sink into the degradation of being pensioned for work

that I never achieved. It is very clear to me that I must not count on

anything else than getting away from Middlemarch as soon as I can

manage it. I should not be able for a long while, at the very best, to

get an income here, and—and it is easier to make necessary changes in a

new place. I must do as other men do, and think what will please the

world and bring in money; look for a little opening in the London

crowd, and push myself; set up in a watering-place, or go to some

southern town where there are plenty of idle English, and get myself

puffed,—that is the sort of shell I must creep into and try to keep my

soul alive in.”

“Now that is not brave,” said Dorothea,—“to give up the fight.”

“No, it is not brave,” said Lydgate, “but if a man is afraid of

creeping paralysis?” Then, in another tone, “Yet you have made a great

difference in my courage by believing in me. Everything seems more

bearable since I have talked to you; and if you can clear me in a few

other minds, especially in Farebrother’s, I shall be deeply grateful.

The point I wish you not to mention is the fact of disobedience to my

orders. That would soon get distorted. After all, there is no evidence

for me but people’s opinion of me beforehand. You can only repeat my

own report of myself.”

“Mr. Farebrother will believe—others will believe,” said Dorothea. “I

can say of you what will make it stupidity to suppose that you would be

bribed to do a wickedness.”

“I don’t know,” said Lydgate, with something like a groan in his voice.

“I have not taken a bribe yet. But there is a pale shade of bribery

which is sometimes called prosperity. You will do me another great

kindness, then, and come to see my wife?”

“Yes, I will. I remember how pretty she is,” said Dorothea, into whose

mind every impression about Rosamond had cut deep. “I hope she will

like me.”

As Lydgate rode away, he thought, “This young creature has a heart

large enough for the Virgin Mary. She evidently thinks nothing of her

own future, and would pledge away half her income at once, as if she

wanted nothing for herself but a chair to sit in from which she can

look down with those clear eyes at the poor mortals who pray to her.

She seems to have what I never saw in any woman before—a fountain of

friendship towards men—a man can make a friend of her. Casaubon must

have raised some heroic hallucination in her. I wonder if she could

have any other sort of passion for a man? Ladislaw?—there was certainly

an unusual feeling between them. And Casaubon must have had a notion of

it. Well—her love might help a man more than her money.”

Dorothea on her side had immediately formed a plan of relieving Lydgate

from his obligation to Bulstrode, which she felt sure was a part,

though small, of the galling pressure he had to bear. She sat down at

once under the inspiration of their interview, and wrote a brief note,

in which she pleaded that she had more claim than Mr. Bulstrode had to

the satisfaction of providing the money which had been serviceable to

Lydgate—that it would be unkind in Lydgate not to grant her the

position of being his helper in this small matter, the favor being

entirely to her who had so little that was plainly marked out for her

to do with her superfluous money. He might call her a creditor or by

any other name if it did but imply that he granted her request. She

enclosed a check for a thousand pounds, and determined to take the

letter with her the next day when she went to see Rosamond.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

“And thus thy fall hath left a kind of blot,

To mark the full-fraught man and best indued

With some suspicion.”

—\_Henry V\_.

The next day Lydgate had to go to Brassing, and told Rosamond that he

should be away until the evening. Of late she had never gone beyond her

own house and garden, except to church, and once to see her papa, to

whom she said, “If Tertius goes away, you will help us to move, will

you not, papa? I suppose we shall have very little money. I am sure I

hope some one will help us.” And Mr. Vincy had said, “Yes, child, I

don’t mind a hundred or two. I can see the end of that.” With these

exceptions she had sat at home in languid melancholy and suspense,

fixing her mind on Will Ladislaw’s coming as the one point of hope and

interest, and associating this with some new urgency on Lydgate to make

immediate arrangements for leaving Middlemarch and going to London,

till she felt assured that the coming would be a potent cause of the

going, without at all seeing how. This way of establishing sequences is

too common to be fairly regarded as a peculiar folly in Rosamond. And

it is precisely this sort of sequence which causes the greatest shock

when it is sundered: for to see how an effect may be produced is often

to see possible missings and checks; but to see nothing except the

desirable cause, and close upon it the desirable effect, rids us of

doubt and makes our minds strongly intuitive. That was the process

going on in poor Rosamond, while she arranged all objects around her

with the same nicety as ever, only with more slowness—or sat down to

the piano, meaning to play, and then desisting, yet lingering on the

music stool with her white fingers suspended on the wooden front, and

looking before her in dreamy ennui. Her melancholy had become so marked

that Lydgate felt a strange timidity before it, as a perpetual silent

reproach, and the strong man, mastered by his keen sensibilities

towards this fair fragile creature whose life he seemed somehow to have

bruised, shrank from her look, and sometimes started at her approach,

fear of her and fear for her rushing in only the more forcibly after it

had been momentarily expelled by exasperation.

But this morning Rosamond descended from her room upstairs—where she

sometimes sat the whole day when Lydgate was out—equipped for a walk in

the town. She had a letter to post—a letter addressed to Mr. Ladislaw

and written with charming discretion, but intended to hasten his

arrival by a hint of trouble. The servant-maid, their sole

house-servant now, noticed her coming down-stairs in her walking dress,

and thought “there never did anybody look so pretty in a bonnet poor

thing.”

Meanwhile Dorothea’s mind was filled with her project of going to

Rosamond, and with the many thoughts, both of the past and the probable

future, which gathered round the idea of that visit. Until yesterday

when Lydgate had opened to her a glimpse of some trouble in his married

life, the image of Mrs. Lydgate had always been associated for her with

that of Will Ladislaw. Even in her most uneasy moments—even when she

had been agitated by Mrs. Cadwallader’s painfully graphic report of

gossip—her effort, nay, her strongest impulsive prompting, had been

towards the vindication of Will from any sullying surmises; and when,

in her meeting with him afterwards, she had at first interpreted his

words as a probable allusion to a feeling towards Mrs. Lydgate which he

was determined to cut himself off from indulging, she had had a quick,

sad, excusing vision of the charm there might be in his constant

opportunities of companionship with that fair creature, who most likely

shared his other tastes as she evidently did his delight in music. But

there had followed his parting words—the few passionate words in which

he had implied that she herself was the object of whom his love held

him in dread, that it was his love for her only which he was resolved

not to declare but to carry away into banishment. From the time of that

parting, Dorothea, believing in Will’s love for her, believing with a

proud delight in his delicate sense of honor and his determination that

no one should impeach him justly, felt her heart quite at rest as to

the regard he might have for Mrs. Lydgate. She was sure that the regard

was blameless.

There are natures in which, if they love us, we are conscious of having

a sort of baptism and consecration: they bind us over to rectitude and

purity by their pure belief about us; and our sins become that worst

kind of sacrilege which tears down the invisible altar of trust. “If

you are not good, none is good”—those little words may give a terrific

meaning to responsibility, may hold a vitriolic intensity for remorse.

Dorothea’s nature was of that kind: her own passionate faults lay along

the easily counted open channels of her ardent character; and while she

was full of pity for the visible mistakes of others, she had not yet

any material within her experience for subtle constructions and

suspicions of hidden wrong. But that simplicity of hers, holding up an

ideal for others in her believing conception of them, was one of the

great powers of her womanhood. And it had from the first acted strongly

on Will Ladislaw. He felt, when he parted from her, that the brief

words by which he had tried to convey to her his feeling about herself

and the division which her fortune made between them, would only profit

by their brevity when Dorothea had to interpret them: he felt that in

her mind he had found his highest estimate.

And he was right there. In the months since their parting Dorothea had

felt a delicious though sad repose in their relation to each other, as

one which was inwardly whole and without blemish. She had an active

force of antagonism within her, when the antagonism turned on the

defence either of plans or persons that she believed in; and the wrongs

which she felt that Will had received from her husband, and the

external conditions which to others were grounds for slighting him,

only gave the more tenacity to her affection and admiring judgment. And

now with the disclosures about Bulstrode had come another fact

affecting Will’s social position, which roused afresh Dorothea’s inward

resistance to what was said about him in that part of her world which

lay within park palings.

“Young Ladislaw the grandson of a thieving Jew pawnbroker” was a phrase

which had entered emphatically into the dialogues about the Bulstrode

business, at Lowick, Tipton, and Freshitt, and was a worse kind of

placard on poor Will’s back than the “Italian with white mice.” Upright

Sir James Chettam was convinced that his own satisfaction was righteous

when he thought with some complacency that here was an added league to

that mountainous distance between Ladislaw and Dorothea, which enabled

him to dismiss any anxiety in that direction as too absurd. And perhaps

there had been some pleasure in pointing Mr. Brooke’s attention to this

ugly bit of Ladislaw’s genealogy, as a fresh candle for him to see his

own folly by. Dorothea had observed the animus with which Will’s part

in the painful story had been recalled more than once; but she had

uttered no word, being checked now, as she had not been formerly in

speaking of Will, by the consciousness of a deeper relation between

them which must always remain in consecrated secrecy. But her silence

shrouded her resistant emotion into a more thorough glow; and this

misfortune in Will’s lot which, it seemed, others were wishing to fling

at his back as an opprobrium, only gave something more of enthusiasm to

her clinging thought.

She entertained no visions of their ever coming into nearer union, and

yet she had taken no posture of renunciation. She had accepted her

whole relation to Will very simply as part of her marriage sorrows, and

would have thought it very sinful in her to keep up an inward wail

because she was not completely happy, being rather disposed to dwell on

the superfluities of her lot. She could bear that the chief pleasures

of her tenderness should lie in memory, and the idea of marriage came

to her solely as a repulsive proposition from some suitor of whom she

at present knew nothing, but whose merits, as seen by her friends,

would be a source of torment to her:—“somebody who will manage your

property for you, my dear,” was Mr. Brooke’s attractive suggestion of

suitable characteristics. “I should like to manage it myself, if I knew

what to do with it,” said Dorothea. No—she adhered to her declaration

that she would never be married again, and in the long valley of her

life which looked so flat and empty of waymarks, guidance would come as

she walked along the road, and saw her fellow-passengers by the way.

This habitual state of feeling about Will Ladislaw had been strong in

all her waking hours since she had proposed to pay a visit to Mrs.

Lydgate, making a sort of background against which she saw Rosamond’s

figure presented to her without hindrances to her interest and

compassion. There was evidently some mental separation, some barrier to

complete confidence which had arisen between this wife and the husband

who had yet made her happiness a law to him. That was a trouble which

no third person must directly touch. But Dorothea thought with deep

pity of the loneliness which must have come upon Rosamond from the

suspicions cast on her husband; and there would surely be help in the

manifestation of respect for Lydgate and sympathy with her.

“I shall talk to her about her husband,” thought Dorothea, as she was

being driven towards the town. The clear spring morning, the scent of

the moist earth, the fresh leaves just showing their creased-up wealth

of greenery from out their half-opened sheaths, seemed part of the

cheerfulness she was feeling from a long conversation with Mr.

Farebrother, who had joyfully accepted the justifying explanation of

Lydgate’s conduct. “I shall take Mrs. Lydgate good news, and perhaps

she will like to talk to me and make a friend of me.”

Dorothea had another errand in Lowick Gate: it was about a new

fine-toned bell for the school-house, and as she had to get out of her

carriage very near to Lydgate’s, she walked thither across the street,

having told the coachman to wait for some packages. The street door was

open, and the servant was taking the opportunity of looking out at the

carriage which was pausing within sight when it became apparent to her

that the lady who “belonged to it” was coming towards her.

“Is Mrs. Lydgate at home?” said Dorothea.

“I’m not sure, my lady; I’ll see, if you’ll please to walk in,” said

Martha, a little confused on the score of her kitchen apron, but

collected enough to be sure that “mum” was not the right title for this

queenly young widow with a carriage and pair. “Will you please to walk

in, and I’ll go and see.”

“Say that I am Mrs. Casaubon,” said Dorothea, as Martha moved forward

intending to show her into the drawing-room and then to go up-stairs to

see if Rosamond had returned from her walk.

They crossed the broader part of the entrance-hall, and turned up the

passage which led to the garden. The drawing-room door was unlatched,

and Martha, pushing it without looking into the room, waited for Mrs.

Casaubon to enter and then turned away, the door having swung open and

swung back again without noise.

Dorothea had less of outward vision than usual this morning, being

filled with images of things as they had been and were going to be. She

found herself on the other side of the door without seeing anything

remarkable, but immediately she heard a voice speaking in low tones

which startled her as with a sense of dreaming in daylight, and

advancing unconsciously a step or two beyond the projecting slab of a

bookcase, she saw, in the terrible illumination of a certainty which

filled up all outlines, something which made her pause, motionless,

without self-possession enough to speak.

Seated with his back towards her on a sofa which stood against the wall

on a line with the door by which she had entered, she saw Will

Ladislaw: close by him and turned towards him with a flushed

tearfulness which gave a new brilliancy to her face sat Rosamond, her

bonnet hanging back, while Will leaning towards her clasped both her

upraised hands in his and spoke with low-toned fervor.

Rosamond in her agitated absorption had not noticed the silently

advancing figure; but when Dorothea, after the first immeasurable

instant of this vision, moved confusedly backward and found herself

impeded by some piece of furniture, Rosamond was suddenly aware of her

presence, and with a spasmodic movement snatched away her hands and

rose, looking at Dorothea who was necessarily arrested. Will Ladislaw,

starting up, looked round also, and meeting Dorothea’s eyes with a new

lightning in them, seemed changing to marble. But she immediately

turned them away from him to Rosamond and said in a firm voice—

“Excuse me, Mrs. Lydgate, the servant did not know that you were here.

I called to deliver an important letter for Mr. Lydgate, which I wished

to put into your own hands.”

She laid down the letter on the small table which had checked her

retreat, and then including Rosamond and Will in one distant glance and

bow, she went quickly out of the room, meeting in the passage the

surprised Martha, who said she was sorry the mistress was not at home,

and then showed the strange lady out with an inward reflection that

grand people were probably more impatient than others.

Dorothea walked across the street with her most elastic step and was

quickly in her carriage again.

“Drive on to Freshitt Hall,” she said to the coachman, and any one

looking at her might have thought that though she was paler than usual

she was never animated by a more self-possessed energy. And that was

really her experience. It was as if she had drunk a great draught of

scorn that stimulated her beyond the susceptibility to other feelings.

She had seen something so far below her belief, that her emotions

rushed back from it and made an excited throng without an object. She

needed something active to turn her excitement out upon. She felt power

to walk and work for a day, without meat or drink. And she would carry

out the purpose with which she had started in the morning, of going to

Freshitt and Tipton to tell Sir James and her uncle all that she wished

them to know about Lydgate, whose married loneliness under his trial

now presented itself to her with new significance, and made her more

ardent in readiness to be his champion. She had never felt anything

like this triumphant power of indignation in the struggle of her

married life, in which there had always been a quickly subduing pang;

and she took it as a sign of new strength.

“Dodo, how very bright your eyes are!” said Celia, when Sir James was

gone out of the room. “And you don’t see anything you look at, Arthur

or anything. You are going to do something uncomfortable, I know. Is it

all about Mr. Lydgate, or has something else happened?” Celia had been

used to watch her sister with expectation.

