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THREE DAUGHTERS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

BY MRS. INNES-BROWN

CHAPTER XI.

The flashes of lightning were less frequent, and the low distant rumble of thunder was rapidly growing more and more indistinct, but the rain still poured in torrents, when Madge, finding herself alone, and feeling chilled, weary, and dispirited, half crept or dragged her weary limbs to the low seat at the foot of the crucifix and crouched languidly upon it. She felt cold, hopeless, and dejected, more so than she had ever done in her life before.

As though in tantalizing mockery, her past happy life rose vividly before her mind; the forms and faces she had loved, but never valued rightly until now. The old home—how distinctly she could see it, with its strong turreted walls and ivy-clad towers; the old keep, with its daisied drawbridge and the grass-grown moat in front; the bright terraces of flowers stretching on both sides far beyond the long grey building, and terminating in green wooded slopes on either side; the pine-clad hills rising higher and higher at the back, and the craggy rocks in the distance—even now she could distinctly trace the fantastic shapes and out lines, as they stood out in bold relief against the background of bright blue sky.

Then as these loved visions passed in her mind, she saw before her the form of a weird and horrid spectre, who seemed to trace in fiery letters, upon a dark and densely black background, the words, "All gone! passed away for ever!"

Surely it was the demon of despair who was thus allowed to tempt her. Madge pressed one damp cold hand upon each now burning cheek—fer, though her body still shuddered and shivered, her head and face had become hot and feverish, but no fear came to the relief of those weary, aching eyes; yet there was surely joy and hope in the picture now before her, for the stately and peaceful walls of St. Benedict rose in all their majesty and splendour, and the girl seemed to breathe more freely as she gazed upon them. She traversed in loving memory each well-remembered cloister, and lingered with yearning fondness near the spots she loved best; then each sweet Sister's face passed in review before those weary eyes. How calm and respectful those faces looked, framed in their pure white wimples and black veils; and as the quiet procession moved slowly past, Madge seemed to catch the intonation of their voices as they chanted the Litany of Our Lady; and yet each face seemed kindly bent towards her, and there was the deep love and pity expressed in their tones as they responded clearly and solemnly to each sweet epithet—"Pray for her! Pray for her!"

Again the tempter whispered, "Ah, its very fall for them to look joyful and serene; their lives glide on in untroubled peace and serenity; they have no sorrow like mine." Then she trembled, and her frame shook, as she stretched out her hands in an agony of supplication, for the fine form and strong, firm face of Lady Abbess seemed to stand before her, and with one hand raised, "point unflinchingly to the crucifix above her head. But the girl turned away her head and groaned; she wrung her hands and cried, "I cannot do it, Mother dear! My courage has failed me; I have not the strength to look up there!" Then in broken gasps she murmured through her dry and parched lips: "It is too much for any one heart to endure. All I have ever valued and loved has passed from my sight and possession for ever. There is no hope, no happiness on earth for me now. How dark and drear, how lower than awful looms the future before me. I see not one ray, ever so faint, of hope or joy in store for me. What will become of me? Yet the same sky that spreads over my old home, sheltered the loved inmates of St. Benedict's. Beatrice and Marie too, they are loved and cared for. Only poor me, I alone am forgotten. I shall never live. I know and feel I shall die!"

The more she brooded over her sorrows the more unendurable they appeared to grow, and a sense of injustice filled her mind. Thus she sat reeking herself in agony, and bemoaning her lot in life, longer than she anticipated. She did not observe that the room was almost dark, that her candle had almost burnt itself out, and now flickered

but faintly in its socket. Life indeed oaked cheerless and dark before her, and her courage and faith seemed ebbing fast. The demon of despair tempted her sorely to rebel at her lot in life; surely some loved friend will intercede for her in this her dark hour, and her good angel must not desert her. Too absorbed in her own grief, Madge had not heard the door open gently, or noticed the slight form of her mother glide softly into the room; but wrapped entirely in her own grief, she continued to murmur her sorrows aloud, and her utter inability to face the future.

