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AT THE GATE OF SAMARIA

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER I.
CHAPTER II.
CHAPTER III.
CHAPTER IV.
CHAPTER V.
CHAPTER VI.
CHAPTER VII.
C. D.
CHAPTER VIII.
CHAPTER IX.
CHAPTER X.
C. D.
CHAPTER XI.
CHAPTER XII.
CHAPTER XIII.
CHAPTER XIV.
CHAPTER XV.
CHAPTER XVI.
CHAPTER XVII.
CHAPTER XVIII.
CHAPTER XIX.
CHAPTER XX.
CHAPTER XXI.
CHAPTER XXII.
CHAPTER XXIV.
CHAPTER XXV.

CHAPTER XXVI.
CHAPTER XXVII.
THE END.

CHAPTER I.

Table of Contents

It was a severe room, scrupulously neat. Along one side ran a bookcase, with beaded glass doors, containing, as one might see by peering through the spaces, the collected, unread literature of two stern generations. A few old prints, placed in bad lights, hung on the walls. In the centre of the room was a leather-covered library table, with writing materials arranged in painful precision. A couch was lined along one wall, in the draught of the door. On either side of the fireplace were ranged two stiff leather armchairs.

In one of these chairs sat an old man, in the other a faded woman just verging upon middle age. The old man was looking at a picture which he supported on his knees-a narrow, oblong strip of canvas nailed on to a rough wooden frame. The woman eyed him with some interest, as if awaiting a decision.

They were father and daughter, and bore a strange family resemblance to each other. Both faces were pale, their foreheads high and narrow, marked by faint horizontal lines, their eyes gray and cold, their upper lips long and thin, setting tightly, without mobility, upon the lower. The only essential point of difference was that the father's chin was weakly pointed, the daughter's squarer and harder. Both faces gave one the impression of negativeness, joylessness, seeming to lack the power of strong emotive expression. One can see such, minus the refinement of gentle birth and social amenities, in the pews of obscure

dissenting chapels, testifying that they have been led thither not by strong convictions, but by the force of mild circumstance.

Indeed, as is the case with hundreds of our upper middle-class families, the Davenants had descended from a fierce old Puritan stock, and though the reality of their Puritanism had gradually lost itself in the current of more respectable orthodoxy, its shadow hung over them still. The vigorous enthusiasm that spurred the Puritan on to lofty action was gone; the vague dread of sin that kept him in moral and mental inactivity alone remained. Perhaps it is this survival amongst us of the negative element of Puritanism that produces in England the curious anomaly of education without enlightenment. It has dulled our perception of life as an art, whose “great incidents,” as Fielding finely says, “are no more to be considered as mere accidents than the several members of a fine statue or a noble poem.” It has caused us to live in a perpetual twilight in which the possibilities of existence loom fantastic and indistinct. The Davenants were gentlefolk, holding a good position in the small country town of Durdleham; they visited among the county families, and, on ordinary, conventional grounds, considered themselves to belong to the cultured classes. They were the curious yet familiar product of the old-fashioned, high-church Toryism impregnated with the Puritan taint.

The light was fading through the French window behind the old man's chair. He laid down the canvas on his lap and looked in a puzzled way at the fire. Then he raised it nearer to his eyes for further examination.

“This is really very dreadful,” he said at last, looking at his daughter.

“Something will have to be done soon,” replied the latter.

“It is so horribly vulgar, Grace,” said the old man; “look at that boy's nose—and that drunken man—his face is a nightmare of evil. I really must begin to talk seriously to Clytie.”

Mrs. Blather smiled somewhat pityingly. Since the earliest days of her long widowhood she had undertaken the charge of her father's house and the care of her two younger sisters, Janet and Clytie. Her familiarity, therefore, with the seamy side of Clytie's nature had been of long duration.

“You might as well talk to that fender, papa,” she said. “Clytie has got it into her head that she is going to be an artist, and no amount of talking will get it out.”

“It's all through her visiting those friends of hers, the Farquharsons. They are not nice people for her to know. I shall not let her go there again.”

“If she goes on like this there is no knowing what will happen.”

