

'Happen you'd like Mumps for company, Miss,' he said when he had taken the baby again. 'He's rare company, Mumps is; he knows iverything, an' makes no bother about it. If I tell him, he'll lie before you an' watch you, as still, - just as he watches my pack. You'd better let me leave him a bit; he'll get fond on you. Lors, it's a fine thing to hev a dumb brute fond on you; it'll stick to you, an' make no jaw.'

'Yes, do leave him, please,' said Maggie. 'I think I should like to have Mumps for a friend.'

'Mumps, lie down there,' said Bob, pointing to a place in front of Maggie, 'and niver do you stir till you're spoke to.'

Mumps lay down at once, and made no sign of restlessness when his master left the room.

Chapter II - St. Ogg's Passes Judgment

It was soon known throughout St. Ogg's that Miss Tulliver was come back; she had not, then, eloped in order to be married to Mr Stephen Guest, - at all events, Mr Stephen Guest had not married her; which came to the same thing, so far as her culpability was concerned. We judge others according to results; how else? - not knowing the process by which results are arrived at. If Miss Tulliver, after a few months of well-chosen travel, had returned as Mrs Stephen Guest, with a post-marital *trousseau*, and all the advantages possessed even by the most unwelcome wife of an only son, public opinion, which at St. Ogg's, as else where, always knew what to think, would have judged in strict consistency with those results. Public opinion, in these cases, is always of the feminine gender, - not the world, but the world's wife; and she would have seen that two handsome young people - the gentleman of quite the first family in St. Ogg's - having found themselves in a false position, had been led into a course which, to say the least of it, was highly injudicious, and productive of sad pain and disappointment, especially to that sweet young thing, Miss Deane. Mr Stephen Guest had certainly not behaved well; but then, young men were liable to those sudden infatuated attachments; and bad as it might seem in Mrs Stephen Guest to admit the faintest advances from her cousin's lover (indeed it *had* been said that she was actually engaged to young Wakem, - old Wakem himself had mentioned it), still, she was very young, - 'and a deformed young man, you know! - and young Guest so very fascinating; and, they say, he positively worships her (to be sure, that can't last!), and he ran away with her in the boat quite against her will, and what could she do? She couldn't come back then; no one would have spoken to her; and how very well that maize-colored satinette becomes her complexion! It seems as if the folds in front were quite come in; several of her dresses are made so, - they say he thinks nothing too handsome to buy for her. Poor

Miss Deane! She is very pitiable; but then there was no positive engagement; and the air at the coast will do her good. After all, if young Guest felt no more for her than *that* it was better for her not to marry him. What a wonderful marriage for a girl like Miss Tulliver, - quite romantic? Why, young Guest will put up for the borough at the next election. Nothing like commerce nowadays! That young Wakem nearly went out of his mind; he always *was* rather queer; but he's gone abroad again to be out of the way, - quite the best thing for a deformed young man. Miss Unit declares she will never visit Mr and Mrs Stephen Guest, - such nonsense! pretending to be better than other people. Society couldn't be carried on if we inquired into private conduct in that way, - and Christianity tells us to think no evil, - and my belief is, that Miss Unit had no cards sent her.'

But the results, we know, were not of a kind to warrant this extenuation of the past. Maggie had returned without a *trousseau*, without a husband, - in that degraded and outcast condition to which error is well known to lead; and the world's wife, with that fine instinct which is given her for the preservation of Society, saw at once that Miss Tulliver's conduct had been of the most aggravated kind. Could anything be more detestable? A girl so much indebted to her friends - whose mother as well as herself had received so much kindness from the Deanes - to lay the design of winning a young man's affections away from her own cousin, who had behaved like a sister to her! Winning his affections? That was not the phrase for such a girl as Miss Tulliver; it would have been more correct to say that she had been actuated by mere unwomanly boldness and unbridled passion. There was always something questionable about her. That connection with young Wakem, which, they said, had been carried on for years, looked very ill, - disgusting, in fact! But with a girl of that disposition! To the world's wife there had always been something in Miss Tulliver's very *physique* that a refined instinct felt to be prophetic of harm. As for poor Mr Stephen Guest, he was rather pitiable than otherwise; a young man of five-and-twenty is not to be too severely judged in these cases, - he is really very much at the mercy of a designing, bold girl. And it was clear that he had given way in spite of himself: he had shaken her off as soon as he could; indeed, their having parted so soon looked very black indeed - *for her*. To be sure, he had written a letter, laying all the blame on himself, and telling the story in a romantic fashion so as to try and make her appear quite innocent; of course he would do that! But the refined instinct of the world's wife was not to be deceived; providentially! - else what would become of Society? Why, her own brother had turned her from his door; he had seen enough, you might be sure, before he would do that. A truly respectable young man, Mr Tom Tulliver; quite likely to rise in the world! His sister's disgrace was naturally a heavy blow to him. It was to be hoped that she would go out of the neighborhood, - to America, or anywhere, - so as to purify the air of St. Ogg's from the stain of her

