Chapter XXX

'Qui veut delasser hors de propos, lasse.' - PASCAL.

Mr Casaubon had no second attack of equal severity with the first, and in a few days began to recover his usual condition. But Lydgate seemed to think the case worth a great deal of attention. He not only used his stethoscope (which had not become a matter of course in practice at that time), but sat quietly by his patient and watched him. To Mr Casaubon's questions about himself, he replied that the source of the illness was the common error of intellectual men - a too eager and monotonous application: the remedy was, to be satisfied with moderate work, and to seek variety of relaxation. Mr Brooke, who sat by on one occasion, suggested that Mr Casaubon should go fishing, as Cadwallader did, and have a turning-room, make toys, table-legs, and that kind of thing.

'In short, you recommend me to anticipate the arrival of my second childhood,' said poor Mr Casaubon, with some bitterness. 'These things,' he added, looking at Lydgate, 'would be to me such relaxation as tow-picking is to prisoners in a house of correction.'

'I confess,' said Lydgate, smiling, 'amusement is rather an unsatisfactory prescription. It is something like telling people to keep up their spirits. Perhaps I had better say, that you must submit to be mildly bored rather than to go on working.'

'Yes, yes,' said Mr Brooke. 'Get Dorothea to play backgammon with you in the evenings. And shuttlecock, now - I don't know a finer game than shuttlecock for the daytime. I remember it all the fashion. To be sure, your eyes might not stand that, Casaubon. But you must unbend, you know. Why, you might take to some light study: conchology, now: it always think that must be a light study. Or get Dorothea to read you light things, Smollett - `Roderick Random,' `Humphrey Clinker:' they are a little broad, but she may read anything now she's married, you know. I remember they made me laugh uncommonly - there's a droll bit about a postilion's breeches. We have no such humor now. I have gone through all these things, but they might be rather new to you.'

'As new as eating thistles,' would have been an answer to represent Mr Casaubon's feelings. But he only bowed resignedly, with due respect to his wife's uncle, and observed that doubtless the works he mentioned had 'served as a resource to a certain order of minds.'

'You see,' said the able magistrate to Lydgate, when they were outside the door, 'Casaubon has been a little narrow: it leaves him rather at a loss when you forbid him his particular work, which I believe is

something very deep indeed - in the line of research, you know. I would never give way to that; I was always versatile. But a clergyman is tied a little tight. If they would make him a bishop, now! - he did a very good pamphlet for Peel. He would have more movement then, more show; he might get a little flesh. But I recommend you to talk to Mrs Casaubon. She is clever enough for anything, is my niece. Tell her, her husband wants liveliness, diversion: put her on amusing tactics.'

Without Mr Brooke's advice, Lydgate had determined on speaking to Dorothea. She had not been present while her uncle was throwing out his pleasant suggestions as to the mode in which life at Lowick might be enlivened, but she was usually by her husband's side, and the unaffected signs of intense anxiety in her face and voice about whatever touched his mind or health, made a drama which Lydgate was inclined to watch. He said to himself that he was only doing right in telling her the truth about her husband's probable future, but he certainly thought also that it would be interesting to talk confidentially with her. A medical man likes to make psychological observations, and sometimes in the pursuit of such studies is too easily tempted into momentous prophecy which life and death easily set at nought. Lydgate had often been satirical on this gratuitous prediction, and he meant now to be guarded.

He asked for Mrs Casaubon, but being told that she was out walking, he was going away, when Dorothea and Celia appeared, both glowing from their struggle with the March wind. When Lydgate begged to speak with her alone, Dorothea opened the library door which happened to be the nearest, thinking of nothing at the moment but what he might have to say about Mr Casaubon. It was the first time she had entered this room since her husband had been taken ill, and the servant had chosen not to open the shutters. But there was light enough to read by from the narrow upper panes of the windows.

'You will not mind this sombre light,' said Dorothea, standing in the middle of the room. 'Since you forbade books, the library has been out of the question. But Mr Casaubon will soon be here again, I hope. Is he not making progress?'

