Chapter IX

1st 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? . . . 2d 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 easts 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 eves 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.