"It is not fair that I should be placed in such a position as this; never again shall I be able to associate with my equals! What would my high minded school friends think, could they but see me now? Not even from your kind heart, Marie, could I endure the pity that I feel sure you would bestow. No, no; I must be unknown and forgotten by you all. What have I done that I should suffer like this?"

"O Madge! in pity cease, and upbraid me not, or you will kill me. My God! and have I not suffered also? and pale as death, and gasping for breath, Mrs. Fitz Allan pressed her hands upon her heart, and fell senseless to the ground. The candle gave one last faint flicker as it suddenly died out, and all was darkness. Madge, too frightened and startled to utter even a cry, but with a dread of guilt pressing her soul, sprang quickly to her feet. She had heard her mother's heart broken cry, and in the dim light had seen her fall—as she supposed—dead. Groping her way in the dark to where her mother lay, she endeavoured to raise her on to the bed, but discovered she had not strength for the task; so dragging a pillow towards her, she rested the poor head upon it, and flew in frenzied haste to Mary's room for assistance. She burst the door violently open, and darting to the bedside, seized Mary's hand and exclaimed wildly, "Hasten quickly! Mother is dying or dead. Oh, bring a light, I am so frightened!"

In a shorter space than it takes to tell it, the woman stood in Madge's room. She knelt down, and holding the candle low, looked earnestly at her mistress's face. Shaking her head sadly, she placed the light upon a chair, and clasping her strong arms around that seemingly lifeless form, raised her gently as if she would a child, and laid her tenderly upon the bed. The delicately chiselled features lay white and motionless, but there was an expression of suffering upon them painful to behold; yet the look of anxiety on Mary's face lessened a little, as unfastening her mistress's collar and dress, she detested signs of life in the faint, low breathing.

To describe Madge's feelings would be almost impossible. All her own sorrows—how trivial they now appeared in the presence of death—seemed to have suddenly vanished. She stood a stricken, guilty thing, an unwilling witness of the havoc her selfish grief had wrought. Every speck of color had departed from her white drawn face, and she leaned against the wall far support, and wrung her hands in speechless agony.

"Lend a hand here, miss, whilst I bring water and bathe your mother's temples." Mechanically the girl moved forward, but Mary was shocked when she saw how ill she looked. The same blue that dyed her mother's lips dyed here; the same dark lines under the eyes.

"Ah," thought the woman, "is her heart weak also? I did not know it." But she spoke cheerfully, "She will soon be better, miss; I have seen her like this before."

The revelation of feelings caused by Mary's words almost overcame the girl, and it was only by a strenuous effort that she was able to retain her standing position at the bedside. She had not killed her mother, then—she who now seemed more than all the world to her, that brave-souled woman who alone and for years had so heroically borne her sorrows without a murmur or a thought of self. She had not, then, as she feared, so overladen that poor tired heart with her own selfish griefs, that through sheer love and sorrow for her child it had broken as last. Ah, was there hope yet? Would she be given one chance more to repay that heart for all she had endured? "My God, forgive me! Spare her, only spare her to me!" cried the sorrow-stricken child, as she threw herself upon her knees by the bedside of her parent, "and oh! I promise to bless Thee, and murmur no more at Thy decrees. Ay, even if all earthly joy must depart from me forever and my heart break in the trial, still for her sake will I be faithful to Thy will. Straight from her heart rose the brief prayer, and, as all such, it was heard and answered. Down upon her soul fell the sweet, soft influence of grace, and Madge rose a different girl. For a full hour she and Mary watched with breathless anxiety beside the silent bed; they scarcely exchanged a word. The woman exerted every effort she could think of to restore life and animation to that pale, silent form; she washed out in search of the only doctor she knew, but he was out. Sometimes, when all her efforts appeared unavailing, and she shook her head sadly and gravely, the face of Madge would grow paler still, and wear a look of awful dread and alarm; whilst her heart would almost cease to beat, overcome by a sickening fear she could not control; and she prayed as she had never

prayed in her life before, short, burning pleadings to the heart of God that He would restore her mother to her once more, and she in return would give—ay, her life if need be, and would not count the cost.