“Where did the child get these repulsive and ungirlish notions from?” the old man asked querulously.

The conception of the picture was not that of a young girl, and though the execution was crude and untrained, there was a bold cruelty of touch that saved it from being amateurish. The canvas was divided into two panels. On the one was painted a tiny bully of a boy with his arm rounded across his throat, about to strike a weakly, poverty-stricken little girl. They were children of the poorest classes, the boy realistically, offensively dirty—the *petit morveux* in its

absolute sense. Behind them was the open doorway of a red-brick, jerry-built cottage, showing a strip of torn and dirty matting along the passage that lost itself in the gloom beyond. On the other panel was the corner of a public house in a low slum, the window lights and a gas-lamp throwing a lurid glare upon wet pavement and the figures of a woman and a drunken man. The faces were those of the children in the first picture, and the eternal tragedy was repeating itself. The man's face was loathsome in its sodden ferocity; the woman, with a child in her arms, was reeling from the blow. The evident haste in which the panels had been painted, the glaring, unsoftened colouring, heightened as if by impressionist design the coarse realism of the effect. Above was written the legend, "*La joie de vivre*" and in the left-hand bottom corner, "*Clytie Davenant pinxit*."

"She has certainly grown much worse of late," sighed Mrs. Blather, holding out her thin, short hand to shield her face from the fire.

There was a pause of some moments. Mr. Davenant ceased nursing the picture and stood it on the floor.

"Have you quite made up your mind, papa," said Mrs. Blather at length, "not to let Clytie go to the Slade School in London?"

"It is out of the question," replied the old man.

"I don't think so, papa. It would perhaps do her good. A year or so's hard work would take all these silly ideas out of her."

"I question it," said Mr. Davenant. "They are not silly ideas. They are debased, degraded ideas."

“My dear papa, they are only fads. All young girls have them. Look how crazy Janet was to join the cookery classes. We let her join, and now she hates the sight of a pie-dish. With Clytie it is quite the same, only she wants to daub.”

“Well, let her daub in a decent way at home,” replied the old man testily.

Mrs. Blather shrugged her lean shoulders.

“We have tried that and it hasn't succeeded, apparently,” she said drily. “You seldom come in her way; you don't know how unpleasant things are for Janet and myself. What do you think she had the impertinence to tell me this morning? She said that we were not real people. We were machines or abstractions based, I think she said, on a formula, or something of that sort. She was pining to live amongst living human beings. And then she is so rude to visitors. What do you think she said to the vicar, who came, at Janet's request, to talk to her about her shameful neglect of her religious duties? She said, if he was a pillar of the Church, she saw no reason why she should be a seat-cushion.”

“Tut, tut,” said the old man angrily. He was vicar's churchwarden, and a power in the parish.

“And then,” continued Mrs. Blather, “when I scolded her for her rudeness, she said that if she had been a man she would have sworn at him for his impertinence. Really people will soon be afraid of coming to the house.”

“They will indeed,” said Mr. Davenant.

Like a wise woman, Mrs. Blather did not press her point. She knew she had thoroughly alarmed her father and had shown him but one way out of the difficulty. His taking it, if left to himself, was only a question of time. She rang the

bell for the servant to come and light Mr. Davenant's gas, and then she left him to his reflections.

Mr. Davenant possessed some landed property, which he had occupied his life in mismanaging. Fortunately for him, his wife had brought him a small fortune which sufficed to keep up a position, modest when compared with that of the Davenants of former days, but still high enough to satisfy the social aspirations of his family. He had lived a colourless life, severe and respectable. Even his university days had passed in a dull uniformity, leaving no glamour behind them. He had walked honourably and blindly in the paths his parents had indicated, and, now that he was nearing the end of the journey, thanked God for having given him the grace not to err from them. He had married when still fairly young, and he had loved his wife in a gentlemanly, passionless way. She, poor thing, had filled up so small a space in life that she had faded out of it almost unnoticed—even by himself. He had no storms of joy or sorrow to look back upon. His thoughts, as he brooded over the fireside, generally wandered back to trifling incidents: ancient municipal interests, the mortgages on his estate, the boundary quarrels with the old earl, his neighbour.

