

Chapter XXXIX

If, as I have, you also doe, Vertue attired in woman see, And dare love that, and say so too, And forget the He and She;

And if this love, though placed so, From prophane men you hide, Which will no faith on this bestow, Or, if they doe, deride:

Then you have done a braver thing Than all the Worthies did, And a braver thence will spring, Which is, to keep that hid.' - DR. DONNE.

Sir James Chettam's mind was not fruitful in devices, but his growing anxiety to 'act on Brooke,' once brought close to his constant belief in Dorothea's capacity for influence, became formative, and issued in a little plan; namely, to plead Celia's indisposition as a reason for fetching Dorothea by herself to the Hall, and to leave her at the Grange with the carriage on the way, after making her fully aware of the situation concerning the management of the estate.

In this way it happened that one day near four o'clock, when Mr Brooke and Ladislaw were seated in the library, the door opened and Mrs Casaubon was announced.

Will, the moment before, had been low in the depths of boredom, and, obliged to help Mr Brooke in arranging 'documents' about hanging sheep-stealers, was exemplifying the power our minds have of riding several horses at once by inwardly arranging measures towards getting a lodging for himself in Middlemarch and cutting short his constant residence at the Grange; while there flitted through all these steadier images a tickling vision of a sheep-stealing epic written with Homeric particularity. When Mrs Casaubon was announced he started up as from an electric shock, and felt a tingling at his finger-ends. Any one observing him would have seen a change in his complexion, in the adjustment of his facial muscles, in the vividness of his glance, which might have made them imagine that every molecule in his body had passed the message of a magic touch. And so it had. For effective magic is transcendent nature; and who shall measure the subtlety of those touches which convey the quality of soul as well as body, and make a man's passion for one woman differ from his passion for another as joy in the morning light over valley and river and white mountain-top differs from joy among Chinese lanterns and glass panels? Will, too, was made of very impressible stuff. The bow of a violin drawn near him cleverly, would at one stroke change the aspect of the world for him, and his point of view shifted - as easily as his mood. Dorothea's entrance was the freshness of morning.

'Well, my dear, this is pleasant, now,' said Mr Brooke, meeting and kissing her. 'You have left Casaubon with his books, I suppose. That's

right. We must not have you getting too learned for a woman, you know.'

'There is no fear of that, uncle,' said Dorothea, turning to Will and shaking hands with open cheerfulness, while she made no other form of greeting, but went on answering her uncle. 'I am very slow. When I want to be busy with books, I am often playing truant among my thoughts. I find it is not so easy to be learned as to plan cottages.'

She seated herself beside her uncle opposite to Will, and was evidently preoccupied with something that made her almost unmindful of him. He was ridiculously disappointed, as if he had imagined that her coming had anything to do with him.

'Why, yes, my dear, it was quite your hobby to draw plans. But it was good to break that off a little. Hobbies are apt to run away with us, you know; it doesn't do to be run away with. We must keep the reins. I have never let myself be run away with; I always pulled up. That is what I tell Ladislaw. He and I are alike, you know: he likes to go into everything. We are working at capital punishment. We shall do a great deal together, Ladislaw and I.'

'Yes,' said Dorothea, with characteristic directness, 'Sir James has been telling me that he is in hope of seeing a great change made soon in your management of the estate - that you are thinking of having the farms valued, and repairs made, and the cottages improved, so that Tipton may look quite another place. Oh, how happy!' - she went on, clasping her hands, with a return to that more childlike impetuous manner, which had been subdued since her marriage. 'If I were at home still, I should take to riding again, that I might go about with you and see all that! And you are going to engage Mr Garth, who praised my cottages, Sir James says.'

'Chettam is a little hasty, my dear,' said Mr Brooke, coloring slightly; 'a little hasty, you know. I never said I should do anything of the kind. I never said I should *not* do it, you know.'

'He only feels confident that you will do it,' said Dorothea, in a voice as clear and unhesitating as that of a young chorister chanting a credo, 'because you mean to enter Parliament as a member who cares for the improvement of the people, and one of the first things to be made better is the state of the land and the laborers. Think of Kit Downes, uncle, who lives with his wife and seven children in a house with one sitting room and one bedroom hardly larger than this table! - and those poor Dagleys, in their tumble-down farmhouse, where they live in the back kitchen and leave the other rooms to the rats! That is one reason why I did not like the pictures here, dear uncle - which you think me stupid about. I used to come from the village with all that

dirt and coarse ugliness like a pain within me, and the simpering pictures in the drawing-room seemed to me like a wicked attempt to find delight in what is false, while we don't mind how hard the truth is for the neighbors outside our walls. I think we have no right to come forward and urge wider changes for good, until we have tried to alter the evils which lie under our own hands.'

