

Chapter XVIII

'Oh, sir, the loftiest hopes on earth Draw lots with meaner hopes: heroic breasts, Breathing bad air, ran risk of pestilence; Or, lacking lime-juice when they cross the Line, May languish with the scurvy.'

Some weeks passed after this conversation before the question of the chaplaincy gathered any practical import for Lydgate, and without telling himself the reason, he deferred the predetermination on which side he should give his vote. It would really have been a matter of total indifference to him - that is to say, he would have taken the more convenient side, and given his vote for the appointment of Tyke without any hesitation - if he had not cared personally for Mr Farebrother.

But his liking for the Vicar of St. Botolph's grew with growing acquaintanceship. That, entering into Lydgate's position as a newcomer who had his own professional objects to secure, Mr Farebrother should have taken pains rather to warn off than to obtain his interest, showed an unusual delicacy and generosity, which Lydgate's nature was keenly alive to. It went along with other points of conduct in Mr Farebrother which were exceptionally fine, and made his character resemble those southern landscapes which seem divided between natural grandeur and social slovenliness. Very few men could have been as filial and chivalrous as he was to the mother, aunt, and sister, whose dependence on him had in many ways shaped his life rather uneasily for himself; few men who feel the pressure of small needs are so nobly resolute not to dress up their inevitably self-interested desires in a pretext of better motives. In these matters he was conscious that his life would bear the closest scrutiny; and perhaps the consciousness encouraged a little defiance towards the critical strictness of persons whose celestial intimacies seemed not to improve their domestic manners, and whose lofty aims were not needed to account for their actions. Then, his preaching was ingenious and pithy, like the preaching of the English Church in its robust age, and his sermons were delivered without book. People outside his parish went to hear him; and, since to fill the church was always the most difficult part of a clergyman's function, here was another ground for a careless sense of superiority. Besides, he was a likable man: sweet-tempered, ready-witted, frank, without grins of suppressed bitterness or other conversational flavors which make half of us an affliction to our friends. Lydgate liked him heartily, and wished for his friendship.

With this feeling uppermost, he continued to waive the question of the chaplaincy, and to persuade himself that it was not only no proper business of his, but likely enough never to vex him with a demand for his vote. Lydgate, at Mr Bulstrode's request, was laying down plans for the internal arrangements of the new hospital, and the two were often

in consultation. The banker was always presupposing that he could count in general on Lydgate as a coadjutor, but made no special recurrence to the coming decision between Tyke and Farebrother. When the General Board of the Infirmary had met, however, and Lydgate had notice that the question of the chaplaincy was thrown on a council of the directors and medical men, to meet on the following Friday, he had a vexed sense that he must make up his mind on this trivial Middlemarch business. He could not help hearing within him the distinct declaration that Bulstrode was prime minister, and that the Tyke affair was a question of office or no office; and he could not help an equally pronounced dislike to giving up the prospect of office. For his observation was constantly confirming Mr Farebrother's assurance that the banker would not overlook opposition. 'Confound their petty politics!' was one of his thoughts for three mornings in the meditative process of shaving, when he had begun to feel that he must really hold a court of conscience on this matter. Certainly there were valid things to be said against the election of Mr Farebrother: he had too much on his hands already, especially considering how much time he spent on non-clerical occupations. Then again it was a continually repeated shock, disturbing Lydgate's esteem, that the Vicar should obviously play for the sake of money, liking the play indeed, but evidently liking some end which it served. Mr Farebrother contended on theory for the desirability of all games, and said that Englishmen's wit was stagnant for want of them; but Lydgate felt certain that he would have played very much less but for the money. There was a billiard-room at the Green Dragon, which some anxious mothers and wives regarded as the chief temptation in Middlemarch. The Vicar was a first-rate billiard-player, and though he did not frequent the Green Dragon, there were reports that he had sometimes been there in the daytime and had won money. And as to the chaplaincy, he did not pretend that he cared for it, except for the sake of the forty pounds. Lydgate was no Puritan, but he did not care for play, and winning money at it had always seemed a meanness to him; besides, he had an ideal of life which made this subservience of conduct to the gaining of small sums thoroughly hateful to him. Hitherto in his own life his wants had been supplied without any trouble to himself, and his first impulse was always to be liberal with half-crowns as matters of no importance to a gentleman; it had never occurred to him to devise a plan for getting half-crowns. He had always known in a general way that he was not rich, but he had never felt poor, and he had no power of imagining the part which the want of money plays in determining the actions of men. Money had never been a motive to him. Hence he was not ready to frame excuses for this deliberate pursuit of small gains. It was altogether repulsive to him, and he never entered into any calculation of the ratio between the Vicar's income and his more or less necessary expenditure. It was possible that he would not have made such a calculation in his own case.