“Yes, dear, a great many things have happened,” said Dodo, in her full

tones.

“I wonder what,” said Celia, folding her arms cozily and leaning

forward upon them.

“Oh, all the troubles of all people on the face of the earth,” said

Dorothea, lifting her arms to the back of her head.

“Dear me, Dodo, are you going to have a scheme for them?” said Celia, a

little uneasy at this Hamlet-like raving.

But Sir James came in again, ready to accompany Dorothea to the Grange,

and she finished her expedition well, not swerving in her resolution

until she descended at her own door.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

“Would it were yesterday and I i’ the grave,

With her sweet faith above for monument.”

Rosamond and Will stood motionless—they did not know how long—he

looking towards the spot where Dorothea had stood, and she looking

towards him with doubt. It seemed an endless time to Rosamond, in whose

inmost soul there was hardly so much annoyance as gratification from

what had just happened. Shallow natures dream of an easy sway over the

emotions of others, trusting implicitly in their own petty magic to

turn the deepest streams, and confident, by pretty gestures and

remarks, of making the thing that is not as though it were. She knew

that Will had received a severe blow, but she had been little used to

imagining other people’s states of mind except as a material cut into

shape by her own wishes; and she believed in her own power to soothe or

subdue. Even Tertius, that most perverse of men, was always subdued in

the long-run: events had been obstinate, but still Rosamond would have

said now, as she did before her marriage, that she never gave up what

she had set her mind on.

She put out her arm and laid the tips of her fingers on Will’s

coat-sleeve.

“Don’t touch me!” he said, with an utterance like the cut of a lash,

darting from her, and changing from pink to white and back again, as if

his whole frame were tingling with the pain of the sting. He wheeled

round to the other side of the room and stood opposite to her, with the

tips of his fingers in his pockets and his head thrown back, looking

fiercely not at Rosamond but at a point a few inches away from her.

She was keenly offended, but the signs she made of this were such as

only Lydgate was used to interpret. She became suddenly quiet and

seated herself, untying her hanging bonnet and laying it down with her

shawl. Her little hands which she folded before her were very cold.

It would have been safer for Will in the first instance to have taken

up his hat and gone away; but he had felt no impulse to do this; on the

contrary, he had a horrible inclination to stay and shatter Rosamond

with his anger. It seemed as impossible to bear the fatality she had

drawn down on him without venting his fury as it would be to a panther

to bear the javelin-wound without springing and biting. And yet—how

could he tell a woman that he was ready to curse her? He was fuming

under a repressive law which he was forced to acknowledge: he was

dangerously poised, and Rosamond’s voice now brought the decisive

vibration. In flute-like tones of sarcasm she said—

“You can easily go after Mrs. Casaubon and explain your preference.”

“Go after her!” he burst out, with a sharp edge in his voice. “Do you

think she would turn to look at me, or value any word I ever uttered to

her again at more than a dirty feather?—Explain! How can a man explain

at the expense of a woman?”

“You can tell her what you please,” said Rosamond with more tremor.

“Do you suppose she would like me better for sacrificing you? She is

not a woman to be flattered because I made myself despicable—to believe

that I must be true to her because I was a dastard to you.”

He began to move about with the restlessness of a wild animal that sees

prey but cannot reach it. Presently he burst out again—

“I had no hope before—not much—of anything better to come. But I had

one certainty—that she believed in me. Whatever people had said or done

about me, she believed in me.—That’s gone! She’ll never again think me

anything but a paltry pretence—too nice to take heaven except upon

flattering conditions, and yet selling myself for any devil’s change by

the sly. She’ll think of me as an incarnate insult to her, from the

first moment we—”

Will stopped as if he had found himself grasping something that must

not be thrown and shattered. He found another vent for his rage by

snatching up Rosamond’s words again, as if they were reptiles to be

throttled and flung off.

“Explain! Tell a man to explain how he dropped into hell! Explain my

preference! I never had a \_preference\_ for her, any more than I have a

preference for breathing. No other woman exists by the side of her. I

would rather touch her hand if it were dead, than I would touch any

other woman’s living.”

Rosamond, while these poisoned weapons were being hurled at her, was

almost losing the sense of her identity, and seemed to be waking into

some new terrible existence. She had no sense of chill resolute

repulsion, of reticent self-justification such as she had known under

Lydgate’s most stormy displeasure: all her sensibility was turned into

a bewildering novelty of pain; she felt a new terrified recoil under a

lash never experienced before. What another nature felt in opposition

to her own was being burnt and bitten into her consciousness. When Will

had ceased to speak she had become an image of sickened misery: her

lips were pale, and her eyes had a tearless dismay in them. If it had

been Tertius who stood opposite to her, that look of misery would have

been a pang to him, and he would have sunk by her side to comfort her,

with that strong-armed comfort which she had often held very cheap.

Let it be forgiven to Will that he had no such movement of pity. He had

felt no bond beforehand to this woman who had spoiled the ideal

treasure of his life, and he held himself blameless. He knew that he

was cruel, but he had no relenting in him yet.

After he had done speaking, he still moved about, half in absence of

mind, and Rosamond sat perfectly still. At length Will, seeming to

bethink himself, took up his hat, yet stood some moments irresolute. He

had spoken to her in a way that made a phrase of common politeness

difficult to utter; and yet, now that he had come to the point of going

away from her without further speech, he shrank from it as a brutality;

he felt checked and stultified in his anger. He walked towards the

mantel-piece and leaned his arm on it, and waited in silence for—he

hardly knew what. The vindictive fire was still burning in him, and he

could utter no word of retractation; but it was nevertheless in his

mind that having come back to this hearth where he had enjoyed a

caressing friendship he had found calamity seated there—he had had

suddenly revealed to him a trouble that lay outside the home as well as

within it. And what seemed a foreboding was pressing upon him as with

slow pincers:—that his life might come to be enslaved by this helpless

woman who had thrown herself upon him in the dreary sadness of her

heart. But he was in gloomy rebellion against the fact that his quick

apprehensiveness foreshadowed to him, and when his eyes fell on

Rosamond’s blighted face it seemed to him that he was the more pitiable

of the two; for pain must enter into its glorified life of memory

before it can turn into compassion.

And so they remained for many minutes, opposite each other, far apart,

in silence; Will’s face still possessed by a mute rage, and Rosamond’s

by a mute misery. The poor thing had no force to fling out any passion

in return; the terrible collapse of the illusion towards which all her

hope had been strained was a stroke which had too thoroughly shaken

her: her little world was in ruins, and she felt herself tottering in

the midst as a lonely bewildered consciousness.

Will wished that she would speak and bring some mitigating shadow

across his own cruel speech, which seemed to stand staring at them both

in mockery of any attempt at revived fellowship. But she said nothing,

and at last with a desperate effort over himself, he asked, “Shall I

come in and see Lydgate this evening?”

“If you like,” Rosamond answered, just audibly.

And then Will went out of the house, Martha never knowing that he had

been in.

After he was gone, Rosamond tried to get up from her seat, but fell

back fainting. When she came to herself again, she felt too ill to make

the exertion of rising to ring the bell, and she remained helpless

until the girl, surprised at her long absence, thought for the first

time of looking for her in all the down-stairs rooms. Rosamond said

that she had felt suddenly sick and faint, and wanted to be helped

up-stairs. When there she threw herself on the bed with her clothes on,

and lay in apparent torpor, as she had done once before on a memorable

day of grief.

Lydgate came home earlier than he had expected, about half-past five,

and found her there. The perception that she was ill threw every other

thought into the background. When he felt her pulse, her eyes rested on

him with more persistence than they had done for a long while, as if

she felt some content that he was there. He perceived the difference in

a moment, and seating himself by her put his arm gently under her, and

bending over her said, “My poor Rosamond! has something agitated you?”

Clinging to him she fell into hysterical sobbings and cries, and for

the next hour he did nothing but soothe and tend her. He imagined that

Dorothea had been to see her, and that all this effect on her nervous

system, which evidently involved some new turning towards himself, was

due to the excitement of the new impressions which that visit had

raised.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

“Now, I saw in my dream, that just as they had ended their talk, they

drew nigh to a very miry slough, that was in the midst of the plain;

and they, being heedless, did both fall suddenly into the bog. The name

of the slough was Despond.”—BUNYAN.

When Rosamond was quiet, and Lydgate had left her, hoping that she

might soon sleep under the effect of an anodyne, he went into the

drawing-room to fetch a book which he had left there, meaning to spend

the evening in his work-room, and he saw on the table Dorothea’s letter

addressed to him. He had not ventured to ask Rosamond if Mrs. Casaubon

had called, but the reading of this letter assured him of the fact, for

Dorothea mentioned that it was to be carried by herself.

When Will Ladislaw came in a little later Lydgate met him with a

surprise which made it clear that he had not been told of the earlier

visit, and Will could not say, “Did not Mrs. Lydgate tell you that I

came this morning?”

“Poor Rosamond is ill,” Lydgate added immediately on his greeting.

“Not seriously, I hope,” said Will.

“No—only a slight nervous shock—the effect of some agitation. She has

been overwrought lately. The truth is, Ladislaw, I am an unlucky devil.

We have gone through several rounds of purgatory since you left, and I

have lately got on to a worse ledge of it than ever. I suppose you are

only just come down—you look rather battered—you have not been long

enough in the town to hear anything?”

“I travelled all night and got to the White Hart at eight o’clock this

morning. I have been shutting myself up and resting,” said Will,

feeling himself a sneak, but seeing no alternative to this evasion.

And then he heard Lydgate’s account of the troubles which Rosamond had

already depicted to him in her way. She had not mentioned the fact of

Will’s name being connected with the public story—this detail not

immediately affecting her—and he now heard it for the first time.

“I thought it better to tell you that your name is mixed up with the

disclosures,” said Lydgate, who could understand better than most men

how Ladislaw might be stung by the revelation. “You will be sure to

hear it as soon as you turn out into the town. I suppose it is true

that Raffles spoke to you.”

“Yes,” said Will, sardonically. “I shall be fortunate if gossip does

not make me the most disreputable person in the whole affair. I should

think the latest version must be, that I plotted with Raffles to murder

Bulstrode, and ran away from Middlemarch for the purpose.”

He was thinking “Here is a new ring in the sound of my name to

recommend it in her hearing; however—what does it signify now?”

But he said nothing of Bulstrode’s offer to him. Will was very open and

careless about his personal affairs, but it was among the more

exquisite touches in nature’s modelling of him that he had a delicate

generosity which warned him into reticence here. He shrank from saying

that he had rejected Bulstrode’s money, in the moment when he was

learning that it was Lydgate’s misfortune to have accepted it.

Lydgate too was reticent in the midst of his confidence. He made no

allusion to Rosamond’s feeling under their trouble, and of Dorothea he

only said, “Mrs. Casaubon has been the one person to come forward and

say that she had no belief in any of the suspicions against me.”

Observing a change in Will’s face, he avoided any further mention of

her, feeling himself too ignorant of their relation to each other not

to fear that his words might have some hidden painful bearing on it.

And it occurred to him that Dorothea was the real cause of the present

visit to Middlemarch.

The two men were pitying each other, but it was only Will who guessed

the extent of his companion’s trouble. When Lydgate spoke with

desperate resignation of going to settle in London, and said with a

faint smile, “We shall have you again, old fellow,” Will felt

inexpressibly mournful, and said nothing. Rosamond had that morning

entreated him to urge this step on Lydgate; and it seemed to him as if

he were beholding in a magic panorama a future where he himself was

sliding into that pleasureless yielding to the small solicitations of

circumstance, which is a commoner history of perdition than any single

momentous bargain.

We are on a perilous margin when we begin to look passively at our

future selves, and see our own figures led with dull consent into

insipid misdoing and shabby achievement. Poor Lydgate was inwardly

groaning on that margin, and Will was arriving at it. It seemed to him

this evening as if the cruelty of his outburst to Rosamond had made an

obligation for him, and he dreaded the obligation: he dreaded Lydgate’s

unsuspecting good-will: he dreaded his own distaste for his spoiled

life, which would leave him in motiveless levity.

CHAPTER LXXX.

Stern lawgiver! yet thou dost wear

The Godhead’s most benignant grace;

Nor know we anything so fair

As is the smile upon thy face;

Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,

And fragrance in thy footing treads;

Thou dost preserve the Stars from wrong;

And the most ancient Heavens, through thee, are fresh and strong.

—WORDSWORTH: \_Ode to Duty\_.

When Dorothea had seen Mr. Farebrother in the morning, she had promised

to go and dine at the parsonage on her return from Freshitt. There was

a frequent interchange of visits between her and the Farebrother

family, which enabled her to say that she was not at all lonely at the

Manor, and to resist for the present the severe prescription of a lady

companion. When she reached home and remembered her engagement, she was

glad of it; and finding that she had still an hour before she could

dress for dinner, she walked straight to the schoolhouse and entered

into a conversation with the master and mistress about the new bell,

giving eager attention to their small details and repetitions, and

getting up a dramatic sense that her life was very busy. She paused on

her way back to talk to old Master Bunney who was putting in some

garden-seeds, and discoursed wisely with that rural sage about the

crops that would make the most return on a perch of ground, and the

result of sixty years’ experience as to soils—namely, that if your soil

was pretty mellow it would do, but if there came wet, wet, wet to make

it all of a mummy, why then—

Finding that the social spirit had beguiled her into being rather late,

she dressed hastily and went over to the parsonage rather earlier than

was necessary. That house was never dull, Mr. Farebrother, like another

White of Selborne, having continually something new to tell of his

inarticulate guests and \_proteges\_, whom he was teaching the boys not

to torment; and he had just set up a pair of beautiful goats to be pets

of the village in general, and to walk at large as sacred animals. The

evening went by cheerfully till after tea, Dorothea talking more than

usual and dilating with Mr. Farebrother on the possible histories of

creatures that converse compendiously with their antennae, and for

aught we know may hold reformed parliaments; when suddenly some

inarticulate little sounds were heard which called everybody’s

attention.

“Henrietta Noble,” said Mrs. Farebrother, seeing her small sister

moving about the furniture-legs distressfully, “what is the matter?”

“I have lost my tortoise-shell lozenge-box. I fear the kitten has

rolled it away,” said the tiny old lady, involuntarily continuing her

beaver-like notes.

“Is it a great treasure, aunt?” said Mr. Farebrother, putting up his

glasses and looking at the carpet.

“Mr. Ladislaw gave it me,” said Miss Noble. “A German box—very pretty,

but if it falls it always spins away as far as it can.”

“Oh, if it is Ladislaw’s present,” said Mr. Farebrother, in a deep tone

of comprehension, getting up and hunting. The box was found at last

under a chiffonier, and Miss Noble grasped it with delight, saying, “it

was under a fender the last time.”

“That is an affair of the heart with my aunt,” said Mr. Farebrother,

smiling at Dorothea, as he reseated himself.

“If Henrietta Noble forms an attachment to any one, Mrs. Casaubon,”

said his mother, emphatically,—“she is like a dog—she would take their

shoes for a pillow and sleep the better.”

“Mr. Ladislaw’s shoes, I would,” said Henrietta Noble.

