Chapter LVI

‘How happy is he born and taught That serveth not another's will; Whose armor is his honest thought, And simple truth his only skill! . . . . This man is freed from servile bands Of hope to rise or fear to fall; Lord of himself though not of lands; And having nothing yet hath all.’ - SIR HENRY WOTTON.

Dorothea's confidence in Caleb Garth's knowledge, which had begun on her hearing that he approved of her cottages, had grown fast during her stay at Freshitt, Sir James having induced her to take rides over the two estates in company with himself and Caleb, who quite returned her admiration, and told his wife that Mrs Casaubon had a head for business most uncommon in a woman. It must be remembered that by ‘business’ Caleb never meant money transactions, but the skilful application of labor.

‘Most uncommon!’ repeated Caleb. ‘She said a thing I often used to think myself when I was a lad: - `Mr Garth, I should like to feel, if I lived to be old, that I had improved a great piece of land and built a great many good cottages, because the work is of a healthy kind while it is being done, and after it is done, men are the better for it.' Those were the very words: she sees into things in that way.’

‘But womanly, I hope,’ said Mrs Garth, half suspecting that Mrs Casaubon might not hold the true principle of subordination.

‘Oh, you can't think!’ said Caleb, shaking his head. ‘You would like to hear her speak, Susan. She speaks in such plain words, and a voice like music. Bless me! it reminds me of bits in the `Messiah' - `and straightway there appeared a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying;' it has a tone with it that satisfies your ear.’

Caleb was very fond of music, and when he could afford it went to hear an oratorio that came within his reach, returning from it with a profound reverence for this mighty structure of tones, which made him sit meditatively, looking on the floor and throwing much unutterable language into his outstretched hands.

With this good understanding between them, it was natural that Dorothea asked Mr Garth to undertake any business connected with the three farms and the numerous tenements attached to Lowick Manor; indeed, his expectation of getting work for two was being fast fulfilled. As he said, ‘Business breeds.’ And one form of business which was beginning to breed just then was the construction of railways. A projected line was to run through Lowick parish where the cattle had hitherto grazed in a peace unbroken by astonishment; and thus it happened that the infant struggles of the railway system

entered into the affairs of Caleb Garth, and determined the course of this history with regard to two persons who were dear to him. The submarine railway may have its difficulties; but the bed of the sea is not divided among various landed proprietors with claims for damages not only measurable but sentimental. In the hundred to which Middlemarch belonged railways were as exciting a topic as the Reform Bill or the imminent horrors of Cholera, and those who held the most decided views on the subject were women and landholders. Women both old and young regarded travelling by steam as presumptuous and dangerous, and argued against it by saying that nothing should induce them to get into a railway carriage; while proprietors, differing from each other in their arguments as much as Mr Solomon Featherstone differed from Lord Medlicote, were yet unanimous in the opinion that in selling land, whether to the Enemy of mankind or to a company obliged to purchase, these pernicious agencies must be made to pay a very high price to landowners for permission to injure mankind.

But the slower wits, such as Mr Solomon and Mrs Waule, who both occupied land of their own, took a long time to arrive at this conclusion, their minds halting at the vivid conception of what it would be to cut the Big Pasture in two, and turn it into three-cornered bits, which would be 'nohow;' while accommodation-bridges and high payments were remote and incredible.

'The cows will all cast their calves, brother,' said Mrs Waule, in a tone of deep melancholy, 'if the railway comes across the Near Close; and I shouldn't wonder at the mare too, if she was in foal. It's a poor tale if a widow's property is to be spaded away, and the law say nothing to it. What's to hinder 'em from cutting right and left if they begin? It's well known, *I* can't fight.'

'The best way would be to say nothing, and set somebody on to send 'em away with a flea in their ear, when they came spying and measuring,' said Solomon. 'Folks did that about Brassing, by what I can understand. It's all a pretence, if the truth was known, about their being forced to take one way. Let 'em go cutting in another parish. And I don't believe in any pay to make amends for bringing a lot of ruffians to trample your crops. Where's a company's pocket?'

'Brother Peter, God forgive him, got money out of a company,' said Mrs Waule. 'But that was for the manganese. That wasn't for railways to blow you to pieces right and left.'

'Well, there's this to be said, Jane,' Mr Solomon concluded, lowering his voice in a cautious manner - 'the more spokes we put in their wheel, the more they'll pay us to let 'em go on, if they must come whether or not.'