'Yes, much more rapid progress than I at first expected. Indeed, he is already nearly in his usual state of health.'

'You do not fear that the illness will return?' said Dorothea, whose quick ear had detected some significance in Lydgate's tone.

'Such cases are peculiarly difficult to pronounce upon,' said Lydgate. 'The only point on which I can be confident is that it will be desirable

to be very watchful on Mr Casaubon's account, lest he should in any way strain his nervous power.'

'I beseech you to speak quite plainly,' said Dorothea, in an imploring tone. 'I cannot bear to think that there might be something which I did not know, and which, if I had known it, would have made me act differently.' The words came out like a cry: it was evident that they were the voice of some mental experience which lay not very far off.

'Sit down,' she added, placing herself on the nearest chair, and throwing off her bonnet and gloves, with an instinctive discarding of formality where a great question of destiny was concerned.

'What you say now justifies my own view,' said Lydgate. 'I think it is one's function as a medical man to hinder regrets of that sort as far as possible. But I beg you to observe that Mr Casaubon's case is precisely of the kind in which the issue is most difficult to pronounce upon. He may possibly live for fifteen years or more, without much worse health than he has had hitherto.'

Dorothea had turned very pale, and when Lydgate paused she said in a low voice, 'You mean if we are very careful.'

'Yes - careful against mental agitation of all kinds, and against excessive application.'

'He would be miserable, if he had to give up his work,' said Dorothea, with a quick prevision of that wretchedness.

'I am aware of that. The only course is to try by all means, direct and indirect, to moderate and vary his occupations. With a happy concurrence of circumstances, there is, as I said, no immediate danger from that affection of the heart, which I believe to have been the cause of his late attack. On the other hand, it is possible that the disease may develop itself more rapidly: it is one of those eases in which death is sometimes sudden. Nothing should be neglected which might be affected by such an issue.'

There was silence for a few moments, while Dorothea sat as if she had been turned to marble, though the life within her was so intense that her mind had never before swept in brief time over an equal range of scenes and motives.

'Help me, pray,' she said, at last, in the same low voice as before. 'Tell me what I can do.'

'What do you think of foreign travel? You have been lately in Rome, I think.'

The memories which made this resource utterly hopeless were a new current that shook Dorothea out of her pallid immobility.

'Oh, that would not do - that would be worse than anything,' she said with a more childlike despondency, while the tears rolled down. 'Nothing will be of any use that he does not enjoy.'

'I wish that I could have spared you this pain,' said Lydgate, deeply touched, yet wondering about her marriage. Women just like Dorothea had not entered into his traditions.

'It was right of you to tell me. I thank you for telling me the truth.'

'I wish you to understand that I shall not say anything to enlighten Mr Casaubon himself. I think it desirable for him to know nothing more than that he must not overwork himself, and must observe certain rules. Anxiety of any kind would be precisely the most unfavorable condition for him.'

Lydgate rose, and Dorothea mechanically rose at the same time? unclasping her cloak and throwing it off as if it stifled her. He was bowing and quitting her, when an impulse which if she had been alone would have turned into a prayer, made her say with a sob in her voice -

'Oh, you are a wise man, are you not? You know all about life and death. Advise me. Think what I can do. He has been laboring all his life and looking forward. He minds about nothing else. - And I mind about nothing else - '

For years after Lydgate remembered the impression produced in him by this involuntary appeal - this cry from soul to soul, without other consciousness than their moving with kindred natures in the same embroiled medium, the same troublous fitfully illuminated life. But what could he say now except that he should see Mr Casaubon again to-morrow?

