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, Dorotheas, 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 early 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 re?’ 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 hack 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 mied 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.