And now, when the question of voting had come, this repulsive fact told more strongly against Mr Farebrother than it had done before. One would know much better what to do if men's characters were more consistent, and especially if one's friends were invariably fit for any function they desired to undertake! Lydgate was convinced that if there had been no valid objection to Mr Farebrother, he would have voted for him, whatever Bulstrode might have felt on the subject: he did not intend to be a vassal of Bulstrode's. On the other hand, there was Tyke, a man entirely given to his clerical office, who was simply curate at a chapel of ease in St. Peter's parish, and had time for extra duty. Nobody had anything to say against Mr Tyke, except that they could not bear him, and suspected him of cant. Really, from his point of view, Bulstrode was thoroughly justified.

But whichever way Lydgate began to incline, there was something to make him wince; and being a proud man, he was a little exasperated at being obliged to wince. He did not like frustrating his own best purposes by getting on bad terms with Bulstrode; he did not like voting against Farebrother, and helping to deprive him of function and salary; and the question occurred whether the additional forty pounds might not leave the Vicar free from that ignoble care about winning at cards. Moreover, Lydgate did not like the consciousness that in voting for Tyke he should be voting on the side obviously convenient for himself. But would the end really be his own convenience? Other people would say so, and would allege that he was currying favor with Bulstrode for the sake of making himself important and getting on in the world. What then? He for his own part knew that if his personal prospects simply had been concerned, he would not have cared a rotten nut for the banker's friendship or enmity. What he really cared for was a medium for his work, a vehicle for his ideas; and after all, was he not bound to prefer the object of getting a good hospital, where he could demonstrate the specific distinctions of fever and test therapeutic results, before anything else connected with this chaplaincy? For the first time Lydgate was feeling the hampering threadlike pressure of small social conditions, and their frustrating complexity. At the end of his inward debate, when he set out for the hospital, his hope was really in the chance that discussion might somehow give a new aspect to the question, and make the scale dip so as to exclude the necessity for voting. I think he trusted a little also to the energy which is begotten by circumstances - some feeling rushing warmly and making resolve easy, while debate in cool blood had only made it more difficult. However it was, he did not distinctly say to himself on which side he would vote; and all the while he was inwardly resenting the subjection which had been forced upon him. It would have seemed beforehand like a ridiculous piece of bad logic that he, with his unmixed resolutions of independence and his select purposes, would find himself at the very outset in the grasp of petty

alternatives, each of which was repugnant to him. In his student's chambers, he had prearranged his social action quite differently.

Lydgate was late in setting out, but Dr. Sprague, the two other surgeons, and several of the directors had arrived early; Mr Bulstrode, treasurer and chairman, being among those who were still absent. The conversation seemed to imply that the issue was problematical, and that a majority for Tyke was not so certain as had been generally supposed. The two physicians, for a wonder, turned out to be unanimous, or rather, though of different minds, they concurred in action. Dr. Sprague, the rugged and weighty, was, as every one had foreseen, an adherent of Mr Farebrother. The Doctor was more than suspected of having no religion, but somehow Middlemarch tolerated this deficiency in him as if he had been a Lord Chancellor; indeed it is probable that his professional weight was the more believed in, the world-old association of cleverness with the evil principle being still potent in the minds even of lady-patients who had the strictest ideas of frilling and sentiment. It was perhaps this negation in the Doctor which made his neighbors call him hard-headed and dry-witted; conditions of texture which were also held favorable to the storing of judgments connected with drugs. At all events, it is certain that if any medical man had come to Middlemarch with the reputation of having very definite religious views, of being given to prayer, and of otherwise showing an active piety, there would have been a general presumption against his medical skill.