Dorothea made an attempt at smiling in return. She was surprised and

annoyed to find that her heart was palpitating violently, and that it

was quite useless to try after a recovery of her former animation.

Alarmed at herself—fearing some further betrayal of a change so marked

in its occasion, she rose and said in a low voice with undisguised

anxiety, “I must go; I have overtired myself.”

Mr. Farebrother, quick in perception, rose and said, “It is true; you

must have half-exhausted yourself in talking about Lydgate. That sort

of work tells upon one after the excitement is over.”

He gave her his arm back to the Manor, but Dorothea did not attempt to

speak, even when he said good-night.

The limit of resistance was reached, and she had sunk back helpless

within the clutch of inescapable anguish. Dismissing Tantripp with a

few faint words, she locked her door, and turning away from it towards

the vacant room she pressed her hands hard on the top of her head, and

moaned out—

“Oh, I did love him!”

Then came the hour in which the waves of suffering shook her too

thoroughly to leave any power of thought. She could only cry in loud

whispers, between her sobs, after her lost belief which she had planted

and kept alive from a very little seed since the days in Rome—after her

lost joy of clinging with silent love and faith to one who, misprized

by others, was worthy in her thought—after her lost woman’s pride of

reigning in his memory—after her sweet dim perspective of hope, that

along some pathway they should meet with unchanged recognition and take

up the backward years as a yesterday.

In that hour she repeated what the merciful eyes of solitude have

looked on for ages in the spiritual struggles of man—she besought

hardness and coldness and aching weariness to bring her relief from the

mysterious incorporeal might of her anguish: she lay on the bare floor

and let the night grow cold around her; while her grand woman’s frame

was shaken by sobs as if she had been a despairing child.

There were two images—two living forms that tore her heart in two, as

if it had been the heart of a mother who seems to see her child divided

by the sword, and presses one bleeding half to her breast while her

gaze goes forth in agony towards the half which is carried away by the

lying woman that has never known the mother’s pang.

Here, with the nearness of an answering smile, here within the

vibrating bond of mutual speech, was the bright creature whom she had

trusted—who had come to her like the spirit of morning visiting the dim

vault where she sat as the bride of a worn-out life; and now, with a

full consciousness which had never awakened before, she stretched out

her arms towards him and cried with bitter cries that their nearness

was a parting vision: she discovered her passion to herself in the

unshrinking utterance of despair.

And there, aloof, yet persistently with her, moving wherever she moved,

was the Will Ladislaw who was a changed belief exhausted of hope, a

detected illusion—no, a living man towards whom there could not yet

struggle any wail of regretful pity, from the midst of scorn and

indignation and jealous offended pride. The fire of Dorothea’s anger

was not easily spent, and it flamed out in fitful returns of spurning

reproach. Why had he come obtruding his life into hers, hers that might

have been whole enough without him? Why had he brought his cheap regard

and his lip-born words to her who had nothing paltry to give in

exchange? He knew that he was deluding her—wished, in the very moment

of farewell, to make her believe that he gave her the whole price of

her heart, and knew that he had spent it half before. Why had he not

stayed among the crowd of whom she asked nothing—but only prayed that

they might be less contemptible?

But she lost energy at last even for her loud-whispered cries and

moans: she subsided into helpless sobs, and on the cold floor she

sobbed herself to sleep.

In the chill hours of the morning twilight, when all was dim around

her, she awoke—not with any amazed wondering where she was or what had

happened, but with the clearest consciousness that she was looking into

the eyes of sorrow. She rose, and wrapped warm things around her, and

seated herself in a great chair where she had often watched before. She

was vigorous enough to have borne that hard night without feeling ill

in body, beyond some aching and fatigue; but she had waked to a new

condition: she felt as if her soul had been liberated from its terrible

conflict; she was no longer wrestling with her grief, but could sit

down with it as a lasting companion and make it a sharer in her

thoughts. For now the thoughts came thickly. It was not in Dorothea’s

nature, for longer than the duration of a paroxysm, to sit in the

narrow cell of her calamity, in the besotted misery of a consciousness

that only sees another’s lot as an accident of its own.

She began now to live through that yesterday morning deliberately

again, forcing herself to dwell on every detail and its possible

meaning. Was she alone in that scene? Was it her event only? She forced

herself to think of it as bound up with another woman’s life—a woman

towards whom she had set out with a longing to carry some clearness and

comfort into her beclouded youth. In her first outleap of jealous

indignation and disgust, when quitting the hateful room, she had flung

away all the mercy with which she had undertaken that visit. She had

enveloped both Will and Rosamond in her burning scorn, and it seemed to

her as if Rosamond were burned out of her sight forever. But that base

prompting which makes a women more cruel to a rival than to a faithless

lover, could have no strength of recurrence in Dorothea when the

dominant spirit of justice within her had once overcome the tumult and

had once shown her the truer measure of things. All the active thought

with which she had before been representing to herself the trials of

Lydgate’s lot, and this young marriage union which, like her own,

seemed to have its hidden as well as evident troubles—all this vivid

sympathetic experience returned to her now as a power: it asserted

itself as acquired knowledge asserts itself and will not let us see as

we saw in the day of our ignorance. She said to her own irremediable

grief, that it should make her more helpful, instead of driving her

back from effort.

And what sort of crisis might not this be in three lives whose contact

with hers laid an obligation on her as if they had been suppliants

bearing the sacred branch? The objects of her rescue were not to be

sought out by her fancy: they were chosen for her. She yearned towards

the perfect Right, that it might make a throne within her, and rule her

errant will. “What should I do—how should I act now, this very day, if

I could clutch my own pain, and compel it to silence, and think of

those three?”

It had taken long for her to come to that question, and there was light

piercing into the room. She opened her curtains, and looked out towards

the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond outside the

entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back

and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures

moving—perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky

was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the

manifold wakings of men to labor and endurance. She was a part of that

involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from

her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish

complaining.

What she would resolve to do that day did not yet seem quite clear, but

something that she could achieve stirred her as with an approaching

murmur which would soon gather distinctness. She took off the clothes

which seemed to have some of the weariness of a hard watching in them,

and began to make her toilet. Presently she rang for Tantripp, who came

in her dressing-gown.

“Why, madam, you’ve never been in bed this blessed night,” burst out

Tantripp, looking first at the bed and then at Dorothea’s face, which

in spite of bathing had the pale cheeks and pink eyelids of a mater

dolorosa. “You’ll kill yourself, you \_will\_. Anybody might think now

you had a right to give yourself a little comfort.”

“Don’t be alarmed, Tantripp,” said Dorothea, smiling. “I have slept; I

am not ill. I shall be glad of a cup of coffee as soon as possible. And

I want you to bring me my new dress; and most likely I shall want my

new bonnet to-day.”

“They’ve lain there a month and more ready for you, madam, and most

thankful I shall be to see you with a couple o’ pounds’ worth less of

crape,” said Tantripp, stooping to light the fire. “There’s a reason in

mourning, as I’ve always said; and three folds at the bottom of your

skirt and a plain quilling in your bonnet—and if ever anybody looked

like an angel, it’s you in a net quilling—is what’s consistent for a

second year. At least, that’s \_my\_ thinking,” ended Tantripp, looking

anxiously at the fire; “and if anybody was to marry me flattering

himself I should wear those hijeous weepers two years for him, he’d be

deceived by his own vanity, that’s all.”

“The fire will do, my good Tan,” said Dorothea, speaking as she used to

do in the old Lausanne days, only with a very low voice; “get me the

coffee.”

She folded herself in the large chair, and leaned her head against it

in fatigued quiescence, while Tantripp went away wondering at this

strange contrariness in her young mistress—that just the morning when

she had more of a widow’s face than ever, she should have asked for her

lighter mourning which she had waived before. Tantripp would never have

found the clew to this mystery. Dorothea wished to acknowledge that she

had not the less an active life before her because she had buried a

private joy; and the tradition that fresh garments belonged to all

initiation, haunting her mind, made her grasp after even that slight

outward help towards calm resolve. For the resolve was not easy.

Nevertheless at eleven o’clock she was walking towards Middlemarch,

having made up her mind that she would make as quietly and unnoticeably

as possible her second attempt to see and save Rosamond.

CHAPTER LXXXI.

Du Erde warst auch diese Nacht beständig,

Und athmest neu erquickt zu meinen Füssen,

Beginnest schon mit Lust mich zu umgeben,

Du regst und rührst ein kräftiges Beschliessen

\_Zum höchsten Dasein immerfort zu streben\_.

—\_Faust:\_ 2r Theil.

When Dorothea was again at Lydgate’s door speaking to Martha, he was in

the room close by with the door ajar, preparing to go out. He heard her

voice, and immediately came to her.

“Do you think that Mrs. Lydgate can receive me this morning?” she said,

having reflected that it would be better to leave out all allusion to

her previous visit.

“I have no doubt she will,” said Lydgate, suppressing his thought about

Dorothea’s looks, which were as much changed as Rosamond’s, “if you

will be kind enough to come in and let me tell her that you are here.

She has not been very well since you were here yesterday, but she is

better this morning, and I think it is very likely that she will be

cheered by seeing you again.”

It was plain that Lydgate, as Dorothea had expected, knew nothing about

the circumstances of her yesterday’s visit; nay, he appeared to imagine

that she had carried it out according to her intention. She had

prepared a little note asking Rosamond to see her, which she would have

given to the servant if he had not been in the way, but now she was in

much anxiety as to the result of his announcement.

After leading her into the drawing-room, he paused to take a letter

from his pocket and put it into her hands, saying, “I wrote this last

night, and was going to carry it to Lowick in my ride. When one is

grateful for something too good for common thanks, writing is less

unsatisfactory than speech—one does not at least \_hear\_ how inadequate

the words are.”

Dorothea’s face brightened. “It is I who have most to thank for, since

you have let me take that place. You \_have\_ consented?” she said,

suddenly doubting.

“Yes, the check is going to Bulstrode to-day.”

He said no more, but went up-stairs to Rosamond, who had but lately

finished dressing herself, and sat languidly wondering what she should

do next, her habitual industry in small things, even in the days of her

sadness, prompting her to begin some kind of occupation, which she

dragged through slowly or paused in from lack of interest. She looked

ill, but had recovered her usual quietude of manner, and Lydgate had

feared to disturb her by any questions. He had told her of Dorothea’s

letter containing the check, and afterwards he had said, “Ladislaw is

come, Rosy; he sat with me last night; I dare say he will be here again

to-day. I thought he looked rather battered and depressed.” And

Rosamond had made no reply.

Now, when he came up, he said to her very gently, “Rosy, dear, Mrs.

Casaubon is come to see you again; you would like to see her, would you

not?” That she colored and gave rather a startled movement did not

surprise him after the agitation produced by the interview yesterday—a

beneficent agitation, he thought, since it seemed to have made her turn

to him again.

Rosamond dared not say no. She dared not with a tone of her voice touch

the facts of yesterday. Why had Mrs. Casaubon come again? The answer

was a blank which Rosamond could only fill up with dread, for Will

Ladislaw’s lacerating words had made every thought of Dorothea a fresh

smart to her. Nevertheless, in her new humiliating uncertainty she

dared do nothing but comply. She did not say yes, but she rose and let

Lydgate put a light shawl over her shoulders, while he said, “I am

going out immediately.” Then something crossed her mind which prompted

her to say, “Pray tell Martha not to bring any one else into the

drawing-room.” And Lydgate assented, thinking that he fully understood

this wish. He led her down to the drawing-room door, and then turned

away, observing to himself that he was rather a blundering husband to

be dependent for his wife’s trust in him on the influence of another

woman.

Rosamond, wrapping her soft shawl around her as she walked towards

Dorothea, was inwardly wrapping her soul in cold reserve. Had Mrs.

Casaubon come to say anything to her about Will? If so, it was a

liberty that Rosamond resented; and she prepared herself to meet every

word with polite impassibility. Will had bruised her pride too sorely

for her to feel any compunction towards him and Dorothea: her own

injury seemed much the greater. Dorothea was not only the “preferred”

woman, but had also a formidable advantage in being Lydgate’s

benefactor; and to poor Rosamond’s pained confused vision it seemed

that this Mrs. Casaubon—this woman who predominated in all things

concerning her—must have come now with the sense of having the

advantage, and with animosity prompting her to use it. Indeed, not

Rosamond only, but any one else, knowing the outer facts of the case,

and not the simple inspiration on which Dorothea acted, might well have

wondered why she came.

Looking like the lovely ghost of herself, her graceful slimness wrapped

in her soft white shawl, the rounded infantine mouth and cheek

inevitably suggesting mildness and innocence, Rosamond paused at three

yards’ distance from her visitor and bowed. But Dorothea, who had taken

off her gloves, from an impulse which she could never resist when she

wanted a sense of freedom, came forward, and with her face full of a

sad yet sweet openness, put out her hand. Rosamond could not avoid

meeting her glance, could not avoid putting her small hand into

Dorothea’s, which clasped it with gentle motherliness; and immediately

a doubt of her own prepossessions began to stir within her. Rosamond’s

eye was quick for faces; she saw that Mrs. Casaubon’s face looked pale

and changed since yesterday, yet gentle, and like the firm softness of

her hand. But Dorothea had counted a little too much on her own

strength: the clearness and intensity of her mental action this morning

were the continuance of a nervous exaltation which made her frame as

dangerously responsive as a bit of finest Venetian crystal; and in

looking at Rosamond, she suddenly found her heart swelling, and was

unable to speak—all her effort was required to keep back tears. She

succeeded in that, and the emotion only passed over her face like the

spirit of a sob; but it added to Rosamond’s impression that Mrs.

Casaubon’s state of mind must be something quite different from what

she had imagined.

So they sat down without a word of preface on the two chairs that

happened to be nearest, and happened also to be close together; though

Rosamond’s notion when she first bowed was that she should stay a long

way off from Mrs. Casaubon. But she ceased thinking how anything would

turn out—merely wondering what would come. And Dorothea began to speak

quite simply, gathering firmness as she went on.

“I had an errand yesterday which I did not finish; that is why I am

here again so soon. You will not think me too troublesome when I tell

you that I came to talk to you about the injustice that has been shown

towards Mr. Lydgate. It will cheer you—will it not?—to know a great

deal about him, that he may not like to speak about himself just

because it is in his own vindication and to his own honor. You will

like to know that your husband has warm friends, who have not left off

believing in his high character? You will let me speak of this without

thinking that I take a liberty?”

The cordial, pleading tones which seemed to flow with generous

heedlessness above all the facts which had filled Rosamond’s mind as

grounds of obstruction and hatred between her and this woman, came as

soothingly as a warm stream over her shrinking fears. Of course Mrs.

Casaubon had the facts in her mind, but she was not going to speak of

anything connected with them. That relief was too great for Rosamond to

feel much else at the moment. She answered prettily, in the new ease of

her soul—

“I know you have been very good. I shall like to hear anything you will

say to me about Tertius.”

“The day before yesterday,” said Dorothea, “when I had asked him to

come to Lowick to give me his opinion on the affairs of the Hospital,

he told me everything about his conduct and feelings in this sad event

which has made ignorant people cast suspicions on him. The reason he

told me was because I was very bold and asked him. I believed that he

had never acted dishonorably, and I begged him to tell me the history.