presence, extremely dangerous to daughters there! No good could happen to her; it was only to be hoped she would repent, and that God would have mercy on her: He had not the care of society on His hands, as the world's wife had.

It required nearly a fortnight for fine instinct to assure itself of these inspirations; indeed, it was a whole week before Stephen's letter came, telling his father the facts, and adding that he was gone across to Holland, - had drawn upon the agent at Mudport for money, - was incapable of any resolution at present.

Maggie, all this while, was too entirely filled with a more agonizing anxiety to spend any thought on the view that was being taken of her conduct by the world of St. Ogg's; anxiety about Stephen, Lucy, Philip, beat on her poor heart in a hard, driving, ceaseless storm of mingled love, remorse, and pity. If she had thought of rejection and injustice at all, it would have seemed to her that they had done their worst; that she could hardly feel any stroke from them intolerable since the words she had heard from her brother's lips. Across all her anxiety for the loved and the injured, those words shot again and again, like a horrible pang that would have brought misery and dread even into a heaven of delights. The idea of ever recovering happiness never glimmered in her mind for a moment; it seemed as if every sensitive fibre in her were too entirely preoccupied by pain ever to vibrate again to another influence. Life stretched before her as one act of penitence; and all she craved, as she dwelt on her future lot, was something to guarantee her from more falling; her own weakness haunted her like a vision of hideous possibilities, that made no peace conceivable except such as lay in the sense of a sure refuge.

But she was not without practical intentions; the love of independence was too strong an inheritance and a habit for her not to remember that she must get her bread; and when other projects looked vague, she fell back on that of returning to her plain sewing, and so getting enough to pay for her lodging at Bob's. She meant to persuade her mother to return to the Mill by and by, and live with Tom again; and somehow or other she would maintain herself at St. Ogg's. Dr. Kenn would perhaps help her and advise her. She remembered his parting words at the bazaar. She remembered the momentary feeling of reliance that had sprung in her when he was talking with her, and she waited with yearning expectation for the opportunity of confiding everything to him. Her mother called every day at Mr Deane's to learn how Lucy was; the report was always sad, - nothing had yet roused her from the feeble passivity which had come on with the first shock. But of Philip, Mrs Tulliver had learned nothing; naturally, no one whom she met would speak to her about what related to her daughter. But at last she summoned courage to go and see sister Glegg, who of course would know everything, and had been even to see Tom at the

Mill in Mrs Tulliver's absence, though he had said nothing of what had passed on the occasion.

As soon as her mother was gone, Maggie put on her bonnet. She had resolved on walking to the Rectory and asking to see Dr. Kenn; he was in deep grief, but the grief of another does not jar upon us in such circumstances. It was the first time she had been beyond the door since her return; nevertheless her mind was so bent on the purpose of her walk, that the unpleasantness of meeting people on the way, and being stared at, did not occur to her. But she had no sooner passed beyond the narrower streets which she had to thread from Bob's dwelling, than she became aware of unusual glances cast at her; and this consciousness made her hurry along nervously, afraid to look to right or left. Presently, however, she came full on Mrs and Miss Turnbull, old acquaintances of her family; they both looked at her strangely, and turned a little aside without speaking. All hard looks were pain to Maggie, but her self-reproach was too strong for resentment. No wonder they will not speak to me, she thought; they are very fond of Lucy. But now she knew that she was about to pass a group of gentlemen, who were standing at the door of the billiard-rooms, and she could not help seeing young Torry step out a little with his glass at his eye, and bow to her with that air of *nonchalance* which he might have bestowed on a friendly barmaid.