But it was a heavy load that Madge voluntarily sought to take upon her young shoulders. Yet what load, what burden imposed upon us by God, is too heavy for us to endure, supported by His grace? It is often the awkward way in which we shoulder our cross that causes it to sit so uneasily upon us. We long to shift it, to move it to any place rather than to allow it to remain where it is; and oh, with what scared and over-anxious eyes do we not search the future before us, dreading with a mortal dread the deep damp gullies and rough rocky heights that may or may not be hidden in front of us, and yet which we feel we shall be compelled to traverse, battered and besmeared, too, it may be by taunts, ignomies, and reproaches, and still with that heavy burden upon us.

To most of us comes a turning-point in our lives, and the sign-post on the right road is sure to point towards Calvary and be marked by the cross. With what anxious dread must the angels of God look down upon mankind at this crisis, as each one arrives and chooses for himself his road. Some with simple faith receive their cross, and, kissing it, place it near their hearts and pass gently on; it is well. Perchance their cross is not very grievous or oppressive, but the goodwill with which they have received it has already less and of half its weight; more is not required from them. What they have done they have done well, and calm peace and joy are theirs.

Alas! it is not so with all, or we should not have to mourn and grieve, with pained and shama-stricken faces, for the deplorable acts of those poor weak ones amongst us, who, rather than face the dark and dreary troubles before them, shrink in weak and helpless cowardice from their lot, preferring rather to evade the weak thread of their existence than face the awful but often just ignomies appertaining to them. Over such as those must the angels weep.

But there are many others, thank God!—and the greater number of them are amongst the poor and unknown—who, though overpowered and awed at first by the dreary prespect before them, yet press bravely forward, nor hesitate, nor flinch amid their trials, sorrow and trouble, in the guidance and aid of that all-powerful Hand which they know will assuredly never desert them, nor cease to lead, conduct, and console them. And there are surely bright spots and sunny nooks on this road, hidden from and unknown to the world, where saints have basked and rested, and where they would fain have spent their lives; for they have listened to and learned secrets there between God and the soul which are never heard or learned elsewhere.

And so it was with one little friend Madge who suddenly found herself at this turning point. For during that long and weary hour when her mother lay unconscious before her, her heart and faith were tried most acutely, and were not found wanting. It seemed to her, as she stood and watched the sweet suffering face of her mother, that she had never known what real sorrow was before; and though she felt that all joy had departed out of her life for ever, and that she should never again see her mother, yet she prayed bravely for courage and strength to endure any cross or suffering God might choose to send her, if only her mother might be restored to her, that by untiring love and aid she might in some measure atone to her for all she had endured so meekly, and obtain pardon for her own murmurings and shortcomings.

At last the pale, transparent lids were feebly raised, and the dark-grey eyes looked dreamily forth.

"What is the matter? Where am I, Madge darling?" came in faint tones, scarce above a whisper, "My head feels so strange. What has happened?"

"All is well now, my own mother; lie still; you will soon be better; do not think of the past," replied the girl, almost beside herself with joy at hearing that dear voice once more.

"But your father?—he will want me; I must go to him."

"No, my lady; you'll lie just where you are. Nor could you rise if you wished to. I'll see to the master if he wants aught. Don't fret yourself about him."

"But you, Madge?—you look tired, my child; I must not occupy your bed."

"There is room for both of us, sweet mother," answered the girl, kissing her tenderly; "and now, once for all, do as your little daughter bids you—try and take this soothing drink, and settle off to sleep. I promise to rest myself, and Mary will attend to father."

Feeling too weak, and unable to resist her entreaties, the poor lady did as she was desired, and soon they had the satisfaction of seeing her fall into a quiet natural sleep; and after many days of given and promised demands, Mary at last departed, fully assured that Miss Madge would call her if required.