This reasoning of Mr Solomon's was perhaps less thorough than he imagined, his cunning bearing about the same relation to the course of railways as the cunning of a diplomatist bears to the general chill or catarrh of the solar system. But he set about acting on his views in a thoroughly diplomatic manner, by stimulating suspicion. His side of Lowick was the most remote from the village, and the houses of the laboring people were either lone cottages or were collected in a hamlet called Frick, where a water-mill and some stone-pits made a little centre of slow, heavy-shouldered industry.

In the absence of any precise idea as to what railways were, public opinion in Frick was against them; for the human mind in that grassy corner had not the proverbial tendency to admire the unknown, holding rather that it was likely to be against the poor man, and that suspicion was the only wise attitude with regard to it. Even the rumor of Reform had not yet excited any millennial expectations in Frick, there being no definite promise in it, as of gratuitous grains to fatten Hiram Ford's pig, or of a publican at the ‘Weights and Scales’ who would brew beer for nothing, or of an offer on the part of the three neighboring farmers to raise wages during winter. And without distinct good of this kind in its promises, Reform seemed on a footing with the bragging of pedlers, which was a hint for distrust to every knowing person. The men of Frick were not ill-fed, and were less given to fanaticism than to a strong muscular suspicion; less inclined to believe that they were peculiarly cared for by heaven, than to regard heaven itself as rather disposed to take them in - a disposition observable in the weather.

Thus the mind of Frick was exactly of the sort for Mr Solomon Featherstone to work upon, he having more plenteous ideas of the same order, with a suspicion of heaven and earth which was better fed and more entirely at leisure. Solomon was overseer of the roads at that time, and on his slow-paced cob often took his rounds by Frick to look at the workmen getting the stones there, pausing with a mysterious deliberation, which might have misled you into supposing that he had some other reason for staying than the mere want of impulse to move. After looking for a long while at any work that was going on, he would raise his eyes a little and look at the horizon; finally he would shake his bridle, touch his horse with the whip, and get it to move slowly onward. The hour-hand of a clock was quick by comparison with Mr Solomon, who had an agreeable sense that he could afford to be slow. He was in the habit of pausing for a cautious, vaguely designing chat with every hedger or ditcher on his way, and was especially willing to listen even to news which he had heard before, feeling himself at an advantage over all narrators in partially disbelieving them. One day, however, he got into a dialogue with Hiram Ford, a wagoner, in which he himself contributed information. He wished to know whether Hiram had seen fellows with staves and

instruments spying about: they called themselves railroad people, but there was no telling what they were or what they meant to do. The least they pretended was that they were going to cut Lowick Parish into sixes and sevens.

'Why, there'll be no stirrin' from one pla-ace to another,' said Hiram, thinking of his wagon and horses.

'Not a bit,' said Mr Solomon. 'And cutting up fine land such as this parish! Let 'em go into Tipton, say I. But there's no knowing what there is at the bottom of it. Traffic is what they put for'ard; but it's to do harm to the land and the poor man in the long-run.'

'Why, they're Lunnon chaps, I reckon,' said Hiram, who had a dim notion of London as a centre of hostility to the country.

'Ay, to be sure. And in some parts against Brassing, by what I've heard say, the folks fell on 'em when they were spying, and broke their peep-holes as they carry, and drove 'em away, so as they knew better than come again.'

'It war good foon, I'd be bound,' said Hiram, whose fun was much restricted by circumstances.

'Well, I wouldn't meddle with 'em myself,' said Solomon. 'But some say this country's seen its best days, and the sign is, as it's being overrun with these fellows trampling right and left, and wanting to cut it up into railways; and all for the big traffic to swallow up the little, so as there shan't be a team left on the land, nor a whip to crack.'

'I'll crack *my* whip about their ear'n, afore they bring it to that, though,' said Hiram, while Mr Solomon, shaking his bridle, moved onward.

Nettle-seed needs no digging. The ruin of this countryside by railroads was discussed, not only at the 'Weights and Scales,' but in the hay-field, where the muster of working hands gave opportunities for talk such as were rarely had through the rural year.