Maggie's pride was too intense for her not to feel that sting, even in the midst of her sorrow; and for the first time the thought took strong hold of her that she would have other obloquy cast on her besides that which was felt to be due to her breach of faith toward Lucy. But she was at the Rectory now; there, perhaps, she would find something else than retribution. Retribution may come from any voice; the hardest, cruelest, most imbruted urchin at the street-corner can inflict it; surely help and pity are rarer things, more needful for the righteous to bestow.

She was shown up at once, after being announced, into Dr. Kenn's study, where he sat amongst piled-up books, for which he had little appetite, leaning his cheek against the head of his youngest child, a girl of three. The child was sent away with the servant, and when the door was closed, Dr. Kenn said, placing a chair for Maggie, -

'I was coming to see you, Miss Tulliver; you have anticipated me; I am glad you did.'

Maggie looked at him with her childlike directness as she had done at the bazaar, and said, 'I want to tell you everything.' But her eyes filled fast with tears as she said it, and all the pent-up excitement of her humiliating walk would have its vent before she could say more.

'Do tell me everything,' Dr. Kenn said, with quiet kindness in his grave, firm voice. 'Think of me as one to whom a long experience has been granted, which may enable him to help you.'

In rather broken sentences, and with some effort at first, but soon with the greater ease that came from a sense of relief in the confidence, Maggie told the brief story of a struggle that must be the beginning of a long sorrow. Only the day before, Dr. Kenn had been made acquainted with the contents of Stephen's letter, and he had believed them at once, without the confirmation of Maggie's statement. That involuntary plaint of hers, '*Oh, I must go,*' had remained with him as the sign that she was undergoing some inward conflict.

Maggie dwelt the longest on the feeling which had made her come back to her mother and brother, which made her cling to all the memories of the past. When she had ended, Dr. Kenn was silent for some minutes; there was a difficulty on his mind. He rose, and walked up and down the hearth with his hands behind him. At last he seated himself again, and said, looking at Maggie, -

'Your prompting to go to your nearest friends, - to remain where all the ties of your life have been formed, - is a true prompting, to which the Church in its original constitution and discipline responds, opening its arms to the penitent, watching over its children to the last; never abandoning them until they are hopelessly reprobate. And the Church ought to represent the feeling of the community, so that every parish should be a family knit together by Christian brotherhood under a spiritual father. But the ideas of discipline and Christian fraternity are entirely relaxed, - they can hardly be said to exist in the public mind; they hardly survive except in the partial, contradictory form they have taken in the narrow communities of schismatics; and if I were not supported by the firm faith that the Church must ultimately recover the full force of that constitution which is alone fitted to human needs, I should often lose heart at observing the want of fellowship and sense of mutual responsibility among my own flock. At present everything seems tending toward the relaxation of ties, - toward the substitution of wayward choice for the adherence to obligation, which has its roots in the past. Your conscience and your heart have given you true light on this point, Miss Tulliver; and I have said all this that you may know what my wish about you - what my advice to you - would be, if they sprang from my own feeling and opinion unmodified by counteracting circumstances.'

Dr. Kenn paused a little while. There was an entire absence of effusive benevolence in his manner; there was something almost cold in the gravity of his look and voice. If Maggie had not known that his benevolence was persevering in proportion to its reserve, she might have been chilled and frightened. As it was, she listened expectantly,

quite sure that there would be some effective help in his words. He went on.

'Your inexperience of the world, Miss Tulliver, prevents you from anticipating fully the very unjust conceptions that will probably be formed concerning your conduct, - conceptions which will have a baneful effect, even in spite of known evidence to disprove them.'

'Oh, I do, - I begin to see,' said Maggie, unable to repress this utterance of her recent pain. 'I know I shall be insulted. I shall be thought worse than I am.'

'You perhaps do not yet know,' said Dr. Kenn, with a touch of more personal pity, 'that a letter is come which ought to satisfy every one who has known anything of you, that you chose the steep and difficult path of a return to the right, at the moment when that return was most of all difficult.'