He confessed to me that he had never told it before, not even to you,

because he had a great dislike to say, ‘I was not wrong,’ as if that

were proof, when there are guilty people who will say so. The truth is,

he knew nothing of this man Raffles, or that there were any bad secrets

about him; and he thought that Mr. Bulstrode offered him the money

because he repented, out of kindness, of having refused it before. All

his anxiety about his patient was to treat him rightly, and he was a

little uncomfortable that the case did not end as he had expected; but

he thought then and still thinks that there may have been no wrong in

it on any one’s part. And I have told Mr. Farebrother, and Mr. Brooke,

and Sir James Chettam: they all believe in your husband. That will

cheer you, will it not? That will give you courage?”

Dorothea’s face had become animated, and as it beamed on Rosamond very

close to her, she felt something like bashful timidity before a

superior, in the presence of this self-forgetful ardor. She said, with

blushing embarrassment, “Thank you: you are very kind.”

“And he felt that he had been so wrong not to pour out everything about

this to you. But you will forgive him. It was because he feels so much

more about your happiness than anything else—he feels his life bound

into one with yours, and it hurts him more than anything, that his

misfortunes must hurt you. He could speak to me because I am an

indifferent person. And then I asked him if I might come to see you;

because I felt so much for his trouble and yours. That is why I came

yesterday, and why I am come to-day. Trouble is so hard to bear, is it

not?— How can we live and think that any one has trouble—piercing

trouble—and we could help them, and never try?”

Dorothea, completely swayed by the feeling that she was uttering,

forgot everything but that she was speaking from out the heart of her

own trial to Rosamond’s. The emotion had wrought itself more and more

into her utterance, till the tones might have gone to one’s very

marrow, like a low cry from some suffering creature in the darkness.

And she had unconsciously laid her hand again on the little hand that

she had pressed before.

Rosamond, with an overmastering pang, as if a wound within her had been

probed, burst into hysterical crying as she had done the day before

when she clung to her husband. Poor Dorothea was feeling a great wave

of her own sorrow returning over her—her thought being drawn to the

possible share that Will Ladislaw might have in Rosamond’s mental

tumult. She was beginning to fear that she should not be able to

suppress herself enough to the end of this meeting, and while her hand

was still resting on Rosamond’s lap, though the hand underneath it was

withdrawn, she was struggling against her own rising sobs. She tried to

master herself with the thought that this might be a turning-point in

three lives—not in her own; no, there the irrevocable had happened,

but—in those three lives which were touching hers with the solemn

neighborhood of danger and distress. The fragile creature who was

crying close to her—there might still be time to rescue her from the

misery of false incompatible bonds; and this moment was unlike any

other: she and Rosamond could never be together again with the same

thrilling consciousness of yesterday within them both. She felt the

relation between them to be peculiar enough to give her a peculiar

influence, though she had no conception that the way in which her own

feelings were involved was fully known to Mrs. Lydgate.

It was a newer crisis in Rosamond’s experience than even Dorothea could

imagine: she was under the first great shock that had shattered her

dream-world in which she had been easily confident of herself and

critical of others; and this strange unexpected manifestation of

feeling in a woman whom she had approached with a shrinking aversion

and dread, as one who must necessarily have a jealous hatred towards

her, made her soul totter all the more with a sense that she had been

walking in an unknown world which had just broken in upon her.

When Rosamond’s convulsed throat was subsiding into calm, and she

withdrew the handkerchief with which she had been hiding her face, her

eyes met Dorothea’s as helplessly as if they had been blue flowers.

What was the use of thinking about behavior after this crying? And

Dorothea looked almost as childish, with the neglected trace of a

silent tear. Pride was broken down between these two.

“We were talking about your husband,” Dorothea said, with some

timidity. “I thought his looks were sadly changed with suffering the

other day. I had not seen him for many weeks before. He said he had

been feeling very lonely in his trial; but I think he would have borne

it all better if he had been able to be quite open with you.”

“Tertius is so angry and impatient if I say anything,” said Rosamond,

imagining that he had been complaining of her to Dorothea. “He ought

not to wonder that I object to speak to him on painful subjects.”

“It was himself he blamed for not speaking,” said Dorothea. “What he

said of you was, that he could not be happy in doing anything which

made you unhappy—that his marriage was of course a bond which must

affect his choice about everything; and for that reason he refused my

proposal that he should keep his position at the Hospital, because that

would bind him to stay in Middlemarch, and he would not undertake to do

anything which would be painful to you. He could say that to me,

because he knows that I had much trial in my marriage, from my

husband’s illness, which hindered his plans and saddened him; and he

knows that I have felt how hard it is to walk always in fear of hurting

another who is tied to us.”

Dorothea waited a little; she had discerned a faint pleasure stealing

over Rosamond’s face. But there was no answer, and she went on, with a

gathering tremor, “Marriage is so unlike everything else. There is

something even awful in the nearness it brings. Even if we loved some

one else better than—than those we were married to, it would be no

use”—poor Dorothea, in her palpitating anxiety, could only seize her

language brokenly—“I mean, marriage drinks up all our power of giving

or getting any blessedness in that sort of love. I know it may be very

dear—but it murders our marriage—and then the marriage stays with us

like a murder—and everything else is gone. And then our husband—if he

loved and trusted us, and we have not helped him, but made a curse in

his life—”

Her voice had sunk very low: there was a dread upon her of presuming

too far, and of speaking as if she herself were perfection addressing

error. She was too much preoccupied with her own anxiety, to be aware

that Rosamond was trembling too; and filled with the need to express

pitying fellowship rather than rebuke, she put her hands on Rosamond’s,

and said with more agitated rapidity,—“I know, I know that the feeling

may be very dear—it has taken hold of us unawares—it is so hard, it may

seem like death to part with it—and we are weak—I am weak—”

The waves of her own sorrow, from out of which she was struggling to

save another, rushed over Dorothea with conquering force. She stopped

in speechless agitation, not crying, but feeling as if she were being

inwardly grappled. Her face had become of a deathlier paleness, her

lips trembled, and she pressed her hands helplessly on the hands that

lay under them.

Rosamond, taken hold of by an emotion stronger than her own—hurried

along in a new movement which gave all things some new, awful,

undefined aspect—could find no words, but involuntarily she put her

lips to Dorothea’s forehead which was very near her, and then for a

minute the two women clasped each other as if they had been in a

shipwreck.

“You are thinking what is not true,” said Rosamond, in an eager

half-whisper, while she was still feeling Dorothea’s arms round

her—urged by a mysterious necessity to free herself from something that

oppressed her as if it were blood guiltiness.

They moved apart, looking at each other.

“When you came in yesterday—it was not as you thought,” said Rosamond

in the same tone.

There was a movement of surprised attention in Dorothea. She expected a

vindication of Rosamond herself.

“He was telling me how he loved another woman, that I might know he

could never love me,” said Rosamond, getting more and more hurried as

she went on. “And now I think he hates me because—because you mistook

him yesterday. He says it is through me that you will think ill of

him—think that he is a false person. But it shall not be through me. He

has never had any love for me—I know he has not—he has always thought

slightly of me. He said yesterday that no other woman existed for him

beside you. The blame of what happened is entirely mine. He said he

could never explain to you—because of me. He said you could never think

well of him again. But now I have told you, and he cannot reproach me

any more.”

Rosamond had delivered her soul under impulses which she had not known

before. She had begun her confession under the subduing influence of

Dorothea’s emotion; and as she went on she had gathered the sense that

she was repelling Will’s reproaches, which were still like a

knife-wound within her.

The revulsion of feeling in Dorothea was too strong to be called joy.

It was a tumult in which the terrible strain of the night and morning

made a resistant pain:—she could only perceive that this would be joy

when she had recovered her power of feeling it. Her immediate

consciousness was one of immense sympathy without check; she cared for

Rosamond without struggle now, and responded earnestly to her last

words—

“No, he cannot reproach you any more.”

With her usual tendency to over-estimate the good in others, she felt a

great outgoing of her heart towards Rosamond, for the generous effort

which had redeemed her from suffering, not counting that the effort was

a reflex of her own energy. After they had been silent a little, she

said—

“You are not sorry that I came this morning?”

“No, you have been very good to me,” said Rosamond. “I did not think

that you would be so good. I was very unhappy. I am not happy now.

Everything is so sad.”

“But better days will come. Your husband will be rightly valued. And he

depends on you for comfort. He loves you best. The worst loss would be

to lose that—and you have not lost it,” said Dorothea.

She tried to thrust away the too overpowering thought of her own

relief, lest she should fail to win some sign that Rosamond’s affection

was yearning back towards her husband.

“Tertius did not find fault with me, then?” said Rosamond,

understanding now that Lydgate might have said anything to Mrs.

Casaubon, and that she certainly was different from other women.

Perhaps there was a faint taste of jealousy in the question. A smile

began to play over Dorothea’s face as she said—

“No, indeed! How could you imagine it?” But here the door opened, and

Lydgate entered.

“I am come back in my quality of doctor,” he said. “After I went away,

I was haunted by two pale faces: Mrs. Casaubon looked as much in need

of care as you, Rosy. And I thought that I had not done my duty in

leaving you together; so when I had been to Coleman’s I came home

again. I noticed that you were walking, Mrs. Casaubon, and the sky has

changed—I think we may have rain. May I send some one to order your

carriage to come for you?”

“Oh, no! I am strong: I need the walk,” said Dorothea, rising with

animation in her face. “Mrs. Lydgate and I have chatted a great deal,

and it is time for me to go. I have always been accused of being

immoderate and saying too much.”

She put out her hand to Rosamond, and they said an earnest, quiet

good-by without kiss or other show of effusion: there had been between

them too much serious emotion for them to use the signs of it

superficially.

As Lydgate took her to the door she said nothing of Rosamond, but told

him of Mr. Farebrother and the other friends who had listened with

belief to his story.

When he came back to Rosamond, she had already thrown herself on the

sofa, in resigned fatigue.

“Well, Rosy,” he said, standing over her, and touching her hair, “what

do you think of Mrs. Casaubon now you have seen so much of her?”

“I think she must be better than any one,” said Rosamond, “and she is

very beautiful. If you go to talk to her so often, you will be more

discontented with me than ever!”

Lydgate laughed at the “so often.” “But has she made you any less

discontented with me?”

“I think she has,” said Rosamond, looking up in his face. “How heavy

your eyes are, Tertius—and do push your hair back.” He lifted up his

large white hand to obey her, and felt thankful for this little mark of

interest in him. Poor Rosamond’s vagrant fancy had come back terribly

scourged—meek enough to nestle under the old despised shelter. And the

shelter was still there: Lydgate had accepted his narrowed lot with sad

resignation. He had chosen this fragile creature, and had taken the

burthen of her life upon his arms. He must walk as he could, carrying

that burthen pitifully.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

“My grief lies onward and my joy behind.”

—SHAKESPEARE: \_Sonnets\_.

Exiles notoriously feed much on hopes, and are unlikely to stay in

banishment unless they are obliged. When Will Ladislaw exiled himself

from Middlemarch he had placed no stronger obstacle to his return than

his own resolve, which was by no means an iron barrier, but simply a

state of mind liable to melt into a minuet with other states of mind,

and to find itself bowing, smiling, and giving place with polite

facility. As the months went on, it had seemed more and more difficult

to him to say why he should not run down to Middlemarch—merely for the

sake of hearing something about Dorothea; and if on such a flying visit

he should chance by some strange coincidence to meet with her, there

was no reason for him to be ashamed of having taken an innocent journey

which he had beforehand supposed that he should not take. Since he was

hopelessly divided from her, he might surely venture into her

neighborhood; and as to the suspicious friends who kept a dragon watch

over her—their opinions seemed less and less important with time and

change of air.

And there had come a reason quite irrespective of Dorothea, which

seemed to make a journey to Middlemarch a sort of philanthropic duty.

Will had given a disinterested attention to an intended settlement on a

new plan in the Far West, and the need for funds in order to carry out

a good design had set him on debating with himself whether it would not

be a laudable use to make of his claim on Bulstrode, to urge the

application of that money which had been offered to himself as a means

of carrying out a scheme likely to be largely beneficial. The question

seemed a very dubious one to Will, and his repugnance to again entering

into any relation with the banker might have made him dismiss it

quickly, if there had not arisen in his imagination the probability

that his judgment might be more safely determined by a visit to

Middlemarch.

That was the object which Will stated to himself as a reason for coming

down. He had meant to confide in Lydgate, and discuss the money

question with him, and he had meant to amuse himself for the few

evenings of his stay by having a great deal of music and badinage with

fair Rosamond, without neglecting his friends at Lowick Parsonage:—if

the Parsonage was close to the Manor, that was no fault of his. He had

neglected the Farebrothers before his departure, from a proud

resistance to the possible accusation of indirectly seeking interviews

with Dorothea; but hunger tames us, and Will had become very hungry for

the vision of a certain form and the sound of a certain voice. Nothing

had done instead—not the opera, or the converse of zealous politicians,

or the flattering reception (in dim corners) of his new hand in leading

articles.

Thus he had come down, foreseeing with confidence how almost everything

would be in his familiar little world; fearing, indeed, that there

would be no surprises in his visit. But he had found that humdrum world

in a terribly dynamic condition, in which even badinage and lyrism had

turned explosive; and the first day of this visit had become the most

fatal epoch of his life. The next morning he felt so harassed with the

nightmare of consequences—he dreaded so much the immediate issues

before him—that seeing while he breakfasted the arrival of the

Riverston coach, he went out hurriedly and took his place on it, that

he might be relieved, at least for a day, from the necessity of doing

or saying anything in Middlemarch. Will Ladislaw was in one of those

tangled crises which are commoner in experience than one might imagine,

from the shallow absoluteness of men’s judgments. He had found Lydgate,

for whom he had the sincerest respect, under circumstances which

claimed his thorough and frankly declared sympathy; and the reason why,

in spite of that claim, it would have been better for Will to have

avoided all further intimacy, or even contact, with Lydgate, was

precisely of the kind to make such a course appear impossible. To a

creature of Will’s susceptible temperament—without any neutral region

of indifference in his nature, ready to turn everything that befell him

into the collisions of a passionate drama—the revelation that Rosamond

had made her happiness in any way dependent on him was a difficulty

which his outburst of rage towards her had immeasurably increased for

him. He hated his own cruelty, and yet he dreaded to show the fulness

of his relenting: he must go to her again; the friendship could not be

put to a sudden end; and her unhappiness was a power which he dreaded.

And all the while there was no more foretaste of enjoyment in the life

before him than if his limbs had been lopped off and he was making his

fresh start on crutches. In the night he had debated whether he should

not get on the coach, not for Riverston, but for London, leaving a note

to Lydgate which would give a makeshift reason for his retreat. But

there were strong cords pulling him back from that abrupt departure:

the blight on his happiness in thinking of Dorothea, the crushing of

that chief hope which had remained in spite of the acknowledged

necessity for renunciation, was too fresh a misery for him to resign

himself to it and go straightway into a distance which was also

despair.

