The Mill on the Floss

BY GEORGE ELIOT

(32. Instalment.)

CHAPTER III.

The Family Council

It was at eleven o'clock the next morning that the aunts and uncles came to hold their consultation. The fire was lighted in the large parlour, and poor Mrs. Tulliver, with a confused impression that it was a great occasion, like a funeral, unbagged the bell-rope tassels, and unpinned the curtains, adjusting them in proper folds—looking round and shaking her head sadly at the polished tops and legs of the tables, which sister Pullet herself could not accuse of insufficient brightness.

Mr. Deane was not coming—he was away on business; but Mrs. Deane appeared punctually in that handsome new gig with the head to it, and the livery-servant driving it, which had thrown so clear a light on several traits in her character to some of her female friends in St. Ogg's. Mr. Deane had been advancing in the world as rapidly as Mr. Tulliver had been going down in it; and in Mrs. Deane's house the Dodson linen and plate were beginning to hold quite a subordinate position, as a mere supplement to the handsomer articles of the same kind, purchased in recent years: a change which had caused an occasional coolness in the sisterly intercourse between her and Mrs. Glegg, who felt that Susan was getting "like the rest," and there would soon be little of the true Dodson spirit surviving except in herself, and, it might be hoped, in those nephews who supported the Dodson name on the family land, far away in the Wolds. People who live at a distance are naturally less faulty than those immediately under our own eyes; and it seems superfluous, when we consider the remote geographical position of the Ethiopians, and how very little the Greeks had to do with them, to inquire further why Homer calls them "blameless."

Mrs. Deane was the first to arrive; and when she had taken her seat in the large parlour, Mrs. Tulliver came down to her with her comely face a little distorted, nearly as it would have been if she had been crying: she was not a woman who could shed abundant tears, except in moments when the prospect of losing her furniture became unusually vivid, but she felt how unfitting it was to be quite calm under present circumstances.

"Oh, sister, what a world this is!" she exclaimed, as she entered; "what trouble, oh dear!"

Mrs. Deane was a thin-lipped woman, who made small, well-considered speeches on peculiar occasions, repeating them afterwards to her husband, and asking him if she had not spoken very properly.

"Yes, sister," she said deliberately, "this is a changing world, and we don't know to-day what may happen to-morrow. But it's right to be prepared for all things, and if trouble's sent, to remember as it isn't sent without a cause. I'm very sorry for you as a sister, and if the doctor orders Jelly for Mr. Tulliver, I hope you'll let me know: I'll send it willingly. For it is but right he should have proper attendance while he's ill."

"Thank you, Susan," said Mrs. Tulliver rather faintly, withdrawing her fat hand from her sister's thin one. "But there's been no talk o' jelly yet." Then after a moment's pause she added, "There's a dozen o' cut jelly-glasses upstairs....I shall never put jelly into 'em no more."

Her voice was rather agitated as she uttered the last words, but the sound of wheels diverted her thoughts. Mr. and Mrs. Glegg were come, and were almost immediately followed by Mr. and Mrs. Pullet.

Mrs. Pullet entered crying, as a compendious mode, at all times, of expressing what were her views of life in general, and what, in brief, were the opinions she held concerning the particular case before her.

Mrs. Glegg had on her fuzziest front, and garments which appeared to have had a recent resurrection from rather a creasy form of burial; a costume selected with the high moral purpose of instilling perfect humility into Bessy and her children.

"Mrs. Glegg, won't you come nearer the fire?" said her husband, unwilling to take the more comfortable seat without offering it to her.

"You see I've seated myself here, Mr. Glegg," returned this superior woman; "you can roast yourself, if you like."

"Well," said Mr. Glegg, seating himself good-humouredly, "and how's the poor man upstairs?"

"Dr. Turnbull thought him a deal better this morning," said Mrs. Tulliver; "he took more notice, and spoke to me; but he's niver known Tom yet—looks at the poor lad as if he was a stranger, though he said something once about Tom and the pony. The doctor says his memory's gone a long way back, and he doesn't know Tom because he's thinking of him when he was little. Eh dear, eh dear!"

"I doubt, it's the water got on his brain," said aunt Pullet, turning round from adjusting her cap in a melancholy way at the pier-glass. "It's much if he ever gets up again; and if he does, he'll most like be childish, as Mr. Carr was, poor man! They fed him with a spoon as if he'd been a baby for three year. He'd quite lost the use of his limbs; but then he'd got a bath chair, and somebody to draw him; and that's what you won't have, I doubt, Bessy."

