

## *The Ladislaw Case*

*Imke Thormählen*

### **Synopsis**

Will Ladislaw leads an enviable life as a Liberal Member of Parliament in 1840s London. He has a loving wife and two promising sons, and his constituency is as safe as a constituency can be. Preparing for the coming election, he has even been so fortunate as to find a financial backer: the genial businessman Sir Henry Walford is willing to shoulder the not inconsiderable expense of conducting a successful campaign. In addition, Will's rival for his seat in Parliament, the dandy Francis Courdroy, does not invest much effort in making himself popular even among members of his own party.

Will has no reason to give much thought to those dramatic events in the town of Middlemarch which took place more than twelve years previously and which ultimately led to his marrying his second cousin's widow Dorothea. Only one thing disturbs his peace of mind from time to time, and that is the feeling of not being worthy of his devoted wife (who regards him as the best man alive).

By contrast, Dr Tertius Lydgate has never been able to forget Middlemarch, however much he wanted to. It was while he was practising medicine in that town that he, albeit entirely innocent, came to be involved in a suspicious death. In consequence of this misfortune, he had to give up his dreams of becoming an eminent scientist whose medical research would bring great benefits to humanity. Now he is a fashionable physician who attends wealthy patients in London and at a Continental watering-place, something that suits his wife Rosamond far better than him.

Lydgate and Will are old friends; but when the Lydgates come on a house visit to the Ladislaws the harmony in the latter's household is disturbed, and the funding of Will's campaign is endangered, too. To make matters worse, Courdroy turns out to be sitting on information about old scandals which could harm Will's reputation and hence his career. When Courdroy is found dead, poisoned with arsenic, suspicion – naturally enough – falls on Will.

Despite competent police work, the investigation of the Courdroy murder makes little progress, and Will's situation becomes increasingly precarious. Finally, Lydgate hits on the idea of engaging the legendary Inspector Bucket, now retired from the Metropolitan Police Force, to find the killer. In order for the case to be solved, however, both Will and Lydgate are compelled to confront their past. Might there be a connection between the Courdroy murder and the death that destroyed the Doctor's life many years ago? Both cases entailed the removal of a blackmailer. Was the murder an attempt to protect Will, or to incriminate him? Could he have enemies he knows nothing about?

*The Ladislaw Case* is a crime story, but it is also a sequel to George Eliot's classic novel *Middlemarch*. There is no need to have read Eliot's novel in order to understand what happens in *The Ladislaw Case*, though previous acquaintance with Lydgate, Will, and the other *Middlemarch* characters undeniably adds to the reading experience. Nor is familiarity with *Middlemarch* a prerequisite for solving the murder case. In fact, the well-informed reader may well swallow the occasional red herring which passes other readers by. The book is intended to make entertaining and thought-provoking reading both for *Middlemarch* fans and others, being a story in which the solution of a mystery is lodged not in time observations and footprints but in the thoughts and emotions of the characters. (Inspector Bucket was stolen from another 19<sup>th</sup>-century classic, *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens.)