But lately he had been thinking anxiously over his daughter Clytie. She had suddenly developed out of a naughty, rebellious child into a problem. He assumed as a matter of course that he bore her the ordinary well-regulated parental affection, but in his heart of hearts he never really loved her. Until lately it had not occurred to him to think of her as anything but a child of his with a singularly unfortunate disposition which time would modify. But time,

on the contrary, was accentuating it, and he realised at last that Clytie had a distinct individuality. His philosophy had left many things in heaven and earth undreamed of. He was mystified, puzzled. How could he and his delicate wife have brought this bright-haired, full-blooded, impulsive creature into existence? Her sisters were gentle, quiet women, possessing the virtues inculcated in his conception of life. Clytie seemed to possess none of them. The peasant woman in the legend could not have wondered more over her changeling. How could a daughter of his and a sister of Janet's scoff at sacred things, defy social rules, and have an imagination that ran riot in scenes of drunkenness and outcast life?

Physiology might grant a solution to the old man's problem in the law of the alternation of heredity. His father's youngest brother had been a family black sheep, and being the only one of the generation who had led an eventful career, was naturally never mentioned by his relations, and the record of his life perished with him. But it is possible that the positive enthusiastic principle of Clytie's Puritan descent, reasserting itself once in every other generation, to the horror of the negative principle that otherwise ran through the race continuously, came out in her with all its strength and vigour. It brought her eager, panting up to the brink of our surging nineteenth century life, imperiously bidding her plunge in and take her part in the tumult.

She was now nineteen, an age when girls try to realise themselves. She discovered that she was a greater problem to herself than to her sisters. They simply looked upon her as odd, eccentric, unpleasant to live with, and if she had not

been their sister would have almost gathered up their skirts around them as they passed her by. But she was conscious of a craving within her that did not proceed from mere wilful caprice. In her earlier girlhood she had thought long and humbly over her shortcomings. Why could she not be as contented and dutiful as Janet? Why could not the interests that satisfied her sisters' life satisfy hers? Often and often an impulse of scorn and ridicule at the littleness of Durdleham would overmaster her, and then would follow a passionate fit of remorse and repentance, received with coldness and ruffled dignity on her sisters' part, that would send her back humiliated and rebellious to her room. From what springs of desire did all this proceed? Whither were these impulses tending?

Ever since she could hold a pencil she had been able to draw. She had received lessons in painting later on, and had covered canvas after canvas with the graceful futilities the Durdleham art teacher suggested. He was a landscape painter, and Clytie had little or no feeling for landscape. Bright colour, vivid contrast, sharp tone, attracted her, but the quiet grays and faint blues of our English scenery came out dull and mechanical when she tried to paint them. At last she gave up her lessons in despair, much to the wonderment of Janet, who improved greatly under instruction, and turned out neat, complacent little water-colours which she sold at bazaars or distributed among her friends. For months Clytie never touched a brush. Art of this sort revolted her. It was soulless, futile. But by degrees, as the breach between herself and her sisters widened, her power of painting became a source of ineffable consolation

—a means of self-commune. She could give external expression to the voices that haunted her. She read books with the eagerness only exhibited by the young girl craving for self-development; and the pictures they vividly impressed on her young imaginative brain she transferred to paper or canvas—not lovingly, tenderly, with the pure artistic delight of gradual creation, but hurriedly, feverishly, longing to see the thing done, the impression realised in a way in which she could understand it. When finished, or rather as soon as it had reached an impressionist stage of artistic completeness, she would feast her heart upon it for a day or two, and then throw it away, or let it lie about in a corner disregarded and forgotten.

Until she was nearly eighteen Mrs. Blather had scrupulously supervised her reading, and Clytie, chafing with irritation, had been compelled either to submit or to smuggle condemned books into the house and read them surreptitiously. But at last her angry impatience at the impeccable literature that satisfied her sisters' needs burst its restraints, and resisted vehemently and finally all censorship on the part of Mrs. Blather.

