

THE LOVE STORY OF ALISON BARNARD

BY KATHARINE TYNAN

(Author of "The Handsome Brando," &c.)

The events of the election were some three weeks over. It was the Long Vacation; and Sir Gerard Molyneux, who had been strongly advised to go yachting or to take some cure that should keep him away from the subjects that most engrossed him, had chosen instead to spend the holidays in the congested districts of the west of Ireland, with Mr. Grace for his companion.

He had sent Paul Bosanquet home to be with his father and uncle for a while, and all three were in Scotland, where the elder Bosanquet had taken a grouse-moor, and where Sir Gerard had promised to join them later.

Kylinoe House was in the market to let furnished. It was true that it had been a burden on the owner's hands, and that the cost of maintenance had taken a good deal of money for which he had other purposes.

It was by no means so fine a place of residence as Castle Barnard. It was indeed an old, red-brick house of the Georgian period, homely and comfortable, with handsome, lofty, and ample rooms, but with little splendour.

The furniture matched the house. There had been no such collector among the Molyneuxs as Anthony Barnard. That the furniture was excellent, even beautiful of its kind, was because it belonged to a period when cabinet-making was an art in Dublin and Cork, and it was in England at the same date.

The furniture for the most part was dark mahogany, beautifully coloured, made with the solid graces of Chippendale rather than the slenderness of Sheraton, except in one or two rooms. The drawing-room was decorated in the French manner with wreaths of roses on walls and ceilings, and gilt furniture and cabinets of burl and ornolu, and many branch candelsticks with stalactites of gilding.

One day Alison and Tessa had driven over to Kylinoe. There were some papers Sir Gerard required for which Alison had to make a search. She was received with enthusiasm by Mrs. Maguire, the housekeeper, who had been a long time with the Molyneuxs, and had transferred her allegiance to Sir Gerard, following Sir John long ago. She had set their tea in the drawing-room where the furniture had been unwrapped from its holland wrappings in their hon-

or. "The young lady would like to see the house?" she said, her hard-featured face quite wistful. It was not Alison's first visit by any means. Sir Gerard had been used to entertain his friends of both sexes, and there had been many a pleasant little luncheon party when Mrs. Tyrrell or Mrs. Lang had taken the head of the table.

"We haven't got maybe as fine things to show as Castle Barnard," the old woman said with an air of stubborn pride, "but the Molyneuxs have been in it a long time. I never thought to see it go to strangers."

"It will be only for a time," said Alison, her own heart answering the pain in the old woman's voice. "I know my cousin would love to see it. She is like all of us, she believes in Sir Gerard." She added hastily, fearing the old woman might not understand her. "This will be a historic house one day, Mrs. Maguire, beyond Castle Barnard or Downe, or any other house of the neighborhood, because it was his house. People will make pilgrimages here to see it."

For an instant the housekeeper's face lightened, then darkened again. "I'd rather he'd be happy in his lifetime," she said. "I know you're a great scholar, Miss Alison. Sure you know that they that loved and worked for this country always suffered for her. Ever and always 'twas martyrs they were."

"Sir Gerard will be the exception," said Alison. Mrs. Maguire, however, refused to take a cheerful view of it; muttering something about not spilling their tea with her miserableness she went away, lifting a corner of her apron to her eyes.

Later, she conducted them over the house. It was true that, as she said, Kylinoe should have housed a large family. The last Lady Molyneux had been a notable housewife, and had filled her cupboards to overflowing with exquisite linen, and blankets of the fleeciest, besides guarding the house carefully from moth and rust. Mrs. Maguire spoke with bated breath of her ladyship's household receipts when at last they reached the housekeeper's room, and handled it as though it were the Holy Bible. The visitors had already beheld with awe the pantries and storerooms walled to the ceiling with pots of preserves and bottles of home-made wines, sauces, pickles and condiments of all kinds. There was a still-room with many kinds of sweet-waters and distillations of all sorts of herbs on its shelves.