One morning, not long after that interview between Mr Farebrother and Mary Garth, in which she confessed to him her feeling for Fred Vincy, it happened that her father had some business which took him to Yoddrell's farm in the direction of Frick: it was to measure and value an outlying piece of land belonging to Lowick Manor, which Caleb expected to dispose of advantageously for Dorothea (it must be confessed that his bias was towards getting the best possible terms from railroad companies). He put up his gig at Yoddrell's, and in walking with his assistant and measuring-chain to the scene of his

work, he encountered the party of the company's agents, who were adjusting their spirit-level. After a little chat he left them, observing that by-and-by they would reach him again where he was going to measure. It was one of those gray mornings after light rains, which become delicious about twelve o'clock, when the clouds part a little, and the scent of the earth is sweet along the lanes and by the hedgerows.

The scent would have been sweeter to Fred Vincy, who was coming along the lanes on horseback, if his mind had not been worried by unsuccessful efforts to imagine what he was to do, with his father on one side expecting him straightway to enter the Church, with Mary on the other threatening to forsake him if he did enter it, and with the working-day world showing no eager need whatever of a young gentleman without capital and generally unskilled. It was the harder to Fred's disposition because his father, satisfied that he was no longer rebellious, was in good humor with him, and had sent him on this pleasant ride to see after some greyhounds. Even when he had fixed on what he should do, there would be the task of telling his father. But it must be admitted that the fixing, which had to come first, was the more difficult task: - what secular avocation on earth was there for a young man (whose friends could not get him an ‘appointment’) which was at once gentlemanly, lucrative, and to be followed without special knowledge? Riding along the lanes by Frick in this mood, and slackening his pace while he reflected whether he should venture to go round by Lowick Parsonage to call on Mary, he could see over the hedges from one field to another. Suddenly a noise roused his attention, and on the far side of a field on his left hand he could see six or seven men in smock-frocks with hay-forks in their hands making an offensive approach towards the four railway agents who were facing them, while Caleb Garth and his assistant were hastening across the field to join the threatened group. Fred, delayed a few moments by having to find the gate, could not gallop up to the spot before the party in smock-frocks, whose work of turning the hay had not been too pressing after swallowing their mid-day beer, were driving the men in coats before them with their hay-forks; while Caleb Garth's assistant, a lad of seventeen, who had snatched up the spirit-level at Caleb's order, had been knocked down and seemed to be lying helpless. The coated men had the advantage as runners, and Fred covered their retreat by getting in front of the smock-frocks and charging them suddenly enough to throw their chase into confusion. ‘What do you confounded fools mean?’ shouted Fred, pursuing the divided group in a zigzag, and cutting right and left with his whip. ‘I'll swear to every one of you before the magistrate. You've knocked the lad down and killed him, for what I know. You'll every one of you be hanged at the next assizes, if you don't mind,’ said Fred, who afterwards laughed heartily as he remembered his own phrases.

The laborers had been driven through the gate-way into their hay-field, and Fred had checked his horse, when Hiram Ford, observing himself at a safe challenging distance, turned back and shouted a defiance which he did not know to be Homeric.

'Yo're a coward, yo are. Yo git off your horse, young measter, and I'll have a round wi' ye, I wull. Yo daredn't come on wi'out your hoss an' whip. I'd soon knock the breath out on ye, I would.'

'Wait a minute, and I'll come back presently, and have a round with you all in turn, if you like,' said Fred, who felt confidence in his power of boxing with his dearly beloved brethren. But just now he wanted to hasten back to Caleb and the prostrate youth.

The lad's ankle was strained, and he was in much pain from it, but he was no further hurt, and Fred placed him on the horse that he might ride to Yoddrell's and be taken care of there.

'Let them put the horse in the stable, and tell the surveyors they can come back for their traps,' said Fred. 'The ground is clear now.'

'No, no,' said Caleb, 'here's a breakage. They'll have to give up for to-day, and it will be as well. Here, take the things before you on the horse, Tom. They'll see you coming, and they'll turn back.'

'I'm glad I happened to be here at the right moment, Mr Garth,' said Fred, as Tom rode away. 'No knowing what might have happened if the cavalry had not come up in time.'

'Ay, ay, it was lucky,' said Caleb, speaking rather absently, and looking towards the spot where he had been at work at the moment of interruption. 'But - deuce take it - this is what comes of men being fools - I'm hindered of my day's work. I can't get along without somebody to help me with the measuring-chain. However!' He was beginning to move towards the spot with a look of vexation, as if he had forgotten Fred's presence, but suddenly he turned round and said quickly, 'What have you got to do to-day, young fellow?'

'Nothing, Mr Garth. I'll help you with pleasure - can I?' said Fred, with a sense that he should be courting Mary when he was helping her father.