Thus he did nothing more decided than taking the Riverston coach. He

came back again by it while it was still daylight, having made up his

mind that he must go to Lydgate’s that evening. The Rubicon, we know,

was a very insignificant stream to look at; its significance lay

entirely in certain invisible conditions. Will felt as if he were

forced to cross his small boundary ditch, and what he saw beyond it was

not empire, but discontented subjection.

But it is given to us sometimes even in our every-day life to witness

the saving influence of a noble nature, the divine efficacy of rescue

that may lie in a self-subduing act of fellowship. If Dorothea, after

her night’s anguish, had not taken that walk to Rosamond—why, she

perhaps would have been a woman who gained a higher character for

discretion, but it would certainly not have been as well for those

three who were on one hearth in Lydgate’s house at half-past seven that

evening.

Rosamond had been prepared for Will’s visit, and she received him with

a languid coldness which Lydgate accounted for by her nervous

exhaustion, of which he could not suppose that it had any relation to

Will. And when she sat in silence bending over a bit of work, he

innocently apologized for her in an indirect way by begging her to lean

backward and rest. Will was miserable in the necessity for playing the

part of a friend who was making his first appearance and greeting to

Rosamond, while his thoughts were busy about her feeling since that

scene of yesterday, which seemed still inexorably to enclose them both,

like the painful vision of a double madness. It happened that nothing

called Lydgate out of the room; but when Rosamond poured out the tea,

and Will came near to fetch it, she placed a tiny bit of folded paper

in his saucer. He saw it and secured it quickly, but as he went back to

his inn he had no eagerness to unfold the paper. What Rosamond had

written to him would probably deepen the painful impressions of the

evening. Still, he opened and read it by his bed-candle. There were

only these few words in her neatly flowing hand:—

“I have told Mrs. Casaubon. She is not under any mistake about you. I

told her because she came to see me and was very kind. You will have

nothing to reproach me with now. I shall not have made any difference

to you.”

The effect of these words was not quite all gladness. As Will dwelt on

them with excited imagination, he felt his cheeks and ears burning at

the thought of what had occurred between Dorothea and Rosamond—at the

uncertainty how far Dorothea might still feel her dignity wounded in

having an explanation of his conduct offered to her. There might still

remain in her mind a changed association with him which made an

irremediable difference—a lasting flaw. With active fancy he wrought

himself into a state of doubt little more easy than that of the man who

has escaped from wreck by night and stands on unknown ground in the

darkness. Until that wretched yesterday—except the moment of vexation

long ago in the very same room and in the very same presence—all their

vision, all their thought of each other, had been as in a world apart,

where the sunshine fell on tall white lilies, where no evil lurked, and

no other soul entered. But now—would Dorothea meet him in that world

again?

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

“And now good-morrow to our waking souls

Which watch not one another out of fear;

For love all love of other sights controls,

And makes one little room, an everywhere.”

—DR. DONNE.

On the second morning after Dorothea’s visit to Rosamond, she had had

two nights of sound sleep, and had not only lost all traces of fatigue,

but felt as if she had a great deal of superfluous strength—that is to

say, more strength than she could manage to concentrate on any

occupation. The day before, she had taken long walks outside the

grounds, and had paid two visits to the Parsonage; but she never in her

life told any one the reason why she spent her time in that fruitless

manner, and this morning she was rather angry with herself for her

childish restlessness. To-day was to be spent quite differently. What

was there to be done in the village? Oh dear! nothing. Everybody was

well and had flannel; nobody’s pig had died; and it was Saturday

morning, when there was a general scrubbing of doors and door-stones,

and when it was useless to go into the school. But there were various

subjects that Dorothea was trying to get clear upon, and she resolved

to throw herself energetically into the gravest of all. She sat down in

the library before her particular little heap of books on political

economy and kindred matters, out of which she was trying to get light

as to the best way of spending money so as not to injure one’s

neighbors, or—what comes to the same thing—so as to do them the most

good. Here was a weighty subject which, if she could but lay hold of

it, would certainly keep her mind steady. Unhappily her mind slipped

off it for a whole hour; and at the end she found herself reading

sentences twice over with an intense consciousness of many things, but

not of any one thing contained in the text. This was hopeless. Should

she order the carriage and drive to Tipton? No; for some reason or

other she preferred staying at Lowick. But her vagrant mind must be

reduced to order: there was an art in self-discipline; and she walked

round and round the brown library considering by what sort of manoeuvre

she could arrest her wandering thoughts. Perhaps a mere task was the

best means—something to which she must go doggedly. Was there not the

geography of Asia Minor, in which her slackness had often been rebuked

by Mr. Casaubon? She went to the cabinet of maps and unrolled one: this

morning she might make herself finally sure that Paphlagonia was not on

the Levantine coast, and fix her total darkness about the Chalybes

firmly on the shores of the Euxine. A map was a fine thing to study

when you were disposed to think of something else, being made up of

names that would turn into a chime if you went back upon them. Dorothea

set earnestly to work, bending close to her map, and uttering the names

in an audible, subdued tone, which often got into a chime. She looked

amusingly girlish after all her deep experience—nodding her head and

marking the names off on her fingers, with a little pursing of her lip,

and now and then breaking off to put her hands on each side of her face

and say, “Oh dear! oh dear!”

There was no reason why this should end any more than a merry-go-round;

but it was at last interrupted by the opening of the door and the

announcement of Miss Noble.

The little old lady, whose bonnet hardly reached Dorothea’s shoulder,

was warmly welcomed, but while her hand was being pressed she made many

of her beaver-like noises, as if she had something difficult to say.

“Do sit down,” said Dorothea, rolling a chair forward. “Am I wanted for

anything? I shall be so glad if I can do anything.”

“I will not stay,” said Miss Noble, putting her hand into her small

basket, and holding some article inside it nervously; “I have left a

friend in the churchyard.” She lapsed into her inarticulate sounds, and

unconsciously drew forth the article which she was fingering. It was

the tortoise-shell lozenge-box, and Dorothea felt the color mounting to

her cheeks.

“Mr. Ladislaw,” continued the timid little woman. “He fears he has

offended you, and has begged me to ask if you will see him for a few

minutes.”

Dorothea did not answer on the instant: it was crossing her mind that

she could not receive him in this library, where her husband’s

prohibition seemed to dwell. She looked towards the window. Could she

go out and meet him in the grounds? The sky was heavy, and the trees

had begun to shiver as at a coming storm. Besides, she shrank from

going out to him.

“Do see him, Mrs. Casaubon,” said Miss Noble, pathetically; “else I

must go back and say No, and that will hurt him.”

“Yes, I will see him,” said Dorothea. “Pray tell him to come.”

What else was there to be done? There was nothing that she longed for

at that moment except to see Will: the possibility of seeing him had

thrust itself insistently between her and every other object; and yet

she had a throbbing excitement like an alarm upon her—a sense that she

was doing something daringly defiant for his sake.

When the little lady had trotted away on her mission, Dorothea stood in

the middle of the library with her hands falling clasped before her,

making no attempt to compose herself in an attitude of dignified

unconsciousness. What she was least conscious of just then was her own

body: she was thinking of what was likely to be in Will’s mind, and of

the hard feelings that others had had about him. How could any duty

bind her to hardness? Resistance to unjust dispraise had mingled with

her feeling for him from the very first, and now in the rebound of her

heart after her anguish the resistance was stronger than ever. “If I

love him too much it is because he has been used so ill:”—there was a

voice within her saying this to some imagined audience in the library,

when the door was opened, and she saw Will before her.

She did not move, and he came towards her with more doubt and timidity

in his face than she had ever seen before. He was in a state of

uncertainty which made him afraid lest some look or word of his should

condemn him to a new distance from her; and Dorothea was afraid of her

\_own\_ emotion. She looked as if there were a spell upon her, keeping

her motionless and hindering her from unclasping her hands, while some

intense, grave yearning was imprisoned within her eyes. Seeing that she

did not put out her hand as usual, Will paused a yard from her and said

with embarrassment, “I am so grateful to you for seeing me.”

“I wanted to see you,” said Dorothea, having no other words at command.

It did not occur to her to sit down, and Will did not give a cheerful

interpretation to this queenly way of receiving him; but he went on to

say what he had made up his mind to say.

“I fear you think me foolish and perhaps wrong for coming back so soon.

I have been punished for my impatience. You know—every one knows now—a

painful story about my parentage. I knew of it before I went away, and

I always meant to tell you of it if—if we ever met again.”

There was a slight movement in Dorothea, and she unclasped her hands,

but immediately folded them over each other.

“But the affair is matter of gossip now,” Will continued. “I wished you

to know that something connected with it—something which happened

before I went away, helped to bring me down here again. At least I

thought it excused my coming. It was the idea of getting Bulstrode to

apply some money to a public purpose—some money which he had thought of

giving me. Perhaps it is rather to Bulstrode’s credit that he privately

offered me compensation for an old injury: he offered to give me a good

income to make amends; but I suppose you know the disagreeable story?”

Will looked doubtfully at Dorothea, but his manner was gathering some

of the defiant courage with which he always thought of this fact in his

destiny. He added, “You know that it must be altogether painful to me.”

“Yes—yes—I know,” said Dorothea, hastily.

“I did not choose to accept an income from such a source. I was sure

that you would not think well of me if I did so,” said Will. Why should

he mind saying anything of that sort to her now? She knew that he had

avowed his love for her. “I felt that”—he broke off, nevertheless.

“You acted as I should have expected you to act,” said Dorothea, her

face brightening and her head becoming a little more erect on its

beautiful stem.

“I did not believe that you would let any circumstance of my birth

create a prejudice in you against me, though it was sure to do so in

others,” said Will, shaking his head backward in his old way, and

looking with a grave appeal into her eyes.

“If it were a new hardship it would be a new reason for me to cling to

you,” said Dorothea, fervidly. “Nothing could have changed me but—” her

heart was swelling, and it was difficult to go on; she made a great

effort over herself to say in a low tremulous voice, “but thinking that

you were different—not so good as I had believed you to be.”

“You are sure to believe me better than I am in everything but one,”

said Will, giving way to his own feeling in the evidence of hers. “I

mean, in my truth to you. When I thought you doubted of that, I didn’t

care about anything that was left. I thought it was all over with me,

and there was nothing to try for—only things to endure.”

“I don’t doubt you any longer,” said Dorothea, putting out her hand; a

vague fear for him impelling her unutterable affection.

He took her hand and raised it to his lips with something like a sob.

But he stood with his hat and gloves in the other hand, and might have

done for the portrait of a Royalist. Still it was difficult to loose

the hand, and Dorothea, withdrawing it in a confusion that distressed

her, looked and moved away.

“See how dark the clouds have become, and how the trees are tossed,”

she said, walking towards the window, yet speaking and moving with only

a dim sense of what she was doing.

Will followed her at a little distance, and leaned against the tall

back of a leather chair, on which he ventured now to lay his hat and

gloves, and free himself from the intolerable durance of formality to

which he had been for the first time condemned in Dorothea’s presence.

It must be confessed that he felt very happy at that moment leaning on

the chair. He was not much afraid of anything that she might feel now.

They stood silent, not looking at each other, but looking at the

evergreens which were being tossed, and were showing the pale underside

of their leaves against the blackening sky. Will never enjoyed the

prospect of a storm so much: it delivered him from the necessity of

going away. Leaves and little branches were hurled about, and the

thunder was getting nearer. The light was more and more sombre, but

there came a flash of lightning which made them start and look at each

other, and then smile. Dorothea began to say what she had been thinking

of.

“That was a wrong thing for you to say, that you would have had nothing

to try for. If we had lost our own chief good, other people’s good

would remain, and that is worth trying for. Some can be happy. I seemed

to see that more clearly than ever, when I was the most wretched. I can

hardly think how I could have borne the trouble, if that feeling had

not come to me to make strength.”

“You have never felt the sort of misery I felt,” said Will; “the misery

of knowing that you must despise me.”

“But I have felt worse—it was worse to think ill—” Dorothea had begun

impetuously, but broke off.

Will colored. He had the sense that whatever she said was uttered in

the vision of a fatality that kept them apart. He was silent a moment,

and then said passionately—

“We may at least have the comfort of speaking to each other without

disguise. Since I must go away—since we must always be divided—you may

think of me as one on the brink of the grave.”

While he was speaking there came a vivid flash of lightning which lit

each of them up for the other—and the light seemed to be the terror of

a hopeless love. Dorothea darted instantaneously from the window; Will

followed her, seizing her hand with a spasmodic movement; and so they

stood, with their hands clasped, like two children, looking out on the

storm, while the thunder gave a tremendous crack and roll above them,

and the rain began to pour down. Then they turned their faces towards

each other, with the memory of his last words in them, and they did not

loose each other’s hands.

“There is no hope for me,” said Will. “Even if you loved me as well as

I love you—even if I were everything to you—I shall most likely always

be very poor: on a sober calculation, one can count on nothing but a

creeping lot. It is impossible for us ever to belong to each other. It

is perhaps base of me to have asked for a word from you. I meant to go

away into silence, but I have not been able to do what I meant.”

“Don’t be sorry,” said Dorothea, in her clear tender tones. “I would

rather share all the trouble of our parting.”

Her lips trembled, and so did his. It was never known which lips were

the first to move towards the other lips; but they kissed tremblingly,

and then they moved apart.

The rain was dashing against the window-panes as if an angry spirit

were within it, and behind it was the great swoop of the wind; it was

one of those moments in which both the busy and the idle pause with a

certain awe.

Dorothea sat down on the seat nearest to her, a long low ottoman in the

middle of the room, and with her hands folded over each other on her

lap, looked at the drear outer world. Will stood still an instant

looking at her, then seated himself beside her, and laid his hand on

hers, which turned itself upward to be clasped. They sat in that way

without looking at each other, until the rain abated and began to fall

in stillness. Each had been full of thoughts which neither of them

could begin to utter.

But when the rain was quiet, Dorothea turned to look at Will. With

passionate exclamation, as if some torture screw were threatening him,

he started up and said, “It is impossible!”

He went and leaned on the back of the chair again, and seemed to be

battling with his own anger, while she looked towards him sadly.

“It is as fatal as a murder or any other horror that divides people,”

he burst out again; “it is more intolerable—to have our life maimed by

petty accidents.”

“No—don’t say that—your life need not be maimed,” said Dorothea,

gently.

“Yes, it must,” said Will, angrily. “It is cruel of you to speak in

that way—as if there were any comfort. You may see beyond the misery of

it, but I don’t. It is unkind—it is throwing back my love for you as if

it were a trifle, to speak in that way in the face of the fact. We can

never be married.”

“Some time—we might,” said Dorothea, in a trembling voice.

“When?” said Will, bitterly. “What is the use of counting on any

success of mine? It is a mere toss up whether I shall ever do more than

keep myself decently, unless I choose to sell myself as a mere pen and

a mouthpiece. I can see that clearly enough. I could not offer myself

to any woman, even if she had no luxuries to renounce.”