And now, when all was still and quiet once more, Madge seemed to realize vividly what lay before her; yet she did not shrink from the task. A delicate mother to tend and shield from every unnecessary sorrow or suffering; an irritable, selfish, and worst of all, intemperate father to

beast with, and endeavor to reform; a faithful servant to assist and reward—and all this with small and ever diminishing means. But the lessons of love and trust in God taught at St. Benedict's stood her in good stead now, and the bitter ones she had learned that night would never be forgotten.

The birds were gaily twittering their morning song, and the rising sun was tinting with a golden light the spire and pinnacles of the town of Edinburgh, ere Madge closed her eyes in sleep; and when she awoke to do so it was only to close them lightly, for her new responsibilities weighed heavily upon her, and she seemed to overstep herself.

When Mary looked in on her way downstairs in the morning, she was not altogether pleased to find Madge up and dressed.

"Do not be cross Mary, but I thought if you would ask the milk-boy to leave this note at Dr. Ferguson's, a few doors up the street, he might call, and insist upon mother's remaining in bed, and give her something to strengthen her."

"We are right, miss; I will do it. We are bound to overlook herself. When Mary looked in on her way downstairs in the morning, she was not altogether pleased to find Madge up and dressed.

"My Dearest Child.—Though I am stretched on a bed of sickness, yet is the thought of my two Marys, in their far away northern home, ever present to my mind, and uneasiness fills my heart respecting them, fearing lest some unknown trouble has overtaken them. To ease my mind somewhat, the doctor has allowed Mother Cecilia to write at my dictation, and bid you, Madge, send me a few lines, assuring me of all that is passing around you."

"Should new or unexpected troubles encompass you, dear child, remember that your first care must be to shield and support her who for so long and alone has borne the burden of the day and the heat thereof, and who, I fear, ere this must be almost worn out in body and mind. As for yourself, my own child, be faithful and steadfast; try and keep a cheerful heart, and, above all things, do not meet troubles halfway, nor waste your spirits fretting over these which may never arrive. Do your duty nobly and well, and in God's own good time, even in this world I do not doubt, happiness will be yours. I cannot say more—my head swims at times—but may Heaven bless you; and believe ever in the sincerest prayers and affection of yours faithfully in Christ, "MARRIE DE VALOIS, Lady Abbess."

"P. S.—Dear Lady Abbess has been very uneasy about you lately, and has caused us all to pray much for you. Write soon.—M. CECILIA."

After reading this letter, Madge kissed it and placed it reverently in the breast-fold of the dress she always wore, her best school-dress, it being the only decent one she possessed in the world, and resolved to answer the letter at once. Then she turned to the other; it was in Marie's neat little handwriting, and, like herself, was full of sympathy and kindness. She begged for a letter in return, and mentioned many kind messages from her brothers; amongst others, "his earnest desire that Madge should know he had given up all idea of joining the army, and had entered their lawyer's office with the ultimate intention of becoming a barrister."

After reading this letter through once or twice, Madge stood for some time gazing abstractedly into the dull street before her. She did not see the numerous brick and mortar houses in front of her, though her eyes appeared intently fixed upon them; but in their stead she could plainly discern the bright, boyish face of Louis, and the kind, gentle face of his sister. Surely she may be forgiven if a painful expression of regret passed over her face, as with difficulty she suppressed a sob, and sighed deeply, as she seemed to realize she should never see either of them again. "Yes," she said bravely, "I will write to you, Marie darling, and let you know what I may; and will tell you simply that not all things are changed between us; that I am but a poor girl, and—must never hope to see you or any of my old school friends again. Alas! she resumed, and a tear fell upon the open letter in her hand, but she dashed it away, and continued, "It is hard, but I will do it; I will not stand in a false light. They have a right to know my position, and after that, way, of course, they will forget us."

But Mrs. Fitz Allan argued thus with her daughter: "I think that by informing your old companions of our present circumstances, you will lose much, and gain nothing, my child. Rather maintain silence altogether upon the subject, unless forced to speak. If, as I hope, they love you for yourself alone, then they will remain faithful to you, and who knows but at some future time you may meet them again when things are brighter." She could not bear to feel that her daughter should be obliged to break every link that bound her to the old happy girl life.