It was not wholesome, this solitary, emotional, imaginative life. Her health showed signs of giving way. They called in a doctor, who prescribed rest and a change of air. One of her aunts, who lived in London, happened to want a companion for a tour on the Continent, and with many misgivings undertook to take Clytie with her. To the girl the trip was an endless succession of delight. Impressions followed each other too fast for her to realise them. The superficial features of continental life, familiar

and commonplace enough to the ordinary traveller, were new to her. Groups at street corners, strangely attired soldiers, odd un-English-looking shops, the very waiters hurrying along through the intricacies of café tables with their fantastically laden trays, all excited her, filled her with the exhilaration of life and movement. Her aunt, who had hitherto shared the family opinion of Clytie, wondered greatly at the transformation. It never occurred to her that this was the natural Clytie filling her heart at last with the emotions it had hungered for.

It was during this time, at a pension in Dresden, that she formed the acquaintance of the Farquharsons. Miss Davenant discovered that they and herself had common acquaintances in London, and that she had heard of Mr. Farquharson as an archæologist of some repute.

The acquaintance thus formed developed quickly into a pleasant intimacy of travel. Mrs. Farquharson, a bright, clever woman of forty, was attracted toward Clytie, who, for her part, found in her new friend a natural sympathy that touched her heart. So far did their sudden friendship go, that before they parted Clytie had conditionally accepted an invitation to visit the archæologist and his wife in Harley Street.

When Mr. Davenant's permission was asked he at first demurred. He had the country-bred man's distrust of strangers; but when his sister vouched for the social position of the Farquharsons he reluctantly consented. Clytie paid her promised visit the following winter. This was one of the turning points of her life. For the first time she found herself in an intellectual, artistic society. It was a glimpse of

another world. At Durdleham young men seldom came to the house. When they did, they avoided her and talked platitudes to her sisters. At dinner parties the men remained in the dining-room long after the ladies had left. They seemed to regard them as somewhat picturesque but wearisome household adjuncts, whose absence their masculine intellects unreservedly welcomed; conversation with their partner was a dinner incident to be got through, like shaving or putting on their white ties beforehand. And the Durdleham ladies seemed to take this as a matter of course, and were equally happy to get by themselves and gossip mildly.

But in Harley Street Clytie found a different order of things. Men and women seemed to have interests in common and to discuss them on a basis of perfect equality. She found, too, women speaking authoritatively on certain subjects and listened to with deference by men. All, young and old, talked to her as if she were as much absorbed in life as themselves. No one made her rage with humiliation by tolerating her with an air of languid or pompous condescension. Even the frivolities and platitudes of everyday conversation were treated in a way new to her experience. The talk was keen, incisive, exaggerated. Everyone could say what he wished without fear of springing some mine of prejudice or prudery. The atmosphere of the house breathed freedom of thought and action. She beheld others putting into form her own vague aspirations. She saw people who wrote, painted, acted, living fully and intensely every day. Even the professed

idlers whom she met seemed to hold their fingers on the throb of life around them.

In the streets—she had been but little in London before—she saw things strange and fascinating—things she had read about, dreamed of, painted, and yet not understood. She was appalled by her ignorance, the narrow gauge of her sympathies. What did all this restless life in the great city mean, its wild cries and passions that struck upon her tightly strung nerves with a deep, mysterious resonance?

She filled a sketch-book with the vivid impressions each day brought her, seeking, as her way was, to realise them by tearing them out of herself, and giving them objectivity. A royal academician picked up the book from the corner of a table in the drawing-room, where Clytie, falling easily into the careless ways of the household, had thrown it. He was turning over the pages when Clytie perceived him, and rushed impulsively to him across the room.

"Oh! you mustn't look at that, Mr. Redgrave. Please don't!"

He looked up at her amusedly.

"Why not? It is rather interesting. Why don't you learn to draw?"

"What would be the good?" she said. "This suits my purpose."

The other shrugged his shoulders good-humouredly.

"That all depends upon what your purpose is," he replied. "If you want to become an artist you must train properly for it."

Become an artist! The words haunted her all that night. They opened up before her infinite vistas of possibilities, life

in the midst of the world, the knowledge of its greatnesses and its mysteries.