"Sister Pullet," said Mrs. Glegg severely, "if I understand right, we've come together this morning to advise and consult about what's to be done in this disgrace as has fallen upon the family, and not to talk o' people as don't belong to us. Mr. Carr was none of our blood, nor noways connected with us, as I've ever heared."

"Sister Glegg," said Mrs. Pullet, in a pleading tone, drawing on her gloves again and stroking the fingers in an agitated manner, "if you've got anything disrespectful to say o' Mr. Carr, I do beg of you as you won't say it to me. *I* know what he was," she added, with a sigh; "his breath was short to that degree as you could hear him two rooms off."

"Sophy!" said Mrs. Glegg, with indignant disgust, "you *do* talk o' people's complaints till it's quite undecent. But I say again, as I said before, I didn't come away from home to talk abaut acquaintance, whether they'd short breath or long. If we aren't come together for one to hear what the other mun do to save a sister and her children from the parish, *I* shall go back. *One* can't act without the other, I suppose; it isn't to be expected as *I* should do everything."

"Well, Jane," said Mrs. Pullet, "I don't see as you've been so very forrard at doing. So far as I know, this is the first time as here you've been, since it's been known as the bailiff's in the house; and I was here yesterday, and looked at all Bessy's linen and things, and I told her I'd buy in the spotted table-cloths. I couldn't speak fairer; for as for the teapot as she doesn't want to go out o' the family, it stands to sense I can't do with two silver teapots, not if it hadn't a straight spout—but the spotted damask I was allays fond on."

"I wish it could be managed so as my teapot and chany and the best castors needn't be put up for sale," said poor Mrs. Tulliver beseechingly, "and the sugar-tongs, the first things ever I bought."

"But that can't be helped, you know," said Mr. Glegg. "If one o' the family chooses to buy 'em in, they can, but one thing must be bid for as well as another."

"And it isn't to be looked for," said uncle Pullet, with unwonted independence of idea, "as your own family should pay more for things nor they'll fetch. They may go for as old song by auction."

"Oh dear, oh dear," said Mrs. Tulliver, "to think o' my chany being sold i' that way—and I bought it when I was married, just as you did yours, Jane and Sophy: and I know you didn't like mine, because o' the sprig, but I was fond of it; and there's niver been a bit broke, for I've washed it myself—and there's the tulips on the cups, and the roses, as anybody might go and look at 'em for pleasure. You wouldn't like your chany to go for an old song and be broke to pieces, though yours has got no colour in it, Jane—it's all white and fluted, and didn't cost so much as mine. And there's the castors—sister Deane, I can't think but you'd like to have the castors, for I've heard you say they're pretty."

"Well, I've no objection to buy some of the best things," said Mrs. Deane, rather loftily; "we can do with extra things in our house."

"Best things!" exclaimed Mrs. Glegg with severity, which had gathered intensity from her long silence. "It drives me past patience to hear you all talking o' best things, and buying in this, that, and the other, such as silver and chany. You must bring your mind to your circumstances, Bessy, and not be thinking o' silver and chany; but whether you shall get so much as a flock-bed to lie on, and a blanket to cover you, and a stool to sit on. You must remember, if you get 'em, it'll be because your friends have bought 'em for you, for you're dependent upon them for everything; for your husband lies there helpless, and hasn't got a penny i' the world to call his own. And it's for your own good I say this, for it's right you should feel what your state is, and what disgrace your husband's brought on your own family, as you've got to look to for everything—and be humble in your mind."

Mrs. Glegg paused, for speaking with much energy for the good of others is naturally exhausting. Mrs. Tulliver, always borne down by the family predominance of sister Jane, who had made her wear the yoke of a younger sister in very tender years, said pleadingly—

"I'm sure, sister, I've niver asked anybody to do anything, only buy things as it 'ud be a pleasure to 'em to have, so as they mightn't go and be spoiled i' strange houses. I niver asked anybody to buy the things in for me and my children; though there's the linen I spun, and I thought when Tom was born—I thought one o' the first things when he was lying i' the cradle, as all the things I'd bought wi' my own money, and been so careful of, 'ud go to him. But I've said nothing as I wanted my sisters to pay their money for me. What my husband has done for his sister's unknown, and we should ha' been better off this day if it hadn't been as he's lent money and niver asked for it again."