On this ground it was (professionally speaking) fortunate for Dr. Minchin that his religious sympathies were of a general kind, and such as gave a distant medical sanction to all serious sentiment, whether of Church or Dissent, rather than any adhesion to particular tenets. If Mr Bulstrode insisted, as he was apt to do, on the Lutheran doctrine of justification, as that by which a Church must stand or fall, Dr. Minchin in return was quite sure that man was not a mere machine or a fortuitous conjunction of atoms; if Mrs Wimple insisted on a particular providence in relation to her stomach complaint, Dr. Minchin for his part liked to keep the mental windows open and objected to fixed limits; if the Unitarian brewer jested about the Athanasian Creed, Dr. Minchin quoted Pope's 'Essay on Man.' He objected to the rather free style of anecdote in which Dr. Sprague indulged, preferring well-sanctioned quotations, and liking refinement of all kinds: it was generally known that he had some kinship to a bishop, and sometimes spent his holidays at 'the palace.'

Dr. Minchin was soft-handed, pale-complexioned, and of rounded outline, not to be distinguished from a mild clergyman in appearance: whereas Dr. Sprague was superfluously tall; his trousers got creased at the knees, and showed an excess of boot at a time when straps seemed necessary to any dignity of bearing; you heard him go in and

out, and up and down, as if he had come to see after the roofing. In short, he had weight, and might be expected to grapple with a disease and throw it; while Dr. Minchin might be better able to detect it lurking and to circumvent it. They enjoyed about equally the mysterious privilege of medical reputation, and concealed with much etiquette their contempt for each other's skill. Regarding themselves as Middlemarch institutions, they were ready to combine against all innovators, and against non-professionals given to interference. On this ground they were both in their hearts equally averse to Mr Bulstrode, though Dr. Minchin had never been in open hostility with him, and never differed from him without elaborate explanation to Mrs Bulstrode, who had found that Dr. Minchin alone understood her constitution. A layman who pried into the professional conduct of medical men, and was always obtruding his reforms, - though he was less directly embarrassing to the two physicians than to the surgeon-apothecaries who attended paupers by contract, was nevertheless offensive to the professional nostril as such; and Dr. Minchin shared fully in the new pique against Bulstrode, excited by his apparent determination to patronize Lydgate. The long-established practitioners, Mr Wrench and Mr Toller; were just now standing apart and having a friendly colloquy, in which they agreed that Lydgate was a jackanapes, just made to serve Bulstrode's purpose. To non-medical friends they had already concurred in praising the other young practitioner, who had come into the town on Mr Peacock's retirement without further recommendation than his own merits and such argument for solid professional acquirement as might be gathered from his having apparently wasted no time on other branches of knowledge. It was clear that Lydgate, by not dispensing drugs, intended to cast imputations on his equals, and also to obscure the limit between his own rank as a general practitioner and that of the physicians, who, in the interest of the profession, felt bound to maintain its various grades, - especially against a man who had not been to either of the English universities and enjoyed the absence of anatomical and bedside study there, but came with a libellous pretension to experience in Edinburgh and Paris, where observation might be abundant indeed, but hardly sound.

Thus it happened that on this occasion Bulstrode became identified with Lydgate, and Lydgate with Tyke; and owing to this variety of interchangeable names for the chaplaincy question, diverse minds were enabled to form the same judgment concerning it.

Dr. Sprague said at once bluntly to the group assembled when he entered, 'I go for Farebrother. A salary, with all my heart. But why take it from the Vicar? He has none too much - has to insure his life, besides keeping house, and doing a vicar's charities. Put forty pounds in his pocket and you'll do no harm. He's a good fellow, is Farebrother, with as little of the parson about him as will serve to carry orders.'

'Ho, ho! Doctor,' said old Mr Powderell, a retired iron-monger of some standing - his interjection being something between a laugh and a Parliamentary disapproval; 'we must let you have your say. But what we have to consider is not anybody's income - it's the souls of the poor sick people' - here Mr Powderell's voice and face had a sincere pathos in them. 'He is a real Gospel preacher, is Mr Tyke. I should vote against my conscience if I voted against Mr Tyke - I should indeed.'