In the morning she wrote to him. He invited her to come to his studio and talk over the matter. She asked Mrs. Farquharson to accompany her, but her hostess was engaged at the hour in question. Clytie looked disappointed. The home traditions asserted themselves and prevented her from thinking it possible to go unchaperoned. Mrs. Farquharson divined this and laughed in her bright way.

“Goodness gracious, my dear,” she said, “the man isn't going to eat you!”

So Clytie went alone to the studio to learn her destiny.

“You have great talent,” said the artist, “but it needs cultivation. After two or three years' severe training you may do something.”

Then Clytie asked him the question that had been burning her heart for two days.

“Do you think I shall ever be able to earn my own living?”

“You might do that now, if you chose, and had patience,” he replied.

“How?”

“By book illustrating.”

“But I want to become a great artist.”

“Doubtless. Most of us do. You may if you try hard, and love art for art's sake. But,” he added, looking at her keenly—“there always is a 'but,' Miss Davenant.”

“Why do you say that?” she asked quickly.

“*Parce que*, as the French say—begging your pardon.”

And that was practically the end of the conversation.

All this had happened to Clytie three months before Mrs. Blather had discovered the offending picture in Clytie's attic studio and had carried it to her father. After this foretaste of life the girl wearied more than ever of Durdleham with its soullessness, its stagnation, its prim formulas. A dangerous reaction of spirit set in, leading her to long spells of hopeless melancholy, alternating with outbursts of passionate rebellion. She would stand for hours in the recess of her window gazing over the flat stretch of country, and dreaming strange dreams of the world that lay beyond the dreary horizon—dreams in which sharp reminiscence mingled with fancy in vague, weird shapes. But still she was beginning to realise herself, her needs, her vague cravings. Her passionate desires now flowed into some definite channel—to escape at all costs from Durdleham, and consequently to enter that free world of art the glimpse of which had enchanted her.

The scenes between her sisters and herself were of daily occurrence. The narrower, gentler women were shocked at her wilfulnesses, her unladylike behaviour; she was revolted to her soul at the pettiness and sordidness of the disputes. Existence at Durdleham had become impossible.

“For God's sake, Gracie, let me go away from here,” she cried one day, “or I shall hate you—and I want to love you if I can. Let me go to London. Auntie will take me in. Oh, my God! I shall go mad in this place among you.”

And Mrs. Blather, for the sake of her own tranquillity and the reputation of the family, made up her mind that Clytie should have her desire and that Durdleham should know her no more. And in the end Mrs. Blather gained her father's

consent to the arrangement; but the old man looked upon Clytie almost as a lost soul.

CHAPTER II.

Table of Contents

When the eager young soul starts out unaided to solve the riddle of life, it meets with many paradoxes that admit of no solution, and many sordid simplicities that only unfamiliarity made it regard as enigmas. Despair in the one instance and disgust in the other not unfrequently drive it into a hopeless pessimism, in which inaction seems to be the least pain. Or else the soul bruises itself in vain against the mocking bars, shrinks in loathing from the disveiled corruption, and flies back to the unavailing aids that it spurned aforetime. It is cast in the valley of the shadow of death which only the stout-hearted can pass through unshaken.

The multitude stands by the formulas that profess to solve the eternal problem. It follows them blindly, like the schoolboy who cares not whether they are right or wrong, or whether the answer is conclusive. So long as there is an answer of some sort its mind is easy. But there are earnester inquirers whom these formulas do not satisfy—who see that they are followed for their own sake, that they never can lead to any conclusions. The soul, now of a people, now of an individual, rebels; it rejects the formulas; it starts from the first principles of being, asserting fiercely its individuality, its inalienable right to seek after truth according to its own methods. These are prejudiced. All great action must be. Because a system is rotten and incomplete the perfervid spirit judges that every factor must be false. It misses the fact that every great human system

contains elemental truths of vital importance, without which it must fall in its struggle. And at last, when the forces of endeavour are well nigh spent, it finds the key of the great enigma inwrapped in a greater one still, in the eternal tragedy of things.

