

THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER.*

An Autobiographical Story.

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CHAPTER II. (CONTINUED).—I TRY.

SO we were married at last. My mother believes it was my father's good advice to Percivale concerning the sort of pictures he painted, that brought it about. For certainly soon after we were engaged, he began to have what his artist friends called a run of luck: he sold one picture after another in a very extraordinary and hopeful manner. But Percivale says it was his love for me—indeed he does—which enabled him to see not only much deeper into things, but also to see much better the bloom that hangs about everything, and so to paint much better pictures than before. He felt, he said, that he had a hold now where before he had only a sight. However this may be, he had got on so well for a while that he wrote at last that if I was willing to share his poverty, it would not, he thought, be absolute starvation, and I was, of course, perfectly content. I can't put into words—indeed I dare not, for fear of writing what would be, if not unladylike, at least uncharitable—my contempt for those women who, loving a man, hesitate to run every risk with him. Of course, if they cannot trust him, it is a different thing. I am not going to say anything about that, for I should be out of my depth—not in the least understanding how a woman can love a man to whom she cannot look up. I believe there are some who can; I see men married whom I don't believe any woman ever did or ever could respect; all I say is, I don't understand it.

My father and mother made no objection, and were evidently at last quite agreed that it would be the best thing for both of us—and so, I say, we were married.

I ought just to mention that, before the day arrived, my mother went up to London at Percivale's request, to help him in getting together a few things absolutely needful for the barest commencement of housekeeping. For the rest, it had been arranged that we should furnish by degrees, buying as we saw what we liked, and could afford it. The greater part of modern fashions in furniture, having both been accustomed to the stateliness of a more artistic period, we detested for

their ugliness, and chiefly therefore we desired to look about us at our leisure.

My mother came back more satisfied with the little house he had taken than I had expected. It was not so easy to get one to suit us, for of course he required a large room to paint in, with a good north light. He had, however, succeeded better than he had hoped.

"You will find things very different from what you have been used to, Wynnies," said my mother.

"Of course, mamma; I know that," I answered. "I hope I am prepared to meet it. If I don't like it, I shall have no one to blame but myself; and I don't see what right people have to expect what they have been used to."

"There is just this advantage," said my father, "in having been used to nice things, that it ought to be easier to keep from sinking into the sordid, however straitened the new circumstances may be, compared with the old."

On the evening before the wedding my father took me into the octagon room, and there knelt down with me and my mother, and prayed for me in such a wonderful way that I was perfectly astonished and overcome. I had never known him do anything of the kind before. He was not favourable to extempore prayer in public, or even in the family, and indeed had often seemed willing to omit prayers for what I could not always count sufficient reason: he had a horror at their getting to be a matter of course and a form; for then, he said, they ceased to be worship at all, and were a mere pagan rite, better far left alone. I remember also he said that those, however good they might be, who urged attention to the forms of religion, such as going to church and saying prayers, were, however innocently, just the prophets of Pharisaism; that what men had to be stirred up to was to lay hold upon God, and then they would not fail to find out what religious forms they ought to cherish. "The spirit first and then the flesh," he would say. To put the latter before the former was a falsehood, and, therefore, a frightful danger, being at the root of all declensions in the church, and making ever recurring earthquakes and persecutions and repentances and reformations needful. I find what my father used to say coming back so often now that I hear so little of it—especially as he talks much less, accusing himself of having always talked too much—and I understand it so much better now, that I shall be always in danger of interrupting my narrative to say something that he said. But when I commence the next chapter I shall get on faster, I hope. My story is like a vessel I saw once being launched: it would stick in the stocks, instead of sliding away into the expectant waters.

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