Dorothea had gathered emotion as she went on, and had forgotten everything except the relief of pouring forth her feelings, unchecked: an experience once habitual with her, but hardly ever present since her marriage, which had been a perpetual struggle of energy with fear. For the moment, Will's admiration was accompanied with a chilling sense of remoteness. A man is seldom ashamed of feeling that he cannot love a woman so well when he sees a certain greatness in her: nature having intended greatness for men. But nature has sometimes made sad oversights in carrying out her intention; as in the case of good Mr Brooke, whose masculine consciousness was at this moment in rather a stammering condition under the eloquence of his niece. He could not immediately find any other mode of expressing himself than that of rising, fixing his eye-glass, and fingering the papers before him. At last he said -

'There is something in what you say, my dear, something in what you say - but not everything - eh, Ladislaw? You and I don't like our pictures and statues being found fault with. Young ladies are a little ardent, you know - a little one-sided, my dear. Fine art, poetry, that kind of thing, elevates a nation - *emollit mores* - you understand a little Latin now. But - eh? what?'

These interrogatives were addressed to the footman who had come in to say that the keeper had found one of Dagley's boys with a leveret in his hand just killed.

'I'll come, I'll come. I shall let him off easily, you know,' said Mr Brooke aside to Dorothea, shuffling away very cheerfully.

'I hope you feel how right this change is that I - that Sir James wishes for,' said Dorothea to Will, as soon as her uncle was gone.

'I do, now I have heard you speak about it. I shall not forget what you have said. But can you think of something else at this moment? I may not have another opportunity of speaking to you about what has occurred,' said Will, rising with a movement of impatience, and holding the back of his chair with both hands.

'Pray tell me what it is,' said Dorothea, anxiously, also rising and going to the open window, where Monk was looking in, panting and wagging his tail. She leaned her back against the window-frame, and

laid her hand on the dog's head; for though, as we know, she was not fond of pets that must be held in the hands or trodden on, she was always attentive to the feelings of dogs, and very polite if she had to decline their advances.

Will followed her only with his eyes and said, 'I presume you know that Mr Casaubon has forbidden me to go to his house.'

'No, I did not,' said Dorothea, after a moment's pause. She was evidently much moved. 'I am very, very sorry,' she added, mournfully. She was thinking of what Will had no knowledge of - the conversation between her and her husband in the darkness; and she was anew smitten with hopelessness that she could influence Mr Casaubon's action. But the marked expression of her sorrow convinced Will that it was not all given to him personally, and that Dorothea had not been visited by the idea that Mr Casaubon's dislike and jealousy of him turned upon herself. He felt an odd mixture of delight and vexation: of delight that he could dwell and be cherished in her thought as in a pure home, without suspicion and without stint - of vexation because he was of too little account with her, was not formidable enough, was treated with an unhesitating benevolence which did not flatter him. But his dread of any change in Dorothea was stronger than his discontent, and he began to speak again in a tone of mere explanation.

'Mr Casaubon's reason is, his displeasure at my taking a position here which he considers unsuited to my rank as his cousin. I have told him that I cannot give way on this point. It is a little too hard on me to expect that my course in life is to be hampered by prejudices which I think ridiculous. Obligation may be stretched till it is no better than a brand of slavery stamped on us when we were too young to know its meaning. I would not have accepted the position if I had not meant to make it useful and honorable. I am not bound to regard family dignity in any other light.'

Dorothea felt wretched. She thought her husband altogether in the wrong, on more grounds than Will had mentioned.

'It is better for us not to speak on the subject,' she said, with a tremulousness not common in her voice, 'since you and Mr Casaubon disagree. You intend to remain?' She was looking out on the lawn, with melancholy meditation.

'Yes; but I shall hardly ever see you now,' said Will, in a tone of almost boyish complaint.

