

## THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER.\*

An Autobiographical Story.

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## CHAPTER XVII.—A DISCOVERY (CONTINUED).

ROGER hesitated; but as I went on, he could but follow me. I wanted to see what the attracting centre of the little crowd was; and that it must be occupied with some affair of more than ordinary interest I judged from the fact that a good many super-terrestrial spectators looked down from the windows at various elevations upon the disputants, whose voices now and then lulled for a moment, only to break out in fresh objurgation and dispute.

Drawing a little nearer, a slight parting of the crowd revealed its core to us. It was a little woman, without bonnet or shawl, whose back was towards us. She turned from side to side, now talking to one, and now to another of the surrounding circle. At first I thought she was setting forth her grievances, in the hope of sympathy, or perhaps of justice; but I soon perceived that her motions were too calm for that. Sometimes the crowd would speak all together sometimes keep silent for a full minute while she went on talking. When she turned her face towards us, Roger and I turned ours, and stared at each other. The face was disfigured by a swollen eye, evidently from a blow; but clearly enough, if it was not Miss Clare, it was the young woman of the beer-jug. Neither of us spoke, but turned once more to watch the result of what seemed to have at length settled down into an almost amicable conference.

After a few more grumbles and protestations, the group began to break up into threes and fours. These the young woman seemed to set herself to break up again. Here, however, an ill-looking fellow like a costermonger, with a broken nose, came up to us, and, with a strong Irish accent and offensive manner, but still with a touch of Irish breeding, requested to know what our business was. Roger asked if the place wasn't a thoroughfare.

"Not for the likes o' you," he answered, "as comes pryin' after the likes of us. We manage our own affairs down here—we do. You'd better be off, my lady."

I have my doubts what sort of reply Roger might have returned if he had been alone, but he certainly spoke in a very conciliatory manner,

which, however, the man did not seem to appreciate, for he called it blarney; but the young woman, catching sight of our little group, and supposing, I presume, that it also required dispersion, approached us. She had come within a yard of us, when suddenly her face brightened, and she exclaimed, in a tone of surprise—

"Mrs. Percivale! You here!"

It was indeed Miss Clare. Without the least embarrassment, she held out her hand to me, but I am afraid I did not take it very cordially. Roger, however, behaved to her as if they stood in a drawing-room, and this brought me to a sense of propriety.

"I don't look very respectable, I fear," she said, putting her hand over her eye. "The fact is, I have had a blow, and it will look worse to-morrow. Were you coming to find me?"

I forget what lame answer either of us gave.

"Will you come in?" she said.

On the spur of the moment I declined. For all my fine talk to Roger, I shrunk from the idea of entering one of those houses. I can only say, in excuse, that my whole mind was in a condition of bewilderment.

"Can I do anything for you, then?" she asked, in a tone slightly marked with disappointment, I thought.

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