'Well, you mustn't mind stooping and getting hot.'

'I don't mind anything. Only I want to go first and have a round with that hulky fellow who turned to challenge me. It would be a good lesson for him. I shall not be five minutes.'

‘Nonsense!’ said Caleb, with his most peremptory intonation. ‘I shall go and speak to the men myself. It's all ignorance. Somebody has been telling them lies. The poor fools don't know any better.’

‘I shall go with you, then,’ said Fred.

‘No, no; stay where you are. I don't want your young blood. I can take care of myself.’

Caleb was a powerful man and knew little of any fear except the fear of hurting others and the fear of having to speechify. But he felt it his duty at this moment to try and give a little harangue. There was a striking mixture in him - which came from his having always been a hard-working man himself - of rigorous notions about workmen and practical indulgence towards them. To do a good day's work and to do it well, he held to be part of their welfare, as it was the chief part of his own happiness; but he had a strong sense of fellowship with them. When he advanced towards the laborers they had not gone to work again, but were standing in that form of rural grouping which consists in each turning a shoulder towards the other, at a distance of two or three yards. They looked rather sulkily at Caleb, who walked quickly with one hand in his pocket and the other thrust between the buttons of his waistcoat, and had his every-day mild air when he paused among them.

‘Why, my lads, how's this?’ he began, taking as usual to brief phrases, which seemed pregnant to himself, because he had many thoughts lying under them, like the abundant roots of a plant that just manages to peep above the water. ‘How came you to make such a mistake as this? Somebody has been telling you lies. You thought those men up there wanted to do mischief.’

‘Aw!’ was the answer, dropped at intervals by each according to his degree of unreadiness.

‘Nonsense! No such thing! They're looking out to see which way the railroad is to take. Now, my lads, you can't hinder the railroad: it will be made whether you like it or not. And if you go fighting against it, you'll get yourselves into trouble. The law gives those men leave to come here on the land. The owner has nothing to say against it, and if you meddle with them you'll have to do with the constable and Justice Blakesley, and with the handcuffs and Middlemarch jail. And you might be in for it now, if anybody informed against you.’

Caleb paused here, and perhaps the greatest orator could not have chosen either his pause or his images better for the occasion.

‘But come, you didn't mean any harm. Somebody told you the railroad was a bad thing. That was a lie. It may do a bit of harm here and there, to this and to that; and so does the sun in heaven. But the railway's a good thing.’

‘Aw! good for the big folks to make money out on,’ said old Timothy Cooper, who had stayed behind turning his hay while the others had been gone on their spree; - ‘I'n seen lots o' things turn up sin' I war a young un - the war an' the peace, and the canells, an' the oald King George, an' the Regen', an' the new King George, an' the new un as has got a new ne-ame - an' it's been all aloike to the poor mon. What's the canells been t' him? They'n brought him neyther me-at nor be-acon, nor wage to lay by, if he didn't save it wi' clemmin' his own inside. Times ha' got wusser for him sin' I war a young un. An' so it'll be wi' the railroads. They'll on'y leave the poor mon furder behind. But them are fools as meddle, and so I told the chaps here. This is the big folks's world, this is. But yo're for the big folks, Muster Garth, yo are.’

Timothy was a wiry old laborer, of a type lingering in those times - who had his savings in a stocking-foot, lived in a lone cottage, and was not to be wrought on by any oratory, having as little of the feudal spirit, and believing as little, as if he had not been totally unacquainted with the Age of Reason and the Rights of Man. Caleb was in a difficulty known to any person attempting in dark times and unassisted by miracle to reason with rustics who are in possession of an undeniable truth which they know through a hard process of feeling, and can let it fall like a giant's club on your neatly carved argument for a social benefit which they do not feel. Caleb had no cant at command, even if he could have chosen to use it; and he had been accustomed to meet all such difficulties in no other way than by doing his ‘business’ faithfully. He answered -

‘If you don't think well of me, Tim, never mind; that's neither here nor there now. Things may be bad for the poor man - bad they are; but I want the lads here not to do what will make things worse for themselves. The cattle may have a heavy load, but it won't help 'em to throw it over into the roadside pit, when it's partly their own fodder.’

‘We war on'y for a bit o' foon,’ said Hiram, who was beginning to see consequences. ‘That war all we war arter.’

‘Well, promise me not to meddle again, and I'll see that nobody informs against you.’

‘I'n ne'er meddled, an' I'n no call to promise,’ said Timothy.