It was with this burning protest against formulas that Clytie entered into the world. They had been presented to her in their smug complacency as solving all mysteries human and divine. She had seen them worshipped as fetiches, and her soul revolted against the futile idolatry. She was too young to examine them carefully, to see that the sacrosanctity of some was miserably justified by human experience. She spurned them all, and she plunged into the waters of Life, a rudderless bark in search of the unknown.

She spent two years in study at the Slade School in University College, living under the protection of her aunt, who had a house in Russell Square. The training was severe and at times irksome. But she learned strict academical rules of drawing, in spite of her repugnance to the stern coldness of the antique. After her term of hard training was over she went for a year into a painter's studio and learned colour and painting from the live model.

They were years of probation, as Clytie well knew, and they brought her lessons in self-restraint, both in art and in the conduct of life. Her aunt, Miss Davenant, was shrewder and broader-minded than her brother, having lived more in the whirl of humanity, but the formulas of Durdleham were ranged as household gods upon her hearthstone, and Clytie, out of pure self-interest, was bound to show them outward respect. To compensate, however, for this, Clytie found in

her student life many experiences, as she had found during her continental trip, with which she could fill her heart without violating her aunt's Lares and Penates.

She seldom went to Durdleham. She had an odd feeling that she was in disgrace there for having wished to leave it. Besides, both Mrs. Blather and Janet, as is the inconsequent way of such women, spoke tauntingly of her gay life in town, and contrasted it enviously with their country dulness. And then, too, her father was always querulous, complaining, not of her absence from home, but of her dissimilarity to her sisters.

“My dear papa,” she said one day, “I could no more be like them than they could be like me.”

“You might if you had tried,” said the old man.

Clytie looked hopelessly out of window. What possible reply could be made?

The happiest, most expansive hours that Clytie spent during these three years were in Harley Street with the Farquharsons. At first her aunt was rather averse to a continuance of the intimacy. Although she had kept up a visiting acquaintance with the Farquharsons since their return from Switzerland, and liked them both personally, she was conscious of an unfamiliar atmosphere in their house. The instinctive shrinking from the unknown made her seek to draw Clytie back with her towards the security of her own accustomed circle. But eventually, when she saw that the girl, to whom she had grown sincerely attached, found real happiness in going to Harley Street, she withdrew her tentative restrictions altogether. Perhaps she read deeper into the girl's heart than either was conscious of, and

realised that in the Farquharsons' society Clytie found a relief from the strain of everyday life with her, which otherwise might have been unbearable.

The conditions of the household in Harley Street were favourable to the development of unceremonious intimacy. Mrs. Farquharson herself was bred in that strange London world we call Bohemia. Her father, long since dead, had been a journalist, a hack story-writer, a maker of plays, sometimes editor of a smart weekly, at others acting manager of a provincial company. Like most men of his type he spent his money as fast as he earned it, and when work came to a temporary standstill drew upon the prospects of his next success. His daughter Caroline had grown up in cheerful familiarity with this hand to mouth, makeshift existence. She had been called upon so often from her earliest childhood to condone the faults of her father and those of his intimates, who were men of much the same mould as himself, that a general habit of indulgence became natural to her. Folly seemed so inherent a quality in humanity that not to smile tolerantly, even though reprovingly, upon it was with her an impossibility. The lowering of moral tone that might have resulted from this mental attitude, and from a continuance of the same conditions of life, was prevented by her early marriage with a man of assured income and position. Her father died shortly afterwards and her connection with the seamy side of Bohemianism was thoroughly broken off. But the ingrained habits of freedom and carelessness still remained. She could never learn to be methodical, systematic. She had an inherited dread of account-books, household rules, fixed

hours for meals, and appointed places for every domestic article. It was fortunate for her that she had married a man who worshipped her, and himself shared her distaste for rigidly organised life. His means had placed him beyond the necessity of working for his livelihood, and so the free life in a home where he could work, idle, eat, and receive his friends at any hour of the day or night was as much to his own taste as to that of his wife.

