

THE QUICK OR THE DEAD? A STUDY

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The Quick or the Dead? A Study by Amélie Rives

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AMÉLIE RIVES

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QUICK OR THE DEAD?

A STUDY.

BY
AMÉLIE RIVES.

"Wanting is—what?"—*Truism*.

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PREFACE.

THE critics have done me a great, though unconscious, honor in assuming that I intended *Barbara Pomfret* for a representation of myself, for in so doing they have attributed to me an absolute honesty and lack of vanity (save in the matter of physical appearance) such as few mortals were ever credited with.

Imagine any self-respecting human creature deliberately setting down the minutiae of her private woes and struggles, and recounting in downright English her absolutely selfish and hysterically morbid fluctuations between two vital questions.

It is strange to me that a man or woman, however obtuse, should deem any one capable of "unlocking her heart with a sonnet key" to so absolute and unflattering an extent.

As for those who think that I intended Barbara to represent a noble character, I will say simply and honestly that such was not my intention. I tried to describe as truthfully as I could a type of woman of whose existence I felt convinced,—a creature morbid, hysterical, sensitive, introspective; an egotist to her finger-ends, although an unconscious one; a sophist and a self-deceiver. If the eyes of even one Barbara have been opened to the way in which she is treating or has treated her Jock, then my study, crude as it is in many respects, will not have been made in vain. I have had letters from more than one Barbara, and from many who have known Barbaras, having suffered at their hands.

My view of human passion, when it is honest and lawful, is the same that Charles Kingsley takes in his preface to "The Saint's Tragedy," and in the tragedy itself.

I will acknowledge with gratitude criticism which enables me to correct errors, to refine

my style, to become simpler, more terse, more in everything what a writer should be; but for those who call me impure I have only one reply: "Ye read by the light of your own spirit." Frederick Robertson has said, "All situations are pure to the pure; to the man that feels that 'the king's daughter is all glorious within,' no outward situation can seem inglorious or impure.

". . . We do not want a new world,—we want new hearts.

"Let the spirit of God purify society, and to the pure all things will be pure."

The *Quick or the Dead?* with all its faults of crudeness and bad taste here and there,—the result of too rapid writing and publication,—is, after all, merely an honest study of a sensitive and morbid woman who feels that she is being disloyal to her dead husband in loving a living man. When I think of the misconstruction which has followed its appearance, I am reminded of a purported fact which was once mentioned to me. The state-

ment may be utterly untrue, but the simile remains apposite. Some one told me that milk and rattlesnakes' poison are identical in the quality and quantity of their ingredients, and that the only way in which scientists explain the harmlessness of the one and the virulence of the other is by supposing some subtle difference in the juxtaposition of the molecules in each fluid. Now, it seems to me that some critics, when they shake the milk of my human kindness about in their own minds, disturb its atoms and force them temporarily into a poisonous relativeness.

It was her husband's ego—his soul—that Barbara loved. If this had not been so, she would have married Dering without question, since physically he was almost the exact reproduction of his cousin.

How blessed a thing it would be if people would only understand that while spades are spades, still one need not always picture them as standing in mud! They may be used more effectually than any other tool for im-

proving the soil about the roots of the Tree of Life, so that it will bear more abundantly and better fruit.

It seems to me that books well meant, strongly written, and from a clean heart resemble mirrors, wherein every one who reads sees his own reflection. The pure will see purity,—the foul-minded, foulness.

AMÉLIE RIVES.