'Mr Tyke's opponents have not asked any one to vote against his conscience, I believe,' said Mr Hackbutt, a rich tanner of fluent speech, whose glittering spectacles and erect hair were turned with some severity towards innocent Mr Powderell. 'But in my judgment it behoves us, as Directors, to consider whether we will regard it as our whole business to carry out propositions emanating from a single quarter. Will any member of the committee aver that he would have entertained the idea of displacing the gentleman who has always discharged the function of chaplain here, if it had not been suggested to him by parties whose disposition it is to regard every institution of this town as a machinery for carrying out their own views? I tax no man's motives: let them lie between himself and a higher Power; but I do say, that there are influences at work here which are incompatible with genuine independence, and that a crawling servility is usually dictated by circumstances which gentlemen so conducting themselves could not afford either morally or financially to avow. I myself am a layman, but I have given no inconsiderable attention to the divisions in the Church and - '

'Oh, damn the divisions!' burst in Mr Frank Hawley, lawyer and town-clerk, who rarely presented himself at the board, but now looked in hurriedly, whip in hand. 'We have nothing to do with them here. Farebrother has been doing the work - what there was - without pay, and if pay is to be given, it should be given to him. I call it a confounded job to take the thing away from Farebrother.'

'I think it would be as well for gentlemen not to give their remarks a personal bearing,' said Mr Plymdale. 'I shall vote for the appointment of Mr Tyke, but I should not have known, if Mr Hackbutt hadn't hinted it, that I was a Servile Crawler.'

'I disclaim any personalities. I expressly said, if I may be allowed to repeat, or even to conclude what I was about to say - '

'Ah, here's Minchin!' said Mr Frank Hawley; at which everybody turned away from Mr Hackbutt, leaving him to feel the uselessness of superior gifts in Middlemarch. 'Come, Doctor, I must have you on the right side, eh?'

'I hope so,' said Dr. Minchin, nodding and shaking hands here and there; 'at whatever cost to my feelings.'

'If there's any feeling here, it should be feeling for the man who is turned out, I think,' said Mr Frank Hawley.

'I confess I have feelings on the other side also. I have a divided esteem,' said Dr. Minchin, rubbing his hands. 'I consider Mr Tyke an exemplary man - none more so - and I believe him to be proposed from unimpeachable motives. I, for my part, wish that I could give him my vote. But I am constrained to take a view of the case which gives the preponderance to Mr Farebrother's claims. He is an amiable man, an able preacher, and has been longer among us.'

Old Mr Powderell looked on, sad and silent. Mr Plymdale settled his cravat, uneasily.

'You don't set up Farebrother as a pattern of what a clergyman ought to be, I hope,' said Mr Larcher, the eminent carrier, who had just come in. 'I have no ill-will towards him, but I think we owe something to the public, not to speak of anything higher, in these appointments. In my opinion Farebrother is too lax for a clergyman. I don't wish to bring up particulars against him; but he will make a little attendance here go as far as he can.'

'And a devilish deal better than too much,' said Mr Hawley, whose bad language was notorious in that part of the county. 'Sick people can't bear so much praying and preaching. And that methodistical sort of religion is bad for the spirits - bad for the inside, eh?' he added, turning quickly round to the four medical men who were assembled.

But any answer was dispensed with by the entrance of three gentlemen, with whom there were greetings more or less cordial. These were the Reverend Edward Thesiger, Rector of St. Peter's, Mr Bulstrode, and our friend Mr Brooke of Tipton, who had lately allowed himself to be put on the board of directors in his turn, but had never before attended, his attendance now being due to Mr Bulstrode's exertions. Lydgate was the only person still expected.

Every one now sat down, Mr Bulstrode presiding, pale and self-restrained as usual. Mr Thesiger, a moderate evangelical, wished for the appointment of his friend Mr Tyke, a zealous able man, who, officiating at a chapel of ease, had not a cure of souls too extensive to leave him ample time for the new duty. It was desirable that chaplaincies of this kind should be entered on with a fervent intention: they were peculiar opportunities for spiritual influence; and while it was good that a salary should be allotted, there was the more need for scrupulous watching lest the office should be perverted into a

mere question of salary. Mr Thesiger's manner had so much quiet propriety that objectors could only simmer in silence.