‘No, but the rest. Come, I'm as hard at work as any of you to-day, and I can't spare much time. Say you'll be quiet without the constable.’

‘Aw, we wooant meddle - they may do as they loike for oos’ - were the forms in which Caleb got his pledges; and then he hastened back to Fred, who had followed him, and watched him in the gateway.

They went to work, and Fred helped vigorously. His spirits had risen, and he heartily enjoyed a good slip in the moist earth under the hedgerow, which soiled his perfect summer trousers. Was it his successful onset which had elated him, or the satisfaction of helping Mary's father? Something more. The accidents of the morning had helped his frustrated imagination to shape an employment for himself which had several attractions. I am not sure that certain fibres in Mr Garth's mind had not resumed their old vibration towards the very end which now revealed itself to Fred. For the effective accident is but the touch of fire where there is oil and tow; and it al ways appeared to Fred that the railway brought the needed touch. But they went on in silence except when their business demanded speech. At last, when they had finished and were walking away, Mr Garth said -

‘A young fellow needn't be a B. A. to do this sort of work, eh, Fred?’

‘I wish I had taken to it before I had thought of being a B. A.,’ said Fred. He paused a moment, and then added, more hesitatingly, ‘Do you think I am too old to learn your business, Mr Garth?’

‘My business is of many sorts, my boy,’ said Mr Garth, smiling. ‘A good deal of what I know can only come from experience: you can't learn it off as you learn things out of a book. But you are young enough to lay a foundation yet.’ Caleb pronounced the last sentence emphatically, but paused in some uncertainty. He had been under the impression lately that Fred had made up his mind to enter the Church.

‘You do think I could do some good at it, if I were to try?’ said Fred, more eagerly.

‘That depends,’ said Caleb, turning his head on one side and lowering his voice, with the air of a man who felt himself to be saying something deeply religious. ‘You must be sure of two things: you must love your work, and not be always looking over the edge of it, wanting your play to begin. And the other is, you must not be ashamed of your work, and think it would be more honorable to you to be doing something else. You must have a pride in your own work and in learning to do it well, and not be always saying, There's this and there's that - if I had this or that to do, I might make something of it. No matter what a man is - I wouldn't give twopence for him’ - here Caleb's mouth looked bitter, and he snapped his fingers - ‘whether he was the prime minister or the rick-thatcher, if he didn't do well what he undertook to do.’

‘I can never feel that I should do that in being a clergyman,’ said Fred, meaning to take a step in argument.

‘Then let it alone, my boy,’ said Caleb, abruptly, ‘else you'll never be easy. Or, if you *are* easy, you'll be a poor stick.’

‘That is very nearly what Mary thinks about it,’ said Fred, coloring. ‘I think you must know what I feel for Mary, Mr Garth: I hope it does not displease you that I have always loved her better than any one else, and that I shall never love any one as I love her.’

The expression of Caleb's face was visibly softening while Fred spoke. But he swung his head with a solemn slowness, and said -

‘That makes things more serious, Fred, if you want to take Mary's happiness into your keeping.’

‘I know that, Mr Garth,’ said Fred, eagerly, ‘and I would do anything for *her*. She says she will never have me if I go into the Church; and I shall be the most miserable devil in the world if I lose all hope of Mary. Really, if I could get some other profession, business - anything that I am at all fit for, I would work hard, I would deserve your good opinion. I should like to have to do with outdoor things. I know a good deal about land and cattle already. I used to believe, you know - though you will think me rather foolish for it - that I should have land of my own. I am sure knowledge of that sort would come easily to me, especially if I could be under you in any way.’

‘Softly, my boy,’ said Caleb, having the image of ‘Susan’ before his eyes. ‘What have you said to your father about all this?’

‘Nothing, yet; but I must tell him. I am only waiting to know what I can do instead of entering the Church. I am very sorry to disappoint him, but a man ought to be allowed to judge for himself when he is four-and-twenty. How could I know when I was fifteen, what it would be right for me to do now? My education was a mistake.’

‘But hearken to this, Fred,’ said Caleb. ‘Are you sure Mary is fond of you, or would ever have you?’

‘I asked Mr Farebrother to talk to her, because she had forbidden me - I didn't know what else to do,’ said Fred, apologetically. ‘And he says that I have every reason to hope, if I can put myself in an honorable position - I mean, out of the Church I dare say you think it unwarrantable in me, Mr Garth, to be troubling you and obtruding my own wishes about Mary, before I have done anything at all for myself. Of course I have not the least claim - indeed, I have already a debt to

you which will never be discharged, even when I have been, able to pay it in the shape of money.'