There was silence. Dorothea’s heart was full of something that she

wanted to say, and yet the words were too difficult. She was wholly

possessed by them: at that moment debate was mute within her. And it

was very hard that she could not say what she wanted to say. Will was

looking out of the window angrily. If he would have looked at her and

not gone away from her side, she thought everything would have been

easier. At last he turned, still resting against the chair, and

stretching his hand automatically towards his hat, said with a sort of

exasperation, “Good-by.”

“Oh, I cannot bear it—my heart will break,” said Dorothea, starting

from her seat, the flood of her young passion bearing down all the

obstructions which had kept her silent—the great tears rising and

falling in an instant: “I don’t mind about poverty—I hate my wealth.”

In an instant Will was close to her and had his arms round her, but she

drew her head back and held his away gently that she might go on

speaking, her large tear-filled eyes looking at his very simply, while

she said in a sobbing childlike way, “We could live quite well on my

own fortune—it is too much—seven hundred a-year—I want so little—no new

clothes—and I will learn what everything costs.”

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

“Though it be songe of old and yonge,

That I sholde be to blame,

Theyrs be the charge, that spoke so large

In hurtynge of my name.”

—\_The Not-Browne Mayde\_.

It was just after the Lords had thrown out the Reform Bill: that

explains how Mr. Cadwallader came to be walking on the slope of the

lawn near the great conservatory at Freshitt Hall, holding the “Times”

in his hands behind him, while he talked with a trout-fisher’s

dispassionateness about the prospects of the country to Sir James

Chettam. Mrs. Cadwallader, the Dowager Lady Chettam, and Celia were

sometimes seated on garden-chairs, sometimes walking to meet little

Arthur, who was being drawn in his chariot, and, as became the

infantine Bouddha, was sheltered by his sacred umbrella with handsome

silken fringe.

The ladies also talked politics, though more fitfully. Mrs. Cadwallader

was strong on the intended creation of peers: she had it for certain

from her cousin that Truberry had gone over to the other side entirely

at the instigation of his wife, who had scented peerages in the air

from the very first introduction of the Reform question, and would sign

her soul away to take precedence of her younger sister, who had married

a baronet. Lady Chettam thought that such conduct was very

reprehensible, and remembered that Mrs. Truberry’s mother was a Miss

Walsingham of Melspring. Celia confessed it was nicer to be “Lady” than

“Mrs.,” and that Dodo never minded about precedence if she could have

her own way. Mrs. Cadwallader held that it was a poor satisfaction to

take precedence when everybody about you knew that you had not a drop

of good blood in your veins; and Celia again, stopping to look at

Arthur, said, “It would be very nice, though, if he were a Viscount—and

his lordship’s little tooth coming through! He might have been, if

James had been an Earl.”

“My dear Celia,” said the Dowager, “James’s title is worth far more

than any new earldom. I never wished his father to be anything else

than Sir James.”

“Oh, I only meant about Arthur’s little tooth,” said Celia,

comfortably. “But see, here is my uncle coming.”

She tripped off to meet her uncle, while Sir James and Mr. Cadwallader

came forward to make one group with the ladies. Celia had slipped her

arm through her uncle’s, and he patted her hand with a rather

melancholy “Well, my dear!” As they approached, it was evident that Mr.

Brooke was looking dejected, but this was fully accounted for by the

state of politics; and as he was shaking hands all round without more

greeting than a “Well, you’re all here, you know,” the Rector said,

laughingly—

“Don’t take the throwing out of the Bill so much to heart, Brooke;

you’ve got all the riff-raff of the country on your side.”

“The Bill, eh? ah!” said Mr. Brooke, with a mild distractedness of

manner. “Thrown out, you know, eh? The Lords are going too far, though.

They’ll have to pull up. Sad news, you know. I mean, here at home—sad

news. But you must not blame me, Chettam.”

“What is the matter?” said Sir James. “Not another gamekeeper shot, I

hope? It’s what I should expect, when a fellow like Trapping Bass is

let off so easily.”

“Gamekeeper? No. Let us go in; I can tell you all in the house, you

know,” said Mr. Brooke, nodding at the Cadwalladers, to show that he

included them in his confidence. “As to poachers like Trapping Bass,

you know, Chettam,” he continued, as they were entering, “when you are

a magistrate, you’ll not find it so easy to commit. Severity is all

very well, but it’s a great deal easier when you’ve got somebody to do

it for you. You have a soft place in your heart yourself, you

know—you’re not a Draco, a Jeffreys, that sort of thing.”

Mr. Brooke was evidently in a state of nervous perturbation. When he

had something painful to tell, it was usually his way to introduce it

among a number of disjointed particulars, as if it were a medicine that

would get a milder flavor by mixing. He continued his chat with Sir

James about the poachers until they were all seated, and Mrs.

Cadwallader, impatient of this drivelling, said—

“I’m dying to know the sad news. The gamekeeper is not shot: that is

settled. What is it, then?”

“Well, it’s a very trying thing, you know,” said Mr. Brooke. “I’m glad

you and the Rector are here; it’s a family matter—but you will help us

all to bear it, Cadwallader. I’ve got to break it to you, my dear.”

Here Mr. Brooke looked at Celia—“You’ve no notion what it is, you know.

And, Chettam, it will annoy you uncommonly—but, you see, you have not

been able to hinder it, any more than I have. There’s something

singular in things: they come round, you know.”

“It must be about Dodo,” said Celia, who had been used to think of her

sister as the dangerous part of the family machinery. She had seated

herself on a low stool against her husband’s knee.

“For God’s sake let us hear what it is!” said Sir James.

“Well, you know, Chettam, I couldn’t help Casaubon’s will: it was a

sort of will to make things worse.”

“Exactly,” said Sir James, hastily. “But \_what\_ is worse?”

“Dorothea is going to be married again, you know,” said Mr. Brooke,

nodding towards Celia, who immediately looked up at her husband with a

frightened glance, and put her hand on his knee. Sir James was almost

white with anger, but he did not speak.

“Merciful heaven!” said Mrs. Cadwallader. “Not to \_young\_ Ladislaw?”

Mr. Brooke nodded, saying, “Yes; to Ladislaw,” and then fell into a

prudential silence.

“You see, Humphrey!” said Mrs. Cadwallader, waving her arm towards her

husband. “Another time you will admit that I have some foresight; or

rather you will contradict me and be just as blind as ever. \_You\_

supposed that the young gentleman was gone out of the country.”

“So he might be, and yet come back,” said the Rector, quietly.

“When did you learn this?” said Sir James, not liking to hear any one

else speak, though finding it difficult to speak himself.

“Yesterday,” said Mr. Brooke, meekly. “I went to Lowick. Dorothea sent

for me, you know. It had come about quite suddenly—neither of them had

any idea two days ago—not any idea, you know. There’s something

singular in things. But Dorothea is quite determined—it is no use

opposing. I put it strongly to her. I did my duty, Chettam. But she can

act as she likes, you know.”

“It would have been better if I had called him out and shot him a year

ago,” said Sir James, not from bloody-mindedness, but because he needed

something strong to say.

“Really, James, that would have been very disagreeable,” said Celia.

“Be reasonable, Chettam. Look at the affair more quietly,” said Mr.

Cadwallader, sorry to see his good-natured friend so overmastered by

anger.

“That is not so very easy for a man of any dignity—with any sense of

right—when the affair happens to be in his own family,” said Sir James,

still in his white indignation. “It is perfectly scandalous. If

Ladislaw had had a spark of honor he would have gone out of the country

at once, and never shown his face in it again. However, I am not

surprised. The day after Casaubon’s funeral I said what ought to be

done. But I was not listened to.”

“You wanted what was impossible, you know, Chettam,” said Mr. Brooke.

“You wanted him shipped off. I told you Ladislaw was not to be done as

we liked with: he had his ideas. He was a remarkable fellow—I always

said he was a remarkable fellow.”

“Yes,” said Sir James, unable to repress a retort, “it is rather a pity

you formed that high opinion of him. We are indebted to that for his

being lodged in this neighborhood. We are indebted to that for seeing a

woman like Dorothea degrading herself by marrying him.” Sir James made

little stoppages between his clauses, the words not coming easily. “A

man so marked out by her husband’s will, that delicacy ought to have

forbidden her from seeing him again—who takes her out of her proper

rank—into poverty—has the meanness to accept such a sacrifice—has

always had an objectionable position—a bad origin—and, \_I believe\_, is

a man of little principle and light character. That is my opinion.” Sir

James ended emphatically, turning aside and crossing his leg.

“I pointed everything out to her,” said Mr. Brooke, apologetically—“I

mean the poverty, and abandoning her position. I said, ‘My dear, you

don’t know what it is to live on seven hundred a-year, and have no

carriage, and that kind of thing, and go amongst people who don’t know

who you are.’ I put it strongly to her. But I advise you to talk to

Dorothea herself. The fact is, she has a dislike to Casaubon’s

property. You will hear what she says, you know.”

“No—excuse me—I shall not,” said Sir James, with more coolness. “I

cannot bear to see her again; it is too painful. It hurts me too much

that a woman like Dorothea should have done what is wrong.”

“Be just, Chettam,” said the easy, large-lipped Rector, who objected to

all this unnecessary discomfort. “Mrs. Casaubon may be acting

imprudently: she is giving up a fortune for the sake of a man, and we

men have so poor an opinion of each other that we can hardly call a

woman wise who does that. But I think you should not condemn it as a

wrong action, in the strict sense of the word.”

“Yes, I do,” answered Sir James. “I think that Dorothea commits a wrong

action in marrying Ladislaw.”

“My dear fellow, we are rather apt to consider an act wrong because it

is unpleasant to us,” said the Rector, quietly. Like many men who take

life easily, he had the knack of saying a home truth occasionally to

those who felt themselves virtuously out of temper. Sir James took out

his handkerchief and began to bite the corner.

“It is very dreadful of Dodo, though,” said Celia, wishing to justify

her husband. “She said she \_never would\_ marry again—not anybody at

all.”

“I heard her say the same thing myself,” said Lady Chettam,

majestically, as if this were royal evidence.

“Oh, there is usually a silent exception in such cases,” said Mrs.

Cadwallader. “The only wonder to me is, that any of you are surprised.

You did nothing to hinder it. If you would have had Lord Triton down

here to woo her with his philanthropy, he might have carried her off

before the year was over. There was no safety in anything else. Mr.

Casaubon had prepared all this as beautifully as possible. He made

himself disagreeable—or it pleased God to make him so—and then he dared

her to contradict him. It’s the way to make any trumpery tempting, to

ticket it at a high price in that way.”

“I don’t know what you mean by wrong, Cadwallader,” said Sir James,

still feeling a little stung, and turning round in his chair towards

the Rector. “He’s not a man we can take into the family. At least, I

must speak for myself,” he continued, carefully keeping his eyes off

Mr. Brooke. “I suppose others will find his society too pleasant to

care about the propriety of the thing.”

“Well, you know, Chettam,” said Mr. Brooke, good-humoredly, nursing his

leg, “I can’t turn my back on Dorothea. I must be a father to her up to

a certain point. I said, ‘My dear, I won’t refuse to give you away.’ I

had spoken strongly before. But I can cut off the entail, you know. It

will cost money and be troublesome; but I can do it, you know.”

Mr. Brooke nodded at Sir James, and felt that he was both showing his

own force of resolution and propitiating what was just in the Baronet’s

vexation. He had hit on a more ingenious mode of parrying than he was

aware of. He had touched a motive of which Sir James was ashamed. The

mass of his feeling about Dorothea’s marriage to Ladislaw was due

partly to excusable prejudice, or even justifiable opinion, partly to a

jealous repugnance hardly less in Ladislaw’s case than in Casaubon’s.

He was convinced that the marriage was a fatal one for Dorothea. But

amid that mass ran a vein of which he was too good and honorable a man

to like the avowal even to himself: it was undeniable that the union of

the two estates—Tipton and Freshitt—lying charmingly within a

ring-fence, was a prospect that flattered him for his son and heir.

Hence when Mr. Brooke noddingly appealed to that motive, Sir James felt

a sudden embarrassment; there was a stoppage in his throat; he even

blushed. He had found more words than usual in the first jet of his

anger, but Mr. Brooke’s propitiation was more clogging to his tongue

than Mr. Cadwallader’s caustic hint.

But Celia was glad to have room for speech after her uncle’s suggestion

of the marriage ceremony, and she said, though with as little eagerness

of manner as if the question had turned on an invitation to dinner, “Do

you mean that Dodo is going to be married directly, uncle?”

“In three weeks, you know,” said Mr. Brooke, helplessly. “I can do

nothing to hinder it, Cadwallader,” he added, turning for a little

countenance toward the Rector, who said—

“\_I\_ should not make any fuss about it. If she likes to be poor, that

is her affair. Nobody would have said anything if she had married the

young fellow because he was rich. Plenty of beneficed clergy are poorer

than they will be. Here is Elinor,” continued the provoking husband;

“she vexed her friends by me: I had hardly a thousand a-year—I was a

lout—nobody could see anything in me—my shoes were not the right

cut—all the men wondered how a woman could like me. Upon my word, I

must take Ladislaw’s part until I hear more harm of him.”

“Humphrey, that is all sophistry, and you know it,” said his wife.

“Everything is all one—that is the beginning and end with you. As if

you had not been a Cadwallader! Does any one suppose that I would have

taken such a monster as you by any other name?”

“And a clergyman too,” observed Lady Chettam with approbation. “Elinor

cannot be said to have descended below her rank. It is difficult to say

what Mr. Ladislaw is, eh, James?”

Sir James gave a small grunt, which was less respectful than his usual

mode of answering his mother. Celia looked up at him like a thoughtful

kitten.

“It must be admitted that his blood is a frightful mixture!” said Mrs.

Cadwallader. “The Casaubon cuttle-fish fluid to begin with, and then a

rebellious Polish fiddler or dancing-master, was it?—and then an old

clo—”

“Nonsense, Elinor,” said the Rector, rising. “It is time for us to go.”

“After all, he is a pretty sprig,” said Mrs. Cadwallader, rising too,

and wishing to make amends. “He is like the fine old Crichley portraits

before the idiots came in.”

“I’ll go with you,” said Mr. Brooke, starting up with alacrity. “You

must all come and dine with me to-morrow, you know—eh, Celia, my dear?”

“You will, James—won’t you?” said Celia, taking her husband’s hand.

“Oh, of course, if you like,” said Sir James, pulling down his

waistcoat, but unable yet to adjust his face good-humoredly. “That is

to say, if it is not to meet anybody else.”

“No, no, no,” said Mr. Brooke, understanding the condition. “Dorothea

would not come, you know, unless you had been to see her.”

When Sir James and Celia were alone, she said, “Do you mind about my

having the carriage to go to Lowick, James?”

“What, now, directly?” he answered, with some surprise.

“Yes, it is very important,” said Celia.

“Remember, Celia, I cannot see her,” said Sir James.

“Not if she gave up marrying?”

“What is the use of saying that?—however, I’m going to the stables.

I’ll tell Briggs to bring the carriage round.”

Celia thought it was of great use, if not to say that, at least to take

a journey to Lowick in order to influence Dorothea’s mind. All through

their girlhood she had felt that she could act on her sister by a word

judiciously placed—by opening a little window for the daylight of her

own understanding to enter among the strange colored lamps by which

Dodo habitually saw. And Celia the matron naturally felt more able to

advise her childless sister. How could any one understand Dodo so well

as Celia did or love her so tenderly?