It was impossible that such a house should not possess a charm for those to whom the Farquharsons gave their friendship. The absence of formality encouraged expansiveness and individuality. There was a tacit understanding that one had a right not only to oneself, but to the appreciation of oneself by the host and hostess. It was this that Clytie had felt during her first visit, and it attracted her more and more to them as time went on. Gradually the house became a second home to her, and Mrs. Farquharson a friend such as she had never known before. She could go to her for strength and comfort during her fits of depression when the time seemed out of joint, and she did not in the least seem called upon to set it right. The restraints of strict draughtsmanship, academic modelling and grouping, chafed her as her simple arithmetic had done at school. She longed to throw them off and to plunge back into her old artistic wilfulnesses. But these occasions generally coincided with fresh sensations of restraint in her home life, and she was wise enough to appreciate the fact.

During this period an incident occurred in her life, giving it fresh colour and helping her to realise herself more fully.

Her girlhood had been far removed from the lax sphere of idle flirtation in which many girls are brought up. The young men of Durdleham, who might have been attracted towards her by her beauty, were frozen by her scarcely veiled impatience at their society.

The dominant impulse towards active search after life had swayed her to the exclusion of any less powerful motive, and it had scarcely yet occurred to her that her personality might interest and possibly influence others. She was too absorbed in her work, in her dimly shadowed yet ever-haunting plans for the future, in the individualities round her, in the foretaste of that full sense of living, in the stirring objectivity of London life, to dwell at all earnestly on subjective matters and to devote much attention to self-analysis. It is only when the question, “How do others affect me?” ceases to interest that the other question, “How does my personality affect others?” begins to assume a paramount importance. The possibility of a man falling in love with her was a factor as yet absent from her scheme of practical life.

She learned that such an event had occurred from Mrs. Farquharson. She had gone to her one Monday morning, depressed, out of tune, to seek consolation.

“Oh, why am I not a man?” she exclaimed petulantly. “Why can't I live by myself, go where I like, and see what I want to see?”

Her friend laughed good-humouredly.

“You want to do too much at once, my dear. The world's your oyster, as ancient Pistol said, and you would force it open with one wrench. As for wishing to be a man, you are

by no means original. Lots of girls say that, but when they grow older they think it's just as well for them that they are women.”

“What on earth's the good of being a *woman?*” asked Clytie, with rather unnecessary emphasis.

One of her studio companions had asked her to join a party at a theatre, and her aunt had demurred on the ground that ladies ought not to go to that particular house. It showed a certain knowledge of the world on the old lady's part, but Clytie did not realise it, and although she accepted the decision with good grace, it fretted her. These trivial things fret even the wisest amongst us quite as much as the important ones do.

Mrs. Farquharson did not reply, but continued placidly her usual Monday morning's occupation of putting her music in order, while Clytie watched her from the long rocking-chair where she was sitting, her hands clasped behind her head.

“What's the good of being a woman when one has to pass half one's life shut up in darkness? It's bad enough being a human being as it is, and having to sleep the other half.”

“How old are you, my dear?” asked Mrs. Farquharson, looking at a song.

“You know,” replied Clytie. “Twenty.”

“Then how would you like to be a young man of twenty—or even two-and-twenty? How would you like to be young Beaumont, for instance? Do you think he knows so very much more than you do?”

“He's such a boy,” said Clytie.

“And you, my dear, are such a girl,” said Mrs. Farquharson, coming up behind her chair and smoothing her cheeks. “But you are many years older than he is—and likely to remain so. Do you know why we women like to be women? Because we see so many things that men would give the eyes of their heads to know. Hasn't it ever struck you that we are familiar with a side of life that is almost forever hidden from men? And as for that particular side that men have exclusively to themselves, it is neither very pretty nor comfortful.”

“I suppose that is why men stop talking when one goes into the smoking-room,” said Clytie. “You hear shouts of laughter outside the door, and you think they must be having an awfully good time, and when you appear in the doorway they seem to pull themselves together, and one or two always look red and sheepish.”

“I should advise you to read the story of Bluebeard,” said Mrs. Farquharson.

“You are just as bad as the rest,” cried Clytie, half laughing and half vexed. “I never thought it of you. That's what I have always been told: Never try to find out what you don't know. Always remain in a state of blissful ignorance. Men are superior beings, and a good little girl ought to accept her position with meekness.”