'No,' said Dorothea, turning her eyes full upon him, 'hardly ever. But I shall hear of you. I shall know what you are doing for my uncle.'

'I shall know hardly anything about you,' said Will. 'No one will tell me anything.'

'Oh, my life is very simple,' said Dorothea, her lips curling with an exquisite smile, which irradiated her melancholy. 'I am always at Lowick.'

'That is a dreadful imprisonment,' said Will, impetuously.

'No, don't think that,' said Dorothea. 'I have no longings.'

He did not speak, but she replied to some change in his expression. 'I mean, for myself. Except that I should like not to have so much more than my share without doing anything for others. But I have a belief of my own, and it comforts me.'

'What is that?' said Will, rather jealous of the belief.

'That by desiring what is perfectly good, even when we don't quite know what it is and cannot do what we would, we are part of the divine power against evil - widening the skirts of light and making the struggle with darkness narrower.'

'That is a beautiful mysticism - it is a - '

'Please not to call it by any name,' said Dorothea, putting out her hands entreatingly. 'You will say it is Persian, or something else geographical. It is my life. I have found it out, and cannot part with it. I have always been finding out my religion since I was a little girl. I used to pray so much - now I hardly ever pray. I try not to have desires merely for myself, because they may not be good for others, and I have too much already. I only told you, that you might know quite well how my days go at Lowick.'

'God bless you for telling me!' said Will, ardently, and rather wondering at himself. They were looking at each other like two fond children who were talking confidentially of birds.

'What is *your* religion?' said Dorothea. 'I mean - not what you know about religion, but the belief that helps you most?'

'To love what is good and beautiful when I see it,' said Will. 'But I am a rebel: I don't feel bound, as you do, to submit to what I don't like.'

'But if you like what is good, that comes to the same thing,' said Dorothea, smiling.

'Now you are subtle,' said Will.

'Yes; Mr Casaubon often says I am too subtle. I don't feel as if I were subtle,' said Dorothea, playfully. 'But how long my uncle is! I must go and look for him. I must really go on to the Hall. Celia is expecting me.'

Will offered to tell Mr Brooke, who presently came and said that he would step into the carriage and go with Dorothea as far as Dagley's, to speak about the small delinquent who had been caught with the leveret. Dorothea renewed the subject of the estate as they drove along, but Mr Brooke, not being taken unawares, got the talk under his own control.

'Chettam, now,' he replied; 'he finds fault with me, my dear; but I should not preserve my game if it were not for Chettam, and he can't say that that expense is for the sake of the tenants, you know. It's a little against my feeling: - poaching, now, if you come to look into it - I have often thought of getting up the subject. Not long ago, Flavell, the Methodist preacher, was brought up for knocking down a hare that came across his path when he and his wife were walking out together. He was pretty quick, and knocked it on the neck.'

'That was very brutal, I think,' said Dorothea

'Well, now, it seemed rather black to me, I confess, in a Methodist preacher, you know. And Johnson said, 'You may judge what a *hypocrite* he is.' And upon my word, I thought Flavell looked very little like 'the highest style of man' - as somebody calls the Christian - Young, the poet Young, I think - you know Young? Well, now, Flavell in his shabby black gaiters, pleading that he thought the Lord had sent him and his wife a good dinner, and he had a right to knock it down, though not a mighty hunter before the Lord, as Nimrod was - I assure you it was rather comic: Fielding would have made something of it - or Scott, now - Scott might have worked it up. But really, when I came to think of it, I couldn't help liking that the fellow should have a bit of hare to say grace over. It's all a matter of prejudice - prejudice with the law on its side, you know - about the stick and the gaiters, and so on. However, it doesn't do to reason about things; and law is law. But I got Johnson to be quiet, and I hushed the matter up. I doubt whether Chettam would not have been more severe, and yet he comes down on me as if I were the hardest man in the county. But here we are at Dagley's.'

Mr Brooke got down at a farmyard-gate, and Dorothea drove on. It is wonderful how much uglier things will look when we only suspect that we are blamed for them. Even our own persons in the glass are apt to change their aspect for us after we have heard some frank remark on their less admirable points; and on the other hand it is astonishing how pleasantly conscience takes our encroachments on those who

never complain or have nobody to complain for them. Dagley's homestead never before looked so dismal to Mr Brooke as it did today, with his mind thus sore about the fault-finding of the 'Trumpet,' echoed by Sir James.