"I learnt of my ladyship," said Mrs. Maguire, standing erect in a lean and mournful dignity, "and if her ladyship was to appear to me this minute and say, 'Anne Maguire, have you done as I brought you up to do?'—I was only sixteen when I entered service at Kylinoe—I could answer faithful: 'Yes, your ladyship.' Year after year I've made the marmalade and the jams and the jellies, and the home-made wines and the herb beer, as her ladyship directed me. I've had to give it away sometimes for fear of spoiling, but none can say that Anne Maguire ever wasted."

"No, indeed," said Alison, "that last chutney was delicious." "I'm glad you liked it, Miss. Who would have a better right to it than you?" Alison did not seem to notice this enigmatic speech. "You will stay on with the new people?" she asked, "whoever they may be?" "They'll have to take me or do without the house," Mrs. Maguire

said firmly. "So I've said to the Master: 'If there's to be strangers in the house, sir, I'll stay here to look after her ladyship's things, and he quite agreed with me. If only he'd settle, Miss Alison!'"

"I'm afraid we mustn't look for that just yet," said Alison. "I want his children in the house before I die. When poor Master Hugh was drowned I thought I'd never care for another child; but I want the master's."

"You know what Father Tracy says," Alison said softly. "That the cause is his wife and the people are his children."

"Cold comfort," said the housekeeper grimly. "Why should he kill himself for them?" And Kylinoe passing to strangers."

"I suppose like all the others who ever served Ireland, he was predestined. The patriot is not made for happiness."

"I wish it had been someone but him," said the old woman fretfully. "Why couldn't it have been anyone else. And sure I know he'll be a great man in history; but we'll all be dead and gone before that. I want to be happy while I'm alive."

Somehow Alison's heart echoed the cry. "I want to be happy while I'm alive. I want him to be happy while he's alive," she thought in her ears to the measure of the horse's hoofbeats as they drove, homeward.

CHAPTER X.

An Industrious Woman.

After the exciting events of the election there came to Alison one of the slack periods when the wheels of life seem to run slowly. She was a sensitive creature, and had such moments even in the midst of her crowded hours. For instance at three o'clock in the afternoon she always felt a waning of energy; and she had remembered at times a supposition that at the hour marked by a sinking of the spirit she was predestined to die.

It was three o'clock of an August afternoon when she suddenly remembered Mrs. Donegan and that she had not seen her for some time. Tessa, who was now altogether her own, had returned to Ballycushla for the day to visit her family, to whom she was now an altered, important Tessa, gifted even, as her mother had set the fashion by declaring her. Alison had been indefatigable in keeping up her part of the things in which Sir Gerard was interested. The libraries, the cooking and sewing classes, the little lectures on the growing of fruit and flowers and vegetables, on the keeping of bees and poultry—these were pursued more diligently in Sir Gerard's absence than if he had been present. When he came back at last he would find that progress had been made, was still in the making.

But the valley up above Dunnam was a little outside Alison's range. She had been leaving it to Father Tracy and his helpers. Now, suddenly, she remembered Mrs. Donegan and Kitty. There would be news of Kitty by this time. She wanted to know that things were well with the girl.

She ordered her mare, Mavourneen, got into her riding habit, and left Castle Barnard behind. She had had a busy morning with her steward over Castle Barnard affairs, and was feeling a little tired as she had not been wont to feel. To be sure the weather was languid. It was going to be a good harvest. Already the corn was bleaching white in the sun. The country began to wear the purple and gold of autumn, masses of heather on the hillside, gorse and ragweed by the roadside. August wore the imperial colours.

It was four o'clock when Alison reached Mrs. Donegan's cottage, having made the detour by the road. It struck her as she rode up to the little gate, and twisted Mavourneen's reign about the post that the place seemed oddly untidy as compared with that June day some weeks back when she had last visited it. The little field was ragged and unkempt. The goat had broken its tether and barked many of the trees. The cottage turned its back to the road, but the impression of discomfort reached Alison even on the wrong side of it, perhaps its origin lay in a monotonous voice that kept on an inharmonious droning, somewhere round the corner, out of sight.

She unlatched the gate and went in. As she came round the corner of the house some silent children, sitting in turned-heaps of their own contriving, dusted and stared at her. An acrid smoke from green boughs smote her eyes and nostrils as she stopped in the low doorway. At first she could see nothing for the smoke.