“I could a tale unfold,” said her friend, “but I won't. It is too early for you. If you want to make experiments on your own account there is young Beaumont for you. He will tell you the sum total of his knowledge in ten minutes.”

“Do you know, I like him,” said Clytie, leaving the main track of the conversation. “He always looks so clean, and his

clothes fit him so well, and he is so serviceable. He always seems to be trying to make the best of himself, since God has done so little for him. And it's very plucky of him to try to improve on the Almighty.”

“I would not like him too much.”

“Why?”

“My poor Clytie! You haven't even got the elements of woman's knowledge yet. Can't you see why Beaumont wears those very chaste ties and those wonderfully shiny boots, and does errands all over London for you? Oh, dear!”

“Do you mean that he——?”

Mrs. Farquharson looked at her quizzically and nodded.

“Therefore I would not like him too much.”

Obeying a first impulse, Clytie burst out laughing. It seemed so ridiculous. Beaumont was a good-looking, fresh-faced young fellow of two-and-twenty, a distant relation of the Farquharsons, and a habitué of the house. She had met him there many times and had begun to feel quite friendly towards him. Besides, he had fetched and carried for her in the most useful way. She had never thought of his falling in love with her. As he was the last man she herself would have thought of falling in love with, she found the event ludicrous.

She stopped laughing suddenly, and crimsoned to her hair; then rushed impulsively up to Mrs. Farquharson, and put her arm round her waist.

“I am sorry; forgive me. What must you think of me! I could not help it, indeed I couldn't. You put me in such a new light before myself. And, dear Mrs. Farquharson, I do so want you to see the best side of me.”

“My dear girl,” said her friend, “you don't suppose that with your face and your nature you are going to pass through life without having men falling in love with you! You see what a lot you have to learn. You want to have a man's experiences before you have passed through the elementary ones of a woman.”

“And Mr. Beaumont—what shall I do?”

“Oh! don't fret yourself about him. He will get over it. He has no end of this sort of thing to go through before his life is up. It will do him good.” Clytie had not much time to map out any fixed plan of treatment of her would-be lover, for he met her an afternoon or two afterwards outside University College, where he had been waiting for her, and pleaded that she would walk a little way up towards the Regent's Park, as the afternoon was fine.

Clytie looked at him and hesitated.

“Only just a little way. I have something I must tell you.”

“Perhaps you had best never tell it,” said Clytie.

The red-waistcoated gate porter behind them beamed on them smilingly. He had seen something of youthful love in his professional career.

“I must, whatever happens,” replied the young fellow. “I know it's wrong to ask you to walk in the street with me, but I don't know when I shall get another chance.”

“I don't see anything wrong about it,” said Clytie. “I will go with you wherever you wish.”

So they wandered up Gower Street and the Euston Road into the park, and there, for the first time in her life, Clytie heard a man confess his love for her and ask her to marry him. He was only a boy after all, but he was in great

earnest. Clytie felt humbled, almost guilty, and yet a great, unknown pleasure thrilled through her. Although she knew that the sooner and more summarily the interview was brought to an end the better for both herself and him, she could scarcely resist the temptation of allowing him to pour out the fulness of his boyish love for her.

She suddenly found herself listening to the sound but not the meaning of his words, her senses filled with the sweetness of the new sensations and the pure May sunlight that flooded the trees and the gay flower-bed opposite the bench where they were sitting. Then she realised her situation, and in a few kind words, harder to speak than she would have expected, dismissed him.

And that was the end of the matter. He went off whither young men in his predicament generally betake themselves, and Clytie returned slowly home to Russell Square.

When she had reached her own room she went deliberately up to the glass and scanned her features. Then she laughed a strange, contented little laugh, and taking off her hat and gloves, went downstairs to tea. She had advanced several steps along the road to knowledge.

Three years! How quickly they passed! How sure yet dimly working were their influences! If they were years of probation and self-restraint for Clytie, they also brought with them softening influences. Hitherto her life had been one of revolt and harsh, crude judgments that had turned away friendship and had left her solitary. Mutual misconception and misunderstanding had crushed sisterly love. Her heart had never been touched by real affection. Now she had friends, real ones, in the Farquharsons whom she could love