It is true that an observer, under that softening influence of the fine arts which makes other people's hardships picturesque, might have been delighted with this homestead called Freeman's End: the old house had dormer-windows in the dark red roof, two of the chimneys were choked with ivy, the large porch was blocked up with bundles of sticks, and half the windows were closed with gray worm-eaten shutters about which the jasmine-boughs grew in wild luxuriance; the mouldering garden wall with hollyhocks peeping over it was a perfect study of highly mingled subdued color, and there was an aged goat (kept doubtless on interesting superstitious grounds) lying against the open back-kitchen door. The mossy thatch of the cow-shed, the broken gray barn-doors, the pauper laborers in ragged breeches who had nearly finished unloading a wagon of corn into the barn ready for early thrashing; the scanty dairy of cows being tethered for milking and leaving one half of the shed in brown emptiness; the very pigs and white ducks seeming to wander about the uneven neglected yard as if in low spirits from feeding on a too meagre quality of rinsings, - all these objects under the quiet light of a sky marbled with high clouds would have made a sort of picture which we have all paused over as a 'charming bit,' touching other sensibilities than those which are stirred by the depression of the agricultural interest, with the sad lack of farming capital, as seen constantly in the newspapers of that time. But these troublesome associations were just now strongly present to Mr Brooke, and spoiled the scene for him. Mr Dagley himself made a figure in the landscape, carrying a pitchfork and wearing his milking-hat - a very old beaver flattened in front. His coat and breeches were the best he had, and he would not have been wearing them on this weekday occasion if he had not been to market and returned later than usual, having given himself the rare treat of dining at the public table of the Blue Bull. How he came to fall into this extravagance would perhaps be matter of wonderment to himself on the morrow; but before dinner something in the state of the country, a slight pause in the harvest before the Far Dips were cut, the stories about the new King and the numerous handbills on the walls, had seemed to warrant a little recklessness. It was a maxim about Middlemarch, and regarded as self-evident, that good meat should have good drink, which last Dagley interpreted as plenty of table ale well followed up by rum-and-water. These liquors have so far truth in them that they were not false enough to make poor Dagley seem merry: they only made his discontent less tongue-tied than usual. He had also taken too much in the shape of muddy political talk, a stimulant dangerously disturbing to his farming conservatism, which consisted in holding that whatever is, is bad, and any change is likely to be worse. He was flushed, and

his eyes had a decidedly quarrelsome stare as he stood still grasping his pitchfork, while the landlord approached with his easy shuffling walk, one hand in his trouser-pocket and the other swinging round a thin walking-stick.

'Dagley, my good fellow,' began Mr Brooke, conscious that he was going to be very friendly about the boy.

'Oh, ay, I'm a good feller, am I? Thank ye, sir, thank ye,' said Dagley, with a loud snarling irony which made Fag the sheep-dog stir from his seat and prick his ears; but seeing Monk enter the yard after some outside loitering, Fag seated himself again in an attitude of observation. 'I'm glad to hear I'm a good feller.'

Mr Brooke reflected that it was market-day, and that his worthy tenant had probably been dining, but saw no reason why he should not go on, since he could take the precaution of repeating what he had to say to Mrs Dagley.

'Your little lad Jacob has been caught killing a leveret, Dagley: I have told Johnson to lock him up in the empty stable an hour or two, just to frighten him, you know. But he will be brought home by-and-by, before night: and you'll just look after him, will you, and give him a reprimand, you know?'

'No, I woon't: I'll be dee'd if I'll leather my boy to please you or anybody else, not if you was twenty landlords istid o' one, and that a bad un.'

Dagley's words were loud enough to summon his wife to the back-kitchen door - the only entrance ever used, and one always open except in bad weather - and Mr Brooke, saying soothingly, 'Well, well, I'll speak to your wife - I didn't mean beating, you know,' turned to walk to the house. But Dagley, only the more inclined to 'have his say' with a gentleman who walked away from him, followed at once, with Fag slouching at his heels and sullenly evading some small and probably charitable advances on the part of Monk.

'How do you do, Mrs Dagley?' said Mr Brooke, making some haste. 'I came to tell you about your boy: I don't want you to give him the stick, you know.' He was careful to speak quite plainly this time.