When he was gone, Dorothea's tears gushed forth, and relieved her stifling oppression. Then she dried her eyes, reminded that her distress must not be betrayed to her husband; and looked round the room thinking that she must order the servant to attend to it as usual, since Mr Casaubon might now at any moment wish to enter. On his writing-table there were letters which had lain untouched since the morning when he was taken ill, and among them, as Dorothea well remembered, there were young Ladislaw's letters, the one addressed to her still unopened. The associations of these letters had been made the more painful by that sudden attack of illness which she felt that the agitation caused by her anger might have helped to

bring on: it would be time enough to read them when they were again thrust upon her, and she had had no inclination to fetch them from the library. But now it occurred to her that they should be put out of her husband's sight: whatever might have been the sources of his annoyance about them, he must, if possible, not be annoyed again; and she ran her eyes first over the letter addressed to him to assure herself whether or not it would be necessary to write in order to hinder the offensive visit.

Will wrote from Rome, and began by saying that his obligations to Mr Casaubon were too deep for all thanks not to seem impertinent. It was plain that if he were not grateful, he must be the poorest-spirited rascal who had ever found a generous friend. To expand in wordy thanks would be like saying, 'I am honest.' But Will had come to perceive that his defects - defects which Mr Casaubon had himself often pointed to - needed for their correction that more strenuous position which his relative's generosity had hitherto prevented from being inevitable. He trusted that he should make the best return, if return were possible, by showing the effectiveness of the education for which he was indebted, and by ceasing in future to need any diversion towards himself of funds on which others might have a better claim. He was coming to England, to try his fortune, as many other young men were obliged to do whose only capital was in their brains. His friend Naumann had desired him to take charge of the 'Dispute' - the picture painted for Mr Casaubon, with whose permission, and Mrs Casaubon's, Will would convey it to Lowick in person. A letter addressed to the Poste Restante in Paris within the fortnight would hinder him, if necessary, from arriving at an inconvenient moment. He enclosed a letter to Mrs Casaubon in which he continued a discussion about art, begun with her in Rome.

Opening her own letter Dorothea saw that it was a lively continuation of his remonstrance with her fanatical sympathy and her want of sturdy neutral delight in things as they were - an outpouring of his young vivacity which it was impossible to read just now. She had immediately to consider what was to be done about the other letter: there was still time perhaps to prevent Will from coming to Lowick. Dorothea ended by giving the letter to her uncle, who was still in the house, and begging him to let Will know that Mr Casaubon had been ill, and that his health would not allow the reception of any visitors.

No one more ready than Mr Brooke to write a letter: his only difficulty was to write a short one, and his ideas in this case expanded over the three large pages and the inward foldings. He had simply said to Dorothea -

'To be sure, I will write, my dear. He's a very clever young fellow - this young Ladislaw - I dare say will be a rising young man. It's a good

letter - marks his sense of things, you know. However, I will tell him about Casaubon.'

But the end of Mr Brooke's pen was a thinking organ, evolving sentences, especially of a benevolent kind, before the rest of his mind could well overtake them. It expressed regrets and proposed remedies, which, when Mr Brooke read them, seemed felicitously worded - surprisingly the right thing, and determined a sequel which he had never before thought of. In this case, his pen found it such a pity young Ladislaw should not have come into the neighborhood. just at that time, in order that Mr Brooke might make his acquaintance more fully, and that they might go over the long-neglected Italian drawings together - it also felt such an interest in a young man who was starting in life with a stock of ideas - that by the end of the second page it had persuaded Mr Brooke to invite young Ladislaw, since he could not be received at Lowick, to come to Tipton Grange. Why not? They could find a great many things to do together, and this was a period of peculiar growth - the political horizon was expanding, and - in short, Mr Brooke's pen went off into a little speech which it had lately reported for that imperfectly edited organ the 'Middlemarch Pioneer.' While Mr Brooke was sealing this letter, he felt elated with an influx of dim projects: - a young man capable of putting ideas into form, the 'Pioneer' purchased to clear the pathway for a new candidate, documents utilized - who knew what might come of it all? Since Celia was going to marry immediately, it would be very pleasant to have a young fellow at table with him, at least for a time.

But he went away without telling Dorothea what he had put into the letter, for she was engaged with her husband, and - in fact, these things were of no importance to her.