

## THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER.\*

An Autobiographical Story.

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## CHAPTER XVII.—A DISCOVERY.

ONE Saturday night, my husband happening to be out, an event of rare occurrence, Roger called; and as there were some things I had not been able to get during the day, I asked him to go with me to Tottenham Court Road. It was not far from the region where we lived, and I did a great part of my small shopping there. The early closing had, if I remember rightly, begun to show itself—anyhow several of the shops were shut, and we walked a long way down the street, looking for some place likely to supply what I required.

"It was just here I came up with the girl and the brown jug," said Roger, as we reached the large dissenting chapel.

"That adventure seems to have taken a great hold of you, Roger," I said.

"She *was* so like Miss Clare!" he returned. "I can't get the one face clear of the other. When I met her at Lady Bernard's, the first thing I thought of was the brown jug."

"Were you as much pleased with her conversation as at our house?" I asked.

"Even more," he answered. "I found her ideas of art so wide, as well as just and accurate, that I was puzzled to think where she had had opportunity of developing them. I questioned her about it, and found she was in the habit of going, as often as she could spare time, to the National Gallery, where her custom was, she said, not to pass from picture to picture, but keep to one until it formed itself in her mind—that is the expression she used—explaining herself to mean—until she seemed to know what the painter had set himself to do, and why this was and that was which she could not at first understand. Clearly, without ever having taken a pencil in her hand, she had educated herself to a keen perception of what is demanded of a true picture. Of course, the root of it lies in her musical development. There," he cried suddenly, as we came opposite a paved passage, "that is the place I saw her go down."

"Then you do think the girl with the beer jug was Miss Clare, after all?"

"Not in the least. I told you I could not separate them in my mind."

"Well, I must say it seems odd. A girl like that and Miss Clare! Why, as often as you speak of the one, you seem to think of the other."

"In fact," he returned, "I am, as I say, unable to dissociate them. But if you had seen the girl you would not wonder. The likeness was absolutely complete."

"I believe you do consider them one and the same; and I'm more than half inclined to think so myself, remembering what Judy said."

"Isn't it possible some one who knew Miss Clare may have seen this girl, and been misled by the likeness?"

"But where, then, does Miss Clare live? Nobody seems to know."

"You have never asked anyone but Mrs. Morley."

"You have yourself, however, given me reason to think she avoids the subject. If she did live anywhere hereabout, she would have some cause to avoid it."

"Suppose," said Roger, "some one were to come past now and see Mrs. Percivale, the wife of the celebrated painter, standing in Tottenham Court Road, beside the swing door of a corner public-house, talking to a young man—"

"Yes; it might give occasion for scandal," I said. "To avoid it, let us go down the court and see what it is like."

"It's not a fit place for you to go into."

"If it were in my father's parish, I should have known everybody in it."

"You haven't the slightest idea what you are saying."

"Come, anyhow, and let us see what the place is like," I insisted.

Without another word, he gave me his arm, and down the court we went, past the flaring gin-shop, and into the gloom beyond. It was one of those places of which, while the general effect remains vivid in one's mind, the salient points are so few that it is difficult to say much by way of description. The houses had once been occupied by people in better circumstances than its present inhabitants, and indeed they looked all decent enough until turning two right angles we came upon another sort. They were still as large, and had plenty of windows, but in the light of a single lamp at the corner they looked very dirty and wretched and dreary. A little shop, with dried herrings and bull's-eyes in the window, was lighted by a tallow candle set in a ginger-beer bottle, with a card of "Kinahan's LL Whisky" for a reflector.

"They can't have many customers to the extent of a bottle," said Roger. "But no doubt they have some privileges from the public-house at the corner for hanging up the card."

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