Overworked Mrs Dagley - a thin, worn woman, from whose life pleasure had so entirely vanished that she had not even any Sunday clothes which could give her satisfaction in preparing for church - had already had a misunderstanding with her husband since he had come home, and was in low spirits, expecting the worst. But her husband was beforehand in answering.

'No, nor he woon't hev the stick, whether you want it or no,' pursued Dagley, throwing out his voice, as if he wanted it to hit hard. 'You've got no call to come an' talk about sticks o' these primises, as you woon't give a stick tow'rt mending. Go to Middlemarch to ax for *your* charrickter.'

'You'd far better hold your tongue, Dagley,' said the wife, 'and not kick your own trough over. When a man as is father of a family has been an' spent money at market and made himself the worse for liquor, he's done enough mischief for one day. But I should like to know what my boy's done, sir.'

'Niver do you mind what he's done,' said Dagley, more fiercely, 'it's my business to speak, an' not yourn. An' I wull speak, too. I'll hev my say - supper or no. An' what I say is, as I've lived upo' your ground from my father and grandfather afore me, an' hev dropped our money into't, an' me an' my children might lie an' rot on the ground for top-dressin' as we can't find the money to buy, if the King wasn't to put a stop.'

'My good fellow, you're drunk, you know,' said Mr Brooke, confidentially but not judiciously. 'Another day, another day,' he added, turning as if to go.

But Dagley immediately fronted him, and Fag at his heels growled low, as his master's voice grew louder and more insulting, while Monk also drew close in silent dignified watch. The laborers on the wagon were pausing to listen, and it seemed wiser to be quite passive than to attempt a ridiculous flight pursued by a bawling man.

'I'm no more drunk nor you are, nor so much,' said Dagley. 'I can carry my liquor, an' I know what I meean. An' I meean as the King 'ull put a stop to 't, for them say it as knows it, as there's to be a Rinform, and them landlords as never done the right thing by their tenants 'ull be treated i' that way as they'll hev to scuttle off. An' there's them i' Middlemarch knows what the Rinform is - an' as knows who'll hev to scuttle. Says they, 'I know who *your* landlord is.' An' says I, 'I hope you're the better for knowin' him, I arn't.' Says they, 'He's a close-fisted un.' 'Ay ay,' says I. 'He's a man for the Rinform,' says they. That's what they says. An' I made out what the Rinform were - an' it were to send you an' your likes a-scuttlin' an' wi' pretty strong-smellin' things too. An' you may do as you like now, for I'm none afeard on you. An' you'd better let my boy aloan, an' look to yoursen, afore the Rinform has got upo' your back. That's what I'n got to say,' concluded Mr Dagley, striking his fork into the ground with a firmness which proved inconvenient as he tried to draw it up again.

At this last action Monk began to bark loudly, and it was a moment for Mr Brooke to escape. He walked out of the yard as quickly as he

could, in some amazement at the novelty of his situation. He had never been insulted on his own land before, and had been inclined to regard himself as a general favorite (we are all apt to do so, when we think of our own amiability more than of what other people are likely to want of us). When he had quarrelled with Caleb Garth twelve years before he had thought that the tenants would be pleased at the landlord's taking everything into his own hands.

Some who follow the narrative of his experience may wonder at the midnight darkness of Mr Dagley; but nothing was easier in those times than for an hereditary farmer of his grade to be ignorant, in spite somehow of having a rector in the twin parish who was a gentleman to the backbone, a curate nearer at hand who preached more learnedly than the rector, a landlord who had gone into everything, especially fine art and social improvement, and all the lights of Middlemarch only three miles off. As to the facility with which mortals escape knowledge, try an average acquaintance in the intellectual blaze of London, and consider what that eligible person for a dinner-party would have been if he had learned scant skill in 'summing' from the parish-clerk of Tipton, and read a chapter in the Bible with immense difficulty, because such names as Isaiah or Apollos remained unmanageable after twice spelling. Poor Dagley read a few verses sometimes on a Sunday evening, and the world was at least not darker to him than it had been before. Some things he knew thoroughly, namely, the slovenly habits of farming, and the awkwardness of weather, stock and crops, at Freeman's End - so called apparently by way of sarcasm, to imply that a man was free to quit it if he chose, but that there was no earthly 'beyond' open to him.