"Come, come," said Mr. Glegg kindly, "don't let us make things too dark. What's done can't be undone. We shall make a shift among us to buy what's sufficient for you; though, as Mrs. Glegg says, they must be useful, plain things. We mustn't be thinking o' what's unnecessary. A table, and a chair or two, and kitchen things, and a good bed, and such like. Why, I've seen the day when I shouldn't ha' known myself if I'd lain on sacking i'stead o' the floor. We get a deal o' useless things about us, only because we've got the money to spend."

"Mr. Glegg," said Mrs. Glegg, "if you'll be kind enough to let me speak, i'stead o' taking the words out o' my month—I was going to say, Bessy, as it's fine talking for you to say as you've never asked us to buy anything for you; let me tell you, you ought to have asked us. Pray, how are you to be purvided for, if your own family don't help you? You must go to the parish, if they didn't. And you ought to know that, and keep it in mind, and ask us humble to do what we can for you, i'stead o' saying, and making a boast, as you've never asked us for anything."

"You talked o' the Mosses, and what Mr. Tulliver's done for 'em," said uncle Pullet, who became unusually suggestive where advances of money were concerned. "Haven't they been anear you? They ought to do something, as well as other folks; and if he's lent 'em money, they ought to be made to pay it back."

"Yes, to be sure," said Mrs. Deane; "I've been thinking so. How is it Mr. and Mrs. Moss aren't here to meet us? It is but right they should do their share."

"Oh dear!" said Mrs. Tulliver, "I niver sent 'em word about Mr. Tulliver, and they live so back'ard among the lanes at Basset, they niver hear anything only when Mr. Moss comes to market. But I niver gave 'em a thought. I wonder Maggie didn't, though, for she was allays so fond of her aunt Moss."

"Why don't your children come in, Bessy?" said Mrs. Pullet, at the mention of Maggie. "They should hear what their aunts and uncles have got to say: and Maggie—when it's me as have paid for half her schooling, she ought to think more of her aunt Pullet than of aunt Mosses. I may go off sudden when I get home to-day—there's no telling."

"If I'd had my way," said Mrs. Glegg, "the children 'ud ha' been in the room from the first. It's time they knew who they've to look to, and it's right as somebody should talk to 'em, and let 'em know their condition i' life, and what they're come down to, and make 'em feel as they've got to suffer for their father's faults."

"Well, I'll go and fetch 'em, sister," said Mrs. Tulliver resignedly. She was quite crushed now, and thought of the treasures in the store-room with no other feeling than blank despair.

She went upstairs to fetch Tom and Maggie, who were both in their father's room, and was on her way down again, when the sight of the store-room door suggested a new thought to her. She went towards it, and left the children to go down by themselves.

The aunts and uncles appeared to have been in warm discussion when the brother and sister entered—both with shrinking reluctance; for though Tom, with a practical sagacity which had been roused into activity by the strong stimulus of the new emotions he had undergone since yesterday, had been turning over in his mind a plan which he meant to propose to one of his aunts or uncles, he felt by no means amicably towards them, and dreaded meeting them all at once as he would have dreaded a large dose of concentrated physic, which was but just endurable in small draughts. As for Maggie, she was peculiarly depressed this morning: she had been called up, after brief rest, at three o'clock, and had that strange dreamy weariness which comes from watching in a sick-room through the chill hours of early twilight and breaking day—in which the outside daylight life seems to have no importance, and to be a mere margin to the hours in the darkened chamber. Their entrance interrupted the conversation. The shaking of hands was a melancholy and silent ceremony, till uncle Pullet observed, as Tom approached him—

"Well, young sir, we've been talking as we should want your pen and ink; you can write rarely now, after all your schooling, I should think."

"Ay, ay," said uncle Glegg, with admonition which he meant to be kind, "we must look to see the good of all this schooling, as your father's sunk so much money in, now—

'When land is gone, and money's spent,
Then learning is most excellent.'

Now's the time, Tom, to let us see the good o' your learning. Let us see whether you can do better than I can, as have made my fortin without it. But I began wi' doing with little, you see: I could live on a basin o' porridge and a crust o' bread and cheese. But I doubt high living and high learning 'ull make it harder for you, young man, nor it was for me."

"But he must do it," interposed aunt Glegg energetically, "whether it's hard or no. He hasn't got to consider what's hard; he must consider as he isn't to trusten to his friends to keep him in idleness and luxury: he's got to bear the fruits of his father's misconduct, and bring his mind to fare hard and to work hard. And he must be humble and grateful to his aunts and uncles for what they're doing for his mother and father, as must be turned out into the streets and go to the workhouse if they didn't help 'em. And his sister, too," continued Mrs. Glegg, looking severely at Maggie, who had sat down on the sofa by her aunt Deane, drawn to her by the sense that she was Lucy's mother, "she must make up her mind to be humble, and work; for there'll be no servants to wait on her any more—she must remember that. She must do the work o' the house, and she must respect and love her aunts as have done so much for her, and saved their money to leave to their nepheys and nieces."