TO BE CONTINUED

We ask God to forgive us for our evil thoughts and evil temper, but rarely, if ever, ask Him to forgive us for our sadness.—R. W. Dale.

THE FREEDOM OF THE WILL

By Mary Elizabeth Armstrong in The Missionary

"Yes, but can't you see that he is quite impossible?" asks Mildred, with an air of finality.

"No, I don't see it at all," retorted Ned.

"You surely must know, Ned, that Arthur is a Catholic and consequently is a bull-headed and antediluvian about some of his ideas as well—the Kaiser for example."

"Just what is he 'bull-headed' about, Mil?" her brother asked, in that calmly impassioned manner which later characterized him as one of the most successful lawyers of his time.

"My dear little boy, you are only eighteen and are just beginning your college course. Wait until you have become thoroughly grounded. We'll talk about it four years from now when you have received your degree at a real university and then you'll understand what I mean about Arthur. You haven't taken up philosophy or any of the higher branches of you'll see that there is no intelligible or impregnable position of any line of thought. We are positively uncertain in regard to the exactitude of ethical criteria. You may be right about a thing in your mind and I may be right about it in my mind and yet our ideas may be apparently contradictory. Still, to my way of thinking, we may both be right as long as we follow what we are destined for. These isn't any proof, it all rests with the individual."

"Wait a minute," the lad interposed, "you mean to say that there are no forms of right and wrong in this world, no laws whereby we may judge of our own or regulate our neighbor's conduct, no scale which applies to one and all?"

"Why, yes," she answered slightly surprised at his grasp of the situation, "that's about it, although, of course, you put it rather baldly."

"Good-night!" Ned exclaimed and as if the argument had exhausted him completely, made a hasty exit of the room, leaving his sister to enjoy her "higher thoughts" alone.

Mildred and Ned Jeffers were the much loved and only children of a doctor, Ned, the young lady, now twenty-three, had just completed work for her Master's Degree in Experimental Psychology at one of the large universities of Illinois.

Ned, on account of ill health, had attended a Catholic college in a nearby city in order that he might return home in the evening. It was thought that the Catholic influence of the school would not affect him much since he was to take only the languages and mathematics. He was not sufficiently robust to begin the course at his sister's Alma Mater, but had lately been persuaded by his cousin, Arthur Rendson, to spend another year at St. Louis.

Arthur was completing the medical course in the same university and seemed to exert a very beneficial influence on his young cousin, Mildred, who, if anything, prided herself on her lofty ideals and freedom from prejudice, made no objections to her brother's attendance at a Catholic university, but what she really did resent was that her otherwise very eligible young doctor cousin should be so set in his views.

It was only a week ago, when they had attended the theater together, that she was thoroughly ashamed of his conduct. The play was most modern in its problematic tendencies and the entire sympathy of the audience was enlisted for the erring one. Unfortunately, stern and unrelenting justice stepped in at the last moment, spoiling a greatly-to-be desired illicit union and leaving the lovers seque with disappointment.

Mildred wiped her eyes copiously as she closed and walked out with the air of one who has been completely overcome by the vicissitudes of life. In the lobby she scrutinized her cousin, whose face, rufled to her surprise, bore an expression of disgusted indignation.

"Wasn't it sad?" she murmured.

"Sad, nothing!" he almost shouted. "That's the kind of play which brings all kinds of misery into the world. They get what they deserved, I think."

"St!" she whispered, clutching his arm. "Everyone is looking at us."

"I don't care," he answered, although in a more subdued tone. "Of course it was cleverly done, and I admit the young fellow was almost carried away by force of circumstances, but he could have refrained from that forgery, and all the rest."

A hot argument had followed during the drive home, and since then Mildred had been fortifying herself for the next attack. Her reading became more abstruse and assiduous than ever, but unlike a true mystic her disposition appeared slightly more irritable.