"Mrs. Donegan, may I come in, please?" she asked.

Someone came forward through the smoke with a thin, dark-haired, a thin, hatchet-faced woman, red-haired and red-eyed, who was wiping her soapy hands and arms in her apron as she came. There was another smell in the house beside the smoke of the green wood, the smell of washing. The woman had evidently been engaged in laundry work.

"You're welcome as flowers in May," she said in a high-pitched, shrill voice. "You're just in time, Miss dear, to cheer her up. She does be getting low of times, because there's no letter from the girl. As I do be telling her it's forgetting us they do be the minute we're out of their sight, and it isn't likely that she's going to be better off than anyone else. There was my uncle Andy that went away Pillalaine with the best of them, and got no further than Liverpool after all, and never remembered to send his old mother sign nor token till it was on his last he was, and walked in as bould as brass, fifteen years come April after he left, because he'd drunk away every situation ever he got, and morebetoken a widow's house, that married him, down to the fenders and fire irons, and then she said he'd drink no more on her, and so he came home to be kept. 'Tis as like as home to be the case with Kitty."

Under this flood of narrative Alison had a sensation of giddiness. As the woman drew breath for another speech she made out through the smoke Mrs. Donegan's figure sitting with the head bent as though the floods had gone over her. "Is it Miss Alison Barnard?" she asked in a small, sweet voice, sweeter by contrast, as the pause came.

"It is I, Mrs. Donegan," said Alison, "but why are you sitting here this beautiful day cooped up in this smoky house? I want to talk to you."

"No news isn't always bad news," began the strange woman, now refreshed by her second of silence. "Tisn't always they want us after we rear them, no more than the kitten the cat, and the cat has great sense, she says Mr. Gerard. There was Patsy Murphy of Greenane, a cousin of my unfortunate husband. And he went away and done well in the States. He had a saloon in the Bowers, and he've heard the grandeur of it 'ud take the sight out of your two eyes. And he sent for the mother. And when she went out, the poor old woman, she found he'd a fine American wife that could do nothing but serve in the bar and play the pianny. Och, too soon she found, the unfortunate woman, that it was to rock the cradle and rear the bould, impudent lumps of children she was there. And 'greenhorn' was the kindest name they'd put to her. And her poor old, frilled cap, and her fine blue cloak that had wore seven generations of her family wasn't good enough for the daughter-in-law, but what she must wear cotton velvet and flowers in her bonnet. The disrespectability of it broke the poor old woman's heart, and Patsy not the man to stand up for his mother, for by the wife owned the saloon. So she died, and then children was reared unmanly at her funeral. Word of it came through a daughter of the McGarrys, that said you'd really pity her, for she was always wanting the mountains and the smells of the old country. Like as not Kitty's doing well, and doesn't want her mother. That's what I do be telling her, but a harder case to cheer up I never knew."

"I want to talk to Mrs. Donegan," said Alison, turning to the perspiring woman with her air of gentle command. "If you'd be good enough to carry out her chair for her and place it under the shade of the tree, I'd carry this stool for myself." "Why, of course," said the woman, with an air of just offence. "I thought ye were talkin' to her all the time." The tree which Alison had indicated was at some little distance from the house. A broad band of shade from the trees about the house made at this point a velvety blackness which let the other afternoon sunshine field in the afternoon sunshine. The silence of August was on the groves and fields. The children on their dust-heaps were almost unnaturally quiet. There was nothing but the clatter within and about the cottage, and that was subdued by distance, to break the hush of the field and the mountains. After having planted the chair the woman had returned and plucked her offspring out of the dust-heaps, administering chastisement to them in turn as she did so. For a few seconds the shrill lamentations of the children, the rhetorical inquiries of the mother as to whether they thought it was hens they were disturbed, the golden afternoon. Then she whisked within the cottage, the children went round the corner and began scraping up more dust-heaps, and there was peace.

Alison watched Mrs. Donegan put a helpless hand to a distracted forehead and let her alone for a minute or two, then she asked who the woman was and how it was that she had come to take possession of the cottage she remembered so quiet and full of the sun.