Tom was still standing before the table in the centre of the group. There was a heightened colour in his face, and he was very far from looking humbled, but he was preparing to say, in a respectful tone, something he had previously meditated, when the door opened and his mother reentered.

Poor Mrs. Tulliver had in her hands a small tray, on which she had placed her silver teapot, a specimen teacup and saucer, the castors, and sugar-tongs.

"See here, sister," she said, looking at Mrs. Deane, as she set the tray on the table, "I thought, perhaps, if you looked at the teapot again—it's a good while since you saw it—you might like the pattern better: it makes beautiful tea, and there's a stand and everything: you might use it for every day, or else lay it by for Lucy when she goes to housekeeping. I should be so loath for 'm to buy it at the Golden Lion," said the poor woman, her heart swelling, and the tears coming, "my teapot as I bought when I was married, and to think of its being scratched, and set before the travellers and folks, and my letters on it—see here, E. D.—and everybody to see 'em."

"Ah, dear dear!" said aunt Pullet, shaking her head with deep sadness, "it's very bad—to think o' the family initials going about everywhere—it niver was so before: you're a very unlucky sister, Bessy. But what's the use o' buying the teapot, when there's the linen and spoons and everything to go, and some o' 'em with your full name—and when it's got that straight spout, too."

"As to disgrace o' the family," said Mrs. Glegg, "that can't be helped wi' buying teapots. The disgrace is, for one o' the family to ha' married a man as has brought her to beggary. The disgrace is, as they're to be sold up. We can't hinder the country from knowing that."

Maggie had started up from the sofa at the allusion to her father, but Tom saw her action and flushed face in time to prevent her from speaking. "Be quiet, Maggie," he said authoritatively, pushing her aside. It was a remarkable manifestation of self-command and practical judgement in a lad of fifteen, that when his aunt Glegg ceased, he began to speak in a quiet and respectful manner, though with a good deal of trembling in his voice; for his mother's words had cut him to the quick.

"Then, aunt," he said, looking straight at Mrs. Glegg, "if you think it's a disgrace to the family that we should be sold up, wouldn't it be better to prevent it altogether? And if you and my aunt Pullet," he continued, looking at the latter, "think of leaving any money to me and Maggie, wouldn't it be better to give it now, and pay the debt we're going to be sold up for, and save my mother from parting with her furniture?"

There was silence for a few moments, for everyone, including Maggie, was astonished at Tom's sudden manliness of tone. Uncle Glegg was the first to speak.

"Ay, ay, young man—come now! You show some notion o' things. But there's the interest you must remember; your aunts get five per cent. on their money, and they'd lose that if they advanced it—you haven't thought o' that."

"I could work and pay that every year," said Tom promptly. "I'd do anything to save my mother from parting with her things."

"Well done!" said uncle Glegg admiringly. He had been drawing Tom out, rather than reflecting on the practicability of his proposal. But he had produced the unfortunate result of irritating his wife.

"Yes, Mr. Glegg!" said that lady with angry sarcasm. "It's pleasant work for you to be giving my money away, as you've pretended to leave at my own disposal. And my money, as was my own father's gift, and not yours, Mr. Glegg; and I've saved it, and added to it myself, and had more to put out almost every year, and it's to go and be sunk in other folks' furniture, and encourage 'em in luxury and extravagance as they've no means of supporting; and I'm to alter my will, or have a codicil made, and leave two or three hundred less behind me when I die—me as have allays done right and been careful, and the eldest o' the family; and my money's to go and be squandered on them as have had the same chance as me, only they've been wicked and wasteful. Sister Pullet, you may do as you like, and you let your husband rob you back again o' the money he's given you, but that isn't my spirit."

"La, June, how fiery you are!" said Mrs. Pullet. "I'm sure you'll have the blood in your head, and have to be cupped. I'm sorry for Bessy and her children—I'm sure I think of 'em o' nights dreadful, far I sleep very bad wi' this new medicine: but it's no use for me to think o' doing anything, if you won't meet me half way."