'Oh, where is he?' said poor Maggie, with a flush and tremor that no presence could have hindered.

'He is gone abroad; he has written of all that passed to his father. He has vindicated you to the utmost; and I hope the communication of that letter to your cousin will have a beneficial effect on her.'

Dr. Kenn waited for her to get calm again before he went on.

'That letter, as I said, ought to suffice to prevent false impressions concerning you. But I am bound to tell you, Miss Tulliver, that not only the experience of my whole life, but my observation within the last three days, makes me fear that there is hardly any evidence which will save you from the painful effect of false imputations. The persons who are the most incapable of a conscientious struggle such as yours are precisely those who will be likely to shrink from you, because they will not believe in your struggle. I fear your life here will be attended not only with much pain, but with many obstructions. For this reason - and for this only - I ask you to consider whether it will not perhaps be better for you to take a situation at a distance, according to your former intention. I will exert myself at once to obtain one for you.'

'Oh, if I could but stop here!' said Maggie. 'I have no heart to begin a strange life again. I should have no stay. I should feel like a lonely wanderer, cut off from the past. I have written to the lady who offered me a situation to excuse myself. If I remained here, I could perhaps atone in some way to Lucy - to others; I could convince them that I'm sorry. And,' she added, with some of the old proud fire flashing out, 'I will not go away because people say false things of me. They shall

learn to retract them. If I must go away at last, because - because others wish it, I will not go now.'

'Well,' said Dr. Kenn, after some consideration, 'if you determine on that, Miss Tulliver, you may rely on all the influence my position gives me. I am bound to aid and countenance you by the very duties of my office as a parish priest. I will add, that personally I have a deep interest in your peace of mind and welfare.'

'The only thing I want is some occupation that will enable me to get my bread and be independent,' said Maggie. 'I shall not want much. I can go on lodging where I am.'

'I must think over the subject maturely,' said Dr. Kenn, 'and in a few days I shall be better able to ascertain the general feeling. I shall come to see you; I shall bear you constantly in mind.'

When Maggie had left him, Dr. Kenn stood ruminating with his hands behind him, and his eyes fixed on the carpet, under a painful sense of doubt and difficulty. The tone of Stephen's letter, which he had read, and the actual relations of all the persons concerned, forced upon him powerfully the idea of an ultimate marriage between Stephen and Maggie as the least evil; and the impossibility of their proximity in St. Ogg's on any other supposition, until after years of separation, threw an insurmountable prospective difficulty over Maggie's stay there. On the other hand, he entered with all the comprehension of a man who had known spiritual conflict, and lived through years of devoted service to his fellow-men, into that state of Maggie's heart and conscience which made the consent to the marriage a desecration to her; her conscience must not be tampered with; the principle on which she had acted was a safer guide than any balancing of consequences. His experience told him that intervention was too dubious a responsibility to be lightly incurred; the possible issue either of an endeavor to restore the former relations with Lucy and Philip, or of counselling submission to this irruption of a new feeling, was hidden in a darkness all the more impenetrable because each immediate step was clogged with evil.

The great problem of the shifting relation between passion and duty is clear to no man who is capable of apprehending it; the question whether the moment has come in which a man has fallen below the possibility of a renunciation that will carry any efficacy, and must accept the sway of a passion against which he had struggled as a trespass, is one for which we have no master-key that will fit all cases. The casuists have become a byword of reproach; but their perverted spirit of minute discrimination was the shadow of a truth to which eyes and hearts are too often fatally sealed, - the truth, that moral judgments must remain false and hollow, unless they are checked and

enlightened by a perpetual reference to the special circumstances that mark the individual lot.

All people of broad, strong sense have an instinctive repugnance to the men of maxims; because such people early discern that the mysterious complexity of our life is not to be embraced by maxims, and that to lace ourselves up in formulas of that sort is to repress all the divine promptings and inspirations that spring from growing insight and sympathy. And the man of maxims is the popular representative of the minds that are guided in their moral judgment solely by general rules, thinking that these will lead them to justice by a ready-made patent method, without the trouble of exerting patience, discrimination, impartiality, - without any care to assure themselves whether they have the insight that comes from a hardly earned estimate of temptation, or from a life vivid and intense enough to have created a wide fellow-feeling with all that is human.