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 a 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 tete-a-tete, 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.