Dorothea, busy in her boudoir, felt a glow of pleasure at the sight of

her sister so soon after the revelation of her intended marriage. She

had prefigured to herself, even with exaggeration, the disgust of her

friends, and she had even feared that Celia might be kept aloof from

her.

“O Kitty, I am delighted to see you!” said Dorothea, putting her hands

on Celia’s shoulders, and beaming on her. “I almost thought you would

not come to me.”

“I have not brought Arthur, because I was in a hurry,” said Celia, and

they sat down on two small chairs opposite each other, with their knees

touching.

“You know, Dodo, it is very bad,” said Celia, in her placid guttural,

looking as prettily free from humors as possible. “You have

disappointed us all so. And I can’t think that it ever \_will\_ be—you

never can go and live in that way. And then there are all your plans!

You never can have thought of that. James would have taken any trouble

for you, and you might have gone on all your life doing what you

liked.”

“On the contrary, dear,” said Dorothea, “I never could do anything that

I liked. I have never carried out any plan yet.”

“Because you always wanted things that wouldn’t do. But other plans

would have come. And how \_can\_ you marry Mr. Ladislaw, that we none of

us ever thought you \_could\_ marry? It shocks James so dreadfully. And

then it is all so different from what you have always been. You would

have Mr. Casaubon because he had such a great soul, and was so old and

dismal and learned; and now, to think of marrying Mr. Ladislaw, who has

got no estate or anything. I suppose it is because you must be making

yourself uncomfortable in some way or other.”

Dorothea laughed.

“Well, it is very serious, Dodo,” said Celia, becoming more impressive.

“How will you live? and you will go away among queer people. And I

shall never see you—and you won’t mind about little Arthur—and I

thought you always would—”

Celia’s rare tears had got into her eyes, and the corners of her mouth

were agitated.

“Dear Celia,” said Dorothea, with tender gravity, “if you don’t ever

see me, it will not be my fault.”

“Yes, it will,” said Celia, with the same touching distortion of her

small features. “How can I come to you or have you with me when James

can’t bear it?—that is because he thinks it is not right—he thinks you

are so wrong, Dodo. But you always were wrong: only I can’t help loving

you. And nobody can think where you will live: where can you go?”

“I am going to London,” said Dorothea.

“How can you always live in a street? And you will be so poor. I could

give you half my things, only how can I, when I never see you?”

“Bless you, Kitty,” said Dorothea, with gentle warmth. “Take comfort:

perhaps James will forgive me some time.”

“But it would be much better if you would not be married,” said Celia,

drying her eyes, and returning to her argument; “then there would be

nothing uncomfortable. And you would not do what nobody thought you

could do. James always said you ought to be a queen; but this is not at

all being like a queen. You know what mistakes you have always been

making, Dodo, and this is another. Nobody thinks Mr. Ladislaw a proper

husband for you. And you \_said\_ you would never be married again.”

“It is quite true that I might be a wiser person, Celia,” said

Dorothea, “and that I might have done something better, if I had been

better. But this is what I am going to do. I have promised to marry Mr.

Ladislaw; and I am going to marry him.”

The tone in which Dorothea said this was a note that Celia had long

learned to recognize. She was silent a few moments, and then said, as

if she had dismissed all contest, “Is he very fond of you, Dodo?”

“I hope so. I am very fond of him.”

“That is nice,” said Celia, comfortably. “Only I would rather you had

such a sort of husband as James is, with a place very near, that I

could drive to.”

Dorothea smiled, and Celia looked rather meditative. Presently she

said, “I cannot think how it all came about.” Celia thought it would be

pleasant to hear the story.

“I dare say not,” said Dorothea, pinching her sister’s chin. “If you

knew how it came about, it would not seem wonderful to you.”

“Can’t you tell me?” said Celia, settling her arms cozily.

“No, dear, you would have to feel with me, else you would never know.”

CHAPTER LXXXV.

“Then went the jury out whose names were Mr. Blindman, Mr. No-good, Mr.

Malice, Mr. Love-lust, Mr. Live-loose, Mr. Heady, Mr. High-mind, Mr.

Enmity, Mr. Liar, Mr. Cruelty, Mr. Hate-light, Mr. Implacable, who

every one gave in his private verdict against him among themselves, and

afterwards unanimously concluded to bring him in guilty before the

judge. And first among themselves, Mr. Blindman, the foreman, said, I

see clearly that this man is a heretic. Then said Mr. No-good, Away

with such a fellow from the earth! Ay, said Mr. Malice, for I hate the

very look of him. Then said Mr. Love-lust, I could never endure him.

Nor I, said Mr. Live-loose; for he would be always condemning my way.

Hang him, hang him, said Mr. Heady. A sorry scrub, said Mr. High-mind.

My heart riseth against him, said Mr. Enmity. He is a rogue, said Mr.

Liar. Hanging is too good for him, said Mr. Cruelty. Let us despatch

him out of the way said Mr. Hate-light. Then said Mr. Implacable, Might

I have all the world given me, I could not be reconciled to him;

therefore let us forthwith bring him in guilty of death.”—\_Pilgrim’s

Progress\_.

When immortal Bunyan makes his picture of the persecuting passions

bringing in their verdict of guilty, who pities Faithful? That is a

rare and blessed lot which some greatest men have not attained, to know

ourselves guiltless before a condemning crowd—to be sure that what we

are denounced for is solely the good in us. The pitiable lot is that of

the man who could not call himself a martyr even though he were to

persuade himself that the men who stoned him were but ugly passions

incarnate—who knows that he is stoned, not for professing the Right,

but for not being the man he professed to be.

This was the consciousness that Bulstrode was withering under while he

made his preparations for departing from Middlemarch, and going to end

his stricken life in that sad refuge, the indifference of new faces.

The duteous merciful constancy of his wife had delivered him from one

dread, but it could not hinder her presence from being still a tribunal

before which he shrank from confession and desired advocacy. His

equivocations with himself about the death of Raffles had sustained the

conception of an Omniscience whom he prayed to, yet he had a terror

upon him which would not let him expose them to judgment by a full

confession to his wife: the acts which he had washed and diluted with

inward argument and motive, and for which it seemed comparatively easy

to win invisible pardon—what name would she call them by? That she

should ever silently call his acts Murder was what he could not bear.

He felt shrouded by her doubt: he got strength to face her from the

sense that she could not yet feel warranted in pronouncing that worst

condemnation on him. Some time, perhaps—when he was dying—he would tell

her all: in the deep shadow of that time, when she held his hand in the

gathering darkness, she might listen without recoiling from his touch.

Perhaps: but concealment had been the habit of his life, and the

impulse to confession had no power against the dread of a deeper

humiliation.

He was full of timid care for his wife, not only because he deprecated

any harshness of judgment from her, but because he felt a deep distress

at the sight of her suffering. She had sent her daughters away to board

at a school on the coast, that this crisis might be hidden from them as

far as possible. Set free by their absence from the intolerable

necessity of accounting for her grief or of beholding their frightened

wonder, she could live unconstrainedly with the sorrow that was every

day streaking her hair with whiteness and making her eyelids languid.

“Tell me anything that you would like to have me do, Harriet,”

Bulstrode had said to her; “I mean with regard to arrangements of

property. It is my intention not to sell the land I possess in this

neighborhood, but to leave it to you as a safe provision. If you have

any wish on such subjects, do not conceal it from me.”

A few days afterwards, when she had returned from a visit to her

brother’s, she began to speak to her husband on a subject which had for

some time been in her mind.

“I \_should\_ like to do something for my brother’s family, Nicholas; and

I think we are bound to make some amends to Rosamond and her husband.

Walter says Mr. Lydgate must leave the town, and his practice is almost

good for nothing, and they have very little left to settle anywhere

with. I would rather do without something for ourselves, to make some

amends to my poor brother’s family.”

Mrs. Bulstrode did not wish to go nearer to the facts than in the

phrase “make some amends;” knowing that her husband must understand

her. He had a particular reason, which she was not aware of, for

wincing under her suggestion. He hesitated before he said—

“It is not possible to carry out your wish in the way you propose, my

dear. Mr. Lydgate has virtually rejected any further service from me.

He has returned the thousand pounds which I lent him. Mrs. Casaubon

advanced him the sum for that purpose. Here is his letter.”

The letter seemed to cut Mrs. Bulstrode severely. The mention of Mrs.

Casaubon’s loan seemed a reflection of that public feeling which held

it a matter of course that every one would avoid a connection with her

husband. She was silent for some time; and the tears fell one after the

other, her chin trembling as she wiped them away. Bulstrode, sitting

opposite to her, ached at the sight of that grief-worn face, which two

months before had been bright and blooming. It had aged to keep sad

company with his own withered features. Urged into some effort at

comforting her, he said—

“There is another means, Harriet, by which I might do a service to your

brother’s family, if you like to act in it. And it would, I think, be

beneficial to you: it would be an advantageous way of managing the land

which I mean to be yours.”

She looked attentive.

“Garth once thought of undertaking the management of Stone Court in

order to place your nephew Fred there. The stock was to remain as it

is, and they were to pay a certain share of the profits instead of an

ordinary rent. That would be a desirable beginning for the young man,

in conjunction with his employment under Garth. Would it be a

satisfaction to you?”

“Yes, it would,” said Mrs. Bulstrode, with some return of energy. “Poor

Walter is so cast down; I would try anything in my power to do him some

good before I go away. We have always been brother and sister.”

“You must make the proposal to Garth yourself, Harriet,” said Mr.

Bulstrode, not liking what he had to say, but desiring the end he had

in view, for other reasons besides the consolation of his wife. “You

must state to him that the land is virtually yours, and that he need

have no transactions with me. Communications can be made through

Standish. I mention this, because Garth gave up being my agent. I can

put into your hands a paper which he himself drew up, stating

conditions; and you can propose his renewed acceptance of them. I think

it is not unlikely that he will accept when you propose the thing for

the sake of your nephew.”

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

“Le cœur se sature d’amour comme d’un sel divin qui le conserve; de là

l’incorruptible adhérence de ceux qui se sont aimés dès l’aube de la

vie, et la fraîcheur des vielles amours prolongées. Il existe un

embaumement d’amour. C’est de Daphnis et Chloé que sont faits Philémon

et Baucis. Cette vieillesse-là, ressemblance du soir avec

l’aurore.”—VICTOR HUGO: \_L’homme qui rit\_.

Mrs. Garth, hearing Caleb enter the passage about tea-time, opened the

parlor-door and said, “There you are, Caleb. Have you had your dinner?”

(Mr. Garth’s meals were much subordinated to “business.”)

“Oh yes, a good dinner—cold mutton and I don’t know what. Where is

Mary?”

“In the garden with Letty, I think.”

“Fred is not come yet?”

“No. Are you going out again without taking tea, Caleb?” said Mrs.

Garth, seeing that her absent-minded husband was putting on again the

hat which he had just taken off.

“No, no; I’m only going to Mary a minute.”

Mary was in a grassy corner of the garden, where there was a swing

loftily hung between two pear-trees. She had a pink kerchief tied over

her head, making a little poke to shade her eyes from the level

sunbeams, while she was giving a glorious swing to Letty, who laughed

and screamed wildly.

Seeing her father, Mary left the swing and went to meet him, pushing

back the pink kerchief and smiling afar off at him with the involuntary

smile of loving pleasure.

“I came to look for you, Mary,” said Mr. Garth. “Let us walk about a

bit.”

Mary knew quite well that her father had something particular to say:

his eyebrows made their pathetic angle, and there was a tender gravity

in his voice: these things had been signs to her when she was Letty’s

age. She put her arm within his, and they turned by the row of

nut-trees.

“It will be a sad while before you can be married, Mary,” said her

father, not looking at her, but at the end of the stick which he held

in his other hand.

“Not a sad while, father—I mean to be merry,” said Mary, laughingly. “I

have been single and merry for four-and-twenty years and more: I

suppose it will not be quite as long again as that.” Then, after a

little pause, she said, more gravely, bending her face before her

father’s, “If you are contented with Fred?”

Caleb screwed up his mouth and turned his head aside wisely.

“Now, father, you did praise him last Wednesday. You said he had an

uncommon notion of stock, and a good eye for things.”

“Did I?” said Caleb, rather slyly.

“Yes, I put it all down, and the date, \_anno Domini\_, and everything,”

said Mary. “You like things to be neatly booked. And then his behavior

to you, father, is really good; he has a deep respect for you; and it

is impossible to have a better temper than Fred has.”

“Ay, ay; you want to coax me into thinking him a fine match.”

“No, indeed, father. I don’t love him because he is a fine match.”

“What for, then?”

“Oh, dear, because I have always loved him. I should never like

scolding any one else so well; and that is a point to be thought of in

a husband.”

“Your mind is quite settled, then, Mary?” said Caleb, returning to his

first tone. “There’s no other wish come into it since things have been

going on as they have been of late?” (Caleb meant a great deal in that

vague phrase;) “because, better late than never. A woman must not force

her heart—she’ll do a man no good by that.”

“My feelings have not changed, father,” said Mary, calmly. “I shall be

constant to Fred as long as he is constant to me. I don’t think either

of us could spare the other, or like any one else better, however much

we might admire them. It would make too great a difference to us—like

seeing all the old places altered, and changing the name for

everything. We must wait for each other a long while; but Fred knows

that.”

Instead of speaking immediately, Caleb stood still and screwed his

stick on the grassy walk. Then he said, with emotion in his voice,

“Well, I’ve got a bit of news. What do you think of Fred going to live

at Stone Court, and managing the land there?”

“How can that ever be, father?” said Mary, wonderingly.

“He would manage it for his aunt Bulstrode. The poor woman has been to

me begging and praying. She wants to do the lad good, and it might be a

fine thing for him. With saving, he might gradually buy the stock, and

he has a turn for farming.”

“Oh, Fred would be so happy! It is too good to believe.”

“Ah, but mind you,” said Caleb, turning his head warningly, “I must

take it on \_my\_ shoulders, and be responsible, and see after

everything; and that will grieve your mother a bit, though she mayn’t

say so. Fred had need be careful.”

“Perhaps it is too much, father,” said Mary, checked in her joy. “There

would be no happiness in bringing you any fresh trouble.”

“Nay, nay; work is my delight, child, when it doesn’t vex your mother.

And then, if you and Fred get married,” here Caleb’s voice shook just

perceptibly, “he’ll be steady and saving; and you’ve got your mother’s

cleverness, and mine too, in a woman’s sort of way; and you’ll keep him

in order. He’ll be coming by-and-by, so I wanted to tell you first,

because I think you’d like to tell \_him\_ by yourself. After that, I

could talk it well over with him, and we could go into business and the

nature of things.”

“Oh, you dear good father!” cried Mary, putting her hands round her

father’s neck, while he bent his head placidly, willing to be caressed.

“I wonder if any other girl thinks her father the best man in the

world!”

“Nonsense, child; you’ll think your husband better.”

“Impossible,” said Mary, relapsing into her usual tone; “husbands are

an inferior class of men, who require keeping in order.”