'Yes, my boy, you have a claim,' said Caleb, with much feeling in his voice. 'The young ones have always a claim on the old to help them forward. I was young myself once and had to do without much help; but help would have been welcome to me, if it had been only for the fellow-feeling's sake. But I must consider. Come to me to-morrow at the office, at nine o'clock. At the office, mind.'

Mr Garth would take no important step without consulting Susan, but it must be confessed that before he reached home he had taken his resolution. With regard to a large number of matters about which other men are decided or obstinate, he was the most easily manageable man in the world. He never knew what meat he would choose, and if Susan had said that they ought to live in a four-roomed cottage, in order to save, he would have said, 'Let us go,' without inquiring into details. But where Caleb's feeling and judgment strongly pronounced, he was a ruler; and in spite of his mildness and timidity in reproving, every one about him knew that on the exceptional occasions when he chose, he was absolute. He never, indeed, chose to be absolute except on some one else's behalf. On ninety-nine points Mrs Garth decided, but on the hundredth she was often aware that she would have to perform the singularly difficult task of carrying out her own principle, and to make herself subordinate.

'It is come round as I thought, Susan,' said Caleb, when they were seated alone in the evening. He had already narrated the adventure which had brought about Fred's sharing in his work, but had kept back the further result. 'The children *are* fond of each other - I mean, Fred and Mary.'

Mrs Garth laid her work on her knee, and fixed her penetrating eyes anxiously on her husband.

'After we'd done our work, Fred poured it all out to me. He can't bear to be a clergyman, and Mary says she won't have him if he is one; and the lad would like to be under me and give his mind to business. And I've determined to take him and make a man of him.'

'Caleb!' said Mrs Garth, in a deep contralto, expressive of resigned astonishment.

'It's a fine thing to do,' said Mr Garth, settling himself firmly against the back of his chair, and grasping the elbows. 'I shall have trouble with him, but I think I shall carry it through. The lad loves Mary, and a true love for a good woman is a great thing, Susan. It shapes many a rough fellow.'

‘Has Mary spoken to you on the subject?’ said Mrs Garth, secretly a little hurt that she had to be informed on it herself.

‘Not a word. I asked her about Fred once; I gave her a bit of a warning. But she assured me she would never marry an idle self-indulgent man - nothing since. But it seems Fred set on Mr Farebrother to talk to her, because she had forbidden him to speak himself, and Mr Farebrother has found out that she is fond of Fred, but says he must not be a clergyman. Fred's heart is fixed on Mary, that I can see: it gives me a good opinion of the lad - and we always liked him, Susan.’

‘It is a pity for Mary, I think,’ said Mrs Garth.

‘Why - a pity?’

‘Because, Caleb, she might have had a man who is worth twenty Fred Vincy's.’

‘Ah?’ said Caleb, with surprise.

‘I firmly believe that Mr Farebrother is attached to her, and meant to make her an offer; but of course, now that Fred has used him as an envoy, there is an end to that better prospect.’ There was a severe precision in Mrs Garth's utterance. She was vexed and disappointed, but she was bent on abstaining from useless words.

Caleb was silent a few moments under a conflict of feelings. He looked at the floor and moved his head and hands in accompaniment to some inward argumentation. At last he said -

‘That would have made me very proud and happy, Susan, and I should have been glad for your sake. I've always felt that your belongings have never been on a level with you. But you took me, though I was a plain man.’

‘I took the best and cleverest man I had ever known,’ said Mrs Garth, convinced that *she* would never have loved any one who came short of that mark.

‘Well, perhaps others thought you might have done better. But it would have been worse for me. And that is what touches me close about Fred. The lad is good at bottom, and clever enough to do, if he's put in the right way; and he loves and honors my daughter beyond anything, and she has given him a sort of promise according to what he turns out. I say, that young man's soul is in my hand; and I'll do the best I can for him, so help me God! It's my duty, Susan.’

Mrs Garth was not given to tears, but there was a large one rolling down her face before her husband had finished. It came from the pressure of various feelings, in which there was much affection and some vexation. She wiped it away quickly, saying -

'Few men besides you would think it a duty to add to their anxieties in that way, Caleb.'