As her brother left the room she picked up her latest volume on the Modern Drama and continued to read. After a time she seized a pencil and underlined a passage with an air of triumph. Glancing out of the window she was surprised to see her antagonist of the theater coming up the walk, arm in arm with her brother. They were deep into a discussion of some kind. The elder youth was talking earnestly, and Ned was listening with respectful attention. She heard Arthur's hearty "Hello, Aunt Amy, I'm here for lunch, I guess. Ned has been coaxing me to stay, and listened absently to her mother's equally warm welcome, and then settling his features into that becoming attitude

of the deeply contemplative, just condescending to observe mundane proceedings, she waited, without so much as a turn of the head, their coming.

"The greetings were cool enough on the feminine side, but absolutely without criticism on the part of the young doctor, who acted as though nothing had happened. He spoke of commonplace, asked his cousin if she were tired after the long drive succeeding the play, and would have entirely ignored her attitude had not her own brother broken the ice.

"Say, Art," he interrupted, "Mil and I were just having a little argument a while ago. She says there isn't any set form for right or wrong in this world. It's just wrong as a person sees it, and even then, it isn't wrong because a person is just bound to do what his nature calls on him to do."

"Well, that's a trifle strong, isn't it?" the young man asked, looking rather at the end of his cigar than at either occupant of the room.

"Now, Ned, I didn't say that at all," the girl retorted on the defensive immediately. "I said there are no intelligible criteria which apply to one and all."

"Yes, but that's similar, isn't it Art?"

"I think it is. But perhaps Mildred will explain."

"Oh, I know," she answered hurriedly, "that the scholastic, and of course Catholic doctrine of free will is entirely opposed to my opinions, which, by the way, are broad enough to accept what is good in the Roman viewpoint and to look beyond to something higher."

"And, pray, what do you call something higher?" asked Arthur, slightly nettled in spite of himself.

"Well, I mean the new school of dramatics, or the new philosophy, if you will. It is one of the forerunners and that play of Galsworthy's we saw the other night was wonderfully true and uplifting to one of my belief."

"Suppose then, that each person in this world did follow the bent of his nature, do you think we could soon look for the millennium?"

"Yes," added Ned, "the bent of the burglar's nature is to burgle as hard as he can; the bent of the dips-dread is to dope as hard as he can, and the bent of the town gossip is to rip everybody up the back. Shall we say to the burglar: 'Go on with the good work. Be a successful burglar. It is your nature; and so on with the all rest?'"

Mildred looked bored. "Of course you would say a ridiculous interpretation to it. Just listen to this passage from Ibsen's letters and you'll see what I mean." Seizing the book she had laid aside and opening it to the passage marked, she read in her low, well modulated voice: "The principal thing is that one remain veracious and faithful in one's relations to oneself. The great thing is not to will one thing rather than another, but to will that which one is absolutely impelled to will because one is oneself and cannot be otherwise." She paused severely.

"And you believe that?" asked Arthur leaning forward intently.

"Yes, I think that sums up my belief pretty well."

"Then I am to conclude that you do not believe in the freedom of the will?"

"Oh, the will," she exclaimed, "is entirely antiquated. In the later psychology, the old scholastic terms are not used at all. Long ago they divided the head into sections called 'faculties,' just as we divide an apple into so many parts, and labeled one intellect, another emotion, and, of course, the will was in a little compartment entirely by itself."

"And how do you locate the will?" was the next question.

"The will, if one adheres to the term, is simply the result, the action impelled by the emotional forces of human nature. It is entirely dependent upon the sum total of mental processes and cannot be separated from them. It is ridiculous to think that this activity can work independent of the nature of the human being. That is why I hold that evil is only evil subjective, as the one who does the act knows and understands."

"Well, let us keep to this one point then. Suppose we forget all about whether good is good in itself or evil is evil in itself, and let's just consider if a thing were evil would a human being be able to choose the right from the wrong and would he be culpable if he were to choose wrong?"

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"Why, yes. He couldn't have lasted much longer, even if small quantities had been administered."

"Yes, but that was exceptional, wasn't it?"

"No, not so very, but it shows he was free to choose."

"Oh, I admit,