When they were entering the house with Letty, who had run to join them,

Mary saw Fred at the orchard-gate, and went to meet him.

“What fine clothes you wear, you extravagant youth!” said Mary, as Fred

stood still and raised his hat to her with playful formality. “You are

not learning economy.”

“Now that is too bad, Mary,” said Fred. “Just look at the edges of

these coat-cuffs! It is only by dint of good brushing that I look

respectable. I am saving up three suits—one for a wedding-suit.”

“How very droll you will look!—like a gentleman in an old

fashion-book.”

“Oh no, they will keep two years.”

“Two years! be reasonable, Fred,” said Mary, turning to walk. “Don’t

encourage flattering expectations.”

“Why not? One lives on them better than on unflattering ones. If we

can’t be married in two years, the truth will be quite bad enough when

it comes.”

“I have heard a story of a young gentleman who once encouraged

flattering expectations, and they did him harm.”

“Mary, if you’ve got something discouraging to tell me, I shall bolt; I

shall go into the house to Mr. Garth. I am out of spirits. My father is

so cut up—home is not like itself. I can’t bear any more bad news.”

“Should you call it bad news to be told that you were to live at Stone

Court, and manage the farm, and be remarkably prudent, and save money

every year till all the stock and furniture were your own, and you were

a distinguished agricultural character, as Mr. Borthrop Trumbull

says—rather stout, I fear, and with the Greek and Latin sadly

weather-worn?”

“You don’t mean anything except nonsense, Mary?” said Fred, coloring

slightly nevertheless.

“That is what my father has just told me of as what may happen, and he

never talks nonsense,” said Mary, looking up at Fred now, while he

grasped her hand as they walked, till it rather hurt her; but she would

not complain.

“Oh, I could be a tremendously good fellow then, Mary, and we could be

married directly.”

“Not so fast, sir; how do you know that I would not rather defer our

marriage for some years? That would leave you time to misbehave, and

then if I liked some one else better, I should have an excuse for

jilting you.”

“Pray don’t joke, Mary,” said Fred, with strong feeling. “Tell me

seriously that all this is true, and that you are happy because of

it—because you love me best.”

“It is all true, Fred, and I am happy because of it—because I love you

best,” said Mary, in a tone of obedient recitation.

They lingered on the door-step under the steep-roofed porch, and Fred

almost in a whisper said—

“When we were first engaged, with the umbrella-ring, Mary, you used

to—”

The spirit of joy began to laugh more decidedly in Mary’s eyes, but the

fatal Ben came running to the door with Brownie yapping behind him,

and, bouncing against them, said—

“Fred and Mary! are you ever coming in?—or may I eat your cake?”

FINALE.

Every limit is a beginning as well as an ending. Who can quit young

lives after being long in company with them, and not desire to know

what befell them in their after-years? For the fragment of a life,

however typical, is not the sample of an even web: promises may not be

kept, and an ardent outset may be followed by declension; latent powers

may find their long-waited opportunity; a past error may urge a grand

retrieval.

Marriage, which has been the bourne of so many narratives, is still a

great beginning, as it was to Adam and Eve, who kept their honeymoon in

Eden, but had their first little one among the thorns and thistles of

the wilderness. It is still the beginning of the home epic—the gradual

conquest or irremediable loss of that complete union which makes the

advancing years a climax, and age the harvest of sweet memories in

common.

Some set out, like Crusaders of old, with a glorious equipment of hope

and enthusiasm and get broken by the way, wanting patience with each

other and the world.

All who have cared for Fred Vincy and Mary Garth will like to know that

these two made no such failure, but achieved a solid mutual happiness.

Fred surprised his neighbors in various ways. He became rather

distinguished in his side of the county as a theoretic and practical

farmer, and produced a work on the “Cultivation of Green Crops and the

Economy of Cattle-Feeding” which won him high congratulations at

agricultural meetings. In Middlemarch admiration was more reserved:

most persons there were inclined to believe that the merit of Fred’s

authorship was due to his wife, since they had never expected Fred

Vincy to write on turnips and mangel-wurzel.

But when Mary wrote a little book for her boys, called “Stories of

Great Men, taken from Plutarch,” and had it printed and published by

Gripp & Co., Middlemarch, every one in the town was willing to give the

credit of this work to Fred, observing that he had been to the

University, “where the ancients were studied,” and might have been a

clergyman if he had chosen.

In this way it was made clear that Middlemarch had never been deceived,

and that there was no need to praise anybody for writing a book, since

it was always done by somebody else.

Moreover, Fred remained unswervingly steady. Some years after his

marriage he told Mary that his happiness was half owing to Farebrother,

who gave him a strong pull-up at the right moment. I cannot say that he

was never again misled by his hopefulness: the yield of crops or the

profits of a cattle sale usually fell below his estimate; and he was

always prone to believe that he could make money by the purchase of a

horse which turned out badly—though this, Mary observed, was of course

the fault of the horse, not of Fred’s judgment. He kept his love of

horsemanship, but he rarely allowed himself a day’s hunting; and when

he did so, it was remarkable that he submitted to be laughed at for

cowardliness at the fences, seeming to see Mary and the boys sitting on

the five-barred gate, or showing their curly heads between hedge and

ditch.

There were three boys: Mary was not discontented that she brought forth

men-children only; and when Fred wished to have a girl like her, she

said, laughingly, “that would be too great a trial to your mother.”

Mrs. Vincy in her declining years, and in the diminished lustre of her

housekeeping, was much comforted by her perception that two at least of

Fred’s boys were real Vincys, and did not “feature the Garths.” But

Mary secretly rejoiced that the youngest of the three was very much

what her father must have been when he wore a round jacket, and showed

a marvellous nicety of aim in playing at marbles, or in throwing stones

to bring down the mellow pears.

Ben and Letty Garth, who were uncle and aunt before they were well in

their teens, disputed much as to whether nephews or nieces were more

desirable; Ben contending that it was clear girls were good for less

than boys, else they would not be always in petticoats, which showed

how little they were meant for; whereupon Letty, who argued much from

books, got angry in replying that God made coats of skins for both Adam

and Eve alike—also it occurred to her that in the East the men too wore

petticoats. But this latter argument, obscuring the majesty of the

former, was one too many, for Ben answered contemptuously, “The more

spooneys they!” and immediately appealed to his mother whether boys

were not better than girls. Mrs. Garth pronounced that both were alike

naughty, but that boys were undoubtedly stronger, could run faster, and

throw with more precision to a greater distance. With this oracular

sentence Ben was well satisfied, not minding the naughtiness; but Letty

took it ill, her feeling of superiority being stronger than her

muscles.

Fred never became rich—his hopefulness had not led him to expect that;

but he gradually saved enough to become owner of the stock and

furniture at Stone Court, and the work which Mr. Garth put into his

hands carried him in plenty through those “bad times” which are always

present with farmers. Mary, in her matronly days, became as solid in

figure as her mother; but, unlike her, gave the boys little formal

teaching, so that Mrs. Garth was alarmed lest they should never be well

grounded in grammar and geography. Nevertheless, they were found quite

forward enough when they went to school; perhaps, because they had

liked nothing so well as being with their mother. When Fred was riding

home on winter evenings he had a pleasant vision beforehand of the

bright hearth in the wainscoted parlor, and was sorry for other men who

could not have Mary for their wife; especially for Mr. Farebrother. “He

was ten times worthier of you than I was,” Fred could now say to her,

magnanimously. “To be sure he was,” Mary answered; “and for that reason

he could do better without me. But you—I shudder to think what you

would have been—a curate in debt for horse-hire and cambric

pocket-handkerchiefs!”

On inquiry it might possibly be found that Fred and Mary still inhabit

Stone Court—that the creeping plants still cast the foam of their

blossoms over the fine stone-wall into the field where the walnut-trees

stand in stately row—and that on sunny days the two lovers who were

first engaged with the umbrella-ring may be seen in white-haired

placidity at the open window from which Mary Garth, in the days of old

Peter Featherstone, had often been ordered to look out for Mr. Lydgate.

Lydgate’s hair never became white. He died when he was only fifty,

leaving his wife and children provided for by a heavy insurance on his

life. He had gained an excellent practice, alternating, according to

the season, between London and a Continental bathing-place; having

written a treatise on Gout, a disease which has a good deal of wealth

on its side. His skill was relied on by many paying patients, but he

always regarded himself as a failure: he had not done what he once

meant to do. His acquaintances thought him enviable to have so charming

a wife, and nothing happened to shake their opinion. Rosamond never

committed a second compromising indiscretion. She simply continued to

be mild in her temper, inflexible in her judgment, disposed to admonish

her husband, and able to frustrate him by stratagem. As the years went

on he opposed her less and less, whence Rosamond concluded that he had

learned the value of her opinion; on the other hand, she had a more

thorough conviction of his talents now that he gained a good income,

and instead of the threatened cage in Bride Street provided one all

flowers and gilding, fit for the bird of paradise that she resembled.

In brief, Lydgate was what is called a successful man. But he died

prematurely of diphtheria, and Rosamond afterwards married an elderly

and wealthy physician, who took kindly to her four children. She made a

very pretty show with her daughters, driving out in her carriage, and

often spoke of her happiness as “a reward”—she did not say for what,

but probably she meant that it was a reward for her patience with

Tertius, whose temper never became faultless, and to the last

occasionally let slip a bitter speech which was more memorable than the

signs he made of his repentance. He once called her his basil plant;

and when she asked for an explanation, said that basil was a plant

which had flourished wonderfully on a murdered man’s brains. Rosamond

had a placid but strong answer to such speeches. Why then had he chosen

her? It was a pity he had not had Mrs. Ladislaw, whom he was always

praising and placing above her. And thus the conversation ended with

the advantage on Rosamond’s side. But it would be unjust not to tell,

that she never uttered a word in depreciation of Dorothea, keeping in

religious remembrance the generosity which had come to her aid in the

sharpest crisis of her life.

Dorothea herself had no dreams of being praised above other women,

feeling that there was always something better which she might have

done, if she had only been better and known better. Still, she never

repented that she had given up position and fortune to marry Will

Ladislaw, and he would have held it the greatest shame as well as

sorrow to him if she had repented. They were bound to each other by a

love stronger than any impulses which could have marred it. No life

would have been possible to Dorothea which was not filled with emotion,

and she had now a life filled also with a beneficent activity which she

had not the doubtful pains of discovering and marking out for herself.

Will became an ardent public man, working well in those times when

reforms were begun with a young hopefulness of immediate good which has

been much checked in our days, and getting at last returned to

Parliament by a constituency who paid his expenses. Dorothea could have

liked nothing better, since wrongs existed, than that her husband

should be in the thick of a struggle against them, and that she should

give him wifely help. Many who knew her, thought it a pity that so

substantive and rare a creature should have been absorbed into the life

of another, and be only known in a certain circle as a wife and mother.

But no one stated exactly what else that was in her power she ought

rather to have done—not even Sir James Chettam, who went no further

than the negative prescription that she ought not to have married Will

Ladislaw.

But this opinion of his did not cause a lasting alienation; and the way

in which the family was made whole again was characteristic of all

concerned. Mr. Brooke could not resist the pleasure of corresponding

with Will and Dorothea; and one morning when his pen had been

remarkably fluent on the prospects of Municipal Reform, it ran off into

an invitation to the Grange, which, once written, could not be done

away with at less cost than the sacrifice (hardly to be conceived) of

the whole valuable letter. During the months of this correspondence Mr.

Brooke had continually, in his talk with Sir James Chettam, been

presupposing or hinting that the intention of cutting off the entail

was still maintained; and the day on which his pen gave the daring

invitation, he went to Freshitt expressly to intimate that he had a

stronger sense than ever of the reasons for taking that energetic step

as a precaution against any mixture of low blood in the heir of the

Brookes.

But that morning something exciting had happened at the Hall. A letter

had come to Celia which made her cry silently as she read it; and when

Sir James, unused to see her in tears, asked anxiously what was the

matter, she burst out in a wail such as he had never heard from her

before.

“Dorothea has a little boy. And you will not let me go and see her. And

I am sure she wants to see me. And she will not know what to do with

the baby—she will do wrong things with it. And they thought she would

die. It is very dreadful! Suppose it had been me and little Arthur, and

Dodo had been hindered from coming to see me! I wish you would be less

unkind, James!”

“Good heavens, Celia!” said Sir James, much wrought upon, “what do you

wish? I will do anything you like. I will take you to town to-morrow if

you wish it.” And Celia did wish it.

It was after this that Mr. Brooke came, and meeting the Baronet in the

grounds, began to chat with him in ignorance of the news, which Sir

James for some reason did not care to tell him immediately. But when

the entail was touched on in the usual way, he said, “My dear sir, it

is not for me to dictate to you, but for my part I would let that

alone. I would let things remain as they are.”

Mr. Brooke felt so much surprised that he did not at once find out how

much he was relieved by the sense that he was not expected to do

anything in particular.

Such being the bent of Celia’s heart, it was inevitable that Sir James

should consent to a reconciliation with Dorothea and her husband. Where

women love each other, men learn to smother their mutual dislike. Sir

James never liked Ladislaw, and Will always preferred to have Sir

James’s company mixed with another kind: they were on a footing of

reciprocal tolerance which was made quite easy only when Dorothea and

Celia were present.

It became an understood thing that Mr. and Mrs. Ladislaw should pay at

least two visits during the year to the Grange, and there came

gradually a small row of cousins at Freshitt who enjoyed playing with

the two cousins visiting Tipton as much as if the blood of these

cousins had been less dubiously mixed.

Mr. Brooke lived to a good old age, and his estate was inherited by

Dorothea’s son, who might have represented Middlemarch, but declined,

thinking that his opinions had less chance of being stifled if he

remained out of doors.

Sir James never ceased to regard Dorothea’s second marriage as a

mistake; and indeed this remained the tradition concerning it in

Middlemarch, where she was spoken of to a younger generation as a fine

girl who married a sickly clergyman, old enough to be her father, and

in little more than a year after his death gave up her estate to marry

his cousin—young enough to have been his son, with no property, and not

well-born. Those who had not seen anything of Dorothea usually observed

that she could not have been “a nice woman,” else she would not have

married either the one or the other.

Certainly those determining acts of her life were not ideally

beautiful. They were the mixed result of young and noble impulse

struggling amidst the conditions of an imperfect social state, in which

great feelings will often take the aspect of error, and great faith the

aspect of illusion. For there is no creature whose inward being is so

strong that it is not greatly determined by what lies outside it. A new

Theresa will hardly have the opportunity of reforming a conventual

life, any more than a new Antigone will spend her heroic piety in

daring all for the sake of a brother’s burial: the medium in which

their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone. But we insignificant

people with our daily words and acts are preparing the lives of many

Dorotheas, some of which may present a far sadder sacrifice than that

of the Dorothea whose story we know.

Her finely touched spirit had still its fine issues, though they were

not widely visible. Her full nature, like that river of which Cyrus

broke the strength, spent itself in channels which had no great name on

the earth. But the effect of her being on those around her was

incalculably diffusive: for the growing good of the world is partly

dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you

and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived

faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.

THE END

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