'That signifies nothing - what other men would think. I've got a clear feeling inside me, and that I shall follow; and I hope your heart will go with me, Susan, in making everything as light as can be to Mary, poor child.'

Caleb, leaning back in his chair, looked with anxious appeal towards his wife. She rose and kissed him, saying, 'God bless you, Caleb! Our children have a good father.'

But she went out and had a hearty cry to make up for the suppression of her words. She felt sure that her husband's conduct would be misunderstood, and about Fred she was rational and unhopeful. Which would turn out to have the more foresight in it - her rationality or Caleb's ardent generosity?

When Fred went to the office the next morning, there was a test to be gone through which he was not prepared for.

'Now Fred,' said Caleb, 'you will have some desk-work. I have always done a good deal of writing myself, but I can't do without help, and as I want you to understand the accounts and get the values into your head, I mean to do without another clerk. So you must buckle to. How are you at writing and arithmetic?'

Fred felt an awkward movement of the heart; he had not thought of desk-work; but he was in a resolute mood, and not going to shrink. 'I'm not afraid of arithmetic, Mr Garth: it always came easily to me. I think you know my writing.'

'Let us see,' said Caleb, taking up a pen, examining it carefully and handing it, well dipped, to Fred with a sheet of ruled paper. 'Copy me a line or two of that valuation, with the figures at the end.'

At that time the opinion existed that it was beneath a gentleman to write legibly, or with a hand in the least suitable to a clerk. Fred wrote the lines demanded in a hand as gentlemanly as that of any viscount or bishop of the day: the vowels were all alike and the consonants only distinguishable as turning up or down, the strokes had a blotted solidity and the letters disdained to keep the line - in short, it was a

manuscript of that venerable kind easy to interpret when you know beforehand what the writer means.

As Caleb looked on, his visage showed a growing depression, but when Fred handed him the paper he gave something like a snarl, and rapped the paper passionately with the back of his hand. Bad work like this dispelled all Caleb's mildness.

'The deuce!' he exclaimed, snarlingly. 'To think that this is a country where a man's education may cost hundreds and hundreds, and it turns you out this!' Then in a more pathetic tone, pushing up his spectacles and looking at the unfortunate scribe, 'The Lord have mercy on us, Fred, I can't put up with this!'

'What can I do, Mr Garth?' said Fred, whose spirits had sunk very low, not only at the estimate of his handwriting, but at the vision of himself as liable to be ranked with office clerks.

'Do? Why, you must learn to form your letters and keep the line. What's the use of writing at all if nobody can understand it?' asked Caleb, energetically, quite preoccupied with the bad quality of the work. 'Is there so little business in the world that you must be sending puzzles over the country? But that's the way people are brought up. I should lose no end of time with the letters some people send me, if Susan did not make them out for me. It's disgusting.' Here Caleb tossed the paper from him.

Any stranger peeping into the office at that moment might have wondered what was the drama between the indignant man of business, and the fine-looking young fellow whose blond complexion was getting rather patchy as he bit his lip with mortification. Fred was struggling with many thoughts. Mr Garth had been so kind and encouraging at the beginning of their interview, that gratitude and hopefulness had been at a high pitch, and the downfall was proportionate. He had not thought of desk-work - in fact, like the majority of young gentlemen, he wanted an occupation which should be free from disagreeables. I cannot tell what might have been the consequences if he had not distinctly promised himself that he would go to Lowick to see Mary and tell her that he was engaged to work under her father. He did not like to disappoint himself there.

'I am very sorry,' were all the words that he could muster. But Mr Garth was already relenting.

'We must make the best of it, Fred,' he began, with a return to his usual quiet tone. 'Every man can learn to write. I taught myself. Go at it with a will, and sit up at night if the day-time isn't enough. We'll be patient, my boy. Callum shall go on with the books for a bit, while you

are learning. But now I must be off,' said Caleb, rising. 'You must let your father know our agreement. You'll save me Callum's salary, you know, when you can write; and I can afford to give you eighty pounds for the first year, and more after.'

When Fred made the necessary disclosure to his parents, the relative effect on the two was a surprise which entered very deeply into his memory. He went straight from Mr Garth's office to the warehouse, rightly feeling that the most respectful way in which he could behave to his father was to make the painful communication as gravely and formally as possible. Moreover, the decision would be more certainly understood to be final, if the interview took place in his father's gravest hours, which were always those spent in his private room at the warehouse.