Mr Brooke believed that everybody meant well in the matter. He had not himself attended to the affairs of the Infirmary, though he had a strong interest in whatever was for the benefit of Middlemarch, and was most happy to meet the gentlemen present on any public question - 'any public question, you know,' Mr Brooke repeated, with his nod of perfect understanding. 'I am a good deal occupied as a magistrate, and in the collection of documentary evidence, but I regard my time as being at the disposal of the public - and, in short, my friends have convinced me that a chaplain with a salary - a salary, you know - is a very good thing, and I am happy to be able to come here and vote for the appointment of Mr Tyke, who, I understand, is an unexceptionable man, apostolic and eloquent and everything of that kind - and I am the last man to withhold my vote - under the circumstances, you know.'

'It seems to me that you have been crammed with one side of the question, Mr Brooke,' said Mr Frank Hawley, who was afraid of nobody, and was a Tory suspicious of electioneering intentions. 'You don't seem to know that one of the worthiest men we have has been doing duty as chaplain here for years without pay, and that Mr Tyke is proposed to supersede him.'

'Excuse me, Mr Hawley,' said Mr Bulstrode. 'Mr Brooke has been fully informed of Mr Farebrother's character and position.'

'By his enemies,' flashed out Mr Hawley.

'I trust there is no personal hostility concerned here,' said Mr Thesiger.

'I'll swear there is, though,' retorted Mr Hawley.

'Gentlemen,' said Mr Bulstrode, in a subdued tone, 'the merits of the question may be very briefly stated, and if any one present doubts that every gentleman who is about to give his vote has not been fully informed, I can now recapitulate the considerations that should weigh on either side.'

'I don't see the good of that,' said Mr Hawley. 'I suppose we all know whom we mean to vote for. Any man who wants to do justice does not wait till the last minute to hear both sides of the question. I have no time to lose, and I propose that the matter be put to the vote at once.'

A brief but still hot discussion followed before each person wrote 'Tyke' or 'Farebrother' on a piece of paper and slipped it into a glass tumbler; and in the mean time Mr Bulstrode saw Lydgate enter.

'I perceive that the votes are equally divided at present,' said Mr Bulstrode, in a clear biting voice. Then, looking up at Lydgate -

'There is a casting-vote still to be given. It is yours, Mr Lydgate: will you be good enough to write?'

'The thing is settled now,' said Mr Wrench, rising. 'We all know how Mr Lydgate will vote.'

'You seem to speak with some peculiar meaning, sir,' said Lydgate, rather defiantly, and keeping his pencil suspended.

'I merely mean that you are expected to vote with Mr Bulstrode. Do you regard that meaning as offensive?'

'It may be offensive to others. But I shall not desist from voting with him on that account.' Lydgate immediately wrote down 'Tyke.'

So the Rev. Walter Tyke became chaplain to the Infirmary, and Lydgate continued to work with Mr Bulstrode. He was really uncertain whether Tyke were not the more suitable candidate, and yet his consciousness told him that if he had been quite free from indirect bias he should have voted for Mr Farebrother. The affair of the chaplaincy remained a sore point in his memory as a case in which this petty medium of Middlemarch had been too strong for him. How could a man be satisfied with a decision between such alternatives and under such circumstances? No more than he can be satisfied with his hat, which he has chosen from among such shapes as the resources of the age offer him, wearing it at best with a resignation which is chiefly supported by comparison.

But Mr Farebrother met him with the same friendliness as before. The character of the publican and sinner is not always practically incompatible with that of the modern Pharisee, for the majority of us scarcely see more distinctly the faultiness of our own conduct than the faultiness of our own arguments, or the dulness of our own jokes. But the Vicar of St. Botolph's had certainly escaped the slightest tincture of the Pharisee, and by dint of admitting to himself that he was too much as other men were, he had become remarkably unlike them in this - that he could excuse others for thinking slightly of him, and could judge impartially of their conduct even when it told against him.

'The world has been too strong for *me*, I know,' he said one day to Lydgate. 'But then I am not a mighty man - I shall never be a man of renown. The choice of Hercules is a pretty fable; but Prodicus makes it easy work for the hero, as if the first resolves were enough. Another story says that he came to hold the distaff, and at last wore the Nessus shirt. I suppose one good resolve might keep a man right if everybody else's resolve helped him.'

The Vicar's talk was not always inspiring: he had escaped being a Pharisee, but he had not escaped that low estimate of possibilities which we rather hastily arrive at as an inference from our own failure. Lydgate thought that there was a pitiable infirmity of will in Mr Farebrother.