

THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER.*

An Autobiographical Story.

BY GEORGE MACDONALD, LL.D.,

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CHAPTER XX.—HER STORY (CONTINUED).

“ONE evening I have particular cause to remember, both for itself and because of something that followed many years after. I was in the drawing-room, a double room with folding doors and a small cabinet behind communicating with a back stair, for the stairs were double all through the house, adding much to the eeriness of the place as I look back upon it in my memory. I fear, in describing the place so minutely, I may have been rousing false expectations of an adventure; but I have a reason for being rather minute, though it will not appear until afterwards. I had been looking out of the window all the afternoon upon the silent square, for, as it was no thoroughfare, it was only enlivened by the passing and returning now and then of a tradesman's cart; and, as it was winter, there were no children playing in the garden. It was a rainy afternoon. A great cloud of fog and soot hung from the whole sky. About a score of yellow leaves yet quivered on the trees, and the statue of Queen Anne stood bleak and disconsolate among the bare branches. I am afraid I am getting long-winded—but somehow that afternoon seems burned into me in enamel. I gazed drearily without interest. I brooded over the past; I never, at this time, so far as I remember, dreamed of looking forward. I had no hope. It never occurred to me that things might grow better. I was dull and wretched. I may just say here in passing that I think this experience is in a great measure what has enabled me to understand the peculiar misery of the poor in our large towns—they have no hope, no impulse to look forward—nothing to expect; they live but in the present, and the dreariness of that soon shapes the whole atmosphere of their spirits to its own likeness. Perhaps the first thing one who would help them has to do, is to aid the birth of some small vital hope in them; that is better than a thousand gifts, especially those of the ordinary kind, which mostly do harm, tending to keep them what they are—a prey to present and importunate wants.

“It began to grow dark, and, tired of standing, I sat down upon the floor, for there was nothing to sit upon besides. There I still sat long after

it was quite dark. All at once a surge of self-pity arose in my heart. I burst out wailing and sobbing, and cried aloud—‘God has forgotten me altogether!’ The fact was I had had no dinner that day, for Mrs. Conan had expected to return long before; and the piece of bread she had given me, which was all that was in the house, I had eaten many hours ago. But I was not thinking of my dinner, though the want of it may have had to do with this burst of misery. What I was really thinking of was—that I could do nothing for anybody. My little ambition had always been to be useful. I knew I was of some use to my father, for I kept the rooms tidy for him, and dusted his pet books—oh, so carefully! for they were like household gods to me. I had also played to him, and I knew he enjoyed that: he said so many times. And I had begun, though not long before he left me, to think how I should be able to help him better by-and-by. For I saw that he worked very hard—so hard that it made him silent; and I knew that my music-mistress made her livelihood—partly, at least—by giving lessons; and I thought that I might, by-and-by, be able to give lessons too, and then papa would not require to work so hard, for I, too, should bring home money to pay for what we wanted. But now I was of use to nobody, I said, and not likely to become of any. I could not even help poor Mrs. Conan except by doing what a child might do just as well as I, for I did not earn a penny of our living; I only gave the poor old thing time to work harder, that I might eat up her earnings! What added to the misery was that I had always thought of myself as a lady—for was not papa a gentleman—let him be ever so poor! Shillings and sovereigns in his pocket could not determine whether a man was a gentleman or not! And if he was a gentleman his daughter must be a lady. But how could I be a lady if I was content to be a burden to a poor charwoman instead of earning my own living, and something besides with which to help her? For I had the notion—how it came I cannot tell, though I know well enough *whence* it came—that position depended on how much a person was able to help other people; and here I was, useless, worse than useless, to anybody! Why did not God remember me, if it was only for my father's sake? He was worth something if I was not! And I would be worth something if only I had a chance! ‘I am of no use,’ I cried, ‘and God has forgotten me altogether!’ And I went on weeping and

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