Fred entered on the subject directly, and declared briefly what he had done and was resolved to do, expressing at the end his regret that he should be the cause of disappointment to his father, and taking the blame on his own deficiencies. The regret was genuine, and inspired Fred with strong, simple words.

Mr Vincy listened in profound surprise without uttering even an exclamation, a silence which in his impatient temperament was a sign of unusual emotion. He had not been in good spirits about trade that morning, and the slight bitterness in his lips grew intense as he listened. When Fred had ended, there was a pause of nearly a minute, during which Mr Vincy replaced a book in his desk and turned the key emphatically. Then he looked at his son steadily, and said -

'So you've made up your mind at last, sir?'

'Yes, father.'

'Very well; stick to it. I've no more to say. You've thrown away your education, and gone down a step in life, when I had given you the means of rising, that's all.'

'I am very sorry that we differ, father. I think I can be quite as much of a gentleman at the work I have undertaken, as if I had been a curate. But I am grateful to you for wishing to do the best for me.'

'Very well; I have no more to say. I wash my hands of you. I only hope, when you have a son of your own he will make a better return for the pains you spend on him.'

This was very cutting to Fred. His father was using that unfair advantage possessed by us all when we are in a pathetic situation and see our own past as if it were simply part of the pathos. In reality, Mr

Vincy's wishes about his son had had a great deal of pride, inconsiderateness, and egoistic folly in them. But still the disappointed father held a strong lever; and Fred felt as if he were being banished with a malediction.

'I hope you will not object to my remaining at home, sir?' he said, after rising to go; 'I shall have a sufficient salary to pay for my board, as of course I should wish to do.'

'Board be hanged!' said Mr Vincy, recovering himself in his disgust at the notion that Fred's keep would be missed at his table. 'Of course your mother will want you to stay. But I shall keep no horse for you, you understand; and you will pay your own tailor. You will do with a suit or two less, I fancy, when you have to pay for 'em.'

Fred lingered; there was still something to be said. At last it came.

'I hope you will shake hands with me, father, and forgive me the vexation I have caused you.'

Mr Vincy from his chair threw a quick glance upward at his son, who had advanced near to him, and then gave his hand, saying hurriedly, 'Yes, yes, let us say no more.'

Fred went through much more narrative and explanation with his mother, but she was inconsolable, having before her eyes what perhaps her husband had never thought of, the certainty that Fred would marry Mary Garth, that her life would henceforth be spoiled by a perpetual infusion of Garths and their ways, and that her darling boy, with his beautiful face and stylish air 'beyond anybody else's son in Middlemarch,' would be sure to get like that family in plainness of appearance and carelessness about his clothes. To her it seemed that there was a Garth conspiracy to get possession of the desirable Fred, but she dared not enlarge on this opinion, because a slight hint of it had made him 'fly out' at her as he had never done before. Her temper was too sweet for her to show any anger, but she felt that her happiness had received a bruise, and for several days merely to look at Fred made her cry a little as if he were the subject of some baleful prophecy. Perhaps she was the slower to recover her usual cheerfulness because Fred had warned her that she must not reopen the sore question with his father, who had accepted his decision and forgiven him. If her husband had been vehement against Fred, she would have been urged into defence of her darling. It was the end of the fourth day when Mr Vincy said to her -

'Come, Lucy, my dear, don't be so down-hearted. You always have spoiled the boy, and you must go on spoiling him.'

‘Nothing ever did cut me so before, Vincy,’ said the wife, her fair throat and chin beginning to tremble again, ‘only his illness.’

‘Pooh, pooh, never mind! We must expect to have trouble with our children. Don't make it worse by letting me see you out of spirits.’

‘Well, I won't,’ said Mrs Vincy, roused by this appeal and adjusting herself with a little shake as of a bird which lays down its ruffled plumage.

‘It won't do to begin making a fuss about one,’ said Mr Vincy, wishing to combine a little grumbling with domestic cheerfulness. ‘There's Rosamond as well as Fred.’

‘Yes, poor thing. I'm sure I felt for her being disappointed of her baby; but she got over it nicely.’

‘Baby, pooh! I can see Lydgate is making a mess of his practice, and getting into debt too, by what I hear. I shall have Rosamond coming to me with a pretty tale one of these days. But they'll get no money from me, I know. Let *his* family help him. I never did like that marriage. But it's no use talking. Ring the bell for lemons, and don't look dull any more, Lucy. I'll drive you and Louisa to Riverston to-morrow.’