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THE VICAR'S DAUGHTER;

A SKETCH.

"And this is love."—L. E. L.

"Is not the coach very late this evening?" cried Nora Burns, as she came skipping down the garden walk of the secluded vicarage of D—. "I'm sure it must be past its time."

"Nay, my dear Nora," replied her elder sister, who was half hidden among the trees, "methinks it is your gay and happy disposition which has outrun even four fleet horses."

"I do not know what you mean, my dear sister, but forgive me, Mary, if I have vexed you, you seem so melancholy."

"I am not melancholy, my dear Nora; but you always look at the bright side of a picture; and I, perhaps do so too much also to be sad. You are all smiles because Charles Driscoll is expected on a short visit to the house which used to be his home. You know, dear, it is now five years ago. Time changes us all: beside, he has mixed much in the gay world of fashion; and although the heart may be still the same, we must not look for the same exterior."

Thus were the two innocent daughters of the vicar of D— employed, as the person alluded to in their discourse, seated upon the box of a London coach, was rapidly whirled onward towards the village. Every turn in the road presented to Driscoll some familiar object, or some new one which the practical might call an improvement: but which, by the lover of nature, would be deemed any thing but picturesque. The tall spires of the church appeared in the distance, and he, too, thought of the playmates of his youth. He recalled before his fancy the pretty little laughing, blue eyed Nora, who, when he had left the vicarage, was but just sixteen; and her more sedate, but no less beautiful, sister. Then came their poor kind mother, who had been gathered to her rest: and the old vicar with his clerical hat, and his mild but impressive manners. However, he had not much time for these musings; the coach stopped; the ivy-clad chimney peeped over the trees as it did of old; and soon the welcoming hands were extended—he was once more in the house of his childhood.

"O, Charles, I am so glad to see you come again!" exclaimed Nora, as running into the room she heedlessly stumbled over a footstool, and almost fell into his arms; then, at the sight of an apparition stranger, she shrunk back, and a crimson blush came over her delicate cheek.

"Come, come, Nora, though I am, perhaps somewhat altered, you need not blush to welcome your fishing companion of by-gone days: I shall think it unkind of you if you do not treat me as you did of old."

"I should think she need not look so much abashed, Mr. Driscoll," replied her sister. "But you know Nora was always so thoughtless, so confiding. And you used to be such great friends," she added, as she turned away her head to hide the tears that were gathering in her large dark eyes."

"Girls, girls!" exclaimed the vicar, as he entered from the garden; "do not give my old pupil such a dolorous reception; one would think you had set him a page of Homer to learn, as a penance for some misbehaviour. Come, cheer up, we will save our tears till there is some sorrowful occasion for them."

If Driscoll was changed from the tall, spare youth of nineteen, to the elegant manhood of refined life, so were the Misses Burns; but Mary the least so, if we might expect a beautiful bloom upon her cheeks, which used to be

pale as the leaves of the lily. Nora had burst from the child into the woman—from the rose-bud to the opening flower of summer?

The two sisters were the very reverse of each other in point of beauty and manners. Mary, the elder, by the death of her mother, had been early left in charge of her father's household; and from the equanimity of her disposition, she was well fitted for the task. She seemed to commune with other than the spirits of this world. The cursory observer would have called her cold and unfeeling; but she had a warmth of affection, a firmness of purpose, which none could imagine but those brought into close and continued intercourse with her. It was a lovely scene to see those two maidens that evening ere they retired to rest, when talking over the improved appearance of their old schoolmate. Mary was seated at the window, ever and anon looking out upon the landscape, revealed in its shadowy softness by the pale light of the moon; as her long white fingers wandered amid the fair hair of her young sister, reclining on a stool at her feet. And now Nora's laughing face, almost hidden by the unbounded curls, was raised, and her blue eyes from beneath their silken veils, rested upon the pure Grecian features of her sister; the dark eyes met that gaze, and a kiss from the red lips was imparted to the blushing cheek of the younger girl. They formed the picture of affection. Their very difference of disposition—the vivacity of the one, and the beautiful pensiveness of the other, seemed to bind them yet closer together. They could be said to be rivals in no one sense; for Mary's tall figure, moulded with more elegance by nature than sculptor's hand could chisel, was but a delightful contrast to the round short form of the merry-hearted Nora. They had no brother, and consequently were all in all with each other.