"Why, there's this to be considered," said Mr. Glegg. "It's no use to pay off this dept and save the furniture, when there's all the law debts behind, as 'ud take every shilling, and more than could be made out o' land and stock, for I've made that out from Lawyer Gore. We'd need save our money to keep the poor man with, instead o' spending it on furniture as he can neither eat nor drink. You will be so hasty, June, as if I didn't know what was reasonable."

"Then speak accordingly, Mr. Glegg!" said his wife, with slow, loud emphasis, bending her head towards him significantly.

Tom's countenance had fallen during the conversation, and his lip quivered; but he was determined not to give way. He would behave like a man. Maggie, on the contrary, after her momentary delight in Tom's speech, had relapsed into her state of trembling indignation. Her mother had been standing close by Tom's side, and had been clinging to his arm ever since he had last spoken. Maggie suddenly started up and stood in front of them, her eyes flashing like the eyes of a young lioness.

"Why do you come, then," she burst out, "talking and interfering with us and scolding us, if you don't mean to do anything to help my poor mother—your own sister—if you've no feeling for her when she's in trouble, and won't part with anything, though you would never miss it, to save her from pain? Keep away from us then, and don't come to find fault with my father—he was better than any of you—he was kind—he would have helped you, if you had been in trouble. Tom and I don't ever want to have any of your money, if you won't help my mother. We'd rather not have it; we'll do without you."

Maggie, having hurled her defiance at aunts and uncles in this way, stood still with her large, dark eyes glaring at them, as if she were ready to await all consequences.

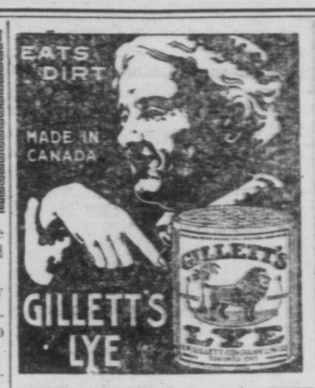
Mrs. Tulliver was frightened; there was something portentious in this mad outbreak; she did not see how life could go on after it. Tom was vexed; it was no use to talk so. The aunts were silent with surprise, for some moments. All length, in a case of aberration such as this, comment presented itself as more expedient than any answer.

"You haven't seen the end o' your trouble wi' that child, Bessy," said Mrs. Pullet; "she's beyond everything for boldness and unthankfulness. It's dreadful. I might ha' let alone paying for her schooling, for she's worse nor ever."

"It's no more than what I've allays said," followed Mrs. Glegg. "Other folks may be surprised, but I'm not. I've said over and over again—years ago I've said, 'Mark my words; that child 'ull come to no good: there isn't a bit of our family in her.' And as for her having so much schooling, I never thought well o' that. I'd my reasons when I said I wouldn't pay anything towards it."

"Come, come," said Mr. Glegg, "lets waste no more time in talking—let's go to business. Tom now, get the pen and ink—"

(To be continued.)



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HOW TO PLAN THE FARMSTEAD

(By Prof. AH. Benton, Winnipeg)

A well arranged farmstead both increases the number of dollars in the farmer's pocket book and adds to the comfort of the family life. In the past farmsteads "just grew." Today farmers are realizing the necessity of having a definite plan for directing the farmstead development. Some of the features accepted as desirable are:

1. The farm house located near enough the public road to give the family the benefit of public travel, but far enough away to avoid undue publicity—150 to 200 feet is a good distance.

2. The buildings containing feeds and sheltering horses, cattle, hogs and sheep so grouped that the labor in caring for a feeding live stock is reduced to a minimum. A barn 150 to 200 feet from the house is easily accessible, yet not offensive from unpleasant odors if placed on the opposite side of the house from the prevailing summer winds.

3. The implement shed close to the barn and on the way to and from the fields. Little extra time is required in taking out and putting away machinery.

4. Hog pens, calf lots, cattle yards and horse paddocks so arranged in relation to the buildings and pastures that there is no loss of time in housing the stock or turning them into lots and pastures.

5. A water system that will supply the home and live stock with the least expenditure of time and energy. Elevated tanks, air pressure tanks and hydraulic rams merit consideration.

6. A small garden near the house where it can be easily reached from the house, as the major part of the gardening usually falls to the women folks.

7. A lawn in front of the house, small enough to be well kept, with shrubbery and trees around the edges and an unobstructed view of the road.

Canada should at once "get after" the big stream of American tourists who, according to the information received by the Canadian Trade Commission at Ottawa, will this year be unable to go to Europe, Mexico or South America, and who do not want to go to their own West.

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