"You'll remember that Kitty left me to my first cousin, Peggy Murphy," said Mrs. Donegan in a painful way as though the confusion hindered her speech. "Well, the poor woman, she had a terrible attack of the rheumatics after working on a hayrick in the wet five weeks ago come Friday. So she couldn't come. And, as ill-luck would have it, Poll, the sister-in-law, knew about it, and she would have it that it was her duty to take Peggy's place. She's a terrible industrious woman, so she went from morning till night, and yet never overtakes the dirt. And her tongue going like the clapper of a mill. She managed poor Larry, the husband, into running away from her at last, though a kinder man, and a fonder of his children never was than Larry."

"How long has she been in possession of your cottage?" Alison asked, interrupting her.

"Let me see, dear. I can't rightly remember. The poor old head o' me is bothered. It would be the Friday after Kitty went."

"Ever since then!" murmured Alison compassionately. "She goes home of nights. She says she has to keep the home together for Larry whenever he takes it into his head to come back to her. Indeed 'tis no place to bring him back, the poor man, for she's going from morning to night—yet the place is ever in a mess and the tongue of her clacking over all. I remember the time poor Larry was a cheerful, pleasant-spoken fellow; but after he married Poll he became no better than a dummy. And the childer the same. There's Johnny that's five years old and walking this many a day, but he can say no more than ba-ba."

"She'd better go back to her own cottage, and leave you your quietness," said Alison. "You would like that, wouldn't you?"

"Indeed I would. A gleam of hope lit up the blank face. "I thought indeed when Kitty left me that there was no more trouble for me in the world. I do sometimes think now that I could be happy if Poll was out of it, and I was quiet to listen to the swishing of the water under the keel of the big ship that took her from me; but there, sure Poll won't go out of it. She's a kind woman, and she thinks the world and all of what she's doing for me. I'm afraid she'll talk me into the 'Spum of my grave before Kitty ever comes home."

"She won't do that," said Alison quietly. "But tell me, has Kitty not written?"

"Not a word. It's what's killing me. And Poll clacking in my ears all day. I don't seem to take in what she says now—the Lord doesn't ask us to bear too much,—else at first



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the supposin' of her drove me mad."

"It's not like Kitty. There must be some reason," said Alison. "There's another quare thing," said the widow, in her eagerness laying a hand on Alison's arm and pressing it. "You know Timothy Sweeney that she was bewitched about. Well, Kitty was hardly out of it till he was gone. He left Nanny and her fine fortune without a word after they'd been called twice. He was met taking the road for Cork one day in the dew of the morning, about four o'clock. 'Where are you off to, Tim?' asked Bartie McCabe that met him. 'Where then,' says he, 'to save my soul.' And Bartie said he looked merry, and was whistling as he came up to him and a bundle tied to his stick across his shoulder."

"It occurred to me," it's maybe that he's searching America for her. I've heard tell that it would be as easy to find a needle in a haystack as anyone in the same America once it swallows them up. Still and all why doesn't she write?"

"It is very mysterious. I shall ask Sir Gerard to write to the friend in New York whom he asked to see after her. How did she go away?" "Och, she took it hard at the end, rale hard. I went across the field with her, and old Pincher the dog followed us. Pincher keeps out these days mostly; it isn't the childer, they're real quiet children, but Poll's talk seems to moidher him. I'd baked her a little griddle cake, the kind that she was fond of, and gathered her a few eggs, and we sat by the road, saying nothing at all till the long car drove up. Twice she tried to leave me, and couldn't, and at the last she gave a cry out of her that was like a soul departing, and she ran away and got on the car, and they drove off like mad; and 'twas only when she was gone that I found she'd left the griddle-cake and the eggs behind. 'Twas the sorrowful couple we were, me and Pincher, trapesin' back alone. And we hadn't the heart to eat a bit or go to bed, or do anything but sit there, me hearing the water and the noise of the ship as she went out, and poor Pincher listening always for her foot to return. Indeed I thought then I couldn't be worse off; but su, sometimes, since Poll came, I thought I'd be just as happy if I could sit in a clean, quiet house and think."

"Don't about Kitty," Alison said earnestly. "It is only that a letter has scared or something of that kind. And now about Mrs. Murphy? You tell me she goes home at night?"

(To be Continued.)

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