A month passed over the vicarage of D—, and although he had intended to have stayed but a few days, Driscoll was still there; as much the companion of the old clergyman in his parochial calls, as the loiterer on the steps of his fair daughters. Some in the neighbourhood even rumoured that he was paying marked attention to one of them; but none could tell whether it was to the parson, to Mary, or to Nora. It was therefore set down as village gossip, and he was allowed to ramble with the vicar, flirt with the one daughter, or make poetry for the other, without its being considered as any very great harm.

It was a beautiful autumn evening; the sun was slowly sinking, bathing the west in a deep dyed glow, which faded and faded away until it merely tinged the soft blue of heaven with a gentle strain. The song of the gleaners returning from their toil, floated up the vale, and every here and there the sides of the hills were decked with sheaves of golden corn.

"Here is my mother's grave, Charles," said Mary, as arm in arm they approached the silent city of tombs. "How many changes happen in a few brief years."

"Truly, Mary. But God is always merciful: if he takes one away, he gives another to supply her place. You and Nora must be great comforts to your father. Do you not think he might be induced to spare one of you?"

Mary replied not. Her heart was full; and had there been any one by, the sudden paleness of her cheeks might have told the feelings of her heart. She withdrew her arm from Driscoll's, and sat down upon her mother's grave.

"Nay, Mary, dear," said the youth, tenderly, "do not be offended at the abruptness of my question; I did not intend to wound your feelings. But—but, you have not known what it is to love."

"Love!" ejaculated the trembling girl, as perhaps the moment she longed for, yet feared to arrive, now hovered over her. That moment which must be fraught with the deepest interest to every female mind. That moment when the dream of woman's solitary hour is to be realised—when she is clasped to the heart of the being she most loves on earth.

"Yes, Mary, to love, for I have dared to do it! You can tell me if there be hope. Or—must I leave D— vicarage for ever!"

"Hope is woman's lot."

"You mean, then, there is none? O foolish, foolish heart, be still."

"I did not say so, Mr. Driscoll. There is hope given to us all. But woman hopes, and hopes for years. Hope feeds her soul with visions of earthly happiness; and hope teaches her to look to Heaven for richer and less fading joys."

"Do you then say that she loves me? May I believe it?"

"Who—who loves you?" faltered the maiden, as she hid her face from his view.

"Your sister, Nora!" continued Charles, heedless of the almost falling form of her whom he had thoughtlessly made his confidante, "her image has been before me ever since I left D—; in the crowded ball, the opera, no where have I seen one like Nora Burns. But she is so light-hearted, so innocently beautiful, I dare not sully her happiness even by the sweet pains of love."

"It is so. My God enable me to bear it," scarcely articulated Mary in a voice so low that it was not heard by the lover, as she slowly rose from her parent's grave. "Mr. Driscoll, may you be happy. Your secret is in good hands. Believe me, you need not despair."

"Thank you, thank you, for ever, gentle Mary. Heaven alone knows how I can show my gratitude!"

Charles Driscoll slept that night with a light heart. Who can tell its lightness: save he who has had its load of love, with which it was bursting conveyed to some kindred object? Man is a being of affection, he was not meant to live alone. We are all miserable when we have not some one to whom to tell our little adventures—some one who will feel an interest in them however trifling—who will listen to us. And how delightful, indeed, to be able to commune over things which are not the mere fancies of time. It is then we feel the whole warmth of our dispositions, that we know ourselves better than we ever did before.

Now Mr. Burns, although a clergyman and an ornament to his cloth, was not one of those fanatics who pretend totally to despise all worldly good, while at the very same moment they have some private advantage in view. He saw, as well as those around him, the advantages of Driscoll's becoming a husband to one of his daughters; still he wished not to influence the affection of either, by the slightest allusion on his part.

Thus things proceeded at the vicarage in that quiet, even sort of routine, which must be so enchanting to those who have no other ambition, than that of doing good in an unpretending way, and making those happy who are around them. The morning's post, at length, brought a letter, requiring Driscoll's immediate attendance in Scotland. Nora had spent the previous day with a family at some distance, and the night proving rather stormy, had not returned home. Up to that moment he had never made an avowal to her of his love; something always came in the way when he had made up his mind to do so. Either she was so full of mirth and girlish mischief, that he feared being laughed at; some party of pleasure was in contemplation